



ESTRANGEMENT AND TRAGEDY:

Exploring the alienating sensation in ancient Greek
tragedies and modern reperformances

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Preface

The idea for this thesis started with the sense of otherness portrayed by the titular character of Euripides' *Medea*. The way Medea embodies something that is completely different from the society for which the play was performed, has fascinated me tremendously. In discussing this 'otherness' with my supervisor, Ronald Blankenborg, we arrived at a subject larger than just Medea's character: the sense of estrangement in tragedy in general, in both ancient plays and modern reperformances. In order to broaden the scope of this research, one play of each of the renowned Greek tragedians was chosen that was restaged in recent years. To make the subject matter manageable, different aspects were selected to reflect on in each of those plays.

Subsequently, the field of Performance Studies was chosen to combine the sense of estrangement in both ancient and modern plays, in order to shed new light on all the six plays and the presence or absence of estrangement. In this way, my fascination with Medea's otherness could be extended to a general sense of alienation that seems to be underestimated when talking about ancient Greek tragedy. Of course, this thesis can only account for a small part of the tragic corpus, but it is my hope that it will get the readers thinking about the sense of estrangement that has been and is now felt when watching tragedy.

The process of writing this thesis has been difficult at times. The discussions with my supervisor were very useful, but it took some time to get my words on paper. For that to happen, I want to thank my friends and family who kept believing in my ability to finish it, and special thanks go out to Margot Vreuls who has been a faithful companion in the university library. I want to thank Ronald Blankenborg for our insightful discussions and his encouragement to make this thesis something to be proud of. To everyone around me during the process of this thesis: thank you for your unwavering support.

Table of Contents

List of figures	2
Introduction	3
Estrangement in theatrical context	5
Estrangement and ancient Greek Tragedy.....	9
Methodology	10
The Athenian, fifth-century audience.....	12
Estrangement in Greek tragedies.....	15
Aeschylus' <i>Eumenides</i>	15
Sophocles' <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	26
Place	28
Time.....	30
Euripides' <i>Medea</i>	35
Estrangement in Greek tragedies: a few notes	46
Modern re-enactments	49
Theu Boermans' <i>Welgezinden</i>	51
Robert Icke's <i>Oedipus</i>	61
Simon Stone's <i>Medea</i>	69
Modern re-enactments and estrangement.....	80
Conclusion: estrangement then and now.....	81
Further Research.....	83
Bibliography.....	84

List of figures

- Figure 1: *Actor seated with a mask, facing left*..... Front cover
Gemstone. Source: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden.
- Figure 2: *Diagram of the different parties concerning tragedy*..... 5
Source: Own making.
- Figure 3: *Photograph of the stage of the Oresteia by the National Theatre*..... 51
Source: Sanne Peper.

Introduction

Greek tragedy: one of the most vivid remnants of the ancient Greek culture. Up until today, plays are re-enacted, themes are reused, and a modern audience can enjoy plots that were written centuries ago. Of course, adjustments are made to make them understandable for a modern, in my case Western, audience, but the ‘original’¹ plays contain elements that can apparently still be used today. To us, i.e. people who are living in the twenty-first century, Greek tragedy is something that we may never fully comprehend. We can study its language, style, characters, contexts, etcetera, but we’ll never be the Greek audience from the fifth century BC that saw the Oedipal drama unfold before their eyes. Between the larger part of the western world today and that Greek audience of the fifth century, a barrier exists that is expressed not only in time, but also in place. For us to understand that drama as it was performed millennia ago, seems thus impossible, and a sense of estrangement equally and unavoidably inevitable. We, as Western, twenty-first-century listeners, readers or watchers of ancient Greek tragedy, might experience some sense of alienation towards what is happening on stage, since it is not relatable to our daily life. We are, however, possibly not the only ones who experience estrangement when looking at the drama on stage. Already during the original performances, which were performed as a part of the Dionysia, the Greek audience itself was watching a plot unfold in a place and time that was not necessarily theirs. What was tragedy, then, to the Greek public? As Aristotle put it:

(Arist. *Poet.*) 1449b. 24-28

ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος
ἔχουσης, ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἐκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις,
δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι’ ἀπαγγελίας, δι’ ἑλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν
τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν.

Tragedy is then an imitation of a serious and complete action that has magnitude, is of a different nature in language which is embellished by

¹ I say ‘original’ because the texts that we have today are not exactly like the ones that were brought on stage during the Dionysian festival. Already in the fourth century BC, plays were amended and the texts which Lycurgus made the ‘official texts’ between 338 to 326 were probably not completely like the ones performed years before. From 250 BC onward, quotation from the Greek plays was narrowed down to the plays from Aeschylus and Sophocles that remain extant today, and ten plays from Euripides. Apart from these, nine plays from Euripides somehow survived to be recopied in the Middle Ages. The first printed editions of the surviving tragedies were made in the fifteenth century, at which time the texts had undergone corruption, emendations, corrections, etcetera (Kovacs, 2005, pp. 382-388).

every form in its parts, acting not through narrative, but achieving through empathy and fear *katharsis* of such sufferings.²

His words about the action, grandeur and language are generic to such extent that it leaves little to argue. Indeed, a tragedy can be seen as consisting of a serious and complete action, with a certain grandeur and written in a stylised language. The statement, however, that tragedy achieves *katharsis* (purification) through empathy and fear remains questionable. Like us, Aristotle never saw the events unfold himself, and his findings on the emotions of the audience might not be as canonical as has always been assumed. For the audience to experience empathy and fear, it needs to feel a connection between the characters and events on stage. Precisely this connection of familiarity is something that will be questioned in this thesis. Aristotle's words on tragedy have been long accepted as truth and his views on tragedy as guiding. In this thesis, I will argue that estrangement plays a major part in the audience perception of three ancient Greek plays – despite Aristotle's appreciation of 'acknowledgment' and 'recognition'. I believe that his view does, however, suit the modern restaging of ancient Greek tragedies, more than its performance in antiquity. To this end, I will start with explaining the concept of estrangement and its meaning in theatrical context. Secondly, I will analyse both secondary literature and primary text on singular and isolated plot elements that may cause this sense of estrangement in three tragedies. Reversely, these same elements will then be analysed in recent examples of their restaging. I will show that, in some cases, fifth-century tragedies were more estranging for the audience back then than for the public of a modern re-enactment. The concluding chapter will focus on the way ancient and modern tragedies can be used to reflect on one another.

² For the Greek text of Aristotle's *Poetics*, I used the edition of Tarán and Gutas (2012), see primary texts in the bibliography, p. 84. All the English translations in this thesis are of my own making.

Estrangement in theatrical context

To define estrangement in the context of Classical Tragedy, the discourse on the concept needs to be cleared out. Since estrangement is an idea originating from the twentieth century, an attempt will first be made in this chapter to clarify it in its original context. Secondly, the concept will be translated to a workable definition for ancient Greek tragedy. Lastly, a method will be fashioned that can be used to put estrangement next to the tragedies that will be studied in this thesis.

To start with the definition, the Oxford English Dictionary defines estrangement as follows: “[t]he action of estranging; the condition of being estranged; separation, withdrawal, alienation in feeling or affection.”³ This self-explanatory word is, in other words, a feeling of distance that exists between the person who feels it and the person(s), object(s), or concept(s) by which estrangement is evoked. When talking about ancient Greek tragedy, we have the writer, the actor(s) and, of course, the audience. When put in a diagram, the connections between the different parties can be seen as below:

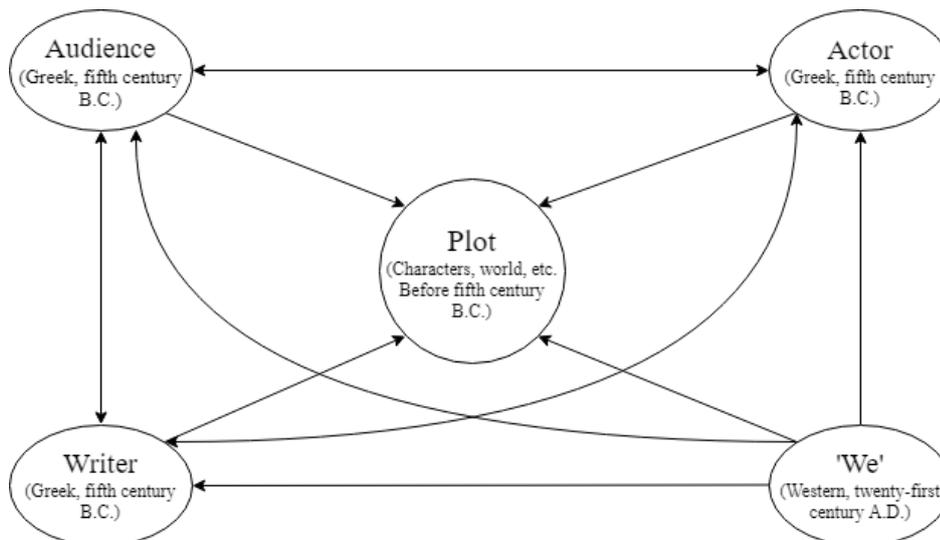


Figure 2

The audience and the actor(s) can experience alienation towards each other, as well as the writer and the audience. The writer and the actor(s) are in turn able to experience estrangement towards each other, and all of them can experience the emotion towards the plot. In the last case, however, it is a one way feeling, since the plot cannot experience the feeling for itself. It would be interesting to look at the sense of estrangement for all parties

³ Oxford English Dictionary online (2018), “estrangement, n”.

that can experience it, but only the audience will be further looked at. This choice has been made not only for the sake of brevity, but also because it makes the audience and me, the writer of this thesis, the same: spectator of a (re-performed) tragedy. The focus of this thesis lies at first on the Greek audience that saw the plays at the time and its feeling of alienation towards the plot. Subsequently, the possible perceptions of the twenty-first-century restaging of the Greek tragedies today will be looked at.

The sense of alienation can be translated to theatrical alienation – i.e. estrangement by happenings on stage. This notion was introduced by different twentieth-century critics and a few theorists from both the nineteenth and twentieth century dominate the debate regarding estrangement: Konstantin Stanislavski, a Russian actor, director and theatre theorist, Bertold Brecht, a German poet, writer and literary critic, and Viktor Shklovsky, Russian writer and literary theorist. Over the years, many scholars have used their theories and from these a few have been selected to shape the discourse on estrangement.

In her book *Theatre of Estrangement: Theory, Practice, Ideology*, Silvija Jestrovic, professor of Theatre and Performance studies, reflects on theatrical estrangement in reaction to both Bertold Brecht and Victor Shklovsky in order to look at Avant-Garde theatre. Jestrovic, through Shklovsky, defines estrangement (*ostranenie*, as Shklovsky calls it) as a “means of counteracting one of the most deadening forces in both art and life – habituation or automatization – that, as Shklovsky puts it, ‘devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war.’”⁴ Estrangement, in other words, serves as a wake-up call that takes you out of your automatised life, a life that is deadened by this automatization. Also reflecting on Brecht’s concept of *Verfremdung*, Jestrovic defines his theory as an “ideological” one: “[*Verfremdung*] distances the audience from the stage work to enable them to see the well-known in its true state.”⁵

Even though Jestrovic’s reflections are used to look at Avant-Garde theatre, these explanations of estrangement can be used to look at Greek theatre. The performances that were put on stage in fifth-century Greece could be estranging in that they were a wake-up call from day-to-day life or offer a reflection on everything that the audience knew to be true. Jestrovic concludes with the notion that the estrangement, or defamiliarization, in a more modern age “brings about an ‘effect of daring innovation,’ while in fact it is based not on new aesthetic inventions, but on the revival of old ones. Since this concept can be traced from

⁴ Jestrovic (2006), 4.

⁵ Jestrovic (2006), 4.

Aristotle and Horace to Hegel and Marx, it becomes clear that in the twentieth century it is inevitably a revival.”⁶ While I disagree slightly on the connection between Aristotle and estrangement – Jestrovic never fully explains what this connection entails, and it is my belief that Aristotle’s argument is stooled on recognition, not defamiliarization –, I support the idea of estrangement existing throughout time. Instead of taking Aristotle as a starting point, however, I will try to use the tragedians themselves to shed light on this concept, which is otherwise known as the *Verfremdungseffekt*.

The *Verfremdungseffekt*, as Brecht calls it, is diametrically opposed to the Aristotelian view that characterises Greek tragedy as based on empathy.⁷ This alienation-effect as mentioned by Brecht is further explained by Douglas Robinson, an American scholar on literary theory (amongst other fields):

The “effect” as experienced by spectators seems mobile, in both geographical and cultural space (across political borders: the experience of localization and foreignization) and psychological and phenomenological time (across the borders of the old and the new: the experience of conventionalization and innovation). The estrangement effect is primarily a measure of strangeness in the current audience's response to a theatrical event, which may vary wildly among audience members depending upon the degree of familiarity each audience member already has with this sort of theatrical experience, or with this particular author or artist or piece;⁸

The effect of estrangement, in other words, is a feeling that can be sensed by the audience. In this thesis, an attempt will be made to characterize the estrangement on a few of these levels for the Greek fifth-century audience. The choice of plays and the level on which they will be looked at, will be explained below.

Robinson mentions a few points of caution that come with this idea of estrangement. First, it is important not to generalize the audience that sees the show.⁹ The audience that is mentioned in the quote above does not consist of a homogenous group that sees the show, or tragedy, in just one way. This cautionary comment highlights the theoretical nature of the research of this thesis. We can speculate all we want about the nature of the Greek audience of the fifth century, but we’ll never know its true character and its diversity. The audience will be discussed further on, since it is an integral part of the thesis, but the caveat Robinson

⁶ Jestrovic (2006), 154.

⁷ Brecht & Bentley (1961), 130.

⁸ Robinson (2007), 123.

⁹ Robinson (2007), 123.

mentioned is noteworthy. His warning comment is directly related to the second point, which is of both temporal and cultural nature: Brecht used the *Verfremdungseffekt* when looking at Chinese theatre,¹⁰ which means that part of the estrangement could be the fact that he, as a German, was experiencing the estrangement due to his foreignness. When taking a look at the material, I will do that with my twenty-first-century Dutch bias. With the defining of the audience of fifth-century Greece, and adherence to that definition, some part of that bias should be filtered out, but awareness of this fact is key. Estrangement deals for a great part with personal feelings and emotions: it is not only important to notice that I cannot completely state the feelings of the Greek audience, but also that I do my research with a modern Western look. What is estranging to me is not necessarily estranging to an audience that lived centuries ago in a country that is, or was, not mine.

So far, we have established a few things about estrangement. It is a feeling of alienation that can serve to take the ‘normal’ and make it strange (as Shklovsky puts it) or be experienced by an audience which distances it from the ‘normal’ in order to see that normal more clearly (according to Brecht). Both theorists have some common ground on which they built their estrangement theories. As Simon Spiegel, a scholar on German literature and linguistics (amongst other things) puts it: “*Ostranenie* and *Verfremdung* are both based on the idea of turning the common into the unfamiliar.”¹¹ Is that what happened with the Greek tragedies? Did, in this case, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides turn the common in the unfamiliar? Could it be that what was shown all those years ago felt rather strange to the audience? And did these three great tragedians try to confront the Greeks with something that was strange to them in order to reflect on their ‘normal’? Spiegel uses the terms *ostranenie* and *verfremdung* in the above quoted article to reflect on science-fiction and mentions that in that genre “these marvelous acts are not presented in an estranged way; rather they are rationalized and made plausible. (...) On a formal level, *sf* does not estrange the familiar, but rather makes the *strange familiar*.”¹² An alien world, in science-fiction sometimes taken literally, is portrayed in a way that is familiar to the audience. If we use that on the Greek tragedies, it would mean that, for example, the story of Medea is in a way strange to the audience but made to look like a normal event for the audience. Is that what was happening? If so, how?

¹⁰ Robinson (2007) gets Brecht’s views on Chinese acting from Brecht’s “*Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst*” (1957 [1936]). I found much of the same views expressed in the article mentioned before (Brecht & Bentley, 1961).

¹¹ Spiegel, S. (2008), 371. [emphasis in original]

¹² Spiegel, S. (2008), 371 & 372. [emphasis in original]

Estrangement and ancient Greek Tragedy

A few theories have been outlined and all we need now, is a framework alongside the ancient Greek tragedies in order to see if estrangement is present in those tragedies. The texts constitute the basis, but the plot and the performance will also be looked at, more on that later. We know now that estrangement can work in two ways: normal things can be presented as unfamiliar and strange things can be presented as normal. Both ways make sure the audience sees something being presented in a way that is different from its expectations. When turning to Greek tragedy, it is not completely evident which form of estrangement, if any at all, is present in the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The theories mentioned above all deal with a more modern form of theatre, which raises the question if these are even applicable to the ancient Greek form.

Ismene Lada-Richards, professor of Classical Literature & Performance Culture at King's College London, uses the angle of Performance Studies to study Greek tragedy. In her article ““Estrangement” or “Reincarnation”?: Performers and Performance on the Classical Athenian stage” she discusses the issue of ‘metatheatricality’ in Greek plays. While she focuses on the ‘internalization’ of the actor, which is not the main topic of this thesis, she aptly uses the theories of Brecht and Stanislavski to reflect on Greek tragedy. One of the first issues she discusses is the question of belief:

... does the actor act his role in such a way as to display consciously his own consciousness that he is a performer ... ? And does he, by extension, make it systematically *impossible* for his spectators to “suspend” their “disbelief” ... Or does he act instead in such a way as to encourage the spectator to “surrender,” to lose sight of the very process of artistic transformation and to prevent his keen awareness of the dramatic frame's artificiality from persistently intruding and constantly shattering the “illusion” of a real-life stage-world?¹³

According to Lada-Richards, the actor can either perform in such a way that the audience is aware of the fact that they are looking at an actor, or the performance is thus convincing that it draws the audience into the performance and reality is left behind. Even if this thesis is not centralised around the metatheatricality of actors, the question whether the audience ‘suspends their disbelief,’ i.e. stows away its scepticism concerning the events on stage, or not, is an important one for this research. If the audience leaves its scepticism behind, they fully accept, for the time being, the plot on stage as plausible. Connecting this to

¹³ Lada-Richards (1997), 68. [emphasis in original]

estrangement, that can mean two things in the case of Greek tragedy: the audience is either able to accept something strange as normal, or the world that is portrayed is not at all strange to the people watching nor is it portrayed in a way that is estranging, since they can suspend their disbelief. In the latter case, it means that the concept of estrangement is not applicable to the Greek tragedy of the fifth century at all, which would be a slightly disappointing, but possible, outcome of this thesis. Lada-Richards is in any case of the opinion that the ancient tragedies had a more “Stanislavskian” approach, i.e. “a desire to merge with the part,” while the ancient comedies have more use for the Brechtian one: the visibility of both the actor and the role he portrays.¹⁴ Through Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, however, she nuances this dichotomy, by stating that tragedy can contain Brechtian elements in, for example, the messenger speeches where events are retold and the messenger represents those events.¹⁵

Concluding the article, Lada-Richards ends with an essential note. She states that distancing – the act of estranging – is a *sine qua non* of Greek tragedy, due to the difference between the audience’s milieu and that of the tragedy: both the characters and the plot are not directly related to the people that are watching them on display.¹⁶ She says that “the tragic *dramatis personae* are “translated” into a different milieu, determined by the new forms of political and juridical thought belonging to the city, the fifth-century democracy of Athens.”¹⁷ This puts the strange characters in an environment that is common to the audience. In other words: the strange is being made familiar.

Methodology

The theoretical base is clear: estrangement, the sense of alienation and/or defamiliarization, can have its effect on the audience in multiple ways. On a theoretical level, Shklovsky was of the opinion that estrangement counteracts automatization of day-to-day life, whereas the Brechtian way of estrangement distances the audience from the stage in order to better know the true state of things. In practice, the Brechtian way of acting makes the audience aware of both the character and the actor, while Stanislavskian Method Acting¹⁸ tries to make the audience see just a character, not the actor. As Lada-Richards concluded, it is likely that the writers of Greek tragedy took a story that did not necessarily belong to the time and place of the audience and transformed it to match the audience’s environment. To see whether that is

¹⁴ Lada-Richards (1997), 76.

¹⁵ Lada-Richards (1997), 87.

¹⁶ Lada-Richards (1997), 90-91.

¹⁷ Lada-Richards (1997), 91.

¹⁸ Lada-Richards (1997), 66.

the case, I will focus on three aspects of tragedy: the involvement of the gods, the place and time where the plot takes place, and the matter of distance to the personality of an important character. In this way, the cultural (mythical) and geographical estrangement can be studied, a few of the aspects Robinson mentioned, as well as and the cultural and geographical estrangement regarding a character. Three plays have been chosen, for which the selection was quite simple: all were re-enacted in recent years, which made it possible for me to make a comparison on aforementioned levels. The *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, the last play of the trilogy the *Oresteia*, will be used to look at the presence of the gods. In this tragedy, the gods play a pivotal role after the murdering of Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, and Aegisthus in the *Agamemnon* and the *Libation Bearers*. This makes the tragedy an excellent example to zoom in on the role of the gods. The environment of the plot, the second object of research, will be looked at through the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles. The story of Oedipus is placed in Thebes and was probably already around in the second millennium BC,¹⁹ which makes both the time and place different from that of the audience of fifth-century Athens. The *Medea* of Euripides will be used to look at the titular character, Medea, and her deliberation about, planning on, and eventual act of murdering her children. The deed itself is horrifying enough, the fact that she is a woman and from Colchis should further the estranging sense the audience may have felt towards her. This makes the *Medea* an excellent example to take a look at the more personal aspect of estrangement. While I do not claim that the outcome of this research is applicable to all of tragedy – three plays is just not enough material –, the use of all three great tragedians can be a base for further research on the subject.

As one can see, all the aspects that will be discussed – gods, difference in place and time, and the character and act of Medea – are inherently different from the characteristics of the Athenian audience of the fifth century BC and allude to the *sine qua non* that Lada-Richards mentioned. It would be easy to just point out the things in the plot that are strange to the audience who saw it, but the research would then only scratch the surface of the sense of estrangement. In order to deepen the study, I will take ideas about theatre from the relatively new field of Performance Studies. This field, originating from the United States, focuses on the idea that performance is everywhere. Not only on the stage, but also in rituals, sports, and everyday life, performance can be found.²⁰ Richard Martin, a Classics scholar at Stanford University with a focus on Homeric epic and poetry in performance, defines performance as follows: “a significant enactment or expression for which the initiator takes responsibility

¹⁹ Edmunds (2006), 4.

²⁰ Schechner (2006), 2.

before a critical audience that can judge his or her skill.”²¹ Or, as Marvin Carlson, professor of Theatre, Comparative Literature and Middle Eastern Studies, notes: “Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self.”²² In other words, performance is an act that is meant to be seen by an audience that is capable of taking in its meaning and of reflecting on itself through the performance. Even though these definitions are used to describe performances of epic or performance in a modern age, it is applicable to tragedy. After all, a tragedy is written to be seen by an audience and is quite literally judged in order to win a prize.²³ Taking as a starting point the fact that the Greek tragedies were first and foremost performances, creates a slightly different focus. The problem remains, however, that for the entire scope of performance, both primary and secondary sources are needed.²⁴ Since we lack fifth-century secondary sources on Greek tragedy, and have only a few fragments about the audience response,²⁵ the ancient texts will remain the capital object of research. Reconstructing the audience’s response and in general making the idea of performance more present, should allow for new insights. Since the field is new and, in the words of one of its founders, Richard Schechner, “resists fixed definition,”²⁶ a precise method is hard to develop. Besides that, the fact that Performance Studies is of such a changing and young nature, makes that the definitions of estrangement are not clearly outlined in this framework. To try and add to the field, the constant question during the research of the text will not just be ‘is there an estranging element present?’, but also ‘how would the audience perceive the estranging sensation through the performance itself?’ In that way both the idea of estrangement and the field of Performance Studies should be able to gain insights from one another.

The Athenian, fifth-century audience

To answer the questions mentioned above, we need to have a clearer definition of the audience that saw the plays in fifth-century Athens. Even though the Athenian, Dionysian context is not the only one in which the Greek tragedies were performed,²⁷ it

²¹ Martin (2011), 642.

²² Carlson (2004), 71. [emphasis in original]

²³ Roisman (2014), 953.

²⁴ Leach (2008), 73.

²⁵ Wiles (2005), 5, for example: “Remember how Merope in the tragedy raised her axe against her son because she mistook him for his own murderer. When she cries: ‘This blow will cost you dearer than the one you gave!’ what uproar she causes in the auditorium, lifting them to their feet in terror, in case she does the boy an injury before the old man can stop her.” (Wiles’ translation of Plut. *Mor.* 998e)

²⁶ Schechner (2006), 22.

²⁷ Kovacs (2005), 380; Scodel (2010), 52.

is the originating context and the best known. This will therefore remain the context in which the plays will be situated when talking about estrangement. Including all the places and periods where tragedy could have been (re)performed, would generate an audience that is impossible to define. Even with a secluded group like in the original context, the caveat that Robinson expressed, applies: the audience is never a homogenous group and the response “may vary wildly among audience members.”²⁸ When discussing the way the audience could experience estrangement, it is important to keep in mind that the audience of fifth-century Athens witnessing the tragedies was not a uniform group with all the same characteristics. I will, however, attempt to define the audience as precisely as possible.

According to Ruth Scodel, professor of Greek and Latin at the University of Michigan, the audience of the City Dionysia, the original context of the tragedies, did not include the lower classes of the Athenian citizens, since the “poorer Athenians probably had other priorities than the theatre.”²⁹ She does, nevertheless, state that the theatre was not that exclusive: even if poorer people may have had other business to attend to, they weren’t banned from the plays. They may have not always had the means to go, however.³⁰ Laura Swift, a Senior Lecturer in Classical Studies at the Open University, agrees with the notion that the audience represented all classes of society and adds that it probably consisted of some five to six thousand spectators.³¹

Another major question about the audience, apart from status and numbers, is whether women attended as well. This remains unclear – some scholars argue that they were excluded –, but the audience of the Greek tragedy was probably quite diverse and consisted of both men and women.³² Women seem to have been a minority, however, and we can assume that men made up the larger part of the audience. More important than that is, in my opinion, the historical context in which the tragedies were performed. The plays were roughly performed between the “end of the Persian Wars and Athens’ defeat by Sparta and her allies.”³³ War, in other words, was common to the audience of the plays and the precarious position of Athens was maybe already settling in the minds of the Athenians. On a political level Athens seemed to fare well, due to the democracy

²⁸ See the quote from his work on p. 7.

²⁹ Scodel (2010), 52.

³⁰ Scodel (2010), 52.

³¹ Swift (2016), 3-4.

³² Swift (2016), 3-4.

³³ Debnar (2005), 6.

alongside which Greek tragedy flourished.³⁴ The Athenian fifth-century audience, in other words, was diverse in status and gender, and possessed the fresh memory of war. The people might have been slightly xenophobic due to the relatively recent attacks from the outside, but this is certainly not an assumption that can be made concerning the entire audience. Democracy became a major part of Athenian life and a recurring theme in the plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.³⁵ The new state form must have been known to the society in general, but, again, no assumption can be made about the general audience's feelings towards it. For now, it is enough to state the fact that democracy was hot and happening in fifth-century Athens. One final notion needs to be made: when talking about the audience in all its diversity, including all the statuses, genders, and origins, I will use the term 'Greek audience' (assuming that the number of people from outside Greece is negligible). If I want to zoom in on the part of the audience that actually came from Athens, I will use 'Athenian audience'.

Now that estrangement in theatrical context has been cleared out and we know more or less who the people were that may or may not have experienced the estrangement, it is time to look at the tragedies themselves. As said before, no clear method from the viewpoint of Performance Studies is present, but this field will remain the base on which this research is built. Going through the text, the question will at all times be how the audience *saw* and *perceived* the performance, whereby the text is more a tool than a goal itself.

³⁴ Swift (2016), 1.

³⁵ Swift (2016), 15 & 78-80.

Estrangement in Greek tragedies

As said before: three ancient Greek tragedies will be discussed when talking about the level of estrangement, one from each of the well-known Greek tragedians: Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Euripides' *Medea*. Any one tragedy could have been chosen to discuss the level of estrangement, but these three have been selected because of their recent re-enactments. Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was re-enacted by the National Theatre of the Netherlands and both Euripides' *Medea* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* have been reperformed by the Theatre Group of Amsterdam. To further minimize the scope of this research to make the material manageable, the focus will be on three parts of estrangement: the place of gods next to man in the *Eumenides*, the distance of place and time in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the distance towards the (actions of the) character in the *Medea*. While my interest for this thesis was sparked by the character of Medea and her strangeness to the Greek world, the plays will be discussed chronologically.

Aeschylus' *Eumenides*

Aeschylus is the eldest of the illustrious three tragedians. He was born in 525/24 BC in Eleusis and thus experienced the birth of democracy with Cleisthenes in 508.³⁶ He witnessed the transfer of tragic performances from the Athenian Agora to the Acropolis and lived through most of the Persian wars, before passing away in 456.³⁷ He was quite successful, having won either thirteen or twenty-eight times, and was famous for his works.³⁸ The *Eumenides* is the third tragedy of the trilogy *Oresteia*, the only complete trilogy that survives. The *Oresteia* was performed at the City Dionysia in 458 BC and won the first prize.³⁹ The trilogy evolves around Agamemnon, the king of Argos who went with his brother to Troy, and his family: his wife Clytaemnestra, her lover Aegisthus, and the children of Clytaemnestra and Agamemnon, Electra and Orestes. The first play, *Agamemnon*, deals with the coming home of Agamemnon after the Trojan war, bringing with him the Trojan princess and priestess Cassandra. His wife Clytaemnestra, still furious over Agamemnon's offering of their daughter Iphigeneia and further enraged by his new concubine, deliberates on, and eventually proceeds to, the murder of her husband and Cassandra with the support of her new lover Aegisthus. The play ends with the instalment of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus as the

³⁶ Mitchell-Boyask (2009), 12-13.

³⁷ Mitchell-Boyask (2009), 17.

³⁸ Mitchell-Boyask (2009), 16.

³⁹ Sommerstein (2008), ix.

new rulers. In the *Libation Bearers*, Orestes returns to Argos, after his exile by his mother to Phocis (something that already happened before the start of *Agamemnon*). Together with his sister Electra, who has mourned his absence and wishes for him to return, he sets up a plan to kill his mother and Aegisthus and after extensive deliberation and hesitation he kills them both with his sister's help.

This is the starting point of the *Eumenides*. Killing your own mother has its consequences in ancient Greece, one of which is being hunted by the Furies, or *Erinyes*, goddesses of vengeance following in-family transgressions like patricide and filicide. The play starts at the temple of Apollo at Delphi, where the Pythia finds Orestes as a suppliant, surrounded by a chorus of sleeping Furies, praying to Apollo. Apollo himself appears and tells Orestes to go to Athens, where he'll find judgment and an end to his misery. On the departure of Orestes, the ghost of Clytaemnestra appears, who tells the Furies to wake up and follow Orestes again. When Apollo encounters the Furies, he admits that he is the one who told Orestes to follow through on the murder of his mother. The scene shifts to Athens, where court is held with Orestes on the one side, the Furies on the other, and Pallas Athena as the judge. Both the Furies and Orestes plead their case with Athena and she urges them to find testimonies and evidence to support their case. Apollo supports Orestes' claim that he himself is responsible for Orestes' action of murdering Clytaemnestra. The Furies persist and ask Orestes about the deed, to which he answers truthfully that he killed his mother. The question remains, however, if Orestes killed her justly,⁴⁰ to which Apollo keeps answering yes, since he deems the father more important than the mother. The Furies turn to Apollo and discussions arise about paternal instincts with the gods and the importance of a father over a mother. After the divine discussion, Athena gives a speech about the importance of what is happening: the way that this first trial is held will be continued throughout time. A ballot is held, which ends in a tie, and Athena decides in favour of Orestes. This infuriates the Furies and after Orestes' plead of thanks to Athena and his exit, a discussion rises between them and Athena. She urges them not to do their name justice, but to accept her judgment gracefully. The Furies, who have been deprived of their revenge, are hard to convince, and Athena offers them a new way of life: instead of the negative ambiance that surrounds them, she offers to make them patrons of good deeds and honour. Eventually, they accept, and the play ends with a procession in which the Furies, now *Eumenides*, are welcomed as honoured goddesses.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Aesch. *Eum.*, 615: "δικαίως".

⁴¹ Aesch. *Eum.*, 1041: "Σεμναὶ θεαί".

Evidently, the gods play a major part in this third play. The only mortal is Orestes and while he is name-bearer of the trilogy, this last play seems to revolve less around him and more around the gods, or god-likes, who discuss his future and punishment. I will now go deeper into the plot, to discuss the involvement of the gods from a performance perspective. This means that I will derive their appearance as much as possible from the text and will, subsequently, focus on the text to reflect on the role they play in this tragedy.

The first time we encounter godlike creatures in the *Eumenides* is when Orestes and the Furies appear on stage. Apparently, they did so on an *ekkyklēma*, which supported Orestes in a suppliant position⁴² and three Furies.⁴³ Other than the fact that Orestes is shown as a suppliant to Apollo,⁴⁴ not much is said about the divine status of the god. The Furies on the other hand, are shown as ugly old creatures in the words of the Pythia:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 46-52

Πυ.: πρόσθεν δὲ τάνδρὸς τοῦδε θαυμαστὸς λόχος
εὔδει γυναικῶν ἐν θρόνοισιν ἥμενος.
οὔτοι γυναῖκας, ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας λέγω·
οὐδ' αὖτε Γοργείοισιν εἰκάσω τύποις.
εἶδόν ποτ' ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας
δεῖπνον φερούσας· ἄπτεροί γε μὴν ἰδεῖν
αὗται, μέλαινα δ', ἐς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι,

Py: In front of this man a wonderful troop of
women sleeps, sitting on thrones.
I call them not women, but Gorgons:
nor again would I compare them to Gorgonic forms.
I saw once already painted creatures, who took
the dinner from Phineus: these are, it's clear to see,
without feathers, and black, and altogether horrifying,

The Pythia does not know what to make of the creatures: they look on the one hand like Gorgons, on the other like wingless harpies. They appear non-human, black, and disgusting. Apollo, who encounters them shortly after the Pythia does, describes them as follows:

⁴² Henderson (2008), 363.

⁴³ Henderson (2008), 362n22.

⁴⁴ Aesch. *Eum.*, 40-41: “ὄρω δ' ἐπ' ὀμφαλῷ μὲν ἄνδρα θεομυσῆ ἔδρας ἔχοντα προστρόπαιον,” (I see on the centre a man, abominable before the gods, having a seat of suppliance)

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 67-70

Ἄπ.: καὶ νῦν ἀλούσας τάσδε τὰς μάργους ὄρᾱις·
ὑπνωὶ πεσοῦσαι δ' αἱ κατάπτυστοι κόραι,
γραῖαι παλαιαιόπαιδες, αἷς οὐ μείγνυται
θεῶν τις οὐδ' ἄνθρωπος οὐδὲ θήρ ποτε—⁴⁵

Ap.: Even now you see these frantic captive women:
fallen by sleep, the despicable maidens,
old women, ancient children, with whom not one
of the gods, nor a man, nor a beast ever came together—

The Furies are, even though they are godlike creatures, depicted as women who stand out by their old age and seem more mortal than god in that respect. This is, however, said by a god and he is obviously talking about immortal beings that are beneath him. In the Pythia's description, they seem to be more distant from humans than the gods themselves, whose appearances are not mentioned. Orestes is the only mortal that directly addresses the gods and he does so in a reverent, but not necessarily awestruck fashion:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 85-87

Ὀρ.: ἄναξ Ἄπολλον, οἶσθα μὲν τὸ μὴ ἀδικεῖν·
ἐπεὶ δ' ἐπίσται, καὶ τὸ μὴ ἀμελεῖν μάθε.
σθένος δὲ ποιεῖν εὖ φερέγγυον τὸ σόν.

Or.: Lord Apollo, you know how to not do wrong:
since you know, teach me also not to neglect.
your power is able to do good.

We do not exactly know how Apollo was shown on stage, but it has been suggested that he carries a bow and arrow to distinguish him from the rest.⁴⁶ As for the rest, I can imagine that the clothes made the god: the actor would probably be dressed in an orderly fashion, but this is not made clear from the text. Even though Orestes does not mention Apollo's godlike appearance, he does speak to the god about powers that seem to go beyond himself. He asks Apollo to help him do good, which is something that he cannot do on his own. This combined with the suppliant position that the Pythia found him in, suggests something more than

⁴⁵ For the Greek text of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, I used the edition of Sommerstein (1989), see primary texts in the bibliography, p. 84.

⁴⁶ Sommerstein (1989), 34.

humans interacting. To the audience, the division of roles would have been made clear: Orestes is the suppliant to the god Apollo. Apollo urges him to leave the temple and go to Athens, a command which Orestes obeys. The Furies who were still asleep during this altercation, are awakened by the ghost of Clytaemnestra, who urges them to follow Orestes. They linger and meet Apollo, who then speaks with the authority belonging to a god:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 179-184

Ἄπ.: ἔξω, κελεύω, τῶνδε δωμάτων τάχος
χωρεῖτ', ἀπαλλάσσεσθε μαντικῶν μυχῶν,
μὴ καὶ λαβοῦσα πτηνὸν ἀργηστὴν ὄφιν
χρυσηλάτου θώμιγος ἐξορμώμενον
ἀνήϊς ὑπ' ἄλγους μέλαν' ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἀφρόν,
ἐμοῦσα θρόμβους οὓς ἀφείλικυσας φόνου.

Ap.: Outside, I order you, leave this house immediately,
go away from my prophetic chamber,
so that you not, having received a winged, flashing snake,
that speeds away from my golden-made bowstring,
send forth in agony black foam from humans,
vomiting blood clots that you swallowed from murder.

While the words he says are not necessarily decent, it is clear that he rules the sanctuary and that he as a god can be difficult for the Furies. Besides that, the fact that Apollo, unlike the common man, had a winged serpent at his disposal with which he could do terrible things, makes it further evident that he is a god. He does, however, answer in the next section answer to the Furies in a politer manner about the way he is responsible for the actions of Orestes and the Furies clearly speak with more reverence to Apollo than he does to them.⁴⁷

What follows, is the trial that eventually clears Orestes' name, where Apollo is Orestes' advocate, the Furies serve as prosecutors, and Athena as the judge. Orestes does not address Apollo as much in this trial as he does Athena, but the god does make an appearance when summoned to the court. Apollo calls Orestes his "lawful suppliant,"⁴⁸ but the next time Orestes talks to Apollo, the reverence seems to be gone:

⁴⁷ Aesch. *Eum.*, 198: "ἄναξ Ἄπολλον".

⁴⁸ Aesch. *Eum.*, 576-577: "νόμῳ ἰκέτης".

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 609-610

Ὅρ.: ἤδη σὺ μαρτύρησον, ἐξηγοῦ δέ μοι,
Ἄπολλον, εἴ σφε σὺν δίκῃ κατέκτανον.

Or.: You, give testimony already, and tell me,
Apollo, whether I killed her rightfully.

The moment of truth has come and the question whether Orestes handled justly or not will be answered by Apollo. Orestes seems to leave all carefulness behind and talks to him like any normal person. This can either be a change of scenery in which it is acceptable to address a god like that, or it is the nervous exclamation of a man who is dying to hear his fate. Apollo, in any case, never rebukes him, but in his turn addresses the court instead of Orestes. In the realm of the court, the division between man and god seems of less importance and we hear a man talking to his attorney, more than a man supplicating to a god. The next time Orestes turns to Apollo, he talks to him in a more godlike manner again:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 744

Ὅρ.: ὦ Φοῖβ' Ἄπολλον, πῶς ἀγὼν κριθήσεται;

Or.: O Phoebus Apollo, how will the trial be decided?

Here, we see an Orestes who is again a suppliant of Apollo, speaking to him as to a god. The two relationships seem to differ inside and outside of court. During the trial Orestes talked to Apollo on a man-to-man basis, but he changed to man-to-god fashion again, when he needed Apollo in that way. That makes one wonder whether Aeschylus deliberately changed the interaction during court. When the trial occurred, all the gods and godlike creatures took on a role that mortal men normally have when going to court: the prosecutor, the advocate and the judge. It is not altogether unbelievable that they leave their godly characteristics behind for the time being. Either the gods stayed in a godlike fashion and the audience saw a human trial dominated by gods, or the gods were made human and the audience perceived humans that they knew were gods. The trial, in any case, must have brought up some reaction with the audience, especially since Athena as a judge addressed some issues that recently became important for the Athenian people, but more on that later.

To sum up, Apollo and Orestes meet multiple times in the play and the tone differs in the various situations. For the audience, the performance must have been a bit weird anyway,

since *Eumenides* deals with gods that are obviously played by men. No matter how capable the actor was with Stanislavskian Method Acting, the actor could never become the god in the way that we can today simulate in movies. Whether the audience suspended their disbelief or not because of the gods, will be discussed when we have included the last one: Athena.

Starting with her probable appearance: she likely came on stage clad in bronze armour to refer not only to her influence realm as a goddess, but also to the procession that will take place at the end of the play.⁴⁹ Her character is not present throughout the entire play, but her role is not less important because of that. From verse 235 onwards, the play continues in Athens, in the temple of Athena Polias on the Acropolis.⁵⁰ Orestes opens this part with an address to Athena:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 235-243

Ὅρ.: ἄνασσ' Ἀθάνᾳ, Λοξίου κελεύμασιν
ἦκω· δέχου δὲ πρηνεμένῳς ἀλάστορα,
οὐ προστρόπαιον οὐδ' ἀφοίβαντον χέρα,
ἀλλ' ἀμβλὺν ἤδη προστετριμμένον τε πρὸς
ἄλλοισιν οἴκοις καὶ πορεύμασιν βροτῶν.
ὁμοῖα χέρσον καὶ θάλασσαν ἐκπερῶν,
σώζων ἐφετμὰς Λοξίου χρηστηρίους,
πρόσειμι δῶμα καὶ βρέτας τὸ σόν, θεά.
αὐτοῦ φυλάσσω ἀναμένω τέλος δίκης.

Or.: Lady Athena, I have come on the biddings of Loxias.
Receive gracefully this wretched man,
neither suppliant, nor with hands uncleaned,
but already spiritless and worn away in
other homes and haunts of mortals.
passing beyond dry land and sea alike,
maintaining the commands of prophetic Loxias,
I am present at your home and image, goddess.
guarding here, I await the outcome of justice.

In this passage, Orestes speaks very reverently to Athena, addressing the goddess in a formal manner. He states that he has not arrived in Athens in the capacity of suppliant, but to await the judgment regarding the murder of his mother. The tone, however, is clearly that of a human talking to a god, not a man talking to an equal. Worn away by his wanderings, which

⁴⁹ Sommerstein (1989), 151.

⁵⁰ Henderson (2008), 387.

he made in order to obey Apollo, whose suppliant he actually is, he is ready to hear Athena's verdict. Instead of Athena, however, the Furies engage with Orestes, pestering him to answer to them before Athena arrives. Orestes sticks to the plan and waits for the goddess with whom the trial can begin. When Athena comes to the stage, she first engages in a civilised conversation with the Furies, after which she turns to Orestes:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 436-441

Ἄθ.: τί πρὸς τάδ' εἰπεῖν, ὦ ξέν', ἐν μέρει θέλεις;
λέξας δὲ χώραν καὶ γένος καὶ ζυμφορὰς
τὰς σάς, ἔπειτα τῶνδ' ἀμυναθοῦ ψόγον,
εἴπερ πεποιθὼς τῇ δίκῃ βρέτας τόδε
ἦσαι φυλάσσω ἐστίας ἐμῆς πέλας,
σεμνὸς προσίκτωρ ἐν τρόποις Ἰξίου.

Ath.: What, stranger, do you wish to say against these things in turn?
after having told your country, your kin and your
destinies, then defend against their reprimand,
if you indeed, trusting justice, sit guarding
this wooden image, close to my hearth,
as an honoured suppliant in the manners of Ixion.

After talking to the Furies, familiar creatures to her, she now turns to Orestes, who is merely a stranger to her. Because he came to the temple of Athena and is now sitting close to a wooden image of her, she deems him a suppliant, a role that Orestes immediately discards:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 443-446

Ὀρ.: ἄνασσ' Ἀθάνᾳ, πρῶτον ἐκ τῶν ὑστάτων
τῶν σῶν ἐπῶν μέλημ' ἀφαιρήσω μέγα.
οὐκ εἰμι προστρόπαιος, οὐδ' ἔχων μύσος
πρὸς χειρὶ τῆμῃ τὸ σὸν ἐφεζόμεν βρέτας.

Or.: Lady Athena, first I will take a great object
of care away from your last words.
I am not a suppliant, nor having dirt on my
hand did I take a seat near your image.

He reassures her that he is not a man seeking purification from a goddess in order to clear his conscience in any way. He asks her to be the judge that is needed to solve this case and puts

his fate in her hands. Athena, even though she is not needed in the godlike capacity she thought, answers in a manner that makes the relationship between them clear:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 470-471

Ἄθ.: τὸ πρᾶγμα μεῖζον, εἴ τις οἶεται τόδε
βροτὸς δικάζειν· οὐδὲ μὴν ἐμοὶ θέμις

Ath.: The matter is too great, if any mortal believes
to judge this: [it is] not even lawful for me

She, as a goddess, can make a verdict better than any mortal can, much like a judge knows judgement better than the other parties involved in a court case. Even Athena as the goddess of wisdom, however, cannot make the correct judgment. Later on, as we will see below, Athena finds a resolution for this.

After urging both Orestes and the Furies to gather testimonies, she disappears from the stage and the chorus of Furies start a choral song about how no one can escape justice. When Athena returns, the trial begins, and the Furies start questioning Orestes about the murder of his mother. Apollo is questioned as well and when the trial ends in a tie, Athena's vote acquits Orestes of the murder of his mother. Orestes, jubilant about his acquittal, addresses both Athena and Apollo in their godly capacity:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 754-760

Ὅρ.: ὦ Παλλάς, ὃ σῶσασα τοὺς ἐμοὺς δόμους.
γαίας πατρώιας ἐστερημένον σύ τοι
κατώικισάς με. καί τις Ἑλλήνων ἐρεῖ
Ἄργεῖος ἀνὴρ αὖθις ἔν τε χρήμασιν
οἰκεῖ πατρώοις, Παλλάδος καὶ Λοξίου
ἕκατι, καὶ τοῦ πάντα κραίνοντος τρίτου
Σωτῆρος·

Or.: O Pallas, because you have saved my house, you
have brought me, who was deprived of fatherlands
back to my homeland. And anyone of the Greeks will
ask 'the man from Argos lives again in the belongings
of his fatherland, because of Pallas and Loxias, and of
the third who rules everything, the Saviour':

Now that the trial has ended, Orestes turns to Athena, the goddess, in order to thank her for the outcome. As Athena is standing next to him, recently having spoken as a judge, he praises her as a human would praise a god. The relationship is that of man-to-god, but, unlike the relation to Apollo, it has never throughout the play been any different. Athena has never been addressed other than with the reverence suitable for a god. This undermines the notion that the gods played a different role in the trial than in the rest of the tragedy and makes the assumption that the audience saw gods partake in a human trial more agreeable than the idea that the audience saw humans where there should have been gods. The attire that Athena and Apollo probably wore during the entire performance supports the claim further that their ‘godness’ was present the entire time. Either way, the audience saw gods descended on earth, partaking in a trial as humans with a human. Something out of the ordinary was placed in an environment known to the audience: they saw gods acting in human capacities. The fact that the audience was looking at human trial performed by gods, was probably an estranging factor.

The last thing I want to mention here includes a passage of *Eumenides*, in which Athena addresses the judges of the trial that she brought with her:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 681-685, 690-699 & 704-710

Ἄθ.: κλύοιτ' ἄν ἤδη θεσμόν, Ἀττικὸς λεῶς,
 πρώτας δίκας κρίνοντες αἵματος χυτοῦ.
 ἔσται δὲ καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν Αἰγέως στρατῶι
 αἰεὶ δικαστῶν τοῦτο βουλευτήριον.
 πάγον δ' Ἄρειον τόνδ', (...)

...

(...) ἐν δὲ τῶι σέβας
 ἄστῶν φόβος τε ξυγγενῆς τὸ μὴ ἀδικεῖν
 σήσει τό τ' ἤμαρ καὶ κατ' εὐφρόνην ὁμῶς,
 αὐτῶν πολιτῶν μὴ ἰπχραινούντων νόμους·
 κακαῖς ἐπιρροαῖσι βορβόρωι θ' ὕδωρ
 λαμπρὸν μιαίνων οὔποθ' εὐρήσεις ποτόν.
 τὸ μήτ' ἄναρχον μήτε δεσποτούμενον
 ἄστοις περιστέλλουσι βουλευῶ σέβειν
 καὶ μὴ τὸ δεινὸν πᾶν πόλεως ἔξω βαλεῖν·

...

κερδῶν ἄθικτον τοῦτο βουλευτήριον,
αἰδοῖον, ὀξύθυμον, εὐδόντων ὕπερ
ἐγρηγορὸς φρούρημα γῆς καθίσταμαι.
ταύτην μὲν ἐξέτειν' ἔμοις παραίνεσιν
ἀστοῖσιν ἐς τὸ λοιπὸν· ὀρθοῦσθαι δὲ χρὴ
καὶ ψῆφον αἶρειν καὶ διαγνῶναι δίκην
αἰδουμένους τὸν ὄρκον. εἴρηται λόγος.

Ath: So that you may already hear the law, Attican people,
who are deciding the first judgements of bloodshed.
Hereafter as well, this court of judges
will be there forever for the people of Aigeus.
And this Areion hill, (...)

...

(...) on this, reverential awe of the citizens
and its relative, fear, will keep you away from
doing wrong, by day and all the same every night,
when the citizens themselves do not defile the laws:
staining clear water with bad streams and filth,
you will never find a drink.
Neither anarchy, nor being ruled by a despot,
I determine for the citizens to attend to and worship
and not to throw all terrible out of the city:

...

I appoint this council untouched by crafty deeds,
honoured, fiery, awake over those who sleep
a watch post of the land.
I extended this exhortation to my citizens
for the future: but it is necessary to rise
and to take a ballot and to give a verdict
honouring your oath. My word is spoken.

She gives a speech about how the people of Athens will know justice of the like from now on. Since she was not suited to do it herself, Athena transfers the giving of judgment to the citizens of Athens, seated on the Areopagus. Since the Areopagus was reformed by Ephialtes in 458,⁵¹ the same year of the *Oresteia*'s performance, the allusion to the transformation

⁵¹ Debnar (2005), 9.

mentioned here is probably not a coincidence. Aeschylus here uses a god to make a statement about the new-founded institution, which gives the democracy and the judicial apparatus some extra allure. Again, we see a cross-over between the divine world and the human world, an experience that should now feel quite familiar to the audience. The sensation itself, however, is estranging: the world of the gods is transferred to the world of humans and the gods roam free as if they belong there. In the last passage of the *Eumenides* quoted above, however, Athena predicts something that no human ever could, which puts her back between the gods.

In the *Eumenides* the gods play a pivotal role. They are wandering around on earth and take up positions normally reserved for humans. They interact with the mortal Orestes in a fashion that may occasionally seem like we're dealing with man-to-man interactions, but most of the time the gods remain gods. Initially, one would think that this makes the suspension of disbelief difficult, since gods do not normally roam the earth. As said before, this may have resulted in an estranging sensation for the audience, since it was confronted with gods playing in a role in the human world: strange made normal. After two plays that deal with solely human interactions in *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers*, the trial by the gods must have given the audience an alienating sensation towards the characters and happenings on stage.

Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*

The next tragedian whose play will be discussed is Sophocles: "seven years younger than Aeschylus and twenty-four years older than Euripides," he lived from approximately 496 to 406/5 BC.⁵² While his family lived in Colonus, Sophocles became part of the Athenian aristocracy⁵³ and gained public office as a general.⁵⁴ He was therefore well-versed in Athenian politics and knew his way around the city. His play *Oedipus Tyrannus* was probably performed around 429-425 BC⁵⁵ and revolves around a myth well-known to the Greek audience. Laius and Iocaste, king and queen of Thebes, want to have a child, but shouldn't, since they know by oracle that the child will bring doom upon their house. When Oedipus is born – Iocaste's maternal instinct is stronger than her fear of the prophecy – they leave him behind and Merope and Polybius, king and queen of Corinth who cannot bear children, find him. Oedipus becomes their son, but after hearing from a drunk man that he is not his parents'

⁵² Tyrell (2012), 20.

⁵³ Tyrell (2012), 20-21.

⁵⁴ Tyrell (2012), 26.

⁵⁵ Segal (2001), ix.

natural born child, he goes to Delphi. Apollo denies him a direct answer, but tells him instead that he is doomed to kill his father and bear children with his mother. He then flees his adoptive parents, whom he still believes to be his biological ones. On the road to Thebes he, unknowingly, encounters his biological father and kills him in a quarrel. When arriving at Thebes, he frees the city from a plague that has been torturing the people, the sphinx. As a reward, he is given the hand of the queen, Iocaste in marriage, thus fulfilling the oracle. For a while all seems right, but then the Plague hits the city, and as new-found king, Oedipus must resolve the situation. This is where *Oedipus Tyrannus* begins. In this play, the focus will be on the difference between the place and time of the story that is portrayed on stage and the place and time of the audience itself. Unlike the interaction between human and gods, the place and time of the plot are difficult to reconstruct performatively, since it has less to do with the performance, and more with context on stage and the content of the text itself. This context will be reconstructed as much as possible

As said before, the story is mythical and was probably already around in the second millennium BC.⁵⁶ Next to that, the story deals mainly with the city of Thebes, which is also different from the direct environment of the Athenian audience. As David Wiles, self-appointed ‘theatre historian’ at the University of Exeter, states when talking about the different spaces and places of Greek tragedy: “an effort of the imagination is needed to view the plays from an Athenian perspective.”⁵⁷ As stated in the first chapter, the caveat of Robinson is even more at play here, since the difference in place and time between plot and audience is something that is very personal and can have different consequences for every individual that watches the play. The festival of Dionysus was an event that attracted people from afar and the audience must have included foreigners, even though they were probably outnumbered by the Athenians.⁵⁸ Not only the variety in status, but also the different origins of the individual members of the audience, makes it difficult to accept any general idea about how the place and the time of the play were received by the audience.

While Euripides is known for his glorifying of Athens over other Greek cities,⁵⁹ we can probably find some sentiment of Thebes as opposed to Athens in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Thebes and Athens have some similarities, like the acropolis and their likeness in

⁵⁶ Edmunds (2006), 4.

⁵⁷ Wiles (2000), 96.

⁵⁸ Croally (2005), 63.

⁵⁹ Wiles (2000), 96.

origin myths, but are in other ways enemies. The two cities were opponents in the Peloponnesian war, and on a mythical level Thebes was a playground for incest, burial issues, and murder, while Athens remained the place where heroism was daily business.⁶⁰ This division between heroic Athens and not-so-heroic other Greek cities was already evident in the previous discussed tragedy. *Eumenides* takes for its larger part place in Athens, where the judicial system was founded, not in Argos, where the murder of relatives had occurred. In other words: Athens rules, the rest of Greece not so much. Adding to that, the story of Oedipus ends with *Oedipus in Colonus*, in which Oedipus travels to Sophocles' birthplace Colonus. The myth gets a satisfying ending there, with Oedipus at peace with the things that have happened. Colonus being a small town close to Athens at the time, this ending paints Athens again as a superior place. The clash between the cities and the consequences it had for the position of the cities in tragedies, may have resulted in an alienating sensation for the audience, whether the individual members originated from Athens or not. Next to that, the fact that the story is not only mythical but took place several hundred years ago, may have created distance between the story and the audience as well. To investigate whether this was the case or not, the different passages in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* where place and/or time play a role, will be further zoomed in on.

Place

In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the audience finds itself brought to Thebes, in front of the palace of the city (the make-up of the *skēnē*⁶¹). In the very first sentence of the entire play, Oedipus emphasizes this fact:

(Soph. *OT.*) 1-3

ἽΟι.: Ὡ τέκνα, Κάδμου τοῦ πάλαι νέα τροφή,
 τίνας ποθ' ἔδρας τάσδε μοι θαάζετε
 ἰκτηρίοις κλάδοισιν ἐξεστεμμένοι; ⁶²

Oe.: Children, new generation of old, descending from Kadmos,
 on which seats do you still sit before me
 adorned with branches of suppliants?

⁶⁰ Wiles (2000), 96-97.

⁶¹ Lloyd-Jones (1994), 327.

⁶² For the Greek text of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, I used the edition of Dawe (1982), see primary texts in the bibliography, p. 84.

He addresses the children and priest of Thebes as the descendants of Cadmus, which must have instantly reminded the Athenian people, next to the idea that they are not in Athens anymore, of the mythological founding of Thebes. This notion not only alludes to the story of the rather violent start of the city – Cadmus slaying the dragon’s teeth, sowing them, making the men that sprung from the teeth fight each other, and constituting the five remaining men as heads of the new families of the city –, but reminds the audience as well that it is dealing with the mythical city here, not (for the audience) contemporary Thebes. This allusion to the founder of Thebes is seen seven times in the play, mostly in the beginning and one time in the end. When mentioned, Cadmus is most often a way of talking about the people, only once is his name directly connected with the city.⁶³ The name of the city itself – Thebes – is mentioned only four times: once when there is talk of the people, the other times to designate the city.⁶⁴ Corinth, the other town that plays a major role – because it is where Oedipus grew up and where he believes he’s from – is only mentioned by its name or, once, by geographical indicator.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, that does not say much, since the name of the mythical founder of Corinth gave his name to the city. Whether Sophocles wanted to designate Corinth by the name of its founder – and with it some mythical allure – or with its geographical name, makes little difference. The city does, however, have some myths that are connected to its history, so if Sophocles had wanted to make the city more mythical, that would have been possible. Fact remains that the mythical ancestry of Thebes is used more than its actual name, which transfers the plot’s location from fifth-century Athens – the environment of the audience – to the time and place of mythical Thebes. The other way in which the place of the plot is made clear is through its decor. The background is made up to present the palace of Thebes, where Oedipus and Iocaste live. The facade of the palace is not an uncommon decor of tragedies in general and sends the message to the audience that it is not dealing with the common man: the people that are on stage, are of a different status than the larger part of the audience.⁶⁶

The plot takes place on a level that is not familiar to the Athenian audience: it sees a city different from their own, and, next to that, a part of the city that is uncommon. Fact remains, however, that Thebes *did* exist at the time of the plays. The Athenian audience was thus looking at a tragedy that occurred in a place and time that was not necessarily theirs, but

⁶³ Soph. *OT*, people: 1, 29, 144, 223, 268, 273, 1288; city: 35.

⁶⁴ Soph. *OT*, city: 153, 1380, 1524; people: 453.

⁶⁵ Soph. *OT*, 939-940: “χθονὸς τῆς Ἰσθμίας”.

⁶⁶ Even though it was said before that the lower classes were probably less represented than the upper classes, I highly doubt the presence of multiple kings, queens or princesses in the Greek audience. High ranking officials were probably present, but a royal house is something different.

was nevertheless known to them. For the people from Thebes, if there were any, it must have been particularly strange to look a place they knew, but that was portrayed in a different manner than they were used to. For the people from Athens that had never seen Thebes before, and I imagine that to be quite a few since travel was not as common as it is today, they saw a city portrayed as something uncommon to their known world.

Time

Taking time into account regarding the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not meant here as part of the unity that Aristotle describes. We do not deal with the question whether the time in the play remains within the span of a day, but with the period in which the events take place and its compatibility to the time of the audience. In the actual time of the audience, we know that democracy was flourishing, war had been and would be present in society, and that Athens had a superior position as well. As said before, the events in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* were already known in the second millennium BC.⁶⁷ That means that the origins of the myth were even further apart from the audience than that and that the storyline had no chronological link to the audience that saw the tragedy. As mythical stories often are, however, the tragedies may have been some sort of explanation of the past of the Greek audience.⁶⁸ The tragedies could entail some sort of an ancestral lineage with which (parts of) the audience would feel a connection. This may have brought the scenes closer to home, how mythical they might be. The plot, however, and the individual characters that play a part in the story could have been less familiar to the audience. The way that *Oedipus Tyrannus* alludes to Cadmus, puts the city more in its mythical past than if it was called Thebes all the time and the events were certainly not contemporary. The Thebes that is talked about in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not the same as (for the audience) present-day Thebes.

The audience knew very well that they were looking at a myth long gone, but there is one character in particular that highlights that fact even more: Teiresias. The characters of the play are all distant from the audience in a way, but they have their place in the oedipal myth, more so than in other stories. Teiresias, on the other hand, is, among other things, known for his collaboration with Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, and has not only served Oedipus (unless there are several blind seers that are called Teiresias). Oracles – both the prophets and the

⁶⁷ Edmunds (2006), 4.

⁶⁸ Sourvinou-Inwood (2005), 296.

prophecies – were still common practice during the time of the tragedies, but that is not Teiresias' way of foretelling, he just knows:

(Soph. *OT.*) 300-304, 324-325

Ὅτι: ὃ πάντα νομῶν Τειρεσία, διδακτά τε
ἄρρητά τ', οὐράνιά τε καὶ χθονοστιβῆ,
πόλιν μὲν, εἰ καὶ μὴ βλέπεις, φρονεῖς δ' ὅμως
οἶαι νόσῳ σύνεστιν· ἦς σὲ προστάτην
σωτήρᾳ τ', ὦναξ, μούνον ἐξευρίσκομεν.

...

Τει.: φεῦ φεῦ· φρονεῖν ὡς δεινὸν ἔνθα μὴ τέλη
λύηι φρονοῦντι·

Oe.: O Teiresias, who observes all things, that what can be taught and unspeakable things, of heaven and earth, you still know, even if you do not see it, with what disease we are in this city: we found you as her only protector and saviour, o lord.

...

Tei.: Alas alas: how terrible it is to know where the fulfilment is accomplished for him who does not know:

His unusual powers as a seer, rather than a priest or priestess confined to the house of worship of his or her god, make him an extraordinary individual. His mythical and mystical nature both distance the time of the play from the time of the audience. Another creature with a clear link to a mythical past is the sphinx, who, even though she does not appear actively in the tragedy itself, played a great part in reuniting Oedipus with his birthplace and -mother.

(Soph. *OT.*) 35-36, 130-131, 391-392

Ἴε.: ὅς γ' ἐξέλυσας ἄστῳ Καδμεῖον μολῶν
σκληρᾶς ἀοιδοῦ δασμὸν ὃν παρείχομεν,

...

Κρε.: ἡ ποικιλωιδὸς Σφιγξ τὸ πρὸς ποσὶ σκοπεῖν
μεθέντας ἡμᾶς τὰφανῆ προσήγετο.

...

Όι.: πῶς οὐκ, ὄθ' ἡ ῥαψωιδὸς ἐνθάδ' ἦν κύων,
ἠΰδας τι τοῖσδ' ἀστοῖσιν ἐκλυτήριον;

Priest: [you] who freed the Kadmean city, when you came,
from the tax of the unyielding singer that we gave,

...

Kre.: The Sphinx with its riddling song got us to look at
the draught, when we let go of the things we could not see.

...

Oe.: How did you, when the reciting dog was here,
not invoke any salvation for these citizens?

The mythical nature of the sphinx that was terrorizing Thebes and stopping Oedipus from entering, and the reference to the beast for the plot puts the story again in a time long gone. Teiresias and the sphinx are of the same essence in that regard: they are both mythical in itself, not only as figures of this particular story, and highlight a time that is not the audience's.

There are, however, also places in the tragedy that have more of a link with the present. The plague that is roaming through Thebes in the story, could very well be a link to the plague that had just been raging through Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian war.⁶⁹

(Soph. OT.) 22-30

Ίε.: πόλις γάρ, ὥσπερ καὐτὸς εἰσορᾷς, ἄγαν
ἤδη σαλεύει κἀνακουφίσει κάρα
βυθῶν ἔτ' οὐχ οἷα τε φοινίου σάλου,
φθίνουσα μὲν κάλυξιν ἐγκάρποις χθονός,
φθίνουσα δ' ἀγέλαις βουνόμοις τόκοισί τε
ἀγόνους γυναικῶν· ἐν δ' ὁ πυρφόρος θεὸς
σκήψας ἐλαύνει, λοιμὸς ἔχθιστος, πόλιν,
ὕφ' οὗ κενοῦται δῶμα Καδμεῖον, μέλας
δ' Ἄιδης στεναγμοῖς καὶ γόοις πλουτίζεται.

⁶⁹ Liapis (2012), 85.

Priest: Because the city, as you can see for yourself, is already very much in trouble and cannot yet lift its head from the depths and such as from bloody heavens, dying with the fruit bearing blossoms of earth, dying with grazing herds and with the unborn children of women: and the flaming god, when he struck, takes the city, the hated plague, by which the house of Kadmos is emptied, and black Hades is enriched with groaning and wailing.

The plague that is pestering the citizens of Thebes is devastating to them, much like it was in Athens only a few moments before. The connection with what had just been happening in Athens, and in some other places in Greece as well, must have been felt by people who had experienced loss by the disease or the disease itself. In this way, the story that is being told may be from ancient times, but this aspect brings the happenings closer to home. Sophocles toys with the past and the present and it is likely that the audience caught some of that. After all, a devastating plague is something that is not easily forgotten. This toying with past and present could have worked in two ways. It may be that instead of estrangement, this may have made the plot more familiar to the audience: even though events that are portrayed are of a mythical nature, the fact that the audience saw something very real and contemporary happening, may have brought the story closer to them and easier to connect with. On the other hand, the clash between present and past could have been estranging. If the connection with present events was tangible for the audience, as I imagine it was, it would see events occurring in a mythical past that they had just experienced for themselves. This could have evoked an estranging sensation for the audience, in that the familiar event of the plague was put in a strange context. Putting aside the fact that this sensation was different for every individual member of the audience, I consider the first explanation more likely. The recognition of an experience the audience had just endured probably brought the tragedy closer to home for the audience than that the alienating sensation distanced the audience from the plot.

Another theme that was present during the age of the audience is the enmity that existed between Athens and Thebes. While the opposition with Athens is not mentioned in this tragedy per se, Thebes does not seem a nice place to be in the plot. Aside from the plague, the sphinx terrorised the city and both incest and murder roam freely during the events of the tragedy. The mythical citizens of Thebes are not aware of it, of course, but it is Thebes, not Athens, where this all takes place. Thebes is established as a city with all things bad. The

Oedipus Tyrannus was performed somewhere between 429 and 425, when the first Peloponnesian war had ended and the second was beginning. Thebes sided with Sparta, Athens' enemy, and the idea of Thebes being Athens' counterpart in all things evil seems a probable approach of Sophocles, general in that war. Since the myth of Oedipus was known long before the enmities, this may be stretching the point too far, but the fact remains that the (largely) Athenian audience saw events unfold in a city that was not necessarily friendly towards their own in their present day. The connection with past Thebes, where atrocities were happening on a daily basis, and with present day Thebes, an enemy of the state, may have been felt for the Athenian audience. Much like with the plague, however, this may have been more of a sensation of familiarity, than of estrangement. The connection, if present, would be an undertone of familiarity for those who had any affiliation to the ongoing war, be it personal or professional. This is not large enough, in my opinion, to make the entire play estranging for, or familiar to, the Athenian audience. As for the foreign members of the audience, especially the ones from Thebes if there were any, the feeling may have been different. The people from Thebes saw their city portrayed as the city of atrocities and may have felt no connection between the city as portrayed in the tragedy and the city that was known to them. Thus, for the Theban audience, the play may have been more estranging than for the Athenian audience. This is, however, very personal and there may have been Thebans that had no sense of estrangement at all on account of the place and time of the plot, and Athenians that did. It is still true, however, that the audience was confronted with an image that they had of current-day Thebes on the one hand and the mythical Thebes displayed in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* on the other, which makes the sense of estrangement not entirely implausible.

The place and time of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* were something different than the place and time of the audience. The audience was, of course, familiar with the fact that they were going to look at something that was strange on those accounts, and the feeling of estrangement seems here less evident to me than the fact that the gods were estranging in the *Eumenides*. The fact that the cities in the tragedies and events like the plague were existing for the audience at the time makes the sense of estrangement even less probable. The audience was, however, looking at something that they would assume would never happen in their present day and time, and the connection between those events and their day-do-day life must have been partly absent. For some aspects the alienating feeling is more present than for others, or so it seems.

Euripides' *Medea*

The last tragedy that will be discussed in this chapter is Euripides' *Medea*. The youngest of the three famous tragedians, Euripides lived from about 480-475 until 407/406 BC.⁷⁰ He was probably part of the upper classes and may have taken part in standard military training and Attic assemblies, but not much of his public career is certain. We may assume, however, that he was "very much at home with the intellectual currents of his day," since his characters are rather intellectual.⁷¹ Euripides was an established writer, even though his plays did not win many prizes. *Medea*, for instance, which was part of a tetralogy including the lost plays *Philoctetes*, *Dictys*, and the satyr play *Theristai*, won third prize in 431.⁷²

The myth surrounding the *Medea* deals with the aftermath of the journey of the Argonauts, who went to Colchis to obtain the golden fleece from king Aetes. Aetes' daughter Medea helps Jason with the tasks he has to perform in order to get the fleece and, since she defied her father by doing so, flees with him from Colchis. In order to keep Aetes from catching up with them, Medea kills her brother Apsyrtus and throws him overboard, so that her father must stop and gather his son's body. When they arrive in Corinth, however, Jason gets engaged to Glauce, the daughter of the king of Corinth, Creon. This is where the *Medea* begins. Medea is full of hatred and feelings of vengeance towards Jason and this new life he has chosen over her. Aside from the fact that she herself sees no reason to live anymore, the love for her children seems gone as well. Throwing all caution to the wind, she concocts a plan to get her revenge. Creon enters, telling her to leave the land, and Medea begs him to let her stay for a few more days. Creon eventually concedes, and Medea starts to plot the murder of Glauce, Creon and Jason. Jason enters the stage and he and Medea get in a fight in which Medea accuses him of injustice. Jason argues that his marriage to the princess will look good on all of them and that it will benefit their children's future. After their argument, Aigeus, king of Athens, arrives, who is willing to grant Medea asylum in Athens, should she need it. Medea, reassured that she has somewhere to go when she isn't welcome in Corinth anymore, changes her plan: instead of killing Jason (next to Glauce and Creon), she now intends to kill her children. The chorus of Corinthian women tries to persuade her not to do that, but her mind is made up. When Jason reappears, she plays nice and they seemingly make up. Their children are sent to Glauce bearing gifts that Medea poisoned. Both Glauce and Creon perish because of them and when that deed is done, Medea proceeds to killing her children, despite

⁷⁰ Mastronarde (2002), 1 (birth) & 4 (death).

⁷¹ Mastronarde (2002), 2.

⁷² Mastronarde (2002), 4-5.

multiple appeals from the chorus. Jason appears too late to save them and he and Medea, who is driving her father Helios' chariot that will take her to Athens, have a heated discussion about who's to blame for everything that happened. Eventually Medea departs, leaving a desperate Jason behind.

In this tragedy, the character of Medea and her deeds are central to the discussion on estrangement. Both Medea herself and the act of murdering her children are elements of the tragedy that could feel estranging to the audience. The fact that Medea, as a woman, plays such a large and active part and the way that she does it, must have caused some agitation for the dominantly male audience. The perception of Medea's womanhood by the audience has been widely discussed, as Donald Mastronarde, a scholar of Classics at Berkeley University, states in his extensive introduction in his commentary to the *Medea*.⁷³ He explains that in the male-dominated society, the convention existed that women remained mostly indoors and silent, even though that could differ in daily life between different families and households.⁷⁴ Medea, on the other hand, is not only a female character, performed in front of a dominantly male audience, she also acts outside of the house and in a quite indecent manner. While we do not know what the characters looked like on stage, we know that women were depicted with white masks and male characters with dark ones.⁷⁵ Medea's character thus stood out when engaging with other male characters, but that is the only performative notion we have on Medea's appearance in the original play. Instead, the focus will be on the way Medea appears in the play through her own words and those of others. In the opening text of the play, for example, Medea's nurse laments the events that happened to her mistress and the way she describes her, immediately set the tone:

(Eur. *Med.*) 20, 34, 44

Τρο.: Μήδεια δ' ἡ δύστηνος ἠτιμασμένη⁷⁶

...

ἔγνωκε δ' ἡ τάλαινα συμφορᾶς (...)

...

⁷³ See Mastronarde (2012), 26n42, where he put together several authors who shed light on this concept.

⁷⁴ Mastronarde (2012), 26.

⁷⁵ Wiles (2000), 148.

⁷⁶ For the Greek text of Euripides' *Medea*, I used the edition of Mossman (2011), see primary texts in the bibliography, p. 84.

δεινή γάρ:

Nurse: Medea, the wretched dishonoured

...

The miserable woman knows her misfortunes (..)

...

For she is terribly smart:

The nurse talks about how she wishes that Jason never came to Colchis and that, if he had not, Medea would be happier for it. The first two words that describe Medea are full of pity (δύστηνος & τάλαινα) – the children’s *paedagogus* calls her *τάλαινα* as well –, but the last word mentioned here (δεινή) says two other things about her. δεινή means both smart and terrible. If Euripides wanted to call Medea just clever, he could have used the word σοφή, but the word δεινή makes Medea smart in a dangerous way.⁷⁷ Medea’s character throughout the play is summarized in these words: she is both to be pitied and to be feared. This opening statement about the title character, saying that a woman could be so powerful to evoke such an emotion, must have been strange to the audience.

The words that Medea says about herself are not more conventional:

(Eur. *Med.*) 230-234 & 248-251

Μη.: πάντων δ’ ὅσ’ ἔστ’ ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει
γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν·
ἄς πρῶτα μὲν δεῖ χρημάτων ὑπερβολῆι
πόσιν πρίασθαι, δεσπότην τε σώματος
λαβεῖν· κακοῦ γὰρ τοῦτ’ ἔτ’ ἄλγιον κακόν.

...

λέγουσι δ’ ἡμᾶς ὡς ἀκίνδυνον βίον
ζῶμεν κατ’ οἴκους, οἱ δὲ μάρνανται δορί,
κακῶς φρονοῦντες· ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ’ ἀσπίδα
στήναι θέλοιμ’ ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ.

Me.: of all that are animated and have insight,

⁷⁷ Mossman (2011), 219.

we women are the most wretched beings:
who first need to buy a husband with excessiveness
of possessions, and take a master of our bodies:
for this is a more painful disaster than any disaster.

...

They say that we live a life without danger
at home, and they against a spear, how
wrong they are: I would rather take three times
a stand near a shield, than give birth once.

She despises her role as a woman in Greek society: women are subjected to men and they are supposed to stay inside and bear children, a purpose that seems lost on Medea. With these words, she actively puts herself out of society that was probably known to the Greek audience and discards the role it makes her play. In doing this, she feels completely by herself:

(Eur. *Med.*) 255-258

Μη.: ἐγὼ δ' ἔρημος ἄπολις οὔσ' ὑβρίζομαι
πρὸς ἀνδρός, ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελητισμένη,
οὐ μητέρ', οὐκ ἀδελφόν, οὐχὶ συγγενῆ
μεθορμίσασθαι τῆσδ' ἔχουσα συμφορᾶς.

Me.: I, who is alone and without city, am treated
wrongly by my husband, taken as booty from a
barbarous land, not having a mother, nor a brother,
nor a kin, to distract me from this misfortune.

With no city or husband to rely on, Medea is utterly alone and with this an outcast to the Greek society. It is probable that the dominantly male, Greek audience saw her in this way. The women that may have been there, would probably feel more related to her, be it because Medea is a woman, or because the feeling of needing a man and a family to have status was familiar to them. There may even have been some women that felt that the things said by Medea were not completely untrue, but I dare not estimate the size of that group present at the performance of the tragedy. Furthermore, the fact that Medea feels alone, might also have to do with the fact that she is a Colchian, not a Greek woman, but more on that later.

Interestingly enough, the first words that are said about her character to her, are not that cruel:

(Eur. *Med.*) 282-286

Κρε.: δέδοικά σ', οὐδὲν δεῖ παραμπίσχειν λόγους,
μη μοί τι δράσης παῖδ' ἀνήκεστον κακόν.
συμβάλλεται δὲ πολλὰ τοῦδε δείγματα·
σοφὴ πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις,
λυπῆι δὲ λέκτρων ἀνδρὸς ἐστερημένη.

Kre.: I fear that you, it is not necessary to use the words
as a cover, may do some irreparable evil to my child.
Many proofs of this are brought together:
you are wise and skilful with many evils,
and are hurt, bereft of your husband's bed.

Even though Creon said something before about her scowling and looking angry,⁷⁸ he is being honest and even polite in a way, calling her wise and capable. He even seems to pity her with the unrequited love she has for Jason. It must be said that he says that she may use her smartness for evil, but he could have used words that would be far more negative. He calls her clever twice,⁷⁹ and remains somewhat polite, aside from calling her a fool once, when she presses him too much to let her and her children stay:

(Eur. *Med.*) 333

Κρε.: ἔρπ', ὦ ματαία, καὶ μ' ἀπάλλαξον πόνων.

Kre.: Go, foolish woman, and set me free from my troubles.

Creon seems to lose his temper here, but eventually lets Medea and her children stay. With Medea's self-pity and the pitiful way in which the chorus and the *paedagogus* address her, Creon's approach can be seen in the same way. Medea, as a woman scorned and alone, is to be pitied. When Jason arrives on stage, his words are not nearly as mild, but it must be said that Medea is rather harsh as well:

(Eur. *Med.*) 446-447, 455-458, 465-468

ΙΑ.: οὐ νῦν κατεῖδον πρῶτον ἀλλὰ πολλάκις
τραχεῖαν ὀργὴν ὡς ἀμήχανον κακόν.

⁷⁸ Eur. *Med.*, 271: “σὲ τὴν σκυθρωπὸν καὶ πόσει θυμουμένην,” (you, scowling and enraged by your husband).

⁷⁹ Eur. *Med.*, 320: “σοφὴ”.

...

κάγω μὲν αἰεὶ βασιλέων θυμουμένων
ὀργᾶς ἀφήιρουν καὶ σ' ἐβουλόμην μένειν·
σὺ δ' οὐκ ἀνίεις μωρίας, λέγουσ' αἰεὶ
κακῶς τυράννους· τοιγὰρ ἐκπεσῆι χθονός.

...

Μη.: ὦ παγκάκιστε, τοῦτο γάρ σ' εἰπεῖν ἔχω
γλώσσηι μέγιστον εἰς ἀνανδρίαν κακόν,
ἦλθες πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἦλθες ἔχθιστος γεγώς
[θεοῖς τε κάμοι παντί τ' ἀνθρώπων γένει];

Ia.: I saw not now for the first time, but many times
your sharp temper as an impossible evil.

...

And I always tried to take tempers away from
angry kings and wanted you to stay:
but you did not let your follies go, always speaking
badly of kings: therefore, you are driven from the land.

...

Me.: O you, vilest of all, for I have that as greatest
to call you with my tongue on your terrible unmanliness,
did you come to us, did you come to become most hated
[by the gods, and me, and everyone of men]?

In the argument that follows, Medea insists that she is wronged because she gave up everything for him, while Jason counters with the explanation that he did not desire another woman, but wanted a better place for himself and his family.

In this first part of the tragedy, we see a woman scorned by the man she gave up everything for: portrayed as a woman that needs to be pitied, as well as feared. The way the men are talking to her seems to be both pitiful and angry and it is probable that the audience had mixed feelings toward the character. These mixed feelings are complemented with two things: her foreignness and her magical abilities. Medea is not only coming from Colchis, she is also a woman with magical abilities, factors that distance her further from the audience. As said about *Oedipus Rex*, the fact that the events happen in a different place, Corinth, distances

the audience from the events on stage. Much like that, the fact that Medea is from Colchis probably distances the audience from the character on stage. It is, in any case, a fact that appears multiple times, it even starts with it:

(Eur. *Med.*) 1-6

Τρο.: Εἴθ' ὄφελ' Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος
Κόλχων ἐς αἴαν κυανέας Συμπληγάδας,
μηδ' ἐν νάπαισι Πηλίου πεσεῖν ποτε
τμηθεῖσα πεύκη, μηδ' ἐρετμῶσαι χέρας
ἀνδρῶν ἀριστέων οἱ τὸ πάγχρυσον δέρος
Πελία μετήλθον.

Nurse: O, if the hull of the Argo did not have to fly
to the land of the Kolchians through the dark Symplegades,
that the cut pine-tree never fell in the vales of Pelias,
nor provided the hands of the best men with oars
who strove for the all-golden fleece for Pelias.

Medea's name may not be mentioned, the audience would know whom the nurse is referring to and the statement is clear: we are dealing with someone who is not from here. References to this fact are woven throughout the entire plot:

(Eur. *Med.*) 131-132, 255-256, 328, 591-592, 1329-1331

Χο.: ἔκλυον φωνάν, ἔκλυον δὲ βοᾶν
τᾶς δυστάνου Κολχίδος·

...

Μη.: ἐγὼ δ' ἔρημος ἄπολις οὔσ' ὑβρίζομαι
πρὸς ἀνδρός, ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελητισμένη,

...

Μη.: ὦ πατρίς, ὡς σου κάρτα νῦν μνεῖαν ἔχω.

...

Μη.: οὐ τοῦτό σ' εἶχεν, ἀλλὰ βάρβαρον λέχος
πρὸς γῆρας οὐκ εὐδοξον ἐξέβαινέ σοι.

...

Ia.: (...) ἐγὼ δὲ νῦν φρονῶ, τότε σὺ φρονῶν,
ὄτ' ἐκ δόμων σε βαρβάρου τ' ἀπὸ χθονὸς
Ἑλλην' ἐς οἶκον ἠγόμην, (...)

Cho.: I heard a sound, I heard the cry
of the wretched one from Kolchis:

...

Me.: I, who is alone and without city, am treated
wrongly by my husband, taken as booty from a
barbarous land,

...

Me.: O fatherland, how I now strongly have a memory of you.

...

Me.: this did not have you, but a barbarian bed
would not go with good reputation for you through old age.

...

Ia.: (...) now I am wise, while I was not then,
when I led you from your home and from your
barbarian land to a Greek home, (...)

A few examples are given here, from different speakers of the play, of which Medea is not the least. The fact that she is foreign is something that Medea emphasises herself as well, and is not only done by people talking about her. Medea herself wants to maintain her own roots and heritage, or so it seems, and does not put Greekness above her eastern origins. This is a notion that is not shared by Jason:

(Eur. *Med.*) 536-541

Ia.: πρῶτον μὲν Ἑλλάδ' ἀντὶ βαρβάρου χθονὸς
γαῖαν κατοικεῖς καὶ δίκην ἐπίστασαι
νόμοις τε χρῆσθαι μὴ πρὸς ἰσχύος χάριν·
πάντες δέ σ' ἤισθοντ' οὔσαν Ἑλληνες σοφὴν

καὶ δόξαν ἔσχες· εἰ δὲ γῆς ἐπ' ἑσχάτοις
ῥοισιν ὤικεις, οὐκ ἂν ἦν λόγος σέθεν.

Ja.: First, you now live on Hellene land instead of
barbarian land and you know justice
and use our laws, not for the sake of force:
all the Greeks learned that you are smart
and you gained respect: if you lived on the uttermost
boundaries of the land, not a word would concern you.

Jason not only mentions that Medea is not from Greece, but is also stating that it is better to be Greek than to be barbarian. When the genre of tragedy was flourishing, the Athenians had just endured the Persian Wars and it has been argued that the “oppositional definition” of Greek and *βάρβαροι* was a direct result from those wars.⁸⁰ The foreigners, be it Egyptians, Colchians, or other ethnicities, were all non-Greek: speaking in a weird language, revering strange gods, tyrannical and cruel, etcetera.⁸¹ To Jason, and maybe to the Greek audience as well, calling Medea a barbarian meant a great insult. For Medea, however, Colchis seems to be more of a home than Greece and Corinth, where Jason so ‘generously’ brought her.

This preference of her old home over Greece could have evoked different sensations with the Greek audience. On the one hand, it may have felt strange to the audience that anyone would rather be non-Greek than Greek, with the negative connotations clinging to the term *βάρβαροι*. On the other hand, it is plausible that the sense of homesickness is something the Greeks understood. Medea recalls home because the new world does not treat her as she would prefer and at home she has her family. Even though they might not treat her good as well, home is home and I can imagine the Greek audience to sympathise with that feeling. Medea is, however, despised at home and homeless, being exiled from her new one, although she can flee to Athens when the deed is done. This last notion may have brought some sense of a good ending to the play, since Athens stood for the best city in the Greek world. This is especially the case in Euripides’ plays, in which Athens remains the place where terrible things did not happen.⁸² This clashes, of course, with Medea’s final deed of killing her children. The fact that Athens’ goodness receives the terrible Medea – who will be an evil in Athens as well – may have been an odd combination to the audience, especially the Athenians.

⁸⁰ Wright (2005), 177.

⁸¹ Wright (2005), 178.

⁸² Wiles (2000), 96.

The last estranging aspects about the character of Medea that I want to discuss here, are, apart from her womanhood and her foreignness, her magic abilities and divine heritage. Even though the play takes place in a mythical environment, most of the characters are essentially human. The background of the nurse and the *paedagogus* is not discussed in the play, but we can assume that they are of human descentance, as are Jason, Glauce, and Creon. Medea, however, repeatedly mentions the fact that she is a descendant from Helios, the sun:

(Eur. *Med.*) 404-406, 746-747, 1321-1322

Μη.: ὀραῖς ἃ πάσχεις; οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ' ὀφλεῖν
τοῖς Σισυφείοις τοῖσδ' Ἰάσονος γάμοις,
γεγῶσαν ἐσθλοῦ πατρὸς Ἥλιου τ' ἄπο.

...

Μη.: ὄμνυ πέδον Γῆς πατέρα θ' Ἥλιον πατρὸς
τοῦμοῦ θεῶν τε συντιθεὶς ἅπαν γένος.

...

Μη.: τοιόνδ' ὄχημα πατρὸς Ἥλιος πατήρ
δίδωσιν ἡμῖν, ἔρυμα πολεμίας χερρός.

Me.: Do you see what you suffer: it is not necessary for you to endure laughter by this Sisyphian marriage of Jason, who was born from a noble father and from Helios.

...

Swear by the land of Gaia and by Helios, father of my father and by the whole merged race of gods.

...

such a vehicle Helios, father of my father,
gave me, as protection from a hostile hand.

Medea is emphasising this fact, maybe because in doing so she puts herself above everyone else. For the audience, it may have made Medea a superhuman character. The other characters of the play are, even though they are part of a mythical history and Jason can even be counted as a hero, of human descentance. The fact that Medea's heritage is explicitly mentioned at

least three times throughout the play, makes her character stand out next to her co-characters. Whereas the largely male part of the audience could characterise with both Creon and Jason as human and male characters, the connection with Medea must have been more difficult to feel. The fact that she leaves on a chariot (probably on top of the palace, the *skēnē*) that she got from her father Helios at the end of the play, distances her literally further from the world below.

Next to that, Medea has some witchlike qualities that make her superhuman nature even more present. In the story of the Argonauts that precedes the *Medea*, and was probably known to the audience, Medea uses potions and spells to trick the daughters of Pelias into murdering their father. In the *Medea*, she kills Glauce and Kreon with a crown and a gown adorned with potions:

(Eur. *Med.*) 384-385

Μη.: κράτιστα τὴν εὐθειᾶν, ἧι πεφύκαμεν
σοφοὶ μάλιστα, φαρμάκοις αὐτοὺς ἐλεῖν.

Me.: It is best to go straightforward, through which
I am most skilled, and seize them with poisonous herbs.

φαρμάκοις, a word strongly associated with poison, highlight the idea of Medea as a witch. The fact that she calls to Hecate, encourages this image:

(Eur. *Med.*) 395-398

Μη.: οὐ γὰρ μὰ τὴν δέσποιναν ἧν ἐγὼ σέβω
μάλιστα πάντων καὶ ξυνεργὸν εἰλόμην,
Ἑκάτην, μυχοῖς ναίουσαν ἐστίας ἐμῆς,
χαίρων τις αὐτῶν τοῦμὸν ἀλγυνεῖ κέαρ.

Me.: By the mistress whom I honour the
most above all and took as my helper,
Hecate, dwelling in the innermost of my hearth,
not one of them rejoicing will hurt my heart.

Hecate was, amongst other things, related to witchcraft⁸³ and the fact that Medea invokes her, should have made an impression on the Greek audience, for whom Hecate was somewhat of a

⁸³ Mossman (2011), 255.

strange, foreign goddess. The relation to her must have alienated Medea from the audience, be it male or female, since we can assume that not many of them were practicing witchcraft.

Medea is thus a self-righteous woman, a foreigner, descendant of a god, and a witch. On top of that, the entire plot revolves around her planning of, and proceeding to, the murder of Glauce, Creon, and her children – the latter of which were also solely innocent bystanders –, an act that must have horrified every member of the audience. The audience may have felt more sympathy with and connection to the character of Jason. Male, Greek, and human, Jason represents characteristics that are more relatable to the audience than that Medea does.

The audience saw thus a play unfold of which the titular character is strange and unrelatable. Opposed to the more relatable personalities of the other characters, especially to Jason, Medea's abnormality may have sprung up even more. This estranging sensation that Medea may have evoked, could have resulted in different feelings towards the play. A consequence could have been that the audience felt an estranging sensation towards the play, since both the character and her deeds are too distant. It could also mean that the audience sided more with her antagonist, Jason, because he opposes her, unlike the other male characters that appear. In that way, the estranging feeling the audience may have felt towards Medea, could have resulted in an increased sense of familiarity towards Jason. Since the *Medea* won third prize, the plot and its titular character may have been too much for the Greek audience that saw it happen. After all, the character that is probably the most relatable one of the play, is left empty-handed with his entire future ruined – not an ending that one wants to relate to. The entire plot revolves around a strange factor, Medea with all her weirdness, being placed in a for the Greek audience relative known surrounding. The fact that, literally, a tragedy follows, must have increased the alienating sensation towards Medea's character and actions.

Estrangement in Greek tragedies: a few notes

In this chapter, I attempted to point out the sense of estrangement that is present in tragedies of each of the canonical tragedians. Whereas Aristotle views recognition as the main part of tragedy, the central question of this part was whether the opposite could be true as well. In my opinion, there are many factors that could be viewed as estranging to a dominantly male, Greek audience. The use of the gods in *Eumenides*, the mythical place and time in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and the central character of the *Medea* are all factors that are strange towards the male audience and I believe that a sense of estrangement was unavoidable for at least some

aspects, storylines or characters in Greek tragedies. A few points should be mentioned, however.

Firstly, and most closely related to the research of this chapter, the aspects that have been mentioned in each of the different plays can also be applied to the others discussed here (and other tragedies outside of this research). Both the *Eumenides* and the *Medea* are set in a place and time that was not directly familiar to the Greek audience, even though they may have viewed them as a sort of ancestral lineage. Female characters are not reserved to the *Medea* alone, for example Athena in the *Eumenides* and Iocaste in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Gods may not have been actively present in the other plays discussed here, but they have been in others, in *Philoctetes* for example. All these estranging factors are thus applicable to more than one tragedy.

Furthermore, the tragedies that were performed in Greek times, were probably in general more estranging than we are used to. If we go and see a play in the theatre, we can admire beautifully made decors and sympathise through the actor's expression on his or her face. The fact that the actors in fifth-century Greece wore expressionless masks that had only symbolised features of gender and age (white for female, dark for male characters, for example),⁸⁴ may have made the sense of estrangement stronger. To add to that, the tragedies were performed in a highly stylized language, that stood apart from day-to-day talking. It must be said, however, that I am now comparing the way I experience theatre nowadays to the way the fifth-century Greek audience experienced it. For them, theatre meant masks, a stage outside, one *skēnē*, and in a style that was not their daily used language. Their suspense of disbelief, as Lada-Richards mentioned, involves thus much more imagination than we today need in order to believe the events on stage. Emotionless masks may have made the performance in general strange, but the audience was used to this and the people knew what they were getting into.

Lastly, it is important to mention that the things that have been discussed in regard to the tragedies, are of itself unfamiliar to the audience (gods, myth, women). The tragedies consisted of more than those aspects, of course, and carried in them also aspects that were more relatable to the fifth-century Greek and male audience. The crux lies, in my opinion, in the details that the writers of the tragedies provided for the audience: Gods are placed in a context that is familiar to the audience, place and time of the tragedy gets intertwined with that of the audience, and a feminine character is stretching the boundaries of her womanhood

⁸⁴ Wiles (2000), 148.

next to her male superior. This all happens in what was a familiar context to the Greek audience: the tragedies performed in honour of the City Dionysia. The audience thus expected to see a tragedy that would not directly relate to the world they knew. The details of strangeness – gods acting in the human world and a woman acting as a man – placed in a familiar context or next to familiar characters must have resulted in a hint of estrangement for the audience.

Modern re-enactments

Having imposed my Western, twenty-first-century view on the ancient Greek tragedies, it is now time to turn that to a medium closer to home: modern re-enactments of the discussed tragedies. Since there are quite some estranging elements to be found in the Greek tragedies, it is interesting to see if these elements remain present in their restaging. The ideas about estrangement as explained in the first chapter will be used here, but the approach will be slightly different. Since the ancient tragedies could not be seen by me, I made a construct of how it would have been and how estranging the tragedies were. The plays that are about to be discussed, however, were performed in the last years and were seen by me. Since I have not only the texts at my disposal – generously provided by each of the theatre groups –, but also the performance itself, including acting styles, decor, other visual aids, etcetera, the approach needs to differ slightly. Next to the textual research, that I will execute as I have done with the Greek text, I will invoke Performance Studies again, using a more defined method this time.

In an article written by several scholars on Performance Studies and Drama History, Jim Davis and others coin the term ‘revival’: “[i]t is used to indicate the new realisation of an old – normally a classic – text, and carries the implication that director and cast bring their contemporary world into fruitful dialogue with the author’s work from an earlier time” (...) “Revival seeks to connect with the past through present consciousness.”⁸⁵ In other words, a revival of an ancient play engages in a dialogue with that ancient play. That means that both of those aspects, ancient and modern, are combined and neither is left out. In his book *Theatre Studies: The Basics*, Robert Leach, an independent scholar on Theatre Studies, discusses the different parts of a performance: text, dramatic form, history, acting, directing, scenography, and the audience.⁸⁶ For the discussion on the reperformances, I will use the text and my experience of the performances and the stage to discuss the dramatic form, the acting, and the scenography. These aspects shall be discussed to see if the modern performances entail some of the estrangement that was found in the ancient tragedies. The history will not be discussed, since the ancestors of the revival have already been explained. It would be interesting to see the course of each of the tragedies throughout their entire history, but that would be too large a project for this thesis. The directing would be interesting as well, but the director’s interpretation of the play would have interfered with my own interpretation on the presence or absence of estrangement. Without the director’s clarification, the road is open to my own

⁸⁵ Davis et. al. (2011), 107.

⁸⁶ Leach (2008).

perception. I have not included the audience in this research, because this thesis would then, again, become too large if it included sociological/anthropological research into the audience's perception. Instead, I will be using my own findings on the play, staying as objective as possible, of course.

The texts will be placed next to their ancestors in order to see whether the language resembles that of the ancient text. The hypothesis here is that the closer the text stays to its predecessor, the more it evokes estrangement, since the stylised Greek text of the ancient plays is – even in translation – not language that we are used to in day-to-day life. It is important to note that the texts that will be discussed here, are scripts. Everything is written down as it was (supposed to be) said on stage, making it probably more practical than anything else. As said on page 3, note 1, the texts we have left of the tragedies are not the ones that were performed in the fifth century BC.⁸⁷ The texts used here are thus of a completely different nature than the texts we have of the ancient tragedies. Regarding the dramatic form, the genre is of the most interest: does it remain a tragedy or is it turned into another form of theatre? As for scenography, the decor as well as the movement of both actors and props will be discussed.⁸⁸ We can compare the decor only to the knowledge that it was, in case of the three tragedies discussed before, a palace's facade. Since we have no real knowledge of what it looked like, the scenography of the modern performance cannot completely be compared to that of its ancestor. The other aspect that stands alone, is the acting. As Leach mentions, the two forms of acting reappear: Stanislavskian method acting and the Brechtian "system of acting [that] depends on self-conscious performing to 'alienate' the audience, that is, to help them judge the actions presented."⁸⁹ Since we have no recordings of the way that the actor's played their parts, other than that they did so wearing masks in a highly stylised language, this also is a stand-alone aspect of the re-performances.

These concepts will be used to take a look at the estranging elements we found before: the gods in *Eumenides*, the difference in place and time of *Oedipus Rex*, and the character of Medea in the play of the same name. I will start by painting a picture of the stage, move on to

⁸⁷ It has even been suggested that that actors and writers never had a script, but that every transmission about the plot was done orally (Wiles, 2000, 167). The opposite has been put forth as well: "[rhapsodes] shared with actors and orators an important aspect of their training: the use of written texts (first in the character of transcripts, then of scripts) to prepare for and secure a successful performance" (González, 2013, 311). The versions of the tragedies that we have left are, in any case, lacking stage directions and are in that regard unlike the scripts that will be discussed in this chapter.

⁸⁸ Leach also mentions stage lighting (2008, 155), but I'm clearly out of my depth in that regard, and any attempt to recall the lighting would be ambitious and unreliable. I can, however, talk about the level of light- and darkness as it appeared to me.

⁸⁹ Leach (2008), 116.

the way the actors performed, and end with the comparison of textual details of the modern play with the fragments used before. This will be concluded with a final note on the dramatic form, in order to see what is left of the genre of tragedy in the reperformance and whether we are dealing with a revival or not.

Theu Boermans' *Welgezinden*

The reperformance of the *Oresteia* by the National Theatre of the Netherlands, and particularly the *Welgezinden* (the Dutch name of the *Eumenides*) played from April to June 2018. I saw the play on the 23rd of May, in Utrecht. The script was based on a translation by Ted Hughes, transformed to Dutch by Tom Klein, and directed by Theu Boermans. The theatre group was kind enough to send me a script that shows the entire Dutch translation, with the eliminated words and sentences still visible to show the adaptations that were made for the performance.

Beginning the analysis of the reperformance, it is important to note that all the characters remained the same, no one was eliminated or added. Besides that, the play is set in the mythical time and place of the ancient text, since the story refers to Athens and the Trojan War. To start the analysis with the stage: it was quite an unusual decor with a square platform construction that spanned most of the stage's floor. It consisted of yellow plates made into some sort of waving podium like the waves of the sea, that spun around constantly, and slowly, and on which the actors could stand and walk. There were two screens hanging on the back of the stage, showing sometimes closeups of the actors, sometimes the stage from above, as the picture below shows:

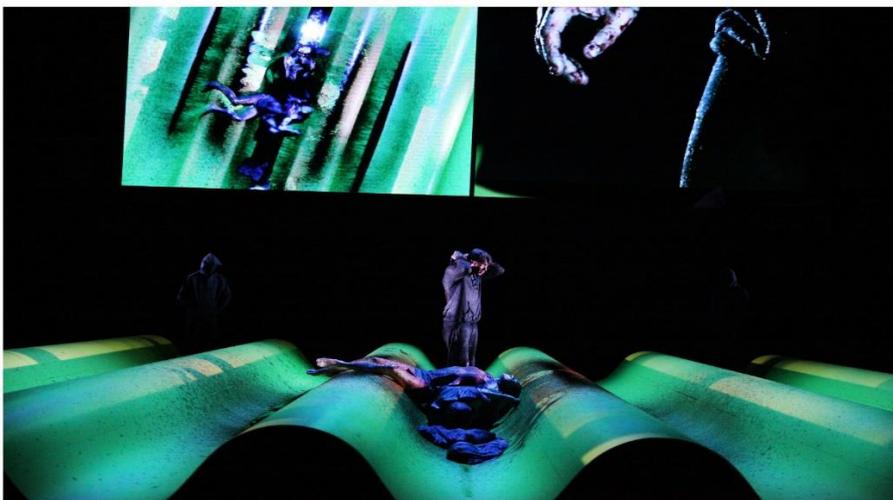


Figure 3

While the stage was, of course, lit enough to show the actors, the entire background looked somewhat dark. The yellow waving platform stood out, however, drawing a lot of attention with its movement. The ‘secondary’ characters like the chorus and the messengers remained mostly on the outer rims of the platform, while the primary characters like Clytaemnestra, Electra, and Orestes moved through the grooves – waves, if you will – of the platform. When the murders of Agamemnon, Cassandra, and Clytaemnestra had taken place, the audience saw their bodies lying in grooves in the middle as well.

The National Theatre performed the *Oresteia* in its entirety, and each part was more or less equally attended to. At the starting point of the *Welgezinden*, four Furies were present at the edges of the turning platform, dressed completely in black, with their faces completely covered with black fabric as well. Apollo and Athena were both dressed in suits: Apollo in a dark suit, Athena wearing a pale pantsuit. Orestes, who was plainly dressed, remained covered in blood throughout the entire play, a result of him killing his mother, and the ghost of Clytaemnestra was wearing white clothes she had on the entire play, also covered in blood. Throughout the entire performance, the characters, when on stage, hopped on the platform and remained static, whether they were sitting or standing. Orestes, being a suppliant to the gods for his own cause, was the only one who made some gestures, grasping his head in a desperate manner from time to time. The gods, other than opening their hands and arms occasionally (Apollo more so than Athena), remained still. When the gods talked, the audience would get a close up – most of the time – of their and the speeches were often made up in long sentences, especially those of Athena. The static, yet with authority, acting style of the gods made sure that the audience was looking at people, or creatures, that were not entirely familiar to the human world. It created a distance between the ‘normal’ and the divine and certainly gave me a sense of estrangement towards their characters. In a way, this recalls the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, whereby the sense of estrangement regarding the stage work enables the viewer to see the well-known in its true state.⁹⁰ The distance made sure that I was looking at a play, and one that portrayed non-human beings at that. The acting style made me conscious about the ideas I have regarding gods, myth, and Greek tragedy. In that way, the sense of estrangement showed me how I view the well-known of tragedy, or, at least, what I regard as well-known. The way the gods were portrayed – static, emotionless, and with authority – is not how I view them entirely. The authority they emanate is something that suits them, but the static and absence of emotion a little less.

⁹⁰ See page 6 of this thesis.

Reading the script of the *Welgezinden*, it immediately stands out that the translator wanted to remain close to the text that has survived up until now. The part of the Pythia, however, with which the *Eumenides* starts, was translated, but not used in the performance.⁹¹ The place and order of the rest of the dialogues remained intact. Instead of the Pythia, Apollo enters together with Orestes, who gets seated in the middle while Apollo remains standing. This immediately shows the relation between the two: Orestes as a boy, suppliant to Apollo. The dialogue that follows is the dialogue that comes after the Pythia speaks her opening monologue in Aeschylus' text and what is said by the two resembles the 'original':

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 85-87

Ὅρ.: ἄναξ Ἄπολλον, οἶσθα μὲν τὸ μὴ ἀδικεῖν·
ἐπεὶ δ' ἐπίσται, καὶ τὸ μὴ ἀμελεῖν μάθε.
σθένος δὲ ποιεῖν εὖ φερέγγυον τὸ σόν.

Or.: Lord Apollo, you know how to not do wrong:
since you know, teach me also not to neglect.
your power is able to do good.

Orestes speaks here reverently to Apollo, a tone that is mirrored in the reperformance:

(Klein, *Welgezinden*) p. 2

ORESTES

Apollo – god van gerechtigheid.
Ik vertrouw mijn hele leven
toe aan jouw leiding
en jouw belofte.

ORESTES

Apollo – god of justice.
I trust my whole live
to your guidance
and your promise.⁹²

⁹¹ Klein (2017), 1.

⁹² The Dutch texts are coming from Tom Klein's translation (2017), see primary texts in the bibliography, p. 84, with the emendations (crossed out parts, additions etc.) applied. The English translations of all the modern plays are of my own making.

While the words are not exactly the same, in both salutations of Orestes there lies some sense of justice that he attributes to Apollo, whom he calls god the very first time they meet in the *Eumenides*. In both the ancient Greek and the Dutch version, Orestes transfers his responsibility to do good to the god, whom he deems more fit to do so. Furthermore, in both the ‘original’ text and the translation by Klein, Orestes breaks with his reverent position towards Apollo during court:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 609-610

Ὅρ.: ἤδη σὺ μαρτύρησον, ἐξηγοῦ δέ μοι,
Ἄπολλον, εἴ σφε σὺν δίκῃ κατέκτανον.

Or.: You, give testimony already, and tell me,
Apollo, whether I killed her rightfully.

(Klein, *Welgezinden*) p. 16

ORESTES
Apollo, zeg jij het hun.
Bewijs dat mijn daad,
het feit dat ik haar doodde,
een daad van gerechtigheid was.

...

Apollo,
hoe moet ik verdedigen
wat ik heb gedaan.

ORESTES
Apollo, tell them.
Prove that my deed,
the fact that I killed her,
was a deed of justice.

...

Apollo,
how do I defend
what I have done.

During Boermans' *Welgezinden*, it was obvious in Orestes' mimicking, played by Bram Suijker, that he was desperate and that he needed Apollo to prove him to be just. While that remained a guess regarding Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, it was obvious in the performance of the actor. The reverence towards the god is still present, however, when he talks to Athena, in both Aeschylus' and Boermans' play:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 235-237, 443-444 & 455-458

Ὅρ.: ἄνασσ' Ἀθήνα, Λοξίου κελεύμασιν
ἦκω· δέχου δὲ πρηνεμενῶς ἀλάστορα,
οὐ προστρόπαιον οὐδ' ἀφοίβαντον χέρα,

...

Ὅρ.: ἄνασσ' Ἀθήνα, πρῶτον ἐκ τῶν ὑστάτων
τῶν σῶν ἐπῶν μέλημ' ἀφαιρήσω μέγα.

...

Ἀργεῖός εἰμι, πατέρα δ' ἱστορεῖς καλῶς,
Ἀγαμέμνον', ἀνδρῶν ναυβατῶν ἀρμόστορα,
ξὺν ᾧ σὺ Τροίαν ἄπολιν Ἴλίου πόλιν
ἔθηκας.

Or.: Lady Athena, I have come on the biddings of Loxias.
Receive gracefully this wretched man,
neither suppliant, nor with hands uncleaned,

...

Lady Athena, first I will take a great object
of care away from your last words.

...

I come from Argos, and you inquire rightly about my father,
Agamemnon, commander of the seafarers,
with whom you made Troy, city of Ilion, a non-city.

(Klein, *Welgezinden*) p. 7 & 11-12

ORESTES

Goddelijke Pallas Athene! Hoor mij aan!
Apollo stuurde me naar jouw tempel –

...

ORESTES

Athene, Godin van de Goddelijke Wijsheid,
Ik ben geboren in Argos.
U kent mijn vader – u streed met hem
om Troje te verpletteren: Agamemnon,
bevelhebber van de grote vloot.

ORESTES

Divine Pallas Athena! Listen to me!
Apollo sent me to your temple –

...

ORESTES

Athena, Goddess of Divine Wisdom,
I was born in Argos.
You know my father – you fought alongside him
to crush Troy: Agamemnon,
commander of the great fleet.

The way Orestes here calls to Athena, is similar to the ancient Greek words, even more so than in the previous example. Orestes speaks reverently to both gods present and that is mimicked by the modern reperformance almost completely.

In Boermans' *Eumenides*, the Furies already mention Orestes' name before Athena speaks to him,⁹³ which slightly changes the passage in which Athena addresses Orestes. Apart from that, the words are almost taken literally:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 436-439

Ἄθ.: τί πρὸς τάδ' εἰπεῖν, ὦ ξέν', ἐν μέρει θέλεις;
λέξας δὲ χώραν καὶ γένος καὶ ζυμφορὰς
τὰς σάς, ἔπειτα τῶνδ' ἀμυναθοῦ ψόγον,

⁹³ Klein (2017), 11.

Ath.: What, stranger, do you wish to say against these things in turn?
after having told your country, your kin and your
destinies, then defend against their reprimand,

(Klein, *Welgezinden*) p. 11

ATHENE

Orestes, spreek.

Vertel me eerst over je land,

je afkomst, je geschiedenis.

Reageer dan op deze aanklacht.

En laat je woorden helder en duidelijk zijn.

ATHENA

Orestes, speak.

Tell me first about your country,

your origin, your history.

Respond, then, to this accusation.

And let your words be clear and plain.

The words spoken by Athena in this section are literally taken from Aeschylus' text, but there are a few parts missing: she is not mentioning his suppliant position – a part that had been translated but was chosen to be omitted.⁹⁴ The wooden sculpture of Athena was mentioned by both Apollo⁹⁵ and Orestes,⁹⁶ but was not used here in the final script. Whether this was for the sake of brevity or had a goal more related to the content, is not known to me. The fact that both Apollo and Orestes mentioned it, but only Athena did not, makes me think that it had more to do with practical matters, than with omitting it in relation to content.

A part where the content of the goddess' words is again practically the same, is when Athena talks about the future of the court and the way the events of that day play a part in it:

(Aesch. *Eum.*) 681-685, 690-699 & 704-710

Ἄθ.: κλύοιτ' ἄν ἤδη θεσμόν, Ἀττικὸς λεώς,
πρώτας δίκας κρίνοντες αἵματος χυτοῦ.
ἔσται δὲ καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν Αἰγέως στρατῶι
αἰεὶ δικαστῶν τοῦτο βουλευτήριον.

⁹⁴ Klein (2017), 10.

⁹⁵ Klein (2017), 2.

⁹⁶ Klein (2017), 7.

πάγον δ' Ἄρειον τόνδ', (...)

...

(...) ἐν δὲ τῷ σέβας
ἀστῶν φόβος τε ξυγγενῆς τὸ μὴ ἀδικεῖν
σχήσει τό τ' ἦμαρ καὶ κατ' εὐφρόνην ὁμῶς,
αὐτῶν πολιτῶν μὴ 'πιχραινούντων νόμους·
κακαῖς ἐπιρροαῖσι βορβόρωι θ' ὕδωρ
λαμπρὸν μαιίνων οὔποθ' εὐρήσεις ποτόν.
τὸ μῆτ' ἀναρχον μῆτε δεσποτούμενον
ἀστοῖς περιστέλλουσι βουλευώ σέβειν
καὶ μὴ τὸ δεινὸν πᾶν πόλεως ἔξω βαλεῖν·

...

κερδῶν ἄθικτον τοῦτο βουλευτήριον,
αἰδοῖον, ὀξύθυμον, εὐδόντων ὑπερ
ἐγρηγορὸς φρούρημα γῆς καθίσταμαι.
ταύτην μὲν ἐξέτειν' ἐμοῖς παραίνεσιν
ἀστοῖσιν ἐς τὸ λοιπὸν· ὀρθοῦσθαι δὲ χρῆ
καὶ ψῆφον αἶρειν καὶ διαγνῶναι δίκην
αἰδουμένους τὸν ὄρκον. εἴρηται λόγος.

Ath: So that you may already hear the law, Attican people,
who are deciding the first judgements of bloodshed.
Hereafter as well, this court of judges
will be there forever for the people of Aigeus.
And this Areion hill, (...)

...

(...) on this, reverential awe of the citizens
and its relative, fear, will keep you away from
doing wrong, by day and all the same every night,
when the citizens themselves do not defile the laws:
staining clear water with bad streams and filth,
you will never find a drink.
Neither anarchy, nor being ruled by a despot,
I determine for the citizens to attend to and worship
and not to throw all terrible out of the city:

...

I appoint this council untouched by crafty deeds,

honoured, fiery, awake over those who sleep
a watch post of the land.

I extended this exhortation to my citizens
for the future: but it is necessary to rise
and to take a ballot and to give a verdict
honouring your oath. My word is spoken.

(Klein, *Welgezinden*) p. 18-19

ATHENE

Burgers van Athene!

Dit is de eerste moordzaak
die in het gerechtshof dat ik heb gesticht, wordt behandeld.
Dit hof is van jullie.

Vanaf vandaag zal iedere moord
voor deze jury van burgers
worden berecht.

Hier zullen mijn wetten uur na uur, dag na dag,
jaar na jaar onveranderlijk gehandhaafd worden.
En vanaf deze dag zullen ontzag, dat het hart nederig maakt,
en vrees, broer van ontzag,
de trots van de burgers onder controle houden.

...

Bescherm dit hof
dat jullie allemaal zal beschermen
tegen de koppige willekeur van één enkele man
en tegen slavernij.

Bovenal, gedenk de kracht die van vrees uitgaat
en koester die als je de wetten handhaaft.

Vrees is het
die de wet kroont met een krans van heiligheid.

In dit hof hebben jullie een bolwerk
dat van geen ander volk is dan van jullie –

Ik geef jullie dit hof en ik zegen het –

het is zoals de hemel, het mag niet onteerd worden,

het is zoals de hemel, heilig,

het is een nimmer slapende, gewapende, onoverwinnelijke bewaker
van de vrede tussen de mensen en hun families.

...

Raadpleeg nu jullie hart indachtig de eed
en vel een oordeel. Breng je stem uit
vanuit de zuiverheid van jullie hart.

Ik heb gezegd.

ATHENA

Citizens of Athens!

This is the first murder trial
that will be judged in the court that I have founded.

This court belongs to you.

From this day forward, every murder
will, in front of this judge of citizens,
be judged.

Here, my laws, hour after hour, day after day,
year after year, will invariably be upheld.

And from this day forward, reverence, which humbles the heart,
and fear, reverence's brother,
will control the pride of the citizens.

...

Protect this court

that will protect you all
against the stubborn arbitrariness of a single man
and against slavery.

Above all, remember the power that fear provides
and cherish that when upholding the laws.

It is fear

who crowns the law with a wreath of holiness.

With this court you have a stronghold
that is of no other people than yours –

I give you this court and give it my blessing –
this is like heaven, it must not be dishonoured,
this is like heaven, holy

this is a never sleeping, armed, invincible guard
of peace between men and their families.

...

Now, consult your heart, mindful of the oath
and give judgment. Cast a vote
from the purity of your hearts.

I have spoken.

The words of Athena are almost literally translated to Dutch. The only changes that have been made is the way Athena speaks to the Athenian people: Attica is changed to Athens and the name of Aigeus has been omitted. This has probably been done to keep the text as clear as possible, since the modern audience may not have understood completely what is meant by Attica and who Aigeus was. Other than that, the content and even the language are mimicked

by Klein's translation and the grandeur of Athena's words were made clear to the audience, emphasised by her static and emotionless attitude.

There are more comparisons that can be made between the texts of the two plays, but these are the most obvious ones that could be compared to the fragments mentioned before. In general, Boermans' play remained close to the text, and through that, combined with the static acting, the dramatic form remained a tragedy as far as we know them from antiquity, apart from the masks. The fact that the characters and the stage gave an estranging sensation adds to that, since, in my opinion, the tragedies evoked the sense of estrangement as well. Calling this play a revival, however, is a label of which I am not sure it applies. Revivals are the result of a "fruitful dialogue" between both ancient and modern performances.⁹⁷ I must admit that the notion 'fruitful' is somewhat subjective, but in my opinion, *Welgezinden* does not bring present consciousness into the play and is thus not a revival. Both ancient and modern aspects were present: the dialogue was very similar to the ancient text and there were some modern aspects, like visuals and the circling platform. They did not seem to be in dialogue, however. Both elements were estranging to me, but they seemed to clash more than that they were interacting. As a result, I saw a play that carried both modern and ancient elements, but was not a revival. However good the play and its actors were, the sense of estrangement was too present for the two periods to engage in a dialogue and connect.

Robert Icke's *Oedipus*

Oedipus, performed by the Theatre Group of Amsterdam (TGA) and directed by Robert Icke, was brought to the theatres in April 2018 and will appear again on stage in the new season. I saw the performance on May 16th, 2018. Robert Icke himself translated the ancient text to English, which was then translated by Rob Klinkenberg to Dutch. TGA also gave me the scripts, but unlike the version of the National Theatre, this script is the final work version of March 2018 without apparent emendations. Before we start with the discussion of the different aspects of the play (stage, acting, text, and dramatic form), the plot needs to be discussed, since it is radically different from the ancient text. The *dramatis personae*, for example, is completely mixed up. Next to Oedipus, Jocasta (as Iocaste is called in the reperformance), Antigone (who plays a silent part at the end of the 'original' *Oedipus Tyrannus*), Creon, and Teiresias, characters are brought to stage that are absent in the ancient text, while other figures are eliminated. Merope, Eteocles, Polyneices, the driver of the car in

⁹⁷ See page 49.

which Laius was killed, Corin, who serves Oedipus' family and is a family friend, and Lichas, who is Oedipus' assistant, are all added characters. The last two characters are completely new and are not present in the mythical tradition of Oedipus. Whereas the driver of the car replaces Laius' subject who was with him when they encountered Oedipus, Corin and Lichas do not seem to replace an eliminated character. Lichas is a messenger of some sort who hands out notes with exit polls – more on that later – to Oedipus, but has only a few practical lines in which she announces people's coming and going and asks whether she can provide anything for Oedipus. Corin, as an old family friend, has more lines and turns out to be the one who put Oedipus in the forest when Jocasta had just given birth to him. He is, however, not one of the missing links that the messenger in the ancient play represents, since Jocasta herself tells the story to Oedipus.

The storyline is changed as well: instead of a mythical setting, the play takes place in a time that could be our own. Other than the names of the characters, everything is changed, and the entire story is put in a different context. Oedipus is now a politician and he is running for office in a city that remains unnamed. The play covers the last evening of the election, when the winner of the election will be made public. It starts with a short film, shown on a screen in front of the stage, of Oedipus giving an impromptu speech right in front of the building where the campaign room – the stage's decor – is located. He says that he wants to change a city that is sick, and wants, furthermore, to do two specific things: he wants to put a stop to the rumours of his birthplace by promising to show his birth certificate⁹⁸ and he aims to solve Laius' death. Creon, his speechwriter, is not happy with that sudden announcement, since he knows more about the latter issue than Oedipus is aware of. During the play, time is counted down – quite literally, as we will see below – to the announcement of the winner of the election. The evening, filled with excitement about Oedipus' probable victory, starts with surprises: Merope, Oedipus' mother drops by unexpected and Jocasta and their three children – Ismene seems to be left out – organise a surprise dinner. Merope says she has something urgent to share, but both the news and the surprise dinner have to wait, since there is a new guest: Teiresias. The only character who stayed more or less the same as a blind prophet, Teiresias tells about the things he saw, which consist of roughly the same material as in the ancient text: Oedipus himself is the murderer he is looking for, he is the murderer of his father and lover of his mother. In Icke's version, Teiresias adds that Creon will eventually win, which is not further explained. Oedipus is angry with Teiresias and makes sure the seer is

⁹⁸ Which could be an allusion to the issue of former President Obama's birth certificate which some still believe to be false.

escorted out. An altercation with Creon follows, in which Creon is fired, after which the family dinner can begin. This dinner scene has no predecessor in the ancient text, and we see a family dining like any other family nowadays: college and boy- and girlfriends are discussed, siblings quarrel, and everybody eats chicken with fries. We learn that one of the siblings died – probably Ismene.

After the dinner, Jocasta, Creon, and Oedipus discuss Laius' death, which happened to be an accident, and the three of them discover that the date and time match an accident that Oedipus had in his youth. It all depends – much like in the ancient text – on a few technicalities that do not seem to match (but eventually will, just like in Sophocles' text). The driver of the car in which Laius was killed is eventually brought to the stage and he connects the dots that were missing. After that, Jocasta tells her story, which, together with the story of Merope (that she gets to share near the end of the play), makes the truth about Oedipus origin clear: Jocasta, under the tyranny of a thirty-six-year older Laius when she was fourteen years old, had a child that was left in the forest. Merope and her husband, who couldn't get children of their own, found Oedipus in the forest and raised him as their own. The scars on Oedipus' legs, compatible with Jocasta's difficult childbirth, show the truth of the story. Just after this piece of knowledge is clear to both of them, the news breaks that Oedipus has won the election and his children come to congratulate him. Jocasta leaves the stage and kills herself. The last thing we see before the stage is temporarily blocked (the play is not over) is Oedipus taking the heels of his wife and bringing them to his eyes. When the curtains open again, we see Oedipus and Jocasta on stage again, two years earlier. They enter the campaign room-to-be and Oedipus asks for Jocasta's approval. Jocasta deems the place perfect and just when they start to run towards each other, for an intensive hug, the curtains close and the play ends.⁹⁹

The summary of Icke's *Oedipus* is more extensive than that of Boermans' *Welgezinden*, because so much of the story has changed. To continue with the research aspects, however, we will start with the stage. As said before, the stage was decorated to show a campaign office with everything that belongs in such a room: posters of Oedipus, cheap, functional furniture, memo's, flip-over, etcetera. There is a front room where the larger part of the play takes place (the dinner, the discussions) with a table and a couch. In the room in the back, partly invisible for the audience by stage parts, the office is located, where the counting of the votes is closely watched on a tv screen. As the play evolves, the front room slowly

⁹⁹ Most of the plotline was brought back from memory, other times the script (Klinkenberg, 2018) was a major help to refresh my memory.

empties, furniture is picked up by a rental company, because the use for it is gone.¹⁰⁰ Another feature of the stage that stresses the passing of time, but in a more literal manner, is the digital timer that is placed centre-left in the front room. When the play starts, the timer goes running, counting down the seconds to the end of the play. According to the introduction preceding the performance *Oedipus* in Amsterdam, Icke made that decision in order to follow Aristotle's idea that a tragedy should consist of one sole action, not surpassing the duration of a day.¹⁰¹ The count-down added an element of anticipation, since the audience knew the exact time that was left leading up to the revelation of Oedipus' true nature. The fact that the decor and the plot – as well as the language, as we'll see below – were brought to the present, made the play very relatable to the audience, or it did so to me. While Boermans' *Welgezinden*, remaining close to the ancient storyline, was estranging in its decor and use of the gods, Icke's *Oedipus* was the complete opposite. The estranging factor of place and time was not shown through the decor, since it was so relatable to our times.

The acting can be seen in much the same way. While the actors in *Welgezinden* remained still and distant, the actors in *Oedipus* walked around, gestured and addressed each other in a less formal way, much like everyday interactions. Sentences are shorter and since Oedipus is running for office instead of ruling as a king, people behave normally around him. The characters have more interaction with one another, as is shown in some of the stage directions:

(Klinkenberg, *Oedipus*) p. 18 & p. 42

Zijn gezin holt op hem af – zijn zoons POLYNEICES en ETEOCLES, ANTIGONE is er ook bij, en zijn vrouw JOCASTA. De tafel wordt gedekt, iedereen helpt mee, CORIN serveert het eten uit op een serveertrolley. LICHAS glundert.

...

¹⁰⁰ Klinkenberg (2018), 1-2. The pages are not numbered, so I counted from the very first page (that also carries the colophon, but has information about the decor).

¹⁰¹ Arist. *Poet.* 1449b12-13: “ἢ μὲν ὅτι μάλιστα πειρᾶται ὑπὸ μίαν περίοδον ἡλίου εἶναι ἢ μικρὸν ἐξαλλάττειν” (“because [tragedy] tries most of all to cover one cycle of the sun or deviate a little”) & Arist. *Poet.* 1451a30-34: “χρῆ οὖν, καθάπερ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις μιμητικαῖς ἢ μία μίμησις ἐνός ἐστιν, οὕτω καὶ τὸν μῦθον, ἐπεὶ πράξεως μίμησις ἐστὶ, μιᾶς τε εἶναι καὶ ταύτης ὅλης, καὶ τὰ μέρη συνεστάναι τῶν πραγμάτων οὕτως ὥστε μετατιθεμένου τινὸς μέρους ἢ ἀφαιρουμένου διαφέρεσθαι καὶ κινεῖσθαι τὸ ὅλον.” (“it is thus necessary, just as one imitation is of one in the other arts of imitation as well, the plot in this way too, since it is an imitation of action, is of one and whole of this, and that the parts of the actions come together in such a way that, when a certain part is displaced or is taken away, the whole is pulled apart and changed:”).

OEDIPUS

Ik kijk alleen naar jou – en doe maar niet alsof je dat niet weet.

Hij gaat op haar af, ze stoeien wat, hij tilt haar op – zet haar op een bank – knielt voor haar neer, begint wat ze draagt lost te knopen of ritsen – ze biedt geen weerstand. ¹⁰²

His family runs towards him – his sons POLYNEICES and ETEOCLES, ANTIGONE is there too, and his wife JOCASTA. The table is set, everyone helps. CORIN serves food from a serving cart. LICHAS beams.

...

OEDIPUS

I only look at you – and do not pretend you do not know that.

He walks towards her, they frolic for a bit, he lifts her up – puts her on the couch – kneels down before here, starts to button down or unzip her clothes – she does not resist. –

Both fragments are stage directions and show clearly that the interactions between the actors are many and with direct contact. We do not have literal stage directions like this left from the ancient text, so to compare the acting is difficult, but these directions fit a contemporary family, with a father receiving his sons and that same man seducing his wife. Like the decor, the acting is not estranging, but the opposite: to a modern-day audience, this looks like a normal, contemporary family, albeit somewhat exaggerated – boys of the age when going to college, do not normally run towards their father. Both the performances of the actors and the stage itself were brought to the present, something that is definitely not what happens in the ancient text.

Focusing on the text, I want to take a look at the fragments of *Oedipus Tyrannus* that were used in the previous chapter. Both Teiresias and the sphinx put the ancient text in a mythical past that was obviously the time within the play. While the sphinx has no place anymore, apart from the well-known riddle,¹⁰³ Teiresias is as present as in the ancient text. In both versions of Oedipus' story, he is someone that sees, knows, and predicts:

¹⁰² The Dutch texts are coming from Rob Klinkenberg's translation (2018), see primary texts in the bibliography, p. 84. Since the text is changed drastically from the original, the literal comparison with the Greek text is of little use. The Greek text is thus, unlike the comparison before, not incorporated here as part of the research.

¹⁰³ Klinkenberg (2018), 48: "Wat heeft vier benen in de ochtend, twee in de middag en drie als het avond wordt?" ("What has four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon and three when evening starts?").

(Klinkenberg, *Oedipus*) p. 7, p. 8 & p. 9

OEDIPUS

Waarom ben je dan gekomen? Wat heeft u gezien?

TEIRESIAS

Wij beiden zijn slechts stervelingen.

...

TEIRESIAS

Mijn jongen, mijn luisterrijke Oedipus – ik ben bang, ik ben niet bij machte je te helpen – de ziekte in de cel *zien* is iets anders dan hem genezen, begrijp je?

...

TEIRESIAS

Er is geen ontsnappen meer. De tijd heeft zijn loop bepaald en die loop richt zich achterwaarts. Ik moet naar huis. Mijn tekst is uit de tijd. *Haal me hier weg – haal me hier weg – haal me hier weg.*

OEDIPUS

Why, then, have you come? What did you see?

TEIRESIAS

We are both mere mortals.

...

TEIRESIAS

My boy, my glorious Oedipus – I am afraid, I do not have the power to help you – to see the sickness in the cell is something different than curing it, do you understand?

...

TEIRESIAS

There is no escape anymore. Time has determined its course and that course runs

backward. I have to go home.
My text is from another time. *Get me out of here*
– *get me out of here* – *get me out of here*.

While the entire plot and context was brought to the present, the character of Teiresias seems to be of the past. In a way, this character seems have the same result in both the ancient play and the reperformance: Teiresias is a reference to a time and place long lost. Where it suits the place and time of the ancient text, this reference is an oddity when it comes to the reperformance, as Teiresias himself points out (“My text is from another time”). The play here seems to make a comment on itself: the inclusion of Teiresias, or at least his prophetic words, are out of place next to the modern approach of the rest of the play. This metatheatricality has an estranging effect, since something that does not belong in the context of this play is forcefully placed there. Teiresias’ words are, of course, important to the play, but even before his observations, Oedipus was already planning to look into his past and the death of his predecessor Laius. Teiresias’ prophecies could have been left out, but Icke chose to keep this part in the play, even though it is out of tune with the context. The exact reason is not known to me, but I can imagine that Icke wanted to keep some part of the ancient tragedy alive or wanted to confront the audience with a remnant of the ancient story in order to keep us on our toes.

Next to the sphinx and Teiresias, the other moment chosen to show the use of place and time in *Oedipus Tyrannus* was the plague. In the ancient play, the plague is a way to connect the mythical past with a present-day problem for the fifth-century Athenians. In the first speech by Oedipus in Icke’s version, there is also talk of a disease:

(Klinkenberg, *Oedipus*) p. 2

OEDIPUS

Wat ik vind van hoe het gaat? Ik denk wat iedereen denkt. We zijn ziek. Wij allemaal: het lichaam van de staat is ziek. Dit land was jong en ooit sterk – en nu zijn we ziek. De verkeerde mensen op de verkeerde plek, met, ja, het verkeerde resultaat.

Ze hebben het water vergiftigd – en we raakten gewend aan de smaak. We zijn ziek. En terwijl we zaten te slapen, terwijl we op onze handen zaten, hebben ze ons welbewust terug in de tijd getrokken, terug naar een tijd waarin mensen die anders waren vervolgd mochten worden, verdreven mochten worden, uitgeroeid – terug naar toen kwaadaardige

geruchten meer betekenden dan de waarheid –

OEDIPUS

What I think about the way things are going? I think what everyone thinks. We are sick. All of us: the body of the nation is sick. This land was once young and strong – and now we are sick. The wrong people in the wrong place with, yeah, the wrong result.

They have poisoned the water – and we got used to the taste. We are sick. And while we were sleeping, while we sat on our hands, they have deliberately pulled us back in time, back to a time when people who were different could be persecuted, could be exiled, exterminated – back to when evil rumours meant more than the truth.

The disease Oedipus talks about here, is not a literal one like the plague, but an illness of society. The nation has apparently changed from a strong one to a place where mistrust reigns and everyone that is different from the set standard is placed out of society. Both the plague and the societal disease have, again, the same function. The plague pointed to a disease that had just terrorised Athens, the disease spoken of in Icke's *Oedipus* points to a mistrust in society that seems to be the case in real life too. Icke shows the audience a mirror of how he sees society nowadays, in which the 'other' seems to have a minor place.¹⁰⁴ The issue of Oedipus' birth certificate further strengthens the sense of mistrust that seems to be present in the society portrayed in the re-enactment. In that way, Icke comments on the literal sense of estrangement that people can feel towards other human beings they do not know. To conclude with the dramatic form, the question is whether the play remained a tragedy. A lot of the plot elements remained the same, but the entire play was brought to a more private environment. Everything that unfolds in *Oedipus* is moved from the front of the palace (a public setting) to an office (indoors) where all kinds of private matters are played out: the family dinner, for example, and, the more intense conversation with Jocasta.¹⁰⁵ The genre seems to turn away from tragedy in that matter and to another genre. As Robert Leach explains: "melodrama may

¹⁰⁴ Which is a sentiment that is not altogether unreal, looking at immigration policies in Europe and America nowadays, for example.

¹⁰⁵ Not discussed above, but certainly an intense moment: "OEDIPUS: Tell me the truth, then we don't ever have to talk about it Don't lie! JOCASTA: Oedipus, if I don't tell you, that is not the same as lying. OEDIPUS: Of course, I don't want this trouble either, but sometimes it's unavoidable to... JOCASTA throws all of a sudden a few plates to the ground. It's an intense reaction and OEDIPUS realises, just like us, that this is way bigger than it seemed so far. Both are frightened by it. (Klinkenberg, 2018, 57, my own English translation)

perhaps be seen as tragedy without a philosophical dimension.” ... “it has become associated with exaggeration, and the adjective ‘melodramatic’ is often applied pejoratively to excessive emotion on stage, over-literary dialogue, and hyperbolic gestures. Melodramas used all these, as well as pictorial tableaux, stock characters and spectacular scenic effects.”¹⁰⁶ While I do not want to say that Icke’s *Oedipus* is a melodrama – there is certainly a philosophical dimension present –, it carries some of the characteristics of melodrama with the excessive emotion and impressive scenery. Not entirely a tragedy anymore, nor a soap opera,¹⁰⁷ *Oedipus* seems to be stranded somewhere in the middle.

Icke’s *Oedipus*, to sum up, is a revival of the ancient *Oedipus Tyrannus*. While modern day and ancient context seemed to clash in the *Welgezinden*, we see here a dialogue between the ancient context of Oedipus’ heritage and the present consciousness in which the investigation unfolds. *Welgezinden* showed an ancient piece that was not necessarily brought to the present in any way – except for the props and the podium –, while *Oedipus* brought ancient and modern together in a way that they co-existed on stage. The sense of estrangement was evoked at times, with Teiresias being a main example in this case: he sometimes destabilised the harmony between ancient and modern. Again, this does not say anything about the quality of the play, the acting in both performances was excellent in my opinion, but it is obvious to me which one is a revival, and which is not. The estranging sensation evoked by *Welgezinden* was almost completely absent during *Oedipus*, apart from a few moments.

Simon Stone’s *Medea*

The *Medea*, again performed by TGA, premiered in December 2014, and will continue to be performed in theatres next season. I went to see it on September 2nd, 2016. It was written and directed by Simon Stone, who put Euripides’ *Medea* together with the story of Debora Green. Green is a doctor whose husband had an affair, after which she tried to poison him and killed two of their three children.¹⁰⁸ The plot of Stone’s *Medea* is thus, like Icke’s *Oedipus*, transferred to the present, and the names are changed: Medea has become doctor Anna, Jason is changed to Lucas, Creon to Christopher, and Glauce to Clara, who plays an active part in the play. Interestingly enough, the play is still called *Medea*. This is probably done to put the modern play in a ‘tradition’ of the Medea-theme, which makes the subject of this play

¹⁰⁶ Leach (2008), 60.

¹⁰⁷ One of the most evident examples of melodrama (Leach, 2008, 60).

¹⁰⁸ Toneelgroep Amsterdam (2014), 8.

universally applicable to different time periods. The *paedagogus* is transformed to social worker Mary-Louise, who tends to the children at some point in the play. The children, Gijs and Edgar, have in turn an active role in the play, while they were mostly silent parts in the ancient texts. Besides that, the role of Herbert is added, who is the owner of a bookstore where Anna works after she is released from the psychiatric ward as part of some sort of reintegration project. He serves as a soundboard for Medea's troubles and thus seems to act as some sort of chorus. Stone's *Medea* opens with Anna leaving the psychiatric ward – which she was ordered to go to when the police found out she slowly poisoned her husband – and Lucas waiting for her. Anna seems intent on acting as if everything is going to be fine and thinks that it will all turn back to normal. In order to make Anna's coming home easier, Lucas agrees to spend some time with her, and they go home where they have dinner with the children, during which Anna does her best to be as frivolous as possible, while Lucas tries to keep it realistic – and in the process is deemed a buzzkill by his two sons, while Anna is playing the happy mom.

As the play continues, Anna's imagined world is slowly falling apart: she cannot go back to her old job, Lucas is still with Clara, and she fails at her responsibilities, like bringing the kids to school. When Lucas wants Anna to sign the divorce papers, Anna seduces him, and they end up waking up together the next morning. This is filmed by their sons, one of which has an autobiographical film project at school, and he shows the movie to Clara. Clara and Lucas make up, and when Clara – very graphically – tells Anna, Anna loses control and gets herself hurt. Things continue to spiral downwards when Lucas tells Anna that Clara is pregnant and the two have a heart to heart – after Anna has had a panic attack because nothing seems to go the way she wants – during which we learn that Anna helped Lucas with his research, while she had to be there for the kids. The fact that she gave up her career and lost everything workwise shows a Medean kind of sacrifice, while Lucas continued to rise in Christopher's company. This feeling is increased by Christopher's decision – who is described by Anna as the brains behind the operation – to move Lucas and Clara to China, together with Gijs and Edgar. In the ending scenes, we find ourselves a few hours before everyone leaves for China, and the scenes get intertwined. On the background Anna is leaving a voicemail to Lucas who turned off his phone when Anna kept calling, while the drama unfolds: when Anna picks up the children for their last evening together at Clara's, she kills Clara with a knife in a rush, and Christopher when he sees them. The boys see it, but Anna persuades them in coming with her to her place. When they are there, she repeatedly calls Lucas, while the voicemail continues on the background, during which she now says that if he

said the right things he could have prevented the unavoidable. The voicemail ends with the accusation that Lucas would have been able to prevent all this, but that Anna and the children – who she drugged and are now sleeping – are now going to a better place and that they will start anew. In the last scene, Mary-Louise explains the events that happened after the voicemail ended: apparently Anna set the house on fire and Lucas arrived at a burned down building where three charred bodies lay amidst the remains.¹⁰⁹

The storyline is obviously brought to the present, with the mixture of Medea's, Debora's, and Anna's story. There is talk of some sort of psychiatric ward, social workers, a pharmaceutical company, and flying to China. The stage of Stone's *Medea*, however, was very minimalistic and showed no particular period, because the entire stage was white and sterile, without much furniture. The only props were a desk chair, some laptops, a camera and a bottle of wine. A screen was located above the stage that sometimes showed close-ups of the actors and was connected with the camera on stage at other times – when the boys filmed mum and dad in bed, for example. The stage does not tell us much about the character of Anna/Medea, but at times her face was zoomed in on. Her acting will be discussed below, but it is noteworthy that, at the beginning of the play, when she leaves the psychiatric ward, the close-up shows us a calm, controlled Anna. Throughout the rest of the play, we never again see such a close-up of her alone again, which makes the image of that Anna stick, even though her character cannot maintain her calmness the entire play.

Much like with the *Oedipus*, the acting in Stone's *Medea*, is livelier than in Boermans' *Welgezinden*. Because the play was brought to the present, the acting fitted the time: the actors moved freely around the stage, interacted physically with each other, and talked in a way that closely resembles modern conversations. Focusing on the character of Medea, she seems to be the odd one out. She appears to be mentally unstable and goes from seemingly calm to crawling on her knees when she begs Christopher for her old job back. The fact that her calmness and her being okay with the entire situation is fake, becomes obvious when she has a panic attack right after Lucas tells her Clara is pregnant:

(Stone, *Medea*) p. 48

Anna Dit was niet het plan.

Lucas Het spijt me.

¹⁰⁹ Just as with the summary of the *Oedipus*, I used the script of the *Medea* to jog my memory (Stone, 2014), see primary texts in the bibliography, p. 84.

Anna DIT WAS NIET HET PLAN

Lucas Zachtjes.

Anna WAAROM DOE JE DIT?

Lucas Anna, laten we het hier rustig over hebben.

Anna WAT DOE JE ME AAN?

Lucas Je wist dat dit aan de hand was. Je wist toen je terugkwam dat dit ging gebeuren.

Anna Ik krijg geen lucht.¹¹⁰

Anna This was not the plan.

Lucas I'm sorry.

Anna THIS WAS NOT THE PLAN.

Lucas Quietly.

Anna WHY DO YOU DO THIS?

Lucas Anna, let's calmly talk about this.

Anna WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?

Lucas You knew that this was going on. You knew, when you were coming back that this was going to happen.

Anna I can't breathe.

When Anna learns that Clara is pregnant, it seems to symbolise for her the fact that Lucas has permanently moved on and that he is not coming back to her. Everything up to now could have been changed by Anna, or so she thought, but that is no longer the case. This realisation causes her to panic and Lucas can only calm her by sitting with her between his legs, holding

¹¹⁰ The Dutch texts are coming from Simon Stone's script (2014), see primary texts in the bibliography, p. 84. Here again, as with Icke's *Oedipus*, the text are changed drastically. The comparison will thus be made on the level of content, not on a textual level.

her, and counting to ten together. The decline of Anna came across as realistic, since the audience knew they were looking at a character with mental instability. Marieke Heebink, the actress who played Anna, obviously made the character her own and we were looking at the character, not the actress behind it. In this way, Heebink's acting came closer to Stanislavskian Method Acting, than to the Brechtian way which makes the audience aware of both character and actor. The things she did and the things she said, could be estranging for the audience, but we'll go deeper into that with the text.

In the ancient play, Medea was thought of as a woman to be pitied and to be feared. In the beginning of the modern *Medea*, Lucas does not seem to know what to do with Medea's calmness. Whenever she comes close to thinking about how things were, Lucas does not know what to say:

(Stone, *Medea*) p. 2, p. 4 & p. 5-6

Anna Dat zeggen ze ja.

Ze glimlacht naar hem.

Ik heb je gemist.

Lucas Anna...

Anna Weet ik. Langzaam aan, langzaam.

...

Anna Anna zal in evenwicht blijven. Maak je geen zorgen.
Laat me je hand vasthouden

Lucas Anna.

Anna Je hebt gelijk. Langzaam aan, langzaam.

...

Anna Heb je haar nog gezien?

Lucas Nee, daar gaan we het niet over hebben.

Anna Oh kom op Lucas, ik kan het hebben.

Lucas Er is genoeg tijd om de nieuwe situatie te bespreken –

Anna Ik neem aan van wel, afgaande op je antwoord. Het is okee.

Lucas ...

Anna Ja, dus?

Lucas Anna, in godsnaam.

Anne Zeg gewoon ja.

Lucas ...

Anna ...

Lucas Ja.

Anna Was het fijn?

Lucas Je hoeft niet zo kalm te blijven.

Anna Yes, that's what they say.

She smiles at him.

I have missed you.

Lucas Anna...

Anna I know, slowly, slowly.

...

Anna Anna will stay in balance. Don't worry. Let me hold your hand.

Lucas Anna.

Anna You are right. Slowly, slowly

...

Anna Did you see her?

Lucas No, we are not going to discuss that.

Anna Oh Lucas, come on, I can handle it.

Lucas There will be enough time to discuss the situation.

Anna I assume you did, judging from your answer. It is okay.

Lucas ...

Anna So, yes?

Lucas Anna, for God's sake.

Anna Just say yes.

Lucas ...

Anna ...

Lucas Yes.

Anna Was it good?

Lucas You do not need to stay this calm.

Lucas treads carefully, not knowing what will happen if he says the wrong things, and recoils from Anna's attempts at intimacy. At the same time, he does not want to discuss past feelings or his present love life and seems to be there just to make sure Anna makes it back home. Anna, on the other hand, wants to get closer to Lucas, and goes so far as to say she is okay with the affair. It is obvious that Lucas finds this odd and his "you do not need to stay this calm" seems an attempt to get Anna out of her fake calm state. Since Anna already poisoned Lucas, whereas Medea had done no such thing to Jason, the pitying seems less at play here than in the Medea:

(Stone, *Medea*) p. 13

Clara (...) Wat zei de maatschappelijk werkster?

Lucas Dat Anna probeerde me dichtbij haar te houden.

Clara Oh kom op.

Lucas Dat ze probeerde te zorgen dat ik haar weer nodig had.

Clara Ik vertrouw haar niet.

Lucas Dat doe ik ook niet.

Clara Ik wil niet dat je nog iets met haar te maken hebt.

Lucas Clara. We weten allebei dat dat onmogelijk is.

Clara (...) What did the social worker tell you?

Lucas That Anna wanted to keep me close.

Clara Oh come on.

Lucas That she tried to make sure I needed her again.

Clara I do not trust her.

Lucas Neither do I.

Clara I do not want you to have anything to do with her again.

Lucas Clara. We both know that that is impossible.

Clara is obviously and not without reason scared for what Anna might do and does not want Lucas to have anything to do with his wife anymore. One character that seems to have more pity than anger towards Anna, since she is there to salvage as much from the situation as possible is the social worker Mary-Louise:

(Stone, *Medea*) p. 21

Mary-Louise (...) Hoezo vertrouwen jullie me niet?

Edgar Jij gaat onze moeder weer wegsturen.

- Mary-Louise** Helemaal niet. Het is mijn taak ervoor te zorgen dat ze bij jullie blijft.
- Edgar** Waarom zou ze niet bij ons willen blijven?
- Mary-Louise** Ik moet er alleen voor zorgen dat iedereen veilig en gelukkig is.
- Gijs** Waarom zouden we niet veilig zijn?
- Mary-Louise** Jullie moeder heeft een moeilijke periode achter de rug.
- Mary-Louise** (...) Why don't you trust me?
- Edgar** You will send our mother away again.
- Mary-Louise** Not at all. It is my job to make sure she stays with you.
- Edgar** Why wouldn't she want to stay with us?
- Mary-Louise** I just have to make sure that everyone is safe and happy.
- Gijs** Why wouldn't we be safe?
- Mary-Louise** Your mother has had a difficult time.

Mary-Louise's job is to make sure everything goes well, and in order to do that, she needs to take care of Anna as well. Being the most objective person in the situation she can objectively state that Anna is a victim as well. For the audience, Anna seemed to be somewhat of a ticking timebomb, ready to explode when the wrong thing is said or done. This comes close to the pitied and feared Medea of Euripides' text, but is increased by the fact that Anna already poisoned Lucas and has thus proven to be capable of committing such a crime. In the storyline of Euripides' *Medea*, however, Jason, like Lucas, knows what Medea is capable of, but does not seem to consider the possibility that she will turn on him too. The fact that Lucas does, makes him a more relatable character and Jason somewhat of a naive man.

The foreignness that Medea portrayed is not present in Anna's character, since nationality is not an issue in the play. The witchcraft of Medea, however, that was accentuated by the invoking of Hecate and the use of *φαρμάκοις* is used in Stone's *Medea* as well. Lucas

and Anna were both working at a pharmaceutical company and have thus some knowledge on chemicals and tests. Anna uses that knowledge to her 'advantage', when drugging Lucas:

(Stone, *Medea*) p. 25

Anna (...) Weet je wat castorbonen zijn?

Herbert Castorbonen?

Anna Het is de bron van ricine. Het is een geurloos, smaakloos middel dat niet te traceren valt. Ik begon de bonen fijn te malen en door zijn avondeten te mengen. Elke keer als hij haar had gezien, hij wist nog steeds niet dat ik het wist, elke keer als hij haar had gezien gaf ik hem een klein beetje ricine te eten.

Herbert Jezus.

Anna Ja. Dan gaf hij de hele nacht over. En dan bleef hij een paar dagen thuis. En ik verzorgde hem dan. We lagen met zijn vieren in bed, de kinderen en Lucas en ik en we maakten grapjes. Het was een fijne tijd.

Anna Do you know what castor beans are?

Herbert Castor beans?

Anna It is the source of ricin. It is an odourless, tasteless product that is untraceable. I started grinding the beans and mixing them in his dinner. Every time he had seen her, he still did not know I knew, every time he had seen her I gave him a little ricin to eat.

Herbert Jesus.

Anna Yes. He would throw up all night. And then he stayed home for a few days. And I would take care of him then. We would be lying in bed, the four of us, the children and Lucas and I and we would make jokes. It was a happy time.

Anna's use of herbs to poison Lucas is a clear allusion to the herbs (*φαρμάκοις*) that Medea uses and makes Anna some sort of present-day Medea. It adds a strange element to her character, but it must be said that that is probably to a greater extent due to the fact that she slowly killed her husband than to the notion that she did that with poisonous herbs. Everyone can nowadays seek out which herbs and plants are unhealthy, so the estranging effect is probably less evoked by her knowledge of this than by the fact that she tried to murder her husband. The fact that she talks to Herbert about the poisoning of her husband in such a nostalgic, almost happy, way, distances the character of Anna further from the audience. She remembers fondly the times when Lucas was bedridden due to her poisoning of him, because she had more time with him and the kids. While everyone can understand the latter sentiment, poisoning Lucas seems a stretch too far in obtaining that goal.

Textually, the play has changed completely, which is logical due to the radical change of the story. The dramatic form, as a result, seems to have changed as well. Both Icke's *Oedipus* and Stone's *Medea* contain more elements of the melodramatic: the acting is more expressive, and the gesturing and interaction are more important. While, again, I would not call both those plays melodrama – especially since melody does not play a big part – both *Oedipus* and the modern *Medea* look sometimes more like a family drama, a genre in itself.

Anna's character in Stone's *Medea* is thus a character that has its estranging effects. Mentally unstable, poisoning her husband, and murdering her children are all features that make Stone's *Medea* a person that we would not relate to. The fact, however, that she is a woman who is part of our place and time, make Anna a more relatable character to us than Medea probably was to the fifth-century Greek audience. Anna does suffer from a mental illness, which make her an outcast, but not necessarily someone that is completely different from our world. Anna is a Medea who can be reintegrated in our world, whereas Euripides' Medea had to fend for herself. What they both have in common is that they are women who have given up everything that mattered to them to support a man who eventually abandons them. This could very well be Stone's idea of a Medea-tradition which he deems most important to show in this reperformance. The fact that Lucas is a somewhat more realistic character with his reservations towards Medea and the fact that nationality is not an issue, make the play less estranging than its ancestor probably was. The way that here, again, the two periods (ancient and modern-day) are intertwined, makes me think that we here, too, deal with a revival. Even more so than with Icke's *Oedipus*, the sense of estrangement seems to have disappeared.

Anna as a Medea is made more understandable and the plot has no obvious allusions to the mythical past, such as Teiresias was for *Oedipus*.

Modern re-enactments and estrangement

We have seen two ways of reperformances: one that takes the text of the ancient play and brings it almost literally translated on stage, and one that leaves the text behind, but makes a new play with more or less the same theme. Both are legitimate ways to deal with ancient tragedies, but the first way mostly avoids the dialogue with present times, while the latter tries to combine modern-day and ancient times. This is what I understand to be a revival: a ‘fruitful’ dialogue that makes room for both periods. When the reperformance has the characteristics of a revival, the play seems to lose its sense of estrangement due to the modern and ancient aspects that complement each other and seamlessly merge. When this is not the case, in the *Welgezinden* for example, modern and ancient theatre clash, rather than merge. The distant gods are then an estranging part of an estranging play, which makes them not stand out as much as the estranging things do in a revival. Anna’s character is alienating partly because she is something different in a normalised context, just as Teiresias is alienating as an ancient artefact in a modern context. The details of strangeness in the modern play, stand out next to their normalised context, just like the estranging elements in the ancient plays were prominent next to the more relatable content. In both ancient and modern times, this combination seems to be the key to what evokes estrangement: the normal and the unnatural details combined. In the next and last chapter, I will comment more on the estrangement that has been transferred from ancient text to modern restaging – or not – to examine the concept in its entirety in all the six plays that have been examined.

Conclusion: estrangement then and now

Theatrical estrangement can be experienced on various levels: the plot, the characters, and the place and time – as well as other elements – of a play can all evoke an alienating sensation.

The keyword with this experience is distance: the more distance exists between the audience and the plot – and even more so when it happens on multiple levels –, the bigger the sense of estrangement can be. When looking at a performance, it is evident that both the story and the way the story is communicated, play a large part in the presence or absence of the sense of alienation. When reading a book, the way a story is told makes a difference as well, but the reader has to imagine many things in his or her head: the appearance of characters, the location, facial expressions, etcetera. When looking at a play, these things are all interpreted by the director and the actors, and the audience does not need to imagine things.

That is, of course, not entirely how it works. Everyone who sees and hears something happen in real life or on stage, interprets that with his or her own background and knowledge. That is what makes this discussion about estrangement so difficult: it all depends on the person that sees the play happen. When I went to see Boermans' *Welgezinden*, I took two friends with me and we discussed the play afterwards. Whereas the stiffness in acting came across as estranging to me, one of my friends felt that this is the way Greek tragedy should be performed. Two people, both classicists, thus ended up going to the same play that was estranging to the one and more or less what was to be expected to the other.

To define what estrangement is to an entire audience of a time and place that is not present anymore, seems thus impossible, especially when the text is all we have left. It is, however, probable that a sense of alienation was evoked with the fifth-century Greek audience who watched the Greek plays unfold. The tragedians were – next to playwrights – innovators and at least some part of the audience must have felt a sense of 'Ahem, what is happening here?', when gods were made to invent the Athenian, very real, court of justice, for example. This tension between what is normal and what is strange makes the oddities stand out. When the entire play is strange to the audience, the anomalies are just part of the completely strange picture of the performance. This was what happened for me in the case of Boermans' *Welgezinden*. The fact that the entire play did not appeal to my sense of what I deem 'normal', made the strangeness of the gods not especially stand out, even though the play was estranging in its entirety. Comparing its ancestor to this play, it seems probable that the gods partaking in the human world like they did in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, may have put the focus

on the estranging sensation that the gods evoked, since they engaged in a world familiar to the audience.

When looking at both performances of the Oedipus-myth, we see that in the reperformance, where the context is changed to fit a modern age, the odd features like Teiresias, stand out. The events themselves are, of course, strange enough, and the mythical nature of both the story and a singular character clash with the sense of familiarity that is portrayed by the place and time of Icke's *Oedipus*. The Greek audience that saw *Oedipus Tyrannus* unfold, must have felt a similar sense of estrangement towards the mythical and – even for them – ancient character of the play, especially since familiar aspects, like the Plague, were added. In the reperformance of the *Medea*, Anna is the odd one out, due to her instability and attempted murder. Placed in a context that is known to the audience, Anna's isolation seems to stand out even more, much like the original Medea probably did in the Greek context of Euripides' play. Both Icke's *Oedipus* and Stone's *Medea* show us that ancient themes can be adapted to a modern play, without the literal text, whereas Boermans' *Welgezinden* shows us the way that the ancient texts can be used on stage in the literal sense.

The thing that all these reperformances have in common is that they took a plot of a few thousand years old and brought that to the modern stage. Next to that, they all, knowingly or not, made us reflect on what we think we know about ancient tragedy and how it could have been perceived. The reperformance of ancient tragedy thus works in two ways: looking at a restaging, we learn something from the ancient plots that is applicable to our times and at the same time deepen our knowledge on those ancient plays themselves. In the case of this thesis, we have learned through both the ancient and modern plays that the familiarity that Aristotle stresses may have been absent at times. In fact, the way that Icke's *Oedipus* and Stone's *Medea* bring the story to our times in a familiar context seems more Aristotelian than the ancient plays were, a point that is stressed by Icke's fixation on Aristotle's idea of time in Greek tragedy.

We must, however, keep in mind that the text is the only remnant we have by which we can ascertain the sense of estrangement in ancient tragedies. When looking at the modern reperformances, everything can be considered: The sense of alienation can be evoked by the way in which a play is performed, as well as by *what* is being performed. Whereas *Welgezinden* was estranging (to me) on both the textual and the performative levels, *Oedipus* had only a few estranging factors, while the estrangement in Stone's *Medea* was more or less absent, in my opinion, due to both the performance and the textual changes. A notion that seems applicable to both ancient tragedy and the modern reperformances, however, is that

when the setting is made comfortable for the audience, the estranging elements are prominent because of the difference with the environment. Performance Studies is a field that can shed light on this notion, but since the field is quite young, methods still need to be developed. The field was loosely adapted to fit this thesis and showed that, when taking all the surroundings, clothing, atmosphere, etcetera, into account, new ideas can be formed about both ancient and modern theatre and concepts like estrangement.

Estrangement remains a part of the world and, thus, of performances. The concept means something different in every separate place and time, in various contexts. Not only in plays, but also in daily life, estrangement is present. Theatre can in that way reflect on the alienation that seems to be present in daily life and it is probable that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides used that sense of alienation in their plays. The past and the present always seem to be interacting, since we keep learning things about the ancient world and can use modern-day concepts to shed light on what we thought we knew. Estrangement is definitely one of those concepts that can teach us about the past and the people that lived it. Discovering what estrangement means in modern performances can thus reflect on past tragedies, while the use of the past in modern performances teaches us how we think about the past.

Further Research

It must be said that, in this thesis, the audience perception has been somewhat neglected. It was noted at various times that estrangement is a subjective feeling, but the sources on audiences of tragedy could have been studied more deeply. The focus here lied on the theoretical perception, not so much on the actual perception, and that could have been included more to make Performance Studies a more complete part of this thesis. The corpus, however, was of such a magnitude and was in itself large enough to suffice. Furthermore, this thesis focused on three of the most well-known tragedies, while there are so many more to be studied. For future research, the corpus could be extended to include more plays on the matter of estrangement. The focus could be more specified as well, since three plays and three concepts made the study somewhat broad. One specific tragedy, or one specific aspect of estrangement should give enough material for another thesis, research project, or maybe even a PhD, and the historical timeline of one specific tragedy could be incorporated. Estrangement is a fascinating concept, that is ironically familiar to us, and this thesis has only scratched the surface of it.

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