Banging the Lyre:
The Classical Plays of Tony Harrison

by

Hallie Rebecca Marshall

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Abstract

British poet Tony Harrison (b. 1937) is the most significant English verse playwright of the second half of the twentieth century and an important figure in the reception of classical literature on the British stage. This dissertation explores Harrison's classical plays in relationship to their Greek and Latin models, positioning them amidst his other poetic works, and examining their cultural and historical contexts.

The intent of this study is to examine these plays from a number of perspectives: intertexuality, exploring the ways in which Harrison engages with both classical literature and his own non-dramatic poetry; genre, arguing that Harrison uses not only Greek tragedy as a model, but also the other fifth-century dramatic genres of satyr play and Old Comedy, as well as nondramatic poetry, such as Latin epigrams; social and political contexts, establishing the importance of Harrison's socio-economic and educational background in understanding the form and content of his dramatic verse, and exploring the ways in which he engages with a range of modern political issues, from the British class system to historical and contemporary military conflicts; performance, discussing Harrison's interpretation and appropriation of fifth-century Athenian performance conventions, such as masks, as well as the influence that collaborators have had on the development of his unique theatrical style; and reception, articulating Harrison's place within the history of the performance of English verse translations on the twentieth-century British stage, associating his work with the productions of translations by Gilbert Murray, differentiating his work from the classical adaptations of T.S. Eliot, and arguing that he is directly responsible for the recent forays into classical drama by other prominent poets, such as Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes.

Conclusions are drawn that what Harrison finds of value within the extant corpus of ancient literature is not the elite values of high culture in which a knowledge of Latin and ancient Greek functions as a shibboleth separating the classes (as had been the case until the post-World War II era in Britain), but a model for creating public poetry for the late-twentieth century.

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for my family

the ones we choose to love become our anchor

Chapter 1: a poet and his poems in their place

Each swung cast-iron Enoch of Leeds stress
clangs a forged music on the frames of Art,
the looms of owned language smashed apart!

From *'On Not Being Milton'*[1]

Overview

This thesis seeks to examine the classical plays of Tony Harrison, exploring their relationship to classical models, positioning them amidst his other poetic works, examining their cultural and historical contexts, and demonstrating their place in the life and work of the poet. Harrison is one of the most passionate and articulate voices in the English-speaking world advocating for the value and relevance of classical literature, and fifth-century Athenian drama in particular. But what Harrison finds of value within the extant corpus of ancient literature is not the elite values of high culture in which knowledge of Latin and ancient Greek functions as a shibboleth separating the classes. Instead Harrison promulgates a view of classical literature as popular culture, and classical drama in particular as a means of society coming together in a shared space and experience to examine the society in which they live, while being entertained.[2] Even in his early school translations of Plautus Harrison was inclined towards colloquial, accessible language, translating an official's line as, "Move along there!", despite the

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[1] Harrison (2007a) 122.

[2] The entertainment aspect of Harrison's drama should not be underplayed. In his introductory essay to *The Oresteia*, "Egil and Eagle-Bark", Harrison recalls a dream that he had after he agreed to work on the trilogy with Peter Hall. In his dream there was a queue of old men snaking through his front garden taking turns signing his guest book, which in his dream had ΟΡΕΣΤΕΙΑ embossed on its cover. When Harrison read the names he found that they were all the names of comedians whom he had seen as a child doing pantomime or vaudeville acts. See Harrison (2002b) 4-5. While the impact of this dream is not readily apparent in *The Oresteia*, the early-twentieth century popular stage tradition exerted a substantial influence on later adaptations and original plays. While this dissertation does not address the influence of early-twentieth century popular performance traditions on Harrison's theatre work for reasons of space, it is a topic deserving of study, as is the influence of Brechtian drama on Harrison's plays.

admonishments of his teacher, who favored "Vacate the thoroughfare."[3] Harrison has always sought to make his classical works as accessible to his audience as fifth-century Athenian drama was to its audience, where the theatre was attended by farmers, craftsmen, and aristocrats alike. And while some might object that the National Theatre, even with the Travelex ten pound ticket seasons,[4] is not accessible, or at least not attended by an audience representative of British demographics,[5] this ignores Harrison's numerous film/poems written for television over the past thirty years.[6] As Joe Kelleher observed:

> In fact his work, as far as poetry goes (and he has taken it to places that it has seldom gone before) is widely disseminated, his films are televised, his theatre receives prominent large-scale production, while sustaining – along with those qualities of tricksy playfulness and erudition which Harrison has never abandoned – a certain accessibility: a fidelity to the everyday, the vernaculars of ordinary speech and experience, to the clarity of symbols, and to the political and cultural issues of widespread import.[7]

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[3] See Harrison (1991e) 437. First published in *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 85 (1988). After delivering this talk, his presidential address to the Classical Association, Harrison received a letter from Peter Jones suggesting that the line in question might be *Aulularia* 407 – *facite totae plateae pateant*.

[4] The Travelex sponsorship agreement with the National Theatre allows two-thirds of the 150 000 tickets available in the Olivier auditorium for the Travelex productions to be sold for ten pounds each.

[5] For an excellent articulation of the nature, function, and value of the National Theatre, see the interview with Nicholas Hytner, Artistic Director of the National Theatre, on HARDtalk, broadcast on BBC News on 1 May 2008. Hytner argues that the National Theatre is as open and affordable as it can be and he argues against the government funding agencies that suggest that one kind of audience is better than another.

[6] Harrison's film/poems broadcast on television include: *Arctic Paradise* (1981), *The Big H* (1984), *Loving Memory* (1987), *Yan Tan Tethra* (1987), *v.* (1987), *The Blasphemers Banquet* (1989), *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992), *Black Daisies for the Bride* (1993), *A Maybe Day in Khazahstan* (1994) *The Shadow of Hiroshima* (1995), and the feature length *Prometheus* (1998).

[7] Kelleher (1996) 68.

While the plays have not been broadcast (and most have not been recorded) since *The Oresteia* was aired on Britain's Channel 4 on 9 October 1983, Harrison has been prolific in writing verse drama for television, the most accessible of modern drama forums.[8] Harrison uses classical models in part to provide a model of public poetry for himself to work with, but also to create public poetry that is built on classical models usually accessible only to the literate and literary segment of society.

While the focus of this thesis is Harrison's classical plays, I begin with a biographical background to Tony Harrison interwoven with an overview of some of the historical social issues as they relate to the reception of Greek and Roman plays in England that are important for understanding the place of his work within the legacy of classical drama in British culture. As Richard Eyre has said, "The man is the work. It is not so much that it is autobiographical (though much of it of course is) but that the content invariably dramatizes the ambivalences at the heart of his character and attempts to reconcile them … Those opposing valences … are not a poet's conceits but are the syntax of his daily life."[9] Harrison's background, his upbringing and education, are essential building blocks out of which and upon which his works have been crafted. The plays may not be nearly as explicitly biographical as the poetic works, such as his *School of Eloquence* cycle, but the subject matter, the inspiration, and the social concerns of the plays are as intimately tied to the biographical as are the sonnets.[10] The classical plays are the fullest articulation of Harrison's eloquence earned at no small cost to Harrison and his immediate family, and the biographical background of the poet is as important to a proper

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[8] As Raymond Williams, (1975) 5, observed in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Drama at Cambridge University, the development of radio, cinema, and television over the course of the twentieth century has resulted in a society that both acts and watches others act to a degree which exponentially exceeds the access to drama experienced in earlier centuries: "What we have now is drama as habitual experience: more in a week, in many cases, than most human beings would previously have seen in a lifetime."

[9] Eyre (1991) 363.

[10] *The School of Eloquence* cycle is a series of sonnets, the first of which were published in *From 'The School of Eloquence' and other poems* (1978), and to which he continues to add. Harrison's most familiar poems about his parents and his relationship with them are part of this cycle.

understanding of the plays as is an understanding of those plays' literary roots and debts, as well the cultural baggage of classical drama in Britain.

Historical Context I: class and the classical languages

Tony Harrison was born on 30 April 1937 into a working-class family in the city of Leeds in northern England.[11] At the age of eleven he won a scholarship to Leeds Grammar School as part of the social engineering experiment initiated with the Butler Education Act of 1944.[12] This program sought to identify exceptionally 'bright' working class children and provide them with an elite education that normally would have been outside of their families' financial means, and, perhaps, aspirations.[13] The Butler Education Act not only afforded Harrison the opportunity to go to an academically rigorous school, but also the opportunity to learn Latin and ancient Greek which had traditionally been the preserve of the British upper classes. Indeed the training of children, and boys in particular, in classical languages had functioned for centuries as a means of shoring up cultural hegemony through the school system. As Lynda Mugglestone has noted, "A knowledge of Latin was of course traditionally part of the liberal education of the 'gentleman', a marker of status which conveyed meanings of social superiority as effectively as did certain nuances of dress or, equally, those of

[11] Harrison's father was a baker and his mother a housewife. On the occupations of Harrison's ancestors, see "v." in (2007a) 264, and on his uncle Joe's occupation, see "Self Justification" in (2007a) 186. For a detailed discussion of the nature of the British working class in the first half of the twentieth century, see Hoggart (1957).

[12] On the Butler Education Act, see Dunford and Sharp (1990) 17-24.

[13] On the scholarship system brought in by the Butler Education Act and the cultural milieu from which it arose, see Worpole (1991) 61-74.

language."[14] And Christopher Stray observes, "Classics became a status symbol of the right kind of schooling, just as keeping one's son at school till 18 became a sign that one could afford to do without his earnings."[15] Harrison's scholarship to Leeds Grammar School afforded him the opportunity to acquire two essential components of belonging to the British elite: an education grounded in classical languages, and a Received Pronunciation accent that would disguise his working-class Yorkshire roots.

Harrison was born in a period that in hindsight was the apex of a movement that sought to establish a single non-localized accent in England. The movement towards an ideal uniform accent began in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.

> Since differences of accent manifestly divided the country, revealing the origin for virtually every speaker, the intention, at least within the tenets of prescriptive ideology, was therefore to dispel these distinctions by formalizing one pronunciation, wherever possible, for each word just as each word had, on the whole, received one spelling.[16]

While the original intent of the movement was to create social harmony and national unity, ultimately it became an essential part of England's social hegemony. Mugglestone reports the Reverend David Williams's comments in 1850 that "No saying was ever truer than that good breeding and good education are sooner discovered from the style of speaking …than from any other means."[17] Williams' comments point towards two significant issues that became closely bound up with the movement for a uniform accent. The first is the issue of breeding or what becomes known commonly as class. Prior to the

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[14] Mugglestone (2003) 125. Mugglestone also observes that in response to the increased access of the 'lower' classes to Latin as part of their education, as the result of the increased prosperity that accompanied the industrial revolution, the 'upper' class sent their children to schools where Greek was increasingly emphasized in the curriculum, with the intended function of acting as a shibboleth between those who were aspiring to rise above their station and those who were born into the British elite. (Michael Jopling distinguished between these classes when he purportedly dismissed fellow parliamentarian Michael Heseltine as the sort who "buys his own furniture" – as opposed to those who inherit their furniture.)

[15] Stray (1998) 180.

[16] Mugglestone (2003) 25-6.

[17] Williams (1850) cited in Mugglestone (2003) 1.

Industrial Revolution there was no notion of class in England, but rather the social hierarchy was based on rank, an attribute which could not be earned, but which was simply a birthright. Those of rank lived in all parts of England, and frequently their speech was strongly indicative of the region in which they lived. For George Puttenham, as evidenced by his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), "it had been possible, and indeed acceptable, for a gentleman to speak in ways manifestly influenced by the area where he lived (even if in his written discourse he ought to approach and adopt court standards)."[18] With the advent of the industrial revolution, however, and the accompanying shift of the social order from one structured by rank to one structured by class, which allowed for a degree of upward social mobility, accent became an important social symbol. For those who had managed to obtain the superficial and visual appearance of the upper classes, speech was often the flaw that revealed their 'low' origins, especially when it involved the question of whether the letter h ought to be aspirated or not.[19] Fortunately for those of rank the 'non-localized' accent that was being advocated was in fact that of the Court in London; hence the origins of the southern aristocratic stranglehold on language that existed in Harrison's England two centuries later.

Biography I: class, language, and education

Harrison and his poetry stand against Received Pronunciation and its associations with class. He acquired everything that was offered by the elite education that he received at Leeds Grammar School, but he refused to take up the non-localized accent that would disguise his place of origin. He refused to accede to the generalization that to be educated is to speak with a posh Received Pronunciation accent and thus excluded from the working-class.

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[18] Mugglestone (2003) 17.

[19] For an extensive discussion on the social perils of h and the books, articles, and education on offer to those who were hoping to disguise their origin through speech patterns that mimicked the upper classes, see Mugglestone (2003) 95-134.

> I chewed up Littererchewer and spat the bones
> into the lap of dozing Daniel Jones,
> dropped the initials I'd been harried as
> and used my name and own voice: [uz] [uz] [uz],
> ended sentences with by, with, from,
> and spoke the language that I spoke at home.[20]

But not only did Harrison speak the language of his home, he created a space on the British stage for others to do so as well, playing not only the roles where the characters were intended to be clearly of British working-class origins, such as Sam and Eddie Shawcross in Trevor Griffiths *The Party* (1973) or Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), but all roles from watchmen, to kings, and even God. As Michael Ratcliffe's review of the 1985 National Theatre production of Harrison's *The Mysteries* in the *Observer* noted, when God declared, "Ego sum alpha et omega!", he did so in a thick Yorkshire accent, reinforced by "Nowt is but I."[21] For Harrison it was not simply a reclamation of his own voice for himself, but a reclamation of the popular drama of earlier eras for the voices, particularly lower class dialects, which had traditionally been excluded from the professional British stage of the twentieth century, except when playing the fool or the working class.

Historical Context II: classical drama, class, and education

Language, class, and the performance of classical drama have been inextricably linked since the first recorded performance of a classical play in England. The earliest records of performances of classical drama in England indicate that Roman comedy was being performed regularly from 1510 onward. For that year the financial accounts of King's Hall, Cambridge record expenditures in that year "*pro comedia Terentii in Ludo*",

[20] Harrison (2007a) 134.

[21] Ratcliffe (1985). Reprinted in Astley (1991) 325.

and the records of various colleges from later years record similar expenditures.[22] While the titles of the plays performed at Cambridge are more frequently recorded beginning in the middle of the century, the first production of a specific identifiable classical play in England was a production of Plautus' *Menaechmi* at a banquet hosted by Cardinal Wolsey at Hampton Court in 1526 for which King Henry VIII was present.[23] Aristophanes' *Plutus* was staged in Greek at St. John's College, Cambridge in 1536, though the production of plays in Greek seems to have been far less common than plays in Latin in the sixteenth century. The first recorded production of classical tragedy was a production of Seneca's *Hippolytus* (now more commonly referred to as *Phaedra*) at Westminster School in the mid-1540s.[24] In 1560, having refounded the school as a part of the restructuring of the British educational institutions following Henry VIII's break with Rome, Queen Elizabeth ordered two plays, one Latin and one English, be put on annually at Christmas.[25] These productions, both at the universities and boys' schools, in the sixteenth century, are marked by two commonalities that remained significant factors for the reception of classical drama until the early-twentieth century. The first aspect is summarized by Bruce R. Smith:

> Not only physically, but socially and philosophically, the great halls of Westminster School, of Oxford and Cambridge colleges, of the Inner Temple, of Whitehall Palace were more constricted places than Pompey's theatre and the Theatre of Dionysus. The households who included classical plays in their celebrations of Christmas and Shrovetide were small, closed societies whose hierarchical structure

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[22] See Smith (1988) 138.

[23] See Smith (1988) 134-7.

[24] In the mid-1480s Seneca's *Hippolytus* was performed on a platform in a public square in Rome by students at the academy of Pomponius Laetus, which Pomponius proclaimed to be the first public performance of a tragedy in Rome in over a thousand years. See Smith (1988) 3.

[25] There are indications that some of these plays were Greek tragedies translated or adapted into Latin. See the database at the Archive of the Performance of Greek and Roman Drama for performances in the 1500s <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/database.htm>.

> and conservative political and moral values replicated and reinforced each other.[26]

The second aspect, which is intimately tied to the first, is the performance of these plays in Latin. As noted earlier, knowledge of Latin has traditionally been a mark of being a gentleman, and intimately associated with the royal court, statesmanship, and the universities, and this was true of the sixteenth century as well as later periods.

From the first recorded performances, classical drama in England has been closely associated with institutions that played significant roles in maintaining the social and political hierarchy. Plays in Latin were performed primarily in educational settings, where, following Cicero, Horace and Quintilian they were argued to have educational value, teaching pupils about rhetoric and at the same time reinforcing social hierarchies.[27] But these performances in Latin were also intimately associated with the monarchy. As noted earlier, Westminster school had been commanded by Queen Elizabeth to perform a play in Latin annually as part of their Christmas celebrations, and she would attend the performances at the school, or more frequently the production would be taken to her court. Performances at the universities also had associations with the Queen. When she visited Cambridge in 1564 among the plays produced for the occasion was Plautus' *Aulularia*.[28] Classical plays continued to be a part of the lives of those educated at such boys' schools and universities, as most English gentlemen with such training would progress from school to university to the inns of court, where plays were also regularly staged. The financial accounts of Furnivall's Inn contain records of expenditures for dramatic performances, apparently by hired professionals rather than by its own members, from 1412 onwards. And it is at the inns of court that the first recorded performance of a classical play in English translation was performed, with the 1566

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[26] See Smith (1988) 119.

[27] See Smith (1988) 103-111.

[28] See Smith (1988) 109.

production of a translation of Euripides' *Phoenician Women*.[29] Performances in translation should not, however, be mistaken for performance accessible to the everyman. At every traceable point in the early performance of classical plays in England, in Latin or in translation, these plays were intended for the very top echelons of the social hierarchy, and bound up with the means by which the social hegemony was reinforced. In England in the sixteenth century classical theatre was private elite theatre.

Biography II: education, class divisions, and career opportunities

Classical plays have continued to be performed in their original languages as part of the elite education system in England throughout the centuries and classical languages have remained subjects studied almost exclusively in public schools at the high school level. In 1948, when Harrison entered Leeds Grammar School, classical theatre was no longer private elite theatre but it was still closely bound up with the intertwined issues of class and language in England. While there had been professional performances of classical plays in accurate English translations from the first years of the twentieth century onward, the vast majority of productions were staged at independent or public schools and universities whose pupils continued to be drawn primarily from the top echelons of British society. The British education system was and remains firmly entrenched in the class system and the opportunity given to Harrison to study Greek and Latin from the age of 11 at Leeds Grammar School and to receive a university education in Classics is a historical anomaly. As *The Economist* recently reported of "241 entrants for Greek A-levels (typically taken at 18) in 2007, fully 226 were from independent (private) schools."[30] The intertwined issues of class, education and voice have been a

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[29] The translation, by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmershe, was not made from the Greek of Euripides, but rather from an Italian version of Euripides' play, *Giocasta* (1549) by Ludovico Dolce. For a more detailed discussion of the English play, see Smith (1988) 217-223.

[30] *The Economist*, "Bats about the Attic," 26 June 2008.

deep and divisive historical reality for generations in Britain, with serious economic consequences for those perceived to belong to the lower classes. The Cockney Eliza Doolittle in G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* epitomizes the issue of economic opportunities limited by class and its associated dialects when she says, "I want to be a lady in a flower shop…But they won't take me unless I can talk more genteel."[31] Harrison, thanks to his scholarship, both learned to talk more genteel and, more importantly, gained a love and knowledge of language through the study of Greek and Latin. Harrison is the product of a brief experiment in post-war Britain that truly sought to create a more egalitarian society. The living conditions of the working class were greatly improved through various acts of parliament, which created a social safety net, and afforded the brightest of their children access to elite educations, paving the way for Harrison to become one of Britain's foremost poets through his education, and the study of classical languages in particular.[32]

The contemporary reality for the working class, however, is that as the British economy has shifted away from manufacturing and mining industries, their economic prospects have grown ever dimmer, resulting in high levels of unemployment, addiction, and family breakdown – issues Harrison has addressed in works such as his poem "v.", his play *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, and his film/poem *Prometheus*. These issues of class, voice, and access to education and thus literature are at the heart of much of Harrison's poetry, dramatic and non-dramatic. He insists on bearing witness to the fact that the class divisions in British society are as deep as ever, and those on the wrong side of the divide are experiencing social and economic consequences even more grievous than in previous generations due to the dwindling power of the trade unions and the consequent loss of well paid jobs in traditional working class areas of labour, such as coal mining. As Harrison said in an interview with John Haffenden, "I thought that somehow

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[31] Shaw (1916) 121. Shaw wrote in his preface to the play, "It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making another Englishman hate or despise him." As John Honey observed, Shaw "was primarily referring to differences of accent." See Honey (1989) 1.

[32] In response to the public furor that arose surrounding the television broadcast of his poem "v." Harrison specifically credited his classical education for his ability to compose such poems, writing: "…without the many years I spent acquiring Latin and Greek I should never have been able to compose my poem *v*." See Harrison (1989) 69.

language would take me away, but – on the contrary – the more I became articulate, the more I was conscious of what I owed to the goad of the inarticulate."[33] His emotions about his own education are deeply ambivalent. A grammar school intended for the upper classes but forced to take working class scholarship boys was not a congenial environment for the scholarship boys by and large.[34] He has observed, "My education offered me lots of models of eloquence, but at the same time it excluded me from creating that eloquence because of the way I spoke."[35] The experience scarred Harrison and his family deeply: "I had a very loving upbringing; without question a very loving, rooted upbringing. Education and poetry came in to disrupt that loving group…"[36] At the same time it gave Harrison the skills and articulateness to become the poet that he is today. He cherishes the education he received and clearly understands how fortunate he was to have benefited from the Butler Education Act, but he also sees clearly the personal cost of that same education to his familial bonds. In response to an audience query about how he felt about the fact that it would not be possible for a child at a state school today to receive the sort of education that he himself had received, Harrison responded:

> I came from a working-class home, without books. I won a scholarship and learnt Greek… that gave me a passion for articulacy and learning languages. Greek gave me a model for a culture and an art, especially Greek tragedy…I think it's terrible that people won't get a chance to find that kind of magic for themselves.[37]

Any nostalgia that Harrison has for the system within which he was educated is not for elitist values as espoused by British Grammar Schools in the 1940s and 50s, but for the

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[33] Haffenden (1991) 234.

[34] While Harrison was always something of an outsider at Leeds Grammar School because of his socio-economic background, his education at that same school made him something of an outsider among his age-mates in his own neighbourhood. See his poem "Me Tarzan" in Harrison (2007a) 126.

[35] Haffenden (1991) 246.

[36] Haffenden (1991) 246.

[37] *Faber playwrights* (2005) 69.

socialist experiments embarked upon in that same period.[38] His nostalgia is for the socialist dream of an egalitarian society that has been dying throughout Europe, but in England in particular thanks to Thatcherite politics (continued and expanded by New Labour under Tony Blair), in exactly the period in which Harrison has been writing plays. And it is in classical drama that Harrison sees a cultural and political model for the kind of drama that he wants to write, one that would be accessible to all segments of society.

Historical context III: reception of classical drama, class, and education

Tony Harrison is by no means the first playwright to draw upon the tradition of classical drama to produce works for the British stage. From the beginning of the professional theatres in England a small number of playwrights wrote plays that were adaptations of or drew upon classical plays, but their relationship to those originals was in no way advertised. Shakespeare wrote *A Comedy of Errors*, which drew upon Plautus' *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo*, perhaps notably the only two plays by Plautus then available in English translation. Thomas Heywood used a translated act of Plautus' *Amphitruo* in his *The Silver Age*, and drew heavily upon *Rudens* in *The Captives*; *or, The Lost Recovered*, and *Mostellaria* in *The English Traveler*. But as Bruce Smith noted,

> Not once was a Greek or Roman comedy mounted in London's public theatres under its own name. Classical drama, clearly enough, was seen as coterie entertainment. Not one of the professional playwrights – not even such proudly self-proclaimed classicists as Jonson or Chapman –

[38] Alan Bennett has also discussed the state of the British education system, and his views on the matter are very similar to Harrison's: "I'm old-fashioned enough to believe that private education should long since have been abolished and that Britain has paid too high a price in social inequality for its public schools…I still hold to the belief that a proper education should be free at the point of entry and the point of exit." Bennett (2005) 401. Bennett used the recent publicity surrounding his donation of his literary archive to Oxford's Bodleian Library to publicly reassert these views while chastising both the universities for seeking tuition increases and the government for the general state of post-secondary education in Britain.

> ever billed any of his public-stage plays as adaptations of particular comedies by Plautus and Terence or by Aristophanes.[39]

And the explanation cannot be that playwrights had given no thought to translation, as while they were not translating plays for the stage they were in at least two instances translating Latin poetry. Christopher Marlowe published a translation of part of Ovid's *Amores* in 1590 and a complete translation by him was published posthumously in 1597. Thomas Heywood in 1598 published translations of both Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and his *Remedium Amoris*, and George Chapman published the first installment of his *Iliad* translation in 1598 and went on to publish complete translations of both Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as well as translations of Homeric Hymns, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Musaeus' *Hero and Leander*, and Virgil's *Georgics*.

There was but a slight change to the approach to classical drama in the English public theatres of the Restoration. Writers such as Dryden, who again were producing English translations of classical poetry, in Dryden's case the works of Virgil, still were not producing translations of classical plays when writing for the stage. Unlike Shakespeare and Heywood's classically modeled plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods which made no mention of their originals, authors in the Restoration theatre proudly advertised, at least in the prefaces to their printed editions, that they were adapting classical plays for the English theatre. These plays were, however, adaptations, not translations, and no audience member would leave the theatre believing that they had seen a production of Terence's *Eunuchus* or Sophocles' *Oedipus*. The extent of the adaptation that was occurring can be seen in the following examples. In Sir Charles Sedley's *Bellamira*, an adaptation of Terence's *Eunuchu*s, he "translated and adapted everything but the denouement of Terence's play, while interspersing among Terence's ten scenes an equal number of new scenes that set in motion two new subplots and give the audience interior views of the major characters, psychologically as well as scenically."[40] (As Dryden explicitly states in the preface to his and Lee's *Oedipus*,

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[39] Smith (1988) 177.

[40] Smith (1988) 185. William Wycherley also used *Eunuchus* as a model for his 1675 play *The Country Wife*.

Restoration audiences expected a subplot.[41]) The play as performed is a Restoration comedy set in the London of the late-1600s with witty names typical of the period: Phaedria becomes Keepsafe, Thraso, the *miles*, becomes Dangerfield, Gnatho the parasite becomes Smoothly, the *servus calidus* Parmeno becomes Merrywell. There is no reason to think that the average audience member would have recognized or seen any significance in Sedley's classical model. It is in the preface to the printed edition that Sedley acknowledges his model and discusses what he did to make it "run in English".[42] Sedley, however, not only acknowledges his model but suggests that he is doing to Terence's text what Terence did to Menander's original, which he had adapted so as to make it run in Latin.[43] Sedley sees his work not as Terence in English, but rather suggests that Terence has provided the scaffolding to create his own new English comedy.

The most popular of the adaptations of classical plays produced during the Restoration was John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee's *Oedipus: A Tragedy* (1678/9), which enjoyed numerous performances on the London stage over a period of seventy-five years. Most influential in Dryden and Lee's decision to write their version of *Oedipus*, was neither Seneca's version nor the Sophoclean original, but rather Corneille's *Œdipe*, which had appeared in Paris in 1659.[44] Dryden notes in the preface to the play that while they are following Sophocles' play, they have made two major additions. The first is taken from Seneca's *Oedipus* in the form of a scene of Tiresias raising the ghost of Laius, allowing for the sort of stage spectacle that Restoration audiences expected. The second major addition is a romantic subplot taken from Corneille involving a love triangle in which Euridice is in love with Adrastus (neither of whom is a character in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*), while Creon is in love with Euridice. Another notable change is the ending of the play; Oedipus is not exiled from Thebes, but instead hurls himself from a

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[41] See Dryden (1931) 352.

[42] Smith (1988) 184-5.

[43] Sedley (1969).

[44] For a brief discussion of Corneille's *Œdipe*, Voltaire's *Œdipe*, and Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus*, see Burian (1997) 240-247. See also, Hall and Macintosh (2005) 215-242.

window to his death. These plays, which are typical of the use of classical models in the theatre of the period, do not disguise their sources. In fact they discuss the why and the how of their engagement with sources in their prefaces. They are not, however, using classical plays as educational models as they had been used and continued to be used within the education system, but rather as a framework for theatrical performances intended for public theatres where they needed to appeal to the contemporary tastes of a heterogeneous audience who could range in rank from King to plebians, though of course sorted into separate seating areas according to the price of tickets.

For those unable to read Greek or Latin, though with money enough to buy books, there was little access to classical drama available through published translations.[45] Not a single play by Aeschylus or Aristophanes had been translated into English in the sixteenth century. Of Sophocles' plays only *Antigone* was translated prior to 1600, and then the translation was not into English, but Latin.[46] And the only available work of Euripides was his *Phoenecian Women* in the translation of George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmershe, which had been made not from the Greek of Euripides, but rather from an Italian version of Euripides' play, *Giocasta* (1549) by Ludovico Dolce. Latin plays were more accessible than Greek plays. Seneca's *Troas* (1559), *Thyestes* (1560), and *Hercules Furens* (1561) had been translated by Jasper Heywood, while *Oedipus* (1563) was translated by Alexander Nevyle, *Hippolytus* (1571) and *Hercules Oetaeus* (1571) by John Studely, and *Thebais* (1581) by Thomas Newton. A complete edition of Terence's plays in English translation was published in 1598 by Richard Bernard. Of Plautus' plays, however, only two were available in English prior to 1600: *Menaechmi* (1595) in a translation by W. Warner, and an adaptation of *Amphitruo* (1562/3) by W. Copland. The reality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and indeed until the twentieth century, was that while classical works existed in English translations access to such works was limited by the cost of books and the limited literacy of the vast majority of the British population.

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[45] For a list of translations of Classical plays into English, French, Italian, German, and Spanish prior to 1600, see the appendix in Bolgar (1958).

[46] The translation is by T. Watson, published in 1581.

The social changes wrought by the industrial revolution led to changes at the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century that to a degree mimic the trends of the sixteenth century in terms of the place of classics and classical drama within the social hegemony. Prior to the industrial revolution Latin had been the mark of the gentleman, but now the newly wealthy industrialists began to use their wealth to purchase educations for their children which had previously been reserved almost exclusively for those of rank, and thus provided mark of rank. As education in Latin became more accessible and so more common, in both senses of the word, elite schools began to place an increased emphasis on Greek in their curricula, and to instill a homogenous pronunciation of English in their students, which would become known as Received Pronunciation.[47] And where Latin had in earlier centuries been a mark of social rank, now knowledge of Greek and a 'proper' accent became a marker of the elite class at the top of the social hierarchy. As Greek gained a place of importance within the school system and cultural hegemony, the performance of Greek plays in the original language began to proliferate at elite boys' schools. Like their Latin counterparts in earlier centuries, these productions were not intended to function primarily as entertainment. The schoolmasters involved with the productions make arguments similar to those made about the earlier Latin productions; the function of the plays is not to entertain; "playacting was a pastime that conduced to style, social breeding—and morality."[48] One difference, aside from language, that is worth noting is that it appears from the available records that there was a strong preference for Roman comedies in performances of Latin plays, though it can also be construed as a preference for comedy as Aristophanes' *Wealth* seems to have found

[47] This push to create clear class division through education and, associated with that education, an accent that was also a clear marker of class, resulted in the British boarding school, where students could more easily be trained to speak with a 'proper' accent when corrupting accents were absent. This of course resulted in many students speaking with a different accent than their parents, and perhaps siblings, which was of course exactly what many families were paying for. See Mugglestone (2003) 212-257.

[48] Smith (1988) 104.

some popularity as well.[49] The performances of Greek plays, however, privileged the performance of Greek tragedy.

Prior to the late-nineteenth century, the picture then is of a social hegemony in which classical languages taught as part of elite education served to shore up the established boundaries of, in the beginning, rank, then, following the industrial revolution, class. In these periods there were three types of performances of classical plays. The first consists of performances of classical plays in their original languages, and occasionally in translation, in educational or court settings, which were by their very nature exclusive performances accessible to a very limited audience. The second consists of plays that used classical models extensively in their composition, but which in no way acknowledge their debts either in the performed or published text. The third consists of plays that to varying degrees acknowledged that they were drawing on classical models in performance, and discussed in the prefaces to the printed text how and why they had adapted these models, but in no way suggested that what they were presenting was anything other than their own play written for the theatre of their own time. The first kind of plays was exclusive, intended for a limited audience who were intimately engaged with classical learning as part of their education. The second was inclusive, playing to public theatre audiences and never explicitly associating these plays with classical texts. The venue for most of Thomas Heywood's plays, which engaged more extensively and explicitly with classical texts than other plays of the early modern period, illustrates the point that these scripts were intended to appeal broadly and not just to an elite audience. Heywood's plays were primarily performed at the Red Bull Theatre, which had a reputation for boisterous, and occasionally violent, audiences who were lower in the social hierarchy than the audiences of the more refined theatres such as Blackfriars.[50] The third kind of plays tread between the first two. On stage they were intended to be contemporary drama, using the norms of the theatre, wit, romantic subplots and spectacular effects, while at the same time using the prefaces to the printed text to

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[49] On the performance of Aristophanic plays in Early Modern England, see Steggle (2007).

[50] On the Red Bull Theatre, see Leggatt (1992) 19-21.

expressly articulate their engagement with classical texts. On stage these plays were engaging primarily with all ranks of the contemporary theatre audiences, but engaging with the literary, and therefore more elite, audience on a more erudite level in the printed text.

This picture begins to change in the late-nineteenth century. Fiona Macintosh has documented how the rise of archaeology coupled with spectacular finds helped to create a larger awareness of and interest in the classical world.[51] As Christopher Stray has outlined, changes in the British university system had a substantial impact on the place of classics in British culture.[52] Allowing men at Oxford to marry, and the establishment of women's colleges at Cambridge and Oxford opened the world of post-secondary education in general and Classics in particular to new demographics.[53] As Prins and Murnaghan and Roberts have argued, university women played an important role in mediating between the professional classicists, who tended to be focused on linguistic and textual issues, for example Richard Porson and his followers, and popular classics.[54] While a number of women learned Greek, it tended to be 'Lady's Greek' without the difficult accents. The admission of women to the universities and the formal study of Classics was nevertheless an early step in its popularization, which would lead at the beginning of the twentieth century to classics infiltrating popular culture in rather

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[51] See Macintosh (2005) 141-143. There had been interest in the antiquities and culture of Greece and Rome in the eighteenth century, but it had largely been restricted to the elite and groups among that elite such as the Society of Dilettanti, which was founded in the 1730s. On the Dilettanti and the reception of Greco-Roman antiquity in eighteenth-century England, see Redford (2008).

[52] Stray (1998).

[53] At Cambridge, Girton College was established in 1869 and Newnham in 1871. Girls had been allowed to write the examinations informally beginning in 1863 and formally from 1864 onward. Girls at Cambridge were permitted to write the Classical Tripos examinations beginning in 1881. Girls were first admitted to Oxford in 1869, and Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville Colleges were both founded in 1879. At Oxford women were allowed to sit the preliminary exams in Classics (Honour Moderations referred to as Mods) in 1884, and the final examinations in 1888. On women studying classics at Cambridge and Oxford in the late-nineteenth century, see Stray (2009).

[54] Murnaghan and Roberts (2009). On Richard Porson, see Todd (2004) 784-87.

astonishing ways, given how limited access had been over the previous three centuries. Classical academics began moving beyond the text and opening classical texts to avenues of study much broader than strict linguistic and textual issues. Scholars such as Gilbert Murray, who was the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford University from 1908-1936 and a prominent public intellectual, began to argue that there were parallels to be found between our own culture and those of antiquity, especially fifth-century Athens. And not only did Murray make such arguments in his university lectures, he also made them in public lectures, broadcast on the radio, and in published books which were intended to appeal to readers beyond academia. In addition to his lectures, Murray also began to popularize ancient Greek drama by two means. The first was the translation of classical plays for the public stage, which were presented not as plays by Murray, but rather as Euripides in English. The second was the publication of Murray's translations in affordable volumes. The world of classics that Murray, and other colleagues to a lesser extent, ushered in was one in which you no longer needed to have knowledge of the original languages to have access to the texts of classical drama, you did not need to attend university to have access to professional knowledge that would provide a historical context for understanding the plays, nor did you even have to be particularly literate, thanks to performances in the theatre and broadcasts on the radio.

The importance of this opening of classical learning to a much wider and diverse audience than that to which it had been traditionally accessible should not be underestimated. The British elite had long used language and literacy to shore up cultural hegemony, and many opposed teaching the poor to read or permitting access to literature for those of the working class who were literate. As Rose puts it in his book, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, "Educated people commonly (though by no means universally) found something profoundly menacing in the efforts of working people to educate themselves and write for themselves."[55] And Rose has extensively documented the ways in which those members of the working class who sought both the ability to read and materials to read faced opposition and various challenges. He also documents the voracious appetite that many members of this class had for all forms of

[55] Rose (2001) 20.

education and literature, and takes to task those who, like Barbara Herrnstein Smith, a past president of the Modern Language Association, would state that it is an obvious "fact that Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare do not figure significantly in the personal economies of these people, do not perform individual or social functions that gratify their interests, do not have value for them."[56] These works held appeal for many not only for their literary merits and the tales contained within, but also because they represented access to cultural stores that the ruling classes sought to deny them. It should not be doubted that English translations of classical literature were perceived by some to pose a threat to the norms of the British social hierarchy. Rose quotes Thomas Burnet and George Duckett's *Homerides*, published in 1715, in which the authors warned that thanks to Pope's translation, "every Country Milkmaid may understand the *Iliad* as well as you or I."[57] Public access to adaptations of classical literature was not particularly threatening, but access to accurate translations of classical literature was perceived by some to be a threat the status quo.

Class condescension by the educated towards the self-educating working class by no means disappeared with the opening up of classical education through affordable translations and public performances. Amanda Wrigley cites a letter to *The Times* (28 May 1956) in which a woman wrote disparagingly of her gardener and his wife's enthusiastic response to the broadcast of the entire *Oresteia* on the BBC's Third Programme: "And we still wonder about it. What's Orestes to him? Or he to Orestes."[58] Such attitudes are still pervasive. In an interview on BBC Radio 3 with John Tusa, Harrison recalled how during the interval of a performance of his first play at the National Theatre, *The Misanthrope* (1973), he overheard a woman with an upper-class accent say, "He has such command over language, but they say he comes from

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[56] Herrnstein quoted in Rose (2001) 4.

[57] Rose (2001) 18. The milkmaid poet Ann Yearsley clearly felt that her social 'betters' did not want her to have access to classical literature, writing a poem entitled, "Addressed to Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman's desiring the Author never to assume a Knowledge of the Ancients". See Yearsley (1994) 93-99.

[58] Wrigley (2005) 231.

Sheffield."[59] While she was right about his command of language, she was wrong about where he came from; he had been born, raised, and educated in Leeds.

Biography III: language, family, and early career

Harrison's time at Leeds Grammar School was both a blessing and a curse, and during the years spent there he was pulled between two very divided worlds: that of the British Grammar school, part of the mission of which was to erase any vestige of lower class traits, especially in speech, and the working class home and community in which he lived with his family. Harrison's education provided him with a knowledge and love of language, and a clear sense of the value and power of an articulate voice. As with so many aspects of his education, this was a double-edged sword. According to Harrison, "My own education led me to think that I had an inarticulate background, which gave me a deep hunger for all modes of articulation; I learned many languages, obsessively, and also threw myself in to becoming a poet, which is for me a supreme and ceremonious mode of articulation."[60] At first Harrison's sense of coming from an inarticulate background was that it was something to be ashamed of and to flee from. This sense was in no small part derived from his school experience during which his teachers chastised him and excluded him because of his thick Yorkshire accent.[61] He has said, "I thought

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[59] Tusa (on-line).

[60] Haffenden (1991) 229.

[61] While many of Harrison's *School of Eloquence* sonnets touch on his experiences at Leeds Grammar School, his sonnet "Them & [uz]" is the best known of these poems:

> αἰαῖ, ay, ay!…stutterer Demonsthenes
> gob full of pebbles outshouting seas —
> 4 words only of *mi 'art aches* and…'Mine's broken,
> you barbarian, T. W.!' *He* was nicely spoken.
> 'Can't have our glorious heritage done to death!'
> I played the Drunken Porter in *Macbeth*.
> 'Poetry's the speech of kings. You're one of those
> Shakespeare gave the comic bits to: prose!

that somehow language would take me away, but on the contrary —the more I became articulate the more I was conscious of what I owed to the goad of the inarticulate."[62] This sense of debt to the tongue-tied and voiceless people from whom he comes is marked throughout his poetry, but most pointedly in the epigraph to his *School of Eloquence* sequence, entitled *Heredity*, which reads:

> *How you became a poet's a mystery!*
> *Wherever did you get your talent from?*
> I say: *I had two uncles, Joe and Harry—*
> *one was a stammerer, the other dumb.*[63]

It is a sentiment not limited to his personal poetry, but one that finds its way into all of Harrison's adaptations and original dramatic works as well. From the pre-Euripidean Medea[64] to the lost satyrs of Sophocles[65] to the forgotten giants of the early-twentieth century, such as Gilbert Murray and Fridtjof Nansen,[66] Harrison has something of an

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> All poetry (even Cockney Keats?) you see
> 's been dubbed by [ΛS] not [uz], T.W.!' That shut my trap.
> I doffed my flat a's (as in 'flat cap')
> my mouth all stuffed with glottals, great
> lumps to hawk up and spit out…*E-nun-ci-ate*!

Harrison (2007a) 133.

[62] Haffenden (1991) 234.

[63] On Harrison's relationship with his family, see Morrison (1991) 54-60.

[64] In *Medea: a sex-war opera*, Harrison draws on the pre-Euripidean mythic tradition in which Medea's children were either killed by the Corinthians or accidentally by Medea. For the pre-Euripidean Medea myths, see Gantz (1993) 358-373. Harrison contrasts the canonical myth of Medea as child-killer with the modern popular mythology of Hercules, whose infanticide is rarely mentioned.

[65] In *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* Harrison draws upon numerous forgotten objects and characters, from the ancient satyr play, which is rarely mentioned by anyone other than classical scholars, to the satyrs themselves and their low-culture modern equivalents, to Sophocles' lost satyr play, *Ichneutae*.

[66] The central figures in *Fram* (2008) are Gilbert Murray and Fridtjof Nansen, both of whom were renowned in the early twentieth century for their work in numerous fields, and both of whom have since largely been forgotten. Murray was a Greek scholar and an important popularizer, writing works on classical culture for general audiences in

obsession with drawing his audience's attention to those whose voices either never were or are no longer heard. Throughout his poetry and verse drama Harrison meditates on what it means to be articulate or inarticulate, and on the deep cultural chasm that exists in between, both within British society and within his own family.

From Leeds Grammar School Harrison went on to Leeds University where he took an undergraduate degree in Classics and a diploma in linguistics, before beginning a doctoral dissertation on English translations of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Harrison never finished his doctorate.[67] While working towards completion he spent four years teaching in Nigeria, and a year teaching in Prague. It was during this period that Harrison came to the realization that he wanted to be a poet rather than an academic. His experiences in both places would prove to be influential for his later work. He has said of Africa:

> What Africa did for me was literally to put in perspective my own education…I found the drama of my own education dramatically posed in black and white: people coming from illiterate backgrounds and reading about Wordsworth's daffodils because it was set in their exam papers, when they didn't know what a fucking daffodil was. That kind of dichotomy made me think about my own education and dramatise it….[68]

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addition to producing the first Oxford Classical Texts of Euripides. He was also, however, a humanitarian who played an important role in the establishment of Oxfam. Nansen's career was even more illustrious than that of Murray. Nansen would, during his lifetime, work as both a professor of Zoology and later Oceanography at the Royal Frederick University in Oslo. It was his arctic explorations and later humanitarian work, however, that made him famous throughout Europe. In 1895 Nansen and Hjalmar Johansen reached 86° 14' N, the highest latitude then reached by man, having set out in his ship *Fram* in 1893 to explore the arctic and prove his theories about the existence of a polar current. Nansen, influential in the dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway, served as the newly independent Norway's ambassador in London between 1906-8. Following World War I he became an important figure in the humanitarian work undertaken by the League of Nations, working especially on initiatives involving prisoners of war and refugees. For his humanitarian work he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922.

[67] Harrison did publish two articles based on his doctoral work under T.W. Harrison, see Harrison (1967) and (1969).

[68] Haffenden (1991) 236.

Reflecting on his own educational experience Harrison realized that contrary to what he had learned in school his life could be the stuff of literature, as could his mother tongue with its thick northern accent, which, more than anything else, marked his class. Drawing on his experiences in Africa and his realizations about his own background Harrison published his first volume of poetry, *The Loiners*, which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize.[69]

Harrison's mother was distraught both by Harrison's decision to give up his academic career – she had always hoped that he would use his education to become a teacher – and by the poetry he had written. Harrison has captured his mother's distress in his poem *Bringing up* which reads in part:

> Even cremation can't have dried the eyes
> that wept for weeks about my 'sordid lust'.
> …
> But still I see your weeping, your hurt looks:
>
> *you weren't brought up to write such mucky books*.[70]

Fortunately for Harrison's future career not every one reacted as negatively as his mother. When the director John Dexter was looking for a writer to do a verse translation of Moliere's *Misanthrope* for the National Theatre in London someone gave him a copy of *The Loiners* – which led to Harrison being commissioned to do the translation. *The Misanthrope* was not Harrison's first venture into theatrical translations. While in Nigeria he, with the Irish poet James Simmons, had done a translation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, entitled *Aikin Mata* for production at the Ahmadu Bello University, which in his words "had thawed out [his] tongue".[71] *The Misanthrope* was, however, his first theatrical work in Britain and his first production at the National. When it was staged in 1973 the critical response was universally effusive. Benedict Nightingale wrote in the *New Statesman*, "The first night audience was rapt…but it was, or so I gathered from its

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[69] Harrison (1970).

[70] Harrison (2007a) 178.

[71] Harrison (1991c) 34. First published without this title in Robson (1971). For a discussion of *Aikin Mata*, see chapter 5.

admiring laughter, more aurally than intellectually or emotionally engaged…it was almost audibly asking itself what striking new rhyme Harrison would wrest out of the original next…"[72] The "Commentary" section of the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote: "It must be many years since London's dramatic critics went out to praise the translation of a classic —the usual ploy is to insist how much has been lost in the process. This time, though, Tony Harrison has seen himself turned into the golden boy of theatre by his brilliant and concise rendition of Moliere into rhyming couplets."[73] For the next decade Harrison would primarily be known for his work in the theatre.

While the effusive praise from critics and audiences was obviously important in regard to Harrison's decision to continue working in the theatre, perhaps equally important was the fact that the theatre offered a way for Harrison to make his poetry accessible and enjoyable for his parents, and by extension the working class amongst whom he had grown up. Harrison has said in an interview that "my parents were reconciled to my work in the theatre: they like the plays…but my parents never read the poetry."[74] Much of the later poetry in its various genres sought to ease his mother's distress and bridge the gap between them which his education had opened and his poetic skills had exacerbated. When in his poem "Rhubarbarians II" Harrison writes "I'd like to be the poet my father reads!" he is speaking not only to his desire for his parents to see value in his work, but also of his active search for a poetic voice to speak both and to his parents.[75] In an interview with Richard Hoggart he said, "It's one of the tragic ironies of my work that I found a language in poetry I could address to my father and mother only when it was too late. I've now found poetry about our life together; I found what it should be; but they're no longer around for me to address the poems to them."[76] The

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[72] Nightingale (1973) 2 March.

[73] *TLS* (1973) 16 March.

[74] Haffenden (1991) 246.

[75] Harrison (2007a) 124.

[76] Hoggart (1991) 45. Harrison's mother died in 1976, followed by the death of his father in 1980.

accessibility of his work to his parents was important on a personal level, but it also was to become very significant in terms of his ideology about the theatre in general. The language of the theatre must be accessible or the audience will be lost.[77] He did not, however, bring that ideology to bear on a classical play until *The Oresteia* (1981).

Historical context IV: classical drama in the early twentieth century

The first professional performance of a classical play in English translation in a public theatre seems to have been the 1904 production of Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripides' *Hippolytus* at the Lyric Theatre under the direction of Harley Granville Barker.[78] It was to be the first of a number of productions of Euripides in Murray's translations that Barker would stage. Barker's productions of Greek tragedies were part of his attempt to radically change the nature of London theatre, or at least to open a new kind of theatre that would run alongside the commercial theatres of the West End. He described it in a letter to William Archer as a repertory season of

> uncommercial Drama: Hauptmann – Suderman – Ibsen – Maeterlinck – Schnitzler – Shaw – Brieux etc.
>
> Not necessarily plays untried in England.
> A fresh production every fortnight.
> Not necessarily a stock company.
> The highest price five or six shillings.
> To be worked mainly as a subscription theatre.
> One would require a guarantee of £5000 – if possible 50 people putting down £100 each. I would take everything on plays and acting – not attempt "productions."[79]

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[77] Harrison has articulated the importance of accessible language in the theatre in a number of places. See for example, Hoggart (1991) 45.

[78] Murray's *Andromache* had been staged at the Garrick Theatre on the 24 February 1901. This was not, however, a production of a translation of Euripides' *Andromache*, but Murray's original play of the same title. It was a production of the Stage Society, which staged private performances for its members on Sunday evenings, when London theatres were closed.

[79] See Salmon (1986) 41-2.

When Barker's plans for this kind of theatre season came to fruition in 1904, at the Court Theatre under joint management with John Vedrenne, the plays were staged as matinees on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, with each production running for two weeks (so a complete run of six performances). In the end, due in large part to a lack of subscriptions, tickets prices were not as low as had been hoped, and "ranged from ten shillings and sixpence in the stalls to a half-crown in the pit, the same as most London theatres. A small gallery was also available, at a shilling a head."[80] Barker dreamed of a theatre that could reach an audience who sought more than entertainment in the theatre and where the audience was comprised in no small part of workers. Kennedy quotes a letter in which Barker laments the fact that matinees mean that these workers, because of their employment, will be excluded from attending his theatre, and that the experiment cannot be done in the evenings as evening performances would be too expensive.[81] He is more explicit as to whom he hopes this audience might be in a letter to Gilbert Murray, "…oh, think G. M., of being able to do *The Trojan Women* to a normal evening audience, with clerks in the pit and dock labourers in the gallery. It is well worth fighting for."[82] The 1904 production of *Hippolytus* was Barker and Murray's first attempt to reach a broader audience than the usual public theatre-goers.[83]

This production marked a monumental shift in the nature and function of classical drama on the British stage. As outlined above, had typically been limited to the exclusive audiences of the schools and universities where they were being staged and the invited

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[80] See Kennedy (1985) 18.

[81] See Kennedy (1985) 21.

[82] Salmon (1986) 282.

[83] The Old Vic, which would come to function as a de facto National Theatre from the 1940s onward, had also sought a different and more diverse audience than the typical public theatre or music hall. Its founder, Emma Cons, was more concerned, however, with reforming morals rather than reforming the theatre. She hoped that by offering light, wholesome entertainment along with coffee and cakes she would keep men away from the pubs and whores. On the early history of the Old Vic, see Williams (1949).

audiences, which we can safely assume rarely included clerks and dockworkers. Accurate knowledge of classical works was yet another dividing line between classes. Barker was in part working against the theatre conventions of his day, which privileged stage spectacle over the actual play and which he condemned as having "stood more or less for intellectual and social vagabondage."[84] But he was also working to undermine the ways in which drama had been traditionally used to reinforce British class structures.

Dramatic works considered to be literature, the works of classical dramatists and Shakespeare for example, were rarely, if ever, performed as written in the public theatres until the early twentieth century. Barker, through his productions at the Court Theatre and elsewhere, and through his writings, was an influential figure in the shift towards a theatre tradition where the focus was on the text largely as written and the quality of acting. Barker envisioned a national theatre in which performances of plays functioned as "a library of living drama" accessible to all who were interested in this kind of theatre.[85] In the preface to *A National Theatre: Schemes and Estimates*, Barker and Archer wrote that such a theatre "must not even have the air of appealing to a specially literary and cultured class. It must be visibly and unmistakably a popular institution, making a large appeal to the whole community."[86] As Kennedy observes, "It was a socialist ideal: not a monument glorifying the nation but a democratic theatre for the people of the nation, showing the best plays at accessible prices."[87] Barker even went so far as to suggest in a speech in 1910 that admission to the National Theatre should be free, as was and continues to be the case with the British Museum and the National Gallery.[88]

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[84] Archer and Barker (1970) xii.

[85] Barker (1922) 262.

[86] Archer and Barker (1970) xviii.

[87] Kennedy (1985) 192.

[88] Kennedy (1985) 196. The first civic theatre in England, open to the public for free and funded through contributions and collections was in Sheffield, Yorkshire. See <http://www.sybilthorndikescrapbook.arthurlloyd.co.uk/Page56.htm>.

It is within this theatrical and political context that the first professional productions of a classical play in production appeared at a public theatre. The Barker-Vedrenne seasons at the Court Theatre began in the fall of 1904 with a production of Gilbert Murray's translation of *Hippolytus*, largely a remounting of the production that had been performed for four matinees at the Lyric Theatre by Barker in May of the same year. While Barker never explicitly associated these seasons at the Court with his plans for a National Theatre, the chronological parallels between the initial private printing and circulation of his and Archer's *Schemes and Estimates* in 1904 and the first season at the Court, and the proper publication of a revised *Schemes and Estimates* in 1907 during the final season at the Court, strongly suggests that these seasons were intended in part as a demonstration of the kind of productions that would be staged at a National Theatre, and a means of building up support for the venture, financial and otherwise.[89] Salmon has argued, "Though Shaw became vastly influential later, and though the effect of Shaw on Barker's work and of Barker on Shaw's can scarcely be over-estimated, the beginnings of the scheme sprang not from Shaw or Shaw's plays but from the direct influence of Gilbert Murray and his translations of Euripides."[90] In addition to Murray being a financial supporter of the venture, his translation of Euripides was the first play staged in the season.[91] Murray and Barker were united not only in their belief that Euripides' plays

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[89] There is a substantial discrepancy between the suggested repertory for a National Theatre as outlined in Schemes and Estimates and the repertory staged during the 1904-1907 seasons at the Court Theatre. Shakespeare figures heavily in the proposed repertory and Shaw and Euripides not at all, while in reality the bulk of performances given at the Court were plays by Shaw, followed by productions of plays by Euripides in Murray's translations, various plays by other playwrights, and not a single Shakespeare production. The link between Archer and Barker's pitch for a National Theatre and the seasons at the Court Theatre, is supported by the correspondence between the two men regarding the productions at the Court between 1904 and 1907, in which Archer, while not a formal partner, seems to have been an active and vocal participant. See Salmon (1986) 41-56.

[90] Salmon (1983) 100.

[91] Murray's willingness to provide money to support the Barker-Vedrenne seasons led Barker to write a letter to Murray fondly chastising him:

> You are shockingly ignorant of the ways of theatrical finance. You should have hummed and ha'ed and consulted your aunts and first cousins and second cousins and my second cousins and your conscience and the

could be staged as modern drama, but they also shared progressive political beliefs despite their affiliations with different political parties. While Murray was a member of the Liberal Party, and Barker a Fabian, both were activists who believed strongly that the theatre could be used to further political agendas through the plays it chose to stage.

It was these English verse translations of Gilbert Murray that popularized, in both senses of the word, Greek drama in Britain.[92] Despite being the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford University, and having married into an aristocratic English family, Murray seems to have had little interest in shoring up traditional cultural and educational barriers.[93] He worked to make Euripides accessible to a number of audiences, producing the first Oxford Classical Texts of Euripides' plays for scholars, and making the plays widely accessible to literate audiences through his affordable translations, which the print numbers indicate were very popular; by 1920 Murray had sold nearly a quarter of a million copies of his translations.[94] Maurice Bowra noted that in the first decade of the twentieth century they "were almost the only new verse in English to command a large sale."[95] But the productions of Murray's translations, both at the Royal Court and at other theatres, made the plays accessible to those who had neither the money nor the inclination to purchase or read volumes of poetry. They functioned very much along the lines of how Harley Granville Barker and William Archer had argued drama would

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> fortune teller and then have said you'd think about it. However, thank you for the cheque…

Salmon (1986) 204.

[92] For a brief discussion of classical drama in translation in Britain in the twentieth century, see chapter 6.

[93] Gilbert Murray married Lady Mary Henrietta Howard, who was the daughter of the Earl and Countess of Carlisle, George and Rosalind Howard. George Bernard Shaw's play *Major Barbara* was based on Murray, with whom Shaw was friends, and his family, with Murray himself providing the model for the character Adolphus Cusins, his wife Lady Mary the title character Major Barbara, and his mother-in-law was the inspiration for the fierce figure of Lady Britomart Undershaft.

[94] Morwood (2005) vii.

[95] Bowra (1966) 216.

function at their proposed National Theatre – as a performed library, making the great works of dramatic literature, both ancient and modern, English and foreign, available to all those who wished to partake.[96] It is this tradition of using the theatre to make classical drama accessible to all who are interested that Harrison follows, as well as of using classical drama to engage with contemporary politics.

Between the socially and theatrically progressive productions of Gilbert Murray's translations and the first professional production of a classical play translated by Tony Harrison (*The Oresteia* in1981 at London's National Theatre), however, the most successful poet drawing on classical models to write verse drama was T.S. Eliot. Eliot wrote a number of plays for the stage that were built upon classical models. His dramatic corpus consists of five complete plays (*Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, *The Elder Statesman*, and *The Family Reunion*) and fragments of two others (*The Rock* and *Sweeney Agonistes*). Two are closely associated with Eliot's work within the Church of England (*Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Rock*), though they are modeled on a classical structure, while the remaining plays, despite being heavily influenced by Eliot's religious beliefs, are built upon classical models. The title of his first and incomplete attempt at a play, *Sweeney Agonistes: fragments of an Aristophanic melodrama*, suggests the use of Old Comedy as his model, though the relationship is far less clear than the title promises. Likewise the classical models behind Eliot's other plays are not immediately obvious. *The Cocktail Party* draws on Euripides' *Alcestis*, *The Confidential Clerk* on Euripides' *Ion*, *The Elder Statesman* on Sophocles' *Oedipus* plays, and *The Family Reunion* on Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. Chiari wrote, "He used Greek myths in his last four plays, and in some instances he has so well covered up his tracks that, had he not declared his debt to the Greek dramatists, probably no one would have discovered it."[97] The obscuring of the debt to particular literary models, coupled with Eliot's need to declare his debt to Greek drama, raises questions about why he used Greek drama at all, and what he perceived the significance of those works to be in relationship to his own drama.

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[96] Archer and Barker (1907).

[97] Chiari (1972) 119.

Eliot's classical plays are peculiar within the British theatre of the first-half of the twentieth century. Eliot's criticism makes clear that he believed that verse drama was superior to prose, arguing in Aristotelian terms that the verse dramatist must engage his audience on multiple levels: dramatically, through plot and character, and on a more primal level, through rhythm, music, and metrical patterns.[98] He was insistent, however, that the verse must reflect modern speech, arguing that it was in their use of out-moded dramatic language that the nineteenth-century English verse playwrights had lost their dramatic power.[99] So on one hand Eliot was at odds with the shifting trends in English drama, which, following the lead of playwrights such as Chekov and Ibsen, was moving away from verse towards prose. At the same time, however, English verse translations of classical drama were finding a place on the professional stage for the first time with productions of Gilbert Murray's translations which continued to be produced with some regularity in theatres throughout London and England into the 1940s. Eliot, however, while privileging the models of earlier verse traditions, was not interested in dramatizing the heroic world, either in translation or adaptation. He envisioned a new model of verse drama that used everyday language and dramatized middle-class life.

Eliot's plays, while significant in the reception of classical drama in the twentieth century, are not translations and it is really only secondary literature that provides any indication of their classical models which are so thoroughly veiled that even the most observant and insightful audience member would be unlikely to identify them. The plays also had no significant impact on the British theatre in the second-half of the twentieth theatre; or at least not a positive impact. Tony Harrison has argued that it was the verse plays of Eliot and Christopher Fry that effectively prevented the next generation of English poets for writing for the theatre. In his words they "had fouled the nest".[100] This perception was supported by the views of George Devine and other members of the English Stage Company when they discussed what sort of new plays by English writers

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[98] Eliot (1933) 153.

[99] Eliot (1953) 77.

[100] Haffenden (1991) 237.

they were or were not seeking for their new venture at the Royal Court Theatre in the mid-1950s. As Lindsay Anderson put it,

> We were still in the post-war doldrums. Nothing that was done in the theatre related in any stimulating way to what was happening in Britain or in the rest of the world. Non-commercial drama was generally 'poetic' drama, represented most successfully and most reputably by T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry.[101]

Devine had characterized the work of Eliot and Fry as appealing to "the so-called highbrow public [who] now seeks a new form of nostalgia in the 'new intellectual theatre'."[102] This was not the kind of theatre that he planned to produce at the Royal Court Theatre; they were seeking to create a writer's theatre, not a literary theatre. Of the approximately 750 scripts that had been received in response to their ads in newspapers soliciting new plays, they felt only one was worth producing, John's Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, while the rest according to Tony Richardson, "were either bottom-drawer pieces by playwrights in decline or 'endless blank verse shit'."[103] T.S. Eliot was among the writers who sought to have their work produced by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, having offered them *The Family Reunion* and *Sweeney Agonistes*. Devine, in his role as Artistic Director, declined both.

Eliot's classical plays are representative of the general phenomenon of the production of classical plays between the heyday of productions of Murray's translations in the first decades of the twentieth century and the 1980s when professional productions once again became somewhat common. There were adaptations and translations of

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[101] Findlater (1981) 143.

[102] Roberts (1999) 37.

[103] Wardle (1978) 180-1. Devine voiced similar opinions, saying, "One the whole the standard of inspipidity…is remarkably high and there is a lot of 'phoney' drama – phoney 'poetry'; phoney 'theatrical situations'; turgid wallowings in the mud of the 'poetic soul' which is just as bad, worse, than conventional ineptitude – such plays have no human interest." See Roberts (1999) 37. One suggestion that was raised by the Artistic Committee at the ESC, in response to the low box-office taking in the first season, was to stage a production of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, with Marilyn Monroe in the lead. In the end it was decided that they would continue with the planned programme but under constant review. See Roberts (1999) 51.

classical plays that were significant in terms of literary history and therefore often loom large in discussion of the reception of classical drama, but their theatrical importance was very limited. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes: fragments of an Aristophanic melodrama* is an excellent example of this. *Sweeney Agonistes* is generally considered to be the most theatrically promising of Eliot's verse drama, as well as being his earliest dramatic work. But it is significant because it is by T.S. Eliot, not because of any impact on the British theatre tradition on the stage or in print. The fragmentary play was staged by The Group Theatre in 1934 for three performances. This was not a professional production, nor was it performed in a theatre. The performances took place in the Group Theatre Rooms, located on the third floor of a building located next to the Arts Theatre. This space functioned as office space, wardrobe, work and storage area, as well as an informal performance space. The Group Theatre also staged two performances of Louis McNeice's *Agamemnon* in November 1936 at the Westminster Theatre. MacNiece's *Agamemnon* figures prominently in studies on the reception of classical drama. Again, however, the performance itself had little to no impact on British theatre on the stage or in print. A review in *Time and Tide* provides a vivid description of the production aesthetics:

> Aeschylus, it seems, would be dead unless modernized. So we had the curious spectacle of a chorus dressed in dinner jackets and goggles…a watchman as a hooded monk. Clytemnestra with a headdress of a Chinese mandarin backed by a scroll, Agamemnon with a jester's cap, slaves in purple tarbushes and veils and close-fitting black tights, more slaves dressed like the Klu Klux Klan, Cassandra as an Arab from the shores of the Euphrates, with an Elizabethan ruff, and lastly Aegisthus in a Christmas cracker helmet and black evening cape. This might be thought enough; yet undoubtedly the *pièce de résistance* was the almost universal gloving of the cast.[104]

Like *Sweeney Agonistes*, MacNiece's *Agamemnon* is significant because of its author's reputation as a poet, not because of the impact of the work on the world of theatre. These plays did not lead to a spate of preeminent poets writing translations or adaptations of classical plays for professional productions, unlike the resurgence of classical drama

[104] *Times and Tide*, 7 November 1936, p. 1562, quoted in Sidnell (1984) 213.

generally and verse 'translations' in particular which followed in the wake of Harrison's classical plays produced in the 1980s.

The differences between the productions of Murray's translation and the Group Theatre productions is illustrative of the different realms of British theatre in which productions of classical drama were taking place in the first half of the twentieth century. The productions of Murray's translations were professional but not commercial productions. Yet while they were not commercial, they did aim to be 'popular', seeking a diverse audience that might include clerks and dock workers. The Group Theatre productions, like the productions of Barker and Vedrenne at the Court Theater, were seeking to create a space for non-commercial drama in the British theatre, but the kind of drama which they were producing seems to have been produced by an elite artistic group for an elite audience composed largely of the self-same group. Not that this was The Group Theatre's intended audience. The first production of a play written specifically for the Group was Auden's *The Dance of Death* which "was the first attempt to forge a link between 'bourgeois' and workers' theatre in London."[105] At the same time, however,

> For the cognoscenti, Auden offered a subtext rich in personal and literary reference and he displayed his virtuosity in yoking together such diverse phenomena as epilepsy and shamanism; fin de siècle poetico-spiritual despair and aeroplane flying; Gerard Manley Hopkins and Fascism; D. H. Lawrence's Rananim and the folk-dance movement; Karl Marx and Father Christmas and thus, by extension, the archetypal symbolism of the death and birth of the year with the thesis of the Communist Manifesto.[106]

Auden's play was intended to be a different play for different audiences, with the educated and well-read members of the audience being offered a narrative to which their education provided access, and which therefore excluded the less-literate audience members.

The work of the writers at The Group Theatre had no real impact on British theatre, though they had a major impact on English poetry. Part of the reason for their lack of impact on the larger theatre community was the reality that non-Shakespearean

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[105] Sidnell (1984) 68.

[106] Sidnell (1984) 70.

verse drama was dying in England. The decision of most of the poets who were writing verse drama not to write for the public theatres, and so for popular audiences, also contributed to its decline. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* and Auden and Isherwood's *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, are often pointed to as among the last verse dramas to showcase exciting possibilities for verse drama in the twentieth century. Both, however, were produced by The Group Theatre as short-lived experiments and failed to have any tangible impact beyond the confines of that small group. Verse drama had one last gasp of success in the commercial theatre with the plays of Christopher Fry, especially with *The Lady's Not for Burning*, but after the verse drawing room dramas of Fry and Eliot there was seemingly no place left for poets in the theatre. At the same time it might be argued that it was a more general phenomenon of the modernist movement that the public 'popular' audience for poetry became increasingly limited.

Biography IV: plays, language, and ideology

Tony Harrison first came to widespread public attention in 1985 on account of his poem "v." which engaged with the coal miner's strike of 1984, the most bitter labour dispute in British history. Under the direction of Richard Eyre, Harrison filmed the poem for broadcast on the UK's Channel 4. While the poem had sold relatively well for a volume of poetry when first released by Newcastle-upon-Tyne publisher Bloodaxe Books, it had merited little notice beyond the pages of literary reviews.[107] The pending broadcast on Channel 4, however, brought the poem to wider attention and resulted in a public uproar that included frontpage news coverage and debate in the House of Parliament. Purportedly at issue was Harrison's liberal use of four letter words and whether any poem that contained such words could or should be counted as literature. Some right leaning papers also took issue with the poem's epigraph, which they

[107] For the initial sales numbers for the first printing of *v*., see Byrne (1998) 67.

misrepresented as a dedication to Arthur Scargill, leader of the National Union of Mineworkers, who had been vilified by the press during the strike. While Harrison had been the most prominent verse playwright in England for a decade by this point in his career, he had largely gone unnoticed by the general public. "v." changed his public profile (not for the better Harrison would say), but more significantly it marked a major foray into the realm of politicized public drama watched by a large and demographically diverse audience. His next play at the National Theatre following the broadcast of "v.", *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, engaged with many of the issues raised in that poem, such as the relationship among literacy, perceived social value, the division between 'high' and 'low' culture, and class divisions, discussed through the veil of classical drama.[108] And while it is the classical plays from 1981's *The Oresteia* onward, and especially the political plays that began with *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, that Harrison is most frequently associated with, he had in fact been making his living exclusively as poet, and primarily as a theatre poet, for nearly a decade

It is difficult to discuss Harrison's verse drama as a unified whole. Some of his plays are translations, such as *The Misanthrope* (1973), *The Oresteia* (1981) and *Hecuba* (2005). Some are translations that have been relocated either chronologically or geographically or both, such as *Phaedra Britannica* (1975) and *The Prince's Play* (1995). Other plays are adaptations, such as *Bow Down* (1977) or *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1988). And yet others are original works, such as *Square Rounds* (1992), *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* (1995), and *Fram* (2008). Overall his dramatic work falls into these three contiguous categories. There is a fairly clear chronological development from translations to adaptations to original works, with his translations of Hugo's *The Prince's Play* (1995) and Euripides' *Hecuba* (2005) being the result not of his own creative impulses but a combination of the influence of friends and financial necessity. There is often, however, not a clear separation between categories with translations verging on adaptations and adaptations verging on original works and vice versa, and some plays are not easily classifiable. At the same time, however, despite moments of murkiness, when his plays are separated into these categories it allows for a clearer sense of the development of

[108] On *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, see chapter 3.

Harrison's dramatic imagination. The first category of translations or very close adaptations, which are primarily early plays, includes: *Aikin Mata* (1966), *The Misanthrope* (1973), *Phaedra Britannica* (1975), *The Passion* (1977), *The Mysteries* (1985), *The Bartered Bride* (1978), *The Oresteia* (1981), *The Prince's Play* (1996), and *Hecuba* (2005). The second category consists of his adaptations, largely works from the 1980s, which are still fairly closely tied to their source text and in which the source texts are readily identifiable. This includes: *Bow Down* (1977), *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* (unperformed but published in1985), *The Common Chorus* (unperformed but published in 1987), *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1988) — and arguably *Aikin Mata*, *The Passion* and *The Mysteries* should be in this category. The third category consists of his original works, which for the most part date from the 1990s onward. This includes: *Yan Tan Tethera* (1985), *Square Rounds* (1992), *Poetry or Bust* (1993), *The Labourers of Heracles* (1995), *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* (1995), his film *Prometheus* (1998), and *Fram* (2008). Organizing Harrison's work in this way is helpful in terms of understanding the nature of his works, what they are attempting to achieve, and their relationship to each other. It highlights the fact that Harrison's work, even just his classical work, cannot be discussed as a single homogeneous body. Each category leads into the next, and while the artistic thought process behind them displays clear continuity as Harrison's career progresses, the works in different sections are generically different entities and need to be discussed as such.

The first category, translations (though Harrison would call them adaptations), consists of faithful versions of plays and operas translated from other languages.[109] These

[109] Some might dispute the nature of this relationship. While Harrison's translations are always close to their originals they also stand on their own as English verse drama. Sheridan Morley writing in *Punch* (17 September 1975) wrote: "Tony Harrison's *Phaedra Britannica*, not to be confused with Racine's *Phèdre* to which it owes little more than Shakespeare owed Holinshed, is as fine a piece of theatre as the National has ever offered us, and you'd be advised to hasten along to the Old Vic where it is now with all possible speed." Nevertheless, when translating Harrison feels a loyalty to the original author's language that is on equal footing with the performability of the text. It becomes necessary at a certain point to define Harrison's hand in the work and when compared to his other work, and to the versions of ancient plays recently produced by poets such as Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, it is clear that translation is indeed the best technical

works showcase Harrison's technical skills as a poet and it is possible to view Harrison's work as a translator as an 'apprenticeship' for his later adaptations and original works.[110] Harrison's translations always seek to convey as much as is possible the poetic rhythms and the sounds of the language of the original in easily accessible and performable English. While Harrison is frequently associated with rhyming couplets, his initial decision to use rhyming couplets in his verse drama was because Racine and Moliere used rhyming couplets. His translation of the libretto of *The Bartered Bride* is remarkable for the fact that very few of the original rhymes have been lost, and not a single note of the vocal line had to be changed.[111] When he came to translating the *Oresteia* he sought to create a language for it that would give an English speaking audience something of the weight and rhythm of Aeschylus' Greek, using distinctive Anglo-Saxon rhythms. He has said, "I always have that urge to make any play my own, but at the same time I am very conscientious as a scholar."[112] It is not irrelevant that Harrison's scholarly work was on translations of a non-dramatic classical author. The nature and purpose of translations was something that Harrison had given years of thought to before he turned his own hand to it. By and large the translations are marked by fidelity to their originals – even where Harrison is tempted to insert his own political vision, he refrains.

When it comes to the second and third categories of his work, however, Harrison feels no obligation to rein in his own political views and it is in these plays that Harrison the political verse dramatist first emerges. While none of Harrison's translations is in and of itself political, all of his adapted and original plays are. When Harrison translates ancient tragedy he does not politicize it. While it is often possible to see reflections of modern politics in the plays, such as the gender conflict in the *Oresteia*, or the politics of

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definition of the work, even if Harrison himself avoids using that particular word. This assessment is echoed by Murray (1991) 263.

[110] Harrison himself has referred to his early work as a translator in the 1970s as a period of apprenticeship in the educational film *Tony Harrison: Six Poems* distributed by English & Media Centre.

[111] See Stivender (1991) 198-201.

[112] Haffenden (1991) 239.

a multi-national western coalition going to war in a Middle-Eastern country as in *Hecuba*, Harrison is faithful to the author's words as they survive in the textual tradition. *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* and the classical plays that followed it, however, with the exception of *Hecuba*, are neither translations nor tragedies. The plays are generic hybrids intended to encapsulate as much of the ancient dramatic experience as possible, blending the mythic subjects of tragedy with the ad hominem attacks of Old Comedy and insisting that the performance of drama can and should be a communal cultural and political experience. One of Harrison's primary complaints about the treatment that Greek drama has received in recent centuries is that it has been removed from its original inherently political context and rarified into an apolitical performance put on by Victorian ladies in white nighties.[113] For Harrison part of what the model of fifth-century Athenian plays offers is drama as an integral part of democratic political debate. It is not simply about entertainment, but about a communal examination of who we are and where as a body politic we are going while engaging in an entertaining manner with our cultural legacies.

Harrison came to the theatre with a firm belief in the political function of the theatre and the ability of translations of old works to speak to the present. This was in part due to his experiences while living in Prague in the late 1960s where he went to the theatre almost every night. He has said, "Their translations have a very strong regard for the past, but they also bristle with a sense of the present. The people have lived so long under oppression that they learn always to read between the lines: it has made them read ancient texts with a sense of them being news."[114] This experience, coupled with Harrison's sense that the ancient experience of Athenian drama involved a wholeness of the imagination which was lacking in modern productions led him to move from his translations such as *The Oresteia* to adaptations such as *The Common Chorus* and *The*

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[113] This view of the British theatrical tradition of staging Greek drama is first voiced in the introduction to *Aikin Mata* in which the European tradition is said to consist of "effete angelic choral speaking and emasculated dancing." Harrison and Simmons (1966) 10. The introduction to the play has been reprinted in Astley (1991) 84-87.

[114] Haffenden (1991) 237.

Trackers of Oxyrhynchus.[115] These plays seek to present ancient drama in a larger social and cultural context. They have tragic elements, but also elements of satyr plays and Old Comedy. Their comic elements allow them to move fairly freely through time and space, while their tragic elements tie the stories to the fact that human suffering is a constant element of the human condition which society is obliged to face up to. In Harrison's words it is "a drama open-eyed about suffering but with a heart still open to celebration and physical affirmation."[116] Harrison intends for his plays to speak to the world in which he lives, even when they are modeled on plays written two and a half millennia ago.

Arguing for authorial intent is looked on with disdain by many literary scholars. This is in no small part because for many, if not most, time periods the information that would allow us to make claims for authorial intent with any degree of certainty is lacking, sometimes altogether absent. And so the critical onus has shifted to the point of reception – the theatre audience or the reader.[117] Harrison's work in the theatre, and his adaptations and original plays in particular, is for the most part inseparable from authorial intent because of his intimate involvement in all aspects of the production. His work in the 1970s was directed by others, but with *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* in 1988 Harrison began directing his own work and something of an informal theatre company coalesced around him. The plays from this point onward were written for specific actors, specific performance spaces, with the constant guidance of designer Jocelyn Herbert, and of Harrison himself in a role akin to the ancient Athenian *didaskalos*, shaping both the text and the production according to his vision. Stephen Edwards, who composed the music for *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, observed that Harrison is genuinely interested in the interaction between music, words, and performance. For Harrison it is not three different groups of theatre professionals working side by side from the same text, but rather three groups working together to create a performance text that can begin to embody and do

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[115] For detailed discussions of the nature of adaptation in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* and *The Common Chorus*, see chapters 3 and 5 respectively.

[116] Harrison (1991) 4.

[117] For an argument that privileges the armchair reader, see Berger (1989). For a focus on audience reception, see Bennett (1990).

justice to the richness of his vision. Harrison's theatre work tends to be overflowing with ideas and an exercise in contrasts with the political sitting beside escapist fantasy, the ancient beside the modern, and yet all of it is held together by the strict forms which mark all of his poetry. Harrison has noted in a poem his fondness for Jean-Louis Barrault's comment on the metre of Racine, "le coeur bat l'iambe"[118], but it is an observation equally applicable to Harrison's theatre; it is the metrical pulse that propels it forward and keeps it alive. Harrison's work is peculiar for its strict metrical form coupled with colloquial language, and this is as true of his plays as it is of his other poetry. The range of colloquial language is much broader in the plays, however, where he is writing for a variety of voices, as opposed to his poetry, which he refers to as being written for his voice, though the voices of others are at times present. Often the voices within a play span the dialect and accents that mark class divisions within Britain. So in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* the posh voice of Apollo contrasts with the northern working class voice of Silenus, and similar contrasts appear in other plays. When it comes to Harrison's poetry, dramatic or otherwise, discussion of the biographical and authorial intent are as useful as examining the literary intertexts in seeking a more complete understanding of the plays. And Harrison's involvement with the work at every stage of production, his insistence on performance conventions that are peculiar to his style of directing, such as speaking directly out to the audience rather than to fellow cast members, allow him to firmly imprint his plays with his authorial intentions and it is his metrical rhythms and language that drive the play forward.

While Harrison's politics at times make some portions of his theatre audiences uncomfortable, with his Aristophanic political explicitness and didacticism, nothing makes all his readers more uncomfortable than his use of language. Bruce Woodcock, in an article in *Critical Quarterly*, writes that one of his friends has complained that the problem with Harrison is that he has too much Latin.[119] Harrison, however, uses far more

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[118] Harrison (2007a) 214.

[119] Woodcock (1990) 50-66, 56. This complaint suggests that the person in question is making a general complaint about his perception of Harrison's work rather than a specific complaint gleaned from the experience of reading his poems, as Latin is relatively uncommon in Harrison's poetry and almost completely absent from the plays, with the

than just Latin in his poems, ensuring that all but the most linguistically adept polyglot will at some point struggle with language when reading Harrison's poems. As Woodcock observes, "Harrison expects his readership to work linguistically for their pleasure in a manner which can be quite uncompromising."[120] This use of language carries over from the published verse into the theatrical verse. Silenus, in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, points out the audience's inability to understand ancient Greek.[121] Professor Gilbert Murray in *Fram*, is more sympathetic to the audience's plight, offering to gloss the ancient Greek passage from Euripides' *Herakles* for them.[122] And the skinhead in "v." mistakes *cri-de-coeur* for Greek:

> *So what's a* cri-de-coeur, *cunt? Can't yer speak*
> *the language that yer mam spoke? Think of 'er!*
> *Can yer only get yer tongue round fucking Greek?*
> *Go and fuck yerself with* cri-de-coeur![123]

But it is Harrison's use of English and its dialectical variety that causes the most discomfort. At the back of *V. and Other Poems* there is a glossary, but the majority of the foreign words that appear in the collection are not glossed, despite the presence of words and phrases in Greek, Latin and German. The words that the publisher has felt necessary to gloss are English words, with a handful of exceptions, which include samosas, but excludes *pour encourager*, Fiat Nox, and ΓΡΑΨΟΝ. Most of the words that have been glossed are words that even a sub-literate Yorkshire denizen would instantly comprehend, such as yobs, nowt, nobbut, Geordies, dole, etc. The choice of words included in the

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exception of *Medea: a sex-war* opera, where the chorus sing passages from Hosidas Geta's *Medea*, and, as I argue in chapter 4, as an underlying source text to *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*.

[120] Woodcock (1990) 50-66, 57.

[121] Harrison (2004) 146.

[122] Harrison (2008) 9-10.

[123] Harrison (2007a) 269. This is passage is alluded to thirteen stanzas later when, in response to Harrison saying, "the skin and the poet united fucking Rimbaud / but the *autre* that *je est* is fucking you", the skinhead says, "*Ah've told yer, not more Greek…/…So don't speak Greek. Don't treat me like I'm dumb*."

glossary suggests that the publisher believed that while readers would willing accept unfamiliar foreign words without explanation and clearly erudite English words—mephitic and sardonyx also go unglossed—, they might be put off by English words accessible to the uneducated, but unfamiliar to the literate purchaser of poetry. Many writers before Harrison have represented regional dialects on the page, striving to represent the sounds of the letters through phonetic spellings of regional pronunciations. But phonetic representation allows the reader to note the change in voice without disrupting the flow of reading. Harrison, instead, uses a mixture of both phonetic representation and linguistic symbols. Harrison can mix into a poem snippets of French (the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* of "On not Being Milton"), Greek (the μοθσομητοϱ᾽ ἔϱγανην of "The Mother of the Muses"), Latin (the VALE, MATER of "Blocks"), Cornish (the *Mes den hep tavas a-gollas y dyr* of "National Trust"), standardized spellings of English that in and of themselves on the page are devoid of dialect, with linguistic representations of words that represent pronunciation such as the [ΛS] and [uz] of 'Them & [uz]. As Sandie Byrne has observed,

> Widely spaced lines, broken lines, a mixture of typographical styles …and languages…acronyms, abbreviation, parentheses, asterixes, footnotes…ensure that the poems are never homogenized, pre-digested verse purée….These never slip down so easily that their message is missed, or their production taken for granted. The effort required to read these poems, especially for RP readers hurtled down an exuberant couplet at whose end is the Beecher's Brook vowel (Stick to the southern pronunciation and ally yourself with [ΛS], as well as spoil the rhyme? Try to produce a natural northern [æ] and risk sounding affected or – horrors – patronizing?) is great.[124]

While typographical issues are obviously not an impediment to his theatre audiences, Harrison uses language in similar ways to challenge those audiences. In his classical plays Harrison uses a multiplicity of languages, but especially ancient Greek and occasionally Latin. While Harrison works to make his classical source texts accessible to his theatre audiences, he never tries to disguise the fact that they are foreign texts written in foreign languages. Literacy is a privilege, the door which Harrison is attempting to

[124] Byrne (1998) 14-15.

open wider, while reminding his audience both of their own privilege, and others' lack thereof. As Harrison stated in an interview on BBC Radio 3 with John Tusa,

> …one thing I've always tried to build in to the way I either take on a, a [sic] former classics, or do a play, or write a poem or make a film of mine own, is to realise that somewhere there's a, a privilege of participation involved, and that there are people outside this privileged participation, who, if I'm not able to bring them into the theatre, I can make those who are participating in the privilege, aware that the theatre has glass walls so they see those who are not participating.[125]

Harrison has translated or adapted plays by all extant fifth-century Athenian dramatists (for a list of extant fifth-century drama, with introductory bibliography, see chapter two). He has written two versions of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*: *Aikin Mata* and Part I of *The Common Chorus*. He has translated Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and adapted his *Prometheus*. He has built his play *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* around the fragments of Sophocles' satyr play, *Ichneutae*. But Euripides is the playwright upon whose works he has drawn most frequently, having translated *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, and drawn on his *Medea* and *Herakles*. He has even worked with the single extant line of the tragedian Phyrnichus' *Alcestis*. What unifies Harrison's approach to all of these works, despite the very different styles and even genres of their authors, is his belief in poetry and the nature and function of Greek drama.

> It seems to me no accident that some of the best poetry in the world is in some of its drama from the Greek onwards. In it I find a reaffirmation of the power of the word, eroded by other media and by some of the speechless events of our worst century. Sometimes, despite the fact that the range of poetry has been diminished by the apparently effortless way that the mass media seem to depict reality, I believe that, maybe, poetry, the word at its most eloquent, is one medium which could concentrate our attention on our worst experiences without leaving us with the feeling, as other media can, that life in this century has had its affirmative spirit burnt out.[126]

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[125] Tusa (on-line).

[126] Harrison (1991a) 9.

For Harrison the supreme embodiment of eloquence is Greek tragedy, and this belief in turn led him to use Greek drama as a model for creating public poetry that speaks to the realities of the England and Europe in which he lives with all its social, cultural, and ethnic divisions.

Chapter 2: *The Oresteia*[127]

After Nigeria and Prague I come
back near to where I started from.
...
From *"Newcastle is Peru"*[128]

Peter Hall approached Tony Harrison about doing a translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in 1973, almost immediately upon receiving the news that he would succeed Laurence Olivier as Artistic Director of the National Theatre.[129] Peter Lewis records that "Peter Hall joined the National Theatre with the firm intention of doing the *Oresteia* there. 'I had wanted to do it ever since I had one line in a production of *Agamemnon* at Cambridge in the original Greek.'"[130] Yet while the commission for a translation of Aeschylus' trilogy came on the heels of the premiere of Harrison's first professional play

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[127] I use the *Oresteia* for the Aeschylean original and *The Oresteia* for both the 1981 National Theatre production and Harrison's text for that production. The text referred to is Tony Harrison, *Plays 4: The Oresteia, The Common Chorus (Parts I and II)*, London: Faber and Faber, 2002.

[128] Harrison (2007a) 64.

[129] In his introductory essay to *The Oresteia* Harrison reports that "the date on page one of the first of what would become over a dozen thick notebooks devoted to my workings and reworkings of the *Oresteia* is 8 March 1973, about two weeks after the opening of my *Misanthrope*…" See Harrison (2002b) 3-36, 3. For the date when Hall had first approached Harrison about a translation of *The Oresteia*, see also Lewis (1990) 159. That Hall approached Harrison even before he had formally taken over as Artistic Director speaks to the esteem in which Harrison's early verse translations were held. Harrison was clearly seen to be a person worth holding onto, and one with whom Hall wished to be artistically associated. Hall did not show the same concern for much of the National's personnel who left in large numbers when Hall took over from Olivier. On the troubled accession, see Lewis (1990) 58-80, 104-109.

[130] Lewis (1990) 159. Lewis goes on to say that when the design for the Olivier auditorium was unveiled, based as it was on the ancient Greek amphitheatre at Epidaurus, Hall's desire to stage the *Oresteia* became obsessive. The Cambridge production in which Hall appeared was the 1953 Greek Play production of *Agamemnon*. On the origins and early history of the Cambridge Greek play, see Easterling (1998) 27-48.

it would be nearly a decade from the time Hall approached Harrison to when the play opened in the Olivier auditorium on 28 November 1981.[131]

While *The Oresteia* is frequently taken to be representative of Harrison's classical works, I would argue that it is in fact atypical, serving as a bridge from the translations and close adaptations that he had been writing for others to direct throughout the 1970s at the National Theatre, to the adaptations and original works that would preoccupy much of his later career, most of which would be directed by himself. None of the aspects that made the production distinctive reappear in Harrison's later classical works, such as the use of masks (though the idea of the mask figures significantly in later works), an all male cast despite significant female roles, and an inclination towards ritual and archaism. This is because these aspects were directorial decisions made by Peter Hall, who sought to create a production that to a certain degree conformed to the 'original practices' of fifth-century Athens.[132] Harrison has remarked that this attention to 'original practices' was "not in the spirit of pedantic archaeology but in order to discover a theatricality the Olivier space cried out for…".[133] It ought to be noted, however, that while Harrison from this point worked exclusively in the Olivier when directing his own productions at the National, he never again used the aspects of this production that might have been considered by some to be pedantic archaeology. Yet while Harrison did not carry forward

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[131] Rehearsals began in March 1979 but were abandoned within a month due to a strike. Following the resolution of the strike the production was then pushed backed yet again, this time because of the announcement by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) that the company would be staging their own epic production of Greek plays, focused on the same myths as *The Oresteia*, at the Aldwych in London in February1980, with John Barton's *The Greeks*. Hall notes in his diary entry for 9 November 1979 that the opening of this production would "pre-empt *The Oresteia* for a year or two." See Goodwin (1983) 472-473.

[132] Hall in his role as a prominent director of Shakespeare and as the Founder and Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company was very much influenced by the ideas and scholarship surrounding original theatre practices in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, and he brought these ideas to bear upon his production of *The Oresteia*. For a discussion of the principles, and origins and development the 'original practices' performances of Shakespeare in the British theatre, see Weingust (2006). See also Tucker (2001).

[133] See Harrison (2002b) 3-36, 7.

the 'original practices' used by Hall into the productions of his later classical plays that he himself would direct, he did take many convictions about Greek drama away from the production which he gleaned from his discussions with Hall and with designer Jocelyn Herbert, particularly the production process, his translation process, and the research that he had done. What *The Oresteia* marked for Harrison was the point in his career in which he began to find his voice on stage. He had, for almost a decade, been putting poetry on stage, frequently in the rhyming couplets for which he is well-known. And with 1977's *The Passion* he had put the northern voice on stage in verse.[134] Both represented vital parts of Harrison's voice, but lacked any hint of Harrison the erudite classicist and provided only a brief glimpse of the scope of his theatrical imagination. In *The Oresteia*, all of these aspects began to come together, foreshadowing what would soon define Harrison's work in the theatre.

The focus of this chapter is not a close examination of Harrison's play text itself, which has been discussed by both Underwood and Taplin, and to a lesser extent by Walton, nor a discussion of the production in relationship to Aeschylus' original as discussed by Parker.[135] Rather the chapter is an examination of Harrison's role within the production, distinguishing where possible between his contributions and Peter Hall's directorial vision. At the same time it also explores the significance of this production within the context of Harrison's career, and his classical plays in particular, as well as the importance of the production to the reception of classical plays, especially in verse, on the British stage in the late-twentieth century. While Harrison may not have made the

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[134] For a discussion of the dialect of the original plays and Harrison's use of dialect in *The Mysteries*, see Byrne (1998) 46-51. Harrison himself has described his work on *The Mysteries* not as a reclamation of the plays for a specific northern dialect, but rather as a "reclamation of a great northern classic for the northern voice..." He justified the inclusion of the York cycle in his Mystery cycle saying, "the Mystery Plays had been 'genteelized', by a canon of the Cathedral in York, and made rather effete. And I wanted to get the northern energy back." Tony Harrison in unpublished selected transcripts from a symposium on contemporary performance of ancient Greek and Roman drama, organized by the Department of Antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum, June 20-23, 2002, 28.

[135] See Underwood (1998) 76-100, 77-79; Taplin (2005) 235-251; Walton (2005) 189-206, also printed in Walton (2006) 43-61; and Parker (1986) 337-357.

final production decisions for this play, the near decade that he spent contemplating and preparing his translation, even when many of the parameters were being set by others, deeply affected his own ideas about theatre and how he would eventually direct his own plays starting with *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* in 1988. Harrison's involvement in the production process for *The Oresteia* was much deeper than it had been in previous productions of his work at the National – he had described his role in *The Mysteries* as "the man who came to read the metre", though that comment understates his role in that production.[136] Oliver Taplin has recounted from his own experience of *The Oresteia* rehearsal room that Harrison was a remarkably active participant in the production and had a significant hand in shaping it beyond providing the text, though the production still ought to be most closely associated with its director, Peter Hall.[137] Harrison's deep and prolonged engagement in the production process helped him to clarify his ideas about how Greek drama functions, how he could use the concepts he found in those plays to write his own plays for the modern stage and how to stage these plays in a way that used his insights about the nature and function of ancient drama.

It is clear from comparing both Hall and Harrison's classical productions post-1981 that their approach to classical drama diverges after *The Oresteia*. Hall has continued to stage classical drama working on the same principles that he followed for that production, which he has articulated as choosing plays that he thinks will speak to the audience in the place where it is being done, while trying to find out about how and why the Athenians did what they did and finding equivalents for his modern audience.[138] Hall staged Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, with a translation by Ranjit Bolt, at the Old Vic in 1993, *The Oedipus Plays* (Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, translated by Ranjit Bolt) in 1996 at the National Theatre, John Barton's *Tantalus* in 2001

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[136] Dallas (1991) 325-326. For a more detailed and accurate account of Harrison's role in *The Mysteries*, see Shepherd (1991) 424-26.

[137] See Taplin (2002) 7-22, 13. Harrison's role in the production was also increased because of the strikes at National Theatre. The picket lines kept Hall from rehearsals for a substantial period, during which time rehearsals and workshops were led by Harrison, among others.

[138] Getty transcripts (2002) 31 and 38.

for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Euripides' *Bacchai*, in a version by Colin Teevan, at the National Theatre in 2002. All of these productions used masks, verse texts, and music, and although Hall did not use all male casts in his later classical productions his production practices were still clearly rooted in an effort to provide modern equivalents for ancient practices. Harrison on the other hand, working with Herbert, saw in his work on *The Oresteia* a means of creating contemporary drama which used numerous aspects of fifth-century Athenian drama to address modern politics. For Harrison what was central to ancient Greek drama was not specific performance practices, but a commitment to drama that engaged its audience in a debate about their politics and social values while at the same time entertaining them.

The differences between their later classical productions point to the very different ways in which the two men engage with the ancient tradition. While Hall has stated that he tries to explore the how and why of what the ancient Athenians did, the evidence suggests that this exploration does not extend to the fastidious research habits of Harrison and tends to display a generalist knowledge, rooted in ideas that were current in the first half of the twentieth century. There is a sharp contrast between Harrison's close reading and application of modern scholarship on Athenian theatre, and Hall's more generalist approach. I would differentiate between their work to a certain extent arguing that Harrison engages with the broader questions of the how and why of ancient performances and tries to find modern equivalents, while Hall tends towards the more specific question of what the ancients did and attempts to make that work on a modern stage. Hall approaches the tradition and asks questions such as did the ancients use masks and then tries to find a way of making masks work indoors, under artificial lighting, with actors trained in a theatrical tradition that does not use masks and depends heavily upon facial expression. Harrison on the other hand asks why the ancients used masks and how they functioned, and then imports those ideas into his productions, but does not use the masks themselves.

The decision to use masks in *The Oresteia* received much critical comment, both positive and negative. Like the decision to use an all-male cast, the decision to have a masked production was based on 'original practices'. Hall, having already made the decision to use masks, retroactively felt affirmed in that decision when the language of

Harrison's translation was decided on. The language is not naturalistic and so, the argument goes, would not work with stage naturalism, but masks would remove any expectation of naturalism for the audience.[139] This justification for the use of masks is problematized, however, by Hall's later productions of Greek drama which used translations that, while still verse, were much more naturalistic than Harrison's *The Oresteia* translation. The comments about the nature and function of masks by those involved in the production range from the flaky to deeply eloquent and insightful. On the more impenetrable side of this discussion continuum Peter Hall claimed that "The masks are like magnifying glasses; they concentrate the mind."[140] Michael Coveney scoffed at the "pronouncement by the production team …that in order to cope with the plays' devastating emotional content, an audience must be protected by the actors' wearing masks."[141] Jocelyn Herbert's assessment of masks, their assets and drawbacks, is more practical:

> There is no tradition of masks in this country. In Shakespeare's time it was accepted that boys would play all the female parts but they did not wear masks. One of the problems when doing an ancient Greek tragedy is the resistance of actors not only to wearing masks, but to accepting why it is important to do so. Actors feel obliterated when their faces are not seen, and they find it hard to understand that through the concentration on the text demanded by the mask and the power of the simplest movement when wearing a mask, they could learn to work with their bodies instead of just their faces. The effect of the mask lies in the opposition of the stillness or stylization of the face with the expressive movements of the body. Masks carry conviction when created with a purpose in mind. The human face carries no such conviction and is overfull of fleeting expressions, frail, restless, disturbed and disturbing because of all these changing moods.[142]

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[139] For an account of Hall's retroactive assessment of his good judgment in this matter, see Fay and Oakes (1991) 288.

[140] Fay and Oakes (1991) 287.

[141] Coveney (1991) 291.

[142] Herbert (1991) 283.

Harrison is perhaps the most fervent in his belief in the function and power of the ancient Greek mask. Among the many things that he has said about masks is this:

> Masks have the curious ability to look many people in the eye at the same time. They had the effect of that famous Lord Kitchener recruiting poster where it seemed impossible for the unenlisted to avoid the pointing finger and the staring eye. A chorus of twelve or fifteen could patrol (if that's the right word) the concentration and attention of those spectators on the curved cavea because they were wearing masks. If you think you are being looked at, if you think you are being addressed personally and directly, you listen. And masks make an audience feel exactly that. You can bet your life that when the Furies in the *Oresteia* talk about individual guilt no one in the audience felt let off the hook of moral scrutiny.[143]

This certainly chimes with the experience of reviewer James Fenton, who seemed to feel that he was being accused of something, though he did not feel a personal responsibility for the cultural misogyny of fifth-century Athens and therefore felt no need to apologize.[144] Harrison's later plays, however, as discussed in future chapters, suggest that this response might have more to do with the nature of the play itself, or perhaps the writing style of the translator, than the use of masks, as reviewers similarly felt they were being accused of something by works such as *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* and *Fram* even though the actors in those productions were unmasked.

Hall and Herbert were drawing on the same source of training regarding masks when they worked together on *The Oresteia*. Peter Hall had worked briefly with Michel Saint-Denis at the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1960s, while Herbert's association with Saint-Denis went back to her training at the London Theatre Studio (LTS) between 1936 and 1938.[145] Saint-Denis, nephew and apprentice to Jacques Copeau, had brought

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[143] See Harrison (1991e) 442. First published in *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 85 (1988).

[144] See Fenton (1991) 293.

[145] Over time Hall has expanded the extent to which he studied masks with Saint-Denis. What was in fact a brief workshop held at the RSC in the mid-1960s is presented in a National Theatre platform discussion with Peter Stothard on 21 September 1996 as, "I was taught masks by a great French teacher, Michel Saint-Denis…" See "Peter Hall talks to Peter Stothard," < https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=2626&tmpl=ntmainprint>.

with him to England the training system developed by Copeau in which masks were seen to be integral, and which drew upon the masking tradition of the Italian Commedia dell'arte. Masks were part of the non-verbal training in which students were "miming animals and inanimate forces of nature, and improvising from behind the shelter of a mask, so as to detach the act of performance from the prison of self."[146] At the LTS masks were divided into two types: the neutral or 'tragic' mask and the comedy or 'character' mask. Tragic masks were full masks, while character masks were half masks. Devine reportedly "said that learning to wear the tragic mask was like learning to sing. By contrast, the character mask was a means of instantaneous transformation."[147] The methods of masks workshops used by Hall to prepare the actors for the production of *The*

Given that much of what Peter Hall says about masks does not agree with what those who studied at length with Saint-Denis say about his training techniques, and that Hall's rehearsal practices explicitly violate the rules for tragic and comic masks set out by Saint-Denis and his partner at the LTS, George Devine, it is wrong to see Hall's masked productions as an extension of Saint-Denis' training exercises onto the professional stage. (On Saint-Denis and Devine's mask techniques, see Gaskill 41-8.) Hall also has a tendency to exaggerate his historical knowledge of the use of masks in the Greek and Roman theatre traditions. In the same platform discussion, when asked by an audience member why the Greeks adopted the use of masks in drama, Hall makes no reference to the fact that masks were part of the worship of Dionysus and that the festivals at which these plays were first staged were religious festivals in his honour. Instead Hall suggests that masks are the Greek equivalent of Shakespeare's iambic pentameter. This idea seems to underpin Hall's conception of masks, as it is an idea that he has reiterated repeatedly over the years. Taplin (2001), responding to a lecture given at Cambridge, rightly takes him to task for this statement, pointing out the Greek equivalent of the iambic pentameter is the iambic hexameter, more commonly referred to as trimeter. Similarly Hall's statement that, "The Greek mask was human scale, very delicate, and very ambiguous. It was the Roman mask which was grandiloquent and huge, and also set in a very rigid expression", suggests a lack of historical knowledge. While there are large questions about which ancient Italian performance traditions may or may not have used masks, it is almost certain that Roman masks would have be animated by body movement just as in the Greek tradition and other mask traditions, both ancient and modern. On the use of masks in Roman performance traditions, see Marshall (2006) 126-158.

[146] Wardle (1978) 60. Examples of the sort of training exercises that Saint-Denis was fond of include being "a goat climbing a rocky tor and becoming terrified when it reaches the peak; a trapeze artist scaling a rope ladder and swinging across to land on the other side of the stage". See Wardle (1978) 64.

[147] Wardle (1978) 63.

Oresteia at the National Theatre were drawn from the techniques used at the LTS by Saint-Denis and Devine. At the LTS, however, there had been different methods and approaches to tragic and character masks, while at the National Theatre Hall combined the techniques using tragic or neutral full-face masks in combination with mirrors, which at the LTS had been used only with half-masks. According to the training system used at the LTS for tragic masks you found your character by contemplating your mask, and then donning it without ever looking in a mirror.[148] Hall has said that *The Oresteia* convinced him that, "The mask is absolutely central to doing Greek drama at all."[149] A more accurate assessment, however, might be that Hall was firmly of this opinion prior to the production, and the production did nothing to dissuade him from this view.

While Harrison's first play, *Aikin Mata*, had used masks, there is no evidence that his experience in Nigeria had any particular influence on his approach to masks at the National, or that it gave him a sense that masks were a necessary component of the staging of ancient Greek drama. While Harrison and Simmons had both provided the playscript and directed the show, the masks used in the production of *Aikin Mata* were in large part drawn from living mask traditions of the region, resulting in all of the actors having far more experience of masks in performance and a much better understanding of how masks can and should be used than either Harrison or Simmons. The poets made the decision that the production would be masked and influence what kind of masks would

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[148] While Jocelyn Herbert has said that she knew little about Greek masks before beginning work on *The Oresteia*, the comments she makes about Hall's initial work with the actors belie her training with Saint-Denis and Devine:

> I discovered the cast had been told it would take six months before they could utter a word and were very disturbed by the idea of masks. Before I was involved, they had been given a mixture of masks that had nothing to do with *The Oresteia* so, naturally, they couldn't speak. They had been told to look in the mirror all the time, and that is the one thing you don't do with a tragic or serious mask: the actor looks at the mask, puts it on and lets the text motivate his moves and gestures. The practice of looking in the mirror comes from the half-masks used in comedy where an actor looks at his reflection to find his character.

See Courtney (1993) 120. For a detailed discussion of masks by one of George Devine's students, see Johnstone (1981) 143-205.

[149] Interview on BBC Radio 3, *The Verb*, 6 April 2002.

be used, but it was the actors themselves who were most familiar with how masks work in performance. So on the one hand, Harrison came into the rehearsals for *The Oresteia* without the training of Hall and Herbert, but on the other hand he came to the process as the only member of the team who had been involved with the use of masks in the performance of ancient drama using actors intimately familiar with a living mask tradition.

Nevertheless, it was *The Oresteia* that resulted in Harrison's fascination, verging on obsession, with Greek masks. Harrison returns to the idea of the Greek masks repeatedly in later works, and he has discussed the importance of the Greek mask in a number of essays. It is wrong, however, to say, as David Wiles does, that Harrison has completely accepted Peter Hall's thinking in relation to masks, not least because Harrison did not mask his cast in any of his classical productions that followed *The Oresteia*.[150] The terms in which Hall and Harrison discuss masks indicates, I would argue, a vast gulf between the two. Hall discusses masks in terms of what they do to the actor and how the actors respond to the masks – most often in terms of a prolonged, unsettling process, that results in a sense of being possessed by the mask. And this discussion is almost always in terms of the rehearsal process, not the theatrical run. The only relationship that seems to exist for Hall, or at least the only relationship that seems to matter, is between the actor and the mask. Harrison, on the other hand, does not discuss the actors at all. For him the mask is of utmost importance because of its relationship to the audience and to language, and when he discusses the function of masks he makes no mention of the actor inhabiting the mask, but only the persona that the mask represents. So for example Harrison has written,

> The open eyes and open mouth of the mask come together very powerfully in the figure of Cassandra in the same play of Aeschylus. For almost three hundred lines of the *Agamemnon* she stands gazing silently into the terrors

[150] Wiles (2004) 255.

> she has witnessed in the destruction of Troy and gazing into the terror she see in the future, her own bloody death and Agamemnon's.[151]

Harrison perceives that the mask enables a response to the worst imaginable horrors where, unlike an ordinary human response, the eyes remain open to see and the mouth open to speak, with both the gaze and the words of the mask directed outward towards the audience creating a theatre of reciprocity in a "shared space and a shared light".[152] In explaining the importance of this kind of theatre, Harrison has written:

> This ancient theatre, this *theatron*, this place for seeing, was not only where the audience saw actors bringing dark events *eis to phos*, to the light of day as Sophocles himself puts it in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the audience also saw each other, everyone else, so that the bearing of terror was not only shared but seen to be shared, and that is very important. As it was seen to be shared so it was communally endured.[153]

Through the ability of the persona represented by the mask to face up to its suffering and speak to its suffering, the audience is made to share in that experience.

For Harrison the visual and the aural are inseparable in the theatre. In *Fram* the character of Gilbert Murray says,

> To speak of the war's atrocities is an almost hopeless task
> even for this open-eyed and eloquent Greek mask.
> I happen to believe that the ancient tragic speech

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[151] Harrison (1991e) 446. First published in *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 85 (1988). This same observation is echoed in *Fram* when Gilbert Murray speaks of the messenger speech in Euripides' *Herakles*:

> What he's saying 's that the horror that's occurred 's
> too terrible to be put into mere words.
> And then from line nine-two-two to ten fifteen
> he lets us know in detail the horrors that he's seen.
> Ninety-three lines in graphic, passionate succession
> giving the unspeakable poetical expression.

Harrison (2008) 10.

[152] This is a phrase that Harrison uses repeatedly when discussing the nature of Athenian tragedy. See Harrison (1991e) 442; first published in *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 85 (1988). See also Harrison (2004) 4-6.

[153] Harrison (1991e) 441; first published in *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 85 (1988).

is the highest form of eloquence a man can hope to reach.[154]

Harrison wrote in a programme note for *The Oresteia* that "Just as the masks are in visual terms a means of conveying the dramatic rhythm of the original, so the ghostly Anglo-Saxon rhythms I chose, with their heavy emphasis on consonants, were intended to convey the particular weight of the original Greek." Harrison has articulated that Herbert's most important discovery with him during this production had to do with the importance of words and speech in Greek tragedy; a discovery closely tied to the use of masks: "I think the exciting discovery for me was that the mask reinforced the primacy of language, that the classical mask of fifth-century Athenian theatre was an existential device to carry tragic meaning and survival, and allow speech to continue in situations that might render us otherwise speechless."[155] This was central to Harrison's decision to continue working in the area of Greek drama after the *Oresteia*. Harrison has said that he is drawn to fifth-century Athenian drama because of the primacy of the word in these plays. While this primacy of language was something that he understood intellectually from his work as a classical scholar, what Herbert brought to this understanding was "an enormous faith in writing as theatrical power, as the main dynamo, bringing the tradition of commitment to the contemporary writer developed at The Royal Court into the arena of ancient Greek drama. That commitment is a wonderful tool for discovering the contemporaneity of an ancient piece."[156] This commitment to the text and belief in the ability of ancient plays to address contemporary life shaped Harrison's work from 1981 onward.

The evidence for ancient performance with which Harrison (and every other scholar working on Greek drama) is working is extremely limited. The fifth-century dramatic texts that have survived to the present represent a scant selection of the plays performed in antiquity and little evidence with which to reconstruct performance contexts

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[154] Harrison (2008) 11.

[155] Courtney (1993) 230.

[156] Courtney (1993) 229.

and techniques. Of tragedy we possess seven plays by Aeschylus[157], seven by Sophocles[158], seventeen by Euripides[159], and a variety of fragments of various lengths which scholars are able to identify with differing degrees of success. There are two complete fourth-place plays, Euripides' *Alcestis* and his satyr play *Cyclops*, and substantial fragments of Sophocles' satyr play, *Ichneutae*. Of Old Comedy, the plays of only one author remain extant. We have eleven complete plays by Aristophanes[160], and fragments of numerous other plays both by Aristophanes and other authors.[161] Not only is

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[157] The extant plays of Aeschylus are: *Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Suppliant Women*, the *Oresteia* trilogy which consists of *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, and *Eumenides*, and *Prometheus Bound*. The attribution of *Prometheus Bound* to Aeschylus is doubted by a number of scholars on stylistic grounds. For a general introduction to Aeschylus, see Gagarin (1976); Rosenmeyer (1982); and Sommerstein (1996).

[158] The extant plays of Sophocles are: *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, *Philoctetes*, *Women of Trachis*, *Ajax*, and *Electra*. In addition to these seven tragedies, we have a substantial fragment of his satyr play *Ichneutae*, around which Harrison built his play *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. For a general introduction to Sophocles, see Winnington-Ingram (1980); Scodel (1984); and Segal (1995).

[159] The seventeen tragedies attributed to Euripides are: *Medea*, *Children of Herakles*, *Hippolytus*, *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *Suppliants*, *Phoenician Women*, *Electra*, *Herakles*, *Trojan Women*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Ion*, *Helen*, *Orestes*, *Bacchae*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and *Rhesus*. Many scholars have doubted the attribution of *Rhesus* to Euripides, arguing that it is instead a fourth-century tragedy by another poet. Willink, (2002-2003) 21-44, argues on metrical grounds that *Rhesus* is an early Euripidean play. In addition to these seventeen tragedies, we also have one satyr play by Euripides, *Cylops*, and *Alcestis*, a fourth-place play that lacks the satyr chorus which scholars believe was the norm for such plays. On the problems of genre and *Alcestis*, see Marshall (2000) 229-38 On satyr plays in general, see Sutton (1980). For a general introduction to Euripides, see Collard (1981); Michelini (1987).

[160] The eleven extant comedies of Aristophanes are: *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Wasps*, *Peace*, *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Frogs*, *Ecclesiazusae*, and *Wealth*. For a general introduction to Aristophanes, see McDowell (1995). For a discussion of Aristophanes' rival Eupolis and what survives and is known about his plays, see Storey (2003). For a discussion of some of the fragments, with English translations, see Olson, (2007).

[161] Wilamowitz (1895) suggested that the extant plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles and the plays of Euripides that are attested by more than one manuscript tradition are texts canonized by the Roman and Byzantine school systems, in which a selection of seven plays by Aeschylus and Sophocles and nine or ten plays by Euripides would have been

the surviving corpus a very small percentage of the plays staged in fifth-century Athens, but these texts, for the most part, preserve nothing beyond the lines of the play. Change of speaker is normally noted, but manuscripts are not consistent in indicating who the speaker is. Context, content, and form often make it clear who is speaking, but not always, resulting in editors disagreeing on the assignment of lines. A scholion to Sophocles' *Ajax* 354 states the general principle for the assignment of lines: "in places where the roles are unclear, one should guess at the character and make a distinction accordingly."[162] Stage directions are infrequent, and those limited notations need not have any origin in a fifth-century text or performance.[163] Entrances and exits are not marked, nor are choral movements. The texts of Aristophanes' *Plutus* and *Ecclesiazusae* as well as all the extant texts of Menander have lost their choral songs entirely, the presence of which is preserved only through the notation ΧΟΡΟΥ.[164] The extant manuscripts also give no indication of musical accompaniment, though we know that all fifth-century Athenian drama had musical accompaniment. There are a couple of

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standard school texts. Euripides' plays survive in greater numbers than the other tragedians by chance. A codex of plays, apparently part of an alphabetically arranged collection of works of Euripides was found in the Byzantine period and copied out preserving a manuscript tradition that was otherwise lost. The survival of Aristophanes can be attributed to the peculiarities of the Byzantine social hierarchy in which Attic Greek was privileged, ensuring that even within the Christian world of the Eastern Empire Athenian classical literature continued to be both read, and, more importantly, copied. Dialect overrode any prurient concerns about the improprieties and paganism found in the plays. For a brief discussion of the place and survival of Athenian dramatic texts in the Roman Empire and Byzantine world, see Reynolds and Wilson (1991) 44-78.

[162] For this scholion and other ancient testimona on the nature of dramatic texts, see Csapo and Slater (1995) 31.

[163] An example of a stage direction occurs in the *Ichneutae* fragments, where at 5.2 roibdow seems to indicate a lyre is to be played. See Hunt (1912) 42, 72. Stage directions are most frequent in the textual tradition of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, though why that should be is very unclear, unless of course at some point a prompt script or similarly annotated text entered the manuscript tradition. On whether poets wrote stage directions, see Taplin (1977b) 121-32; Revermann (2006) 320-325.

[164] On the similar tendency in Shakespearean texts for the presence of a song to be noted in the text, but for the song itself not to be preserved in the text, see Stern (2004) 113-124.

fragments of dramatic texts with musical notation, but it is not clear whether the musical notation is indicative of the music that would have been played in the fifth-century or whether the music indicated dates from later centuries.[165] What we do know about fifth-century Athenian drama comes from a variety of sources, at times conflicting, and most often lacking precisely the information that we would most like in order to have a clearer sense of what the performance of Greek drama might have been like.

When it comes to the *Oresteia*, there are a number of aspects of the original performance that we can identify with a degree of certainty. The plays were performed as part of a tetralogy – the satyr play *Proteus* is lost – in competition at the Greater Dionysia in 458 BCE, where it won first prize.[166] The play required a stage-building complete with a roof from which the watchman delivers the opening speech, equipped with stage-equipment, including the *ekkyklema* which is required to reveal interior tableaus in the first and second plays of the trilogy.[167] Unlike earlier plays, which can be performed with two speaking actors, the *Oresteia* requires three speaking actors.[168] As in all fifth-century Athenian tragedy these actors would have been male, as would the chorus, and they would have performed in masks. One could argue that to a large degree the aspects of

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[165] On dramatic texts with musical notation, see Winnington-Ingram (1955) 29-87; Solomon (1977) 71-83. On ancient music in general, see West (1992).

[166] While scholars refer to plays as having won first place, that statement is slightly misleading for a number of reasons. Foremost, prizes were awarded not to the plays, but one was awarded to the *choregos* (a wealthy citizen who, as part of his public service to the *polis*, was responsible for the training, upkeep, and costuming of the chorus) and the *didaskalos*, (in the case of tragic competitions often, but not necessarily, the poet), and starting in 449 a prize was awarded for best actor. It would be possible for the top prize in each category to be awarded to a different production. On the judging system, see Marshall and van Willigenburg (2004) 90-107.

[167] Earlier Aeschylean plays, make no reference to anything that might be taken as a *skene*, and characters do not make entrances or exits out of or into buildings. See Hammond (1972) 387-450 and (1988) 5-33.

[168] Most plays staged after 458 BCE require three actors, though Euripides' *Alcestis* can be staged with two actors. This, however, may well be a result of its construction as the fourth play of the tetralogy. On the use of three actors in performance, see Damen (1989) 316-40; Marshall (1994) 53-61.

'original practice' that Hall elected to use are the few aspects upon which scholars agree: an all-male cast, masks, a chorus, musical accompaniment, and a verse text. At the same time, however, his decision to not split the roles between three speaking actors, employing role sharing with less rigor, suggests that perhaps some of these directorial decisions were influenced by his familiarity with Shakespearean 'original practices' rather than academic consensus regarding fifth-century Athenian practices.

Peter Hall's production did not aim for archaeological accuracy, but intended to create an English Aeschylus for an English audience, but which to some extent, conveyed its origins in the theatrical festivals of fifth-century Athens.[169] Given that the intent was not historical accuracy there is no point in cataloguing the ways in which the production was not 'authentic'; and instead the focus here is on the significant production decisions made by Hall as they relate to fifth-century Athenian practices. The most ambitious decision made was to stage Aeschylus' trilogy in its entirety, perhaps for the first time on the British stage.[170] As discussed above the norm for tragic productions at the Greater

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[169] At a symposium on contemporary performance of Ancient Greek and Roman drama held at the Getty Museum in June 2002, Peter Hall said: "I think to do a classic at any point in time because you think it is archaeologically or scholastically necessary is dead and boring…I think the only reason for doing a great classic is because it speaks now to the audience now in the place where you're doing it. And if none of those conditions are met, you shouldn't do it." Getty transcript (2002) 31. Later, in response to Michael Kustow, he also said: " I think the point is, we try to find out as much as we can about how they did it and why they did it and then we try and find equivalents for our audience." Getty transcript (2002) 38.

[170] Frank R. Benson's Dramatic Company staged a version of the entire *Oresteia* in 1904, revived in 1905, using George Warr's translation which had been adapted for performance by E.D.A Morshead. It is unclear from the Archive of Performance of Greek and Roman Drama whether this production of the *Oresteia* used an abridged text and, if so, to what extent the text had been cut. It is also unclear if or how these productions by Benson in 1904 and 1905 were related to his production in 1885 listed in the appendix to Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall, and Taplin (2005). The 1885 entry in the appendix may, however, be a typo as the 1885 production does not appear in the on-line database of the Archive: < www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk>. Similarly, the entry for the 1926 production of *The Curse of the House of Atreus* at Oxford by the Balliol Players Club does not indicate whether the text used was abridged. The translation used was that of R.C. Trevelyan, who had provided the English translation for the Cambridge Greek Play production of the *Oresteia* in 1921, directed by J.T. Sheppard. The text used for the Cambridge Greek play was heavily abridged with just over 1500 lines being cut from the original plays, with the

Dionysia in fifth-century Athens was a trilogy of tragedies followed by a satyr play. But of course in their original context the plays were staged as part of a religious festival in which an entire week was put aside for celebrations and rituals in honour of the god Dionysus (as well as a substantial amount of pageantry that seems to have been aimed less at the worship of Dionysus and more at the glorification of Athens).[171] As with the religious contexts in which the medieval Mystery Cycles were staged, such as Corpus Christi Day, it seems that the normal social, economic, and political activities of Athens were put aside for the religious festivities. This religious context facilitated dramatic productions that would have occupied much of the day for several days in a row. While the daily workings of London under various governments in the 1970s had occasionally ground to a halt due to labour strikes, they certainly were not stopping to allow people to attend a production of a Greek tragedy at the National. The running time of *The Oresteia* was over five hours. In making the decision to stage the trilogy in its entirety Hall was committing the largest auditorium, and so potentially most lucrative in terms of the box-office space, to a production whose audience would inevitably be curtailed by the scope of the performance and the time commitment required from the audience.[172] At this point

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Agamemnon running to 1019 lines (1673 in the Oxford Classical Text), *Choephoroi* 620 (1076 in the Oxford Classical Text) and *Eumenides* 625 (1048 in the Oxford Classical Text). See The Greek Play Committee (1920). It seems likely that the Balliol Players were using the same abridged text. This is almost certainly the case if, as the archive's database reports, the *Oresteia* was staged as part of a double-bill with *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and two one-act curtain raisers. It may, however, be that the *Oresteia* was being produced in repertory with *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and that each play had a one-act curtain raiser performed with it. The *Oresteia* had been produced in its entirety for the BBC's Third Programme on Sunday 27 May 1957 using the Penguin translation of Philip Vellacott. See Wrigley (2005) 216-244.

[171] On the dramatic festivals in general, see Pickard-Cambridge (1968). On the Dionysia and civic ideology, see Goldhill (1987) 58-76. On the debate about the nature and function of tragedy, see Griffin (1998) 39-61 and Seaford (2000) 30-44.

[172] This is of course one of the advantages of the National Theatre. It can produce monumentally ambitious productions and allow them a complete run, even if the audience numbers are low. Peter Hall has commented on the advantages of the National, and notably two of the productions that he mentions involve texts by Tony Harrison:

> I relished, too, the productions that only a National Theatre can create because they need extra time and special resources: Bill Bryden's

there had been no tradition of Greek drama in English translation as popular theatre since the translations of Gilbert Murray were staged at Sloane Square and in the West End in the early-twentieth century. In fact the perceived allure of Greek tragedy was such that in 1964 Prime Minister Harold Wilson, concerned about the effect that the airing of the popular BBC program *Steptoe and Son* in the last hour of the general election before the polls closed would have on voter turn out, phoned the Director General of the BBC and suggested that they instead run "Greek drama, preferably in the original."[173] But Hall saw that to take away one or two of the plays from the trilogy would destroy the narrative progression of the play, which he interpreted as the "political progress from matriarchy through patriarchy to democracy".[174] The *Agamemnon* is a dramatically exciting play and stands well on its own, but alone it says nothing about political progress. There is disagreement about how we ought to interpret the narrative progression of the *Oresteia*. Hall, through the guidance of Harrison[175], took his lead from feminist interpretations of

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> overwhelming *Mysteries*, which reclaimed medieval theatre for our age; *The Oresteia*, a massive undertaking achieved after six months of research and rehearsal; the luxury of three months given to staging the Judi Dench/Anthony Hopkins *Antony and Cleopatra*; and mounting the two parts of *Tamburlaine* on the same evening as a mighty diptych.

Hall (2000) 268.

[173] Harrison told this anecdote in his address at the Getty Symposium on Contemporary Performance of Ancient Greek and Roman Drama. Getty transcripts (2002) 27. Burton, (1991) 15, also refers to it, though with less detail, in her article on Tony Harrison in the Bloodaxe anthology.

[174] Goodwin (1983) 401. This view of the play bears a resemblance to that of Bachofen who had argued in *Das Mutterrecht* (1821) that the trilogy was a historical narrative of the overthrow of a matriarchal system by a patriarchal one. Harrison, (2002b) 30, notes that the rediscovery of Bachofen's work "by US academic feminists in the 1960s and 1970s has spawned a great deal of pseudo-scholarship about the existence of matriarchal societies before their forceful appropriation by patriarchy."

[175] All of Harrison's adaptations and original plays after The Oresteia are explicitly and aggressively political. Even his later translations of Hugo's *The Prince's Play* (1996) and Euripides' *Hecuba* (2005) can be interpreted as political plays. On the other hand, none of Hall's later productions of Greek tragedy were politically engaged even to the extent of *The Oresteia*.

the trilogy, such as that of Zeitlin[176], pushing the production to engage with issues of political progress in the 1970s, particularly the feminist movement.

The basic narrative of the trilogy is straightforward. The *Agamemnon* opens with a watchman on the roof sighting a beacon fire signaling victory for the Greeks in Troy and the imminent return of the eponymous king of the play to his home in Argos. In his absence his wife, Clytemnestra, has taken control of both the palace and the *polis*, aided by her lover Aegisthus, cousin to Agamemnon. When Agamemnon returns, accompanied by the Trojan princess Cassandra whom he has taken as a war prize, Clytemnestra greets him at the entrance to the palace strewing his path with red tapestries, inviting and exhorting him into an act of hubris. Agamemnon enters his house, though Cassandra initially refuses, remaining on-stage with the chorus. Having recalled the bloody history of the house of Atreus and predicted its future crimes in a mantic frenzy, Cassandra voluntarily enters the house, knowingly going to her death. The death cries of Agamemnon, killed in the bath by Clytemnestra, come from within the palace. Clytemnestra reappears on stage standing over the bodies, the interior scene exhibited by means of the *ekkyklema*, only to be confronted by the chorus to whom she defends her actions. Aegisthus then appears on-stage to explain his motivation and the play ends with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in control of the palace and ruling over Argos.

The second play of the trilogy, the *Choephoroi* or *The Libation Bearers*, begins with the return of Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, who was spirited away by his Paedagogus following the death of Agamemnon. He is accompanied by his friend Pylades. The young men upon first arriving in Argos, go to the tomb of Agamemnon to offer prayers and seek divine assistance. At the same time Orestes' sister, Electra, comes to the tomb to offer libations in an attempt to appease his spirit at the behest of her mother who had received an alarming dream. Upon arriving at the tomb, Electra sees the

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[176] Zeitlin (1978) 149-184; see also Pomeroy (1975). While Harrison, (2002b) 31, has discussed the influence of feminist historians on his interpretation of the trilogy for this production, Oswyn Murray, (1991) 270-271, has pointed out that it is also a Marxist interpretation in which, "Nature, the mother-right to avenge her daughter's sacrifice, to call down the Furies on the son who murders her, stands in conflict with culture, the demands of the state, the war effort, and ultimately the while structure of justice and the social order."

offering left by Orestes and recognizes his footprints, at which point Orestes reveals himself to her. Orestes explains that he has been sent by Apollo to seek vengeance for his father. Electra in turn tells him of Clytemnestra's ominous dream, which he interprets as a propitious sign for his endeavor. He knocks on the door of the palace, pretending to be a messenger bearing news of Orestes' death. Clytemnestra, not recognizing her son, takes him into the palace. Soon after Orestes' old nurse exits from the palace to summon Aegisthus so that he might be told the news. The chorus intervene to encourage her to tell Aegisthus to come without his usual bodyguard. Aegisthus enters the palace and is killed by Orestes. Clytemnestra, alerted to the danger by Aegisthus' death cries, enters the stage from the palace, pursued by Orestes. Clytemnestra bares her breast and pleads for her life. Orestes, wavering, seeks the advice of Pylades, who, in his only three lines in the play, tells Orestes to obey Apollo. Orestes takes Clytemnestra back into the palace and slays her. He then, in a scene that mirrors the scene at the end of *Agamemnon*, appears on the *ekkyklema* standing over the bodies of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, defending his actions. Yet unlike the end of the *Agamemnon*, Orestes does not exit the stage into the palace in control of his *oikos* and the *polis*, but rather he sees the Furies, ancient chthonic deities who avenge blood crimes, approaching and he flees off-stage.

The *Eumenides*, the final tragedy in the trilogy, opens in Delphi where Orestes has sought refuge at the temple of Apollo. The play begins with a priestess of Apollo entering the shrine only to exit in horror at the sight of the Furies who are resting inside. Orestes, having sought solace from and having been ritually purified by Apollo, is sent to Athens. The Furies, aroused from their sleep by the ghost of Clytemnestra, are sent away from Delphi by Apollo. The setting of the play then shifts to Athens where Orestes is seeking protection from Athena, and where the Furies arrive in pursuit of him. Orestes attempts to defend his actions to the Furies, who refuse to hear him out and begin to sing a song that will ensure a horrific death for its object as punishment for his crimes, in this case Orestes. Athena then enters to intervene, agreeing to preside over the matter, hearing arguments from both sides and setting up a jury of citizens to cast votes in judgment. A trial takes place with the jury members cross-examining Orestes, and Apollo speaking in his defense, followed by the casting of votes. Athena announces that if the votes are equal, as they turn out to be, she will add her vote to the not guilty votes, allowing

Orestes to go free. Orestes, grateful for his freedom, offers the eternal support of his city, Argos, to Athens before departing. The Furies, robbed of their victim, turn against Athens. Athena again intervenes, this time on behalf of the city of which she is the patron deity, and offers the Furies a place of honour. Eventually the Furies acquiesce and accept their new role as the Eumenides, the kindly ones, who will protect the city and confer blessings upon it. The play ends with a song praising the new ordering of the city and justice.

There is no doubt that the trilogy is political, though most scholars would not argue that its central focus is on matriarchy, which Clytemnestra's reign clearly is not, but rather that the play begins with a patriarchy and shifts by the third play to reflect something of the democratic system of fifth-century Athens.[177] The play is tied to the political reforms of Ephialtes, who was assassinated for his efforts, in which the aristocratic court, the Areopagus, had its powers curtailed and limited to murder trials and religious transgressions.[178] The language of the play makes clear that one of the central themes of the trilogy is the notion of justice, or the Greek *dikē*. The word is used repeatedly in different formulations and different senses throughout the trilogy. The plays explore cyclical revenge within multiple generations of one family. This, of course, is an atypical type of murder in which the relationship of murderer and victim both provides some justification for the violent act, while at the same time problematizing it. If Clytemnestra were not his mother, the Furies would not have come for Orestes. If Clytemnestra had murdered someone other than Orestes' father, there would have been no need for him to avenge the dead. In the first two plays of the trilogy, murder and justice are inextricably bound to each other, creating a familial cycle of violence that permits no obvious or happy ending. *The Eumenides* offers a solution to this cycle, providing a mythic narrative for a shift from *lex talionis*, which calls for an eye for an eye

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[177] On the issue of matriarchies, patriarchies, and the succession to the throne in heroic myths, see Finkelberg (1991) 303-16; revised and expanded in Finkelberg (2005) 65-108.

[178] For the ancient sources regarding the reforms of Ephilates, see Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 25-26; Plutarch, *Life of Cimon* 15 and 17 and *Life of Pericles* 9.

and a tooth for a tooth, to a judicial system where innocence or guilt is judged by one's peers.

This is a fairly standard interpretation of the trilogy's central themes, but it is not the interpretation that underpinned Hall's production. Harrison researched the *Oresteia* meticulously and was certainly aware of the competing interpretations. Nevertheless, it was decided (by whom is unclear, though I presume it was largely through well-informed discussions between Hall and Harrison) that focusing on the gender conflict which runs throughout all three plays would allow the play to resonate on a social and political level with a British audience in the late-1970s and early-1980s. It was also the thematic focus that clearly resonated with Harrison, as his classical works through the mid-1980s are focused on gender conflicts, with *Medea: a sex-war opera* taking it as its central theme, and *The Common Chorus*, which puts gender conflict alongside military warfare. Jocelyn Herbert, who designed the production, cites a postcard sent to her by Harrison when they began working together on the plays:

> There are a lot of references in the workbooks to background books etc, which you might find useful including what I now regard my essential reading in militant feminism and champions of *her*story. Their contentiousness goes right to the key problems in the plays and I've found them more useful than any of the scholarship on Aeschylus.[179]

In his translation Harrison picks up on and uses the gendered nature of the original Greek. In fact, not only does Harrison preserve the gendering of words, but he emphasizes the gender differences, using neologisms such as he-god, she-god and he-child, she-child, adding a dimension of gender conflict that was not present, or rather not present in the same way for Aeschylus' fifth-century Athenian audience.

While there are academic reasons to disagree with the feminist interpretation of the plays and the importation of gendered language into a culture where its cultural resonances are very different than in its culture of origin, those academic quarrels are irrelevant to the production. What Harrison and Hall found in the theme of gender conflict was a through-line that they could use to tie all of the plays together. What is more they could emphasize this theme in the production strictly through the language of

[179] See Herbert (1991) 282.

the translation and production choices without making additions to the original or cutting it. This thematic emphasis also worked with the dramatic structure of the play. As described above, the scenes at the end of *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* are mirror scenes, which in turn stand against the end of the *Eumenides* in which a trial brings an end to the cycle of revenge that threatens to destroy the House of Atreus.[180] In the *Agamemnon* the play ends with a woman killing a man. The opposite occurs at the end of *Choephoroi*, with Orestes killing Clytemnestra. While the theological implications of the Aeschylean plays make the relationship between these killings much more complex than this basic juxtaposition, these scenes, without alteration beyond emphasis in translation and staging, can be made to represent a violent struggle between the genders for power. This is exactly what Harrison and Hall sought to represent in their production, with Hall saying, "The play's political progress from matriarchy through patriarchy to democracy is something so violently sexual that we've got to make that work."[181] It is not clear to what extent the audience became invested in this gender conflict, but Michael Coveney's review reports that there was a collective gasp at Apollo's defense of Orestes in which he argues that mothers are not really kin to their children, just incubators in which the true kin's seed is gestated[182]:

> The mother of what's called her offspring's no parent
> but the nurse to the seed that's implanted.
> The mounter, the male's the only true parent.
> She harbours the bloodshot, unless some god blasts it.
> The womb of the woman's a convenient transit.[183]

There is a difference, however, between buying into a conflict and just being astonished at the depth of the misogyny that existed in fifth-century Athens which pervaded both

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[180] On mirror scenes in Greek tragedy, including the *Oresteia*, see Taplin (1978) 122-139.

[181] Goodwin (1983) 401.

[182] Coveney (1981) 291-292.

[183] Harrison (2002b) 169.

social practices and scientific and philosophical discourse.[184] Some clearly did not buy into the conflict. James Fenton commented in his review in the *Sunday Times* that "Aeschylus expresses views that we cannot possibly share, but they are, in their historical context, progressive. The invention of civil law was progressive. It was achieved at the expense of women. I really don't see that there is anything to apologise about here."[185] A heterogeneous audience response to the politics of the play should be assumed, as it should be with any play and any audience. What Fenton's comments significantly point to is that even when the audience did not feel embroiled by the politics of the production, they felt no ambiguity as to what the politics of the production were and associated them with contemporary gender politics.

Tied to both the gesture towards 'original practices' and to the theme of gender conflict, Hall decided that the production would use an all-male cast. While this casting decision reflected fifth-century Athenian theatre practices, there were more than a few actresses at the National who were perturbed at female roles such as Clytemnestra, Electra, and Athena, not to mention the Furies, being not only assigned to male actors, but being assigned to male actors to the complete exclusion of actresses. The male actors involved also expressed anxieties about such casting, irritating Hall with "the company's anxiously progressive questions about whether it was right for men to play women?"[186] Harrison, himself, seems to have had some anxieties about the decision as well, promising the hostile actresses that he would soon write an all-female play.[187] In the event, it is not clear how much of an impact the decision to use an all-male cast had on

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[184] Aristotle (*Politics* 1245b) states unequivocally that the relationship between men and women was one of superior and inferior beings, the ruler and the ruled.

[185] Fenton (1991) 293.

[186] Goodwin (1983) 401.

[187] This would be *The Common Chorus* trilogy, akin to *The Oresteia* in its ambitious scope. The trilogy, however, never made it into production. When the third play of the trilogy was staged under the title *Square Rounds* in 1992, its cast was primarily female, but there were three men in the production: quick change artist Arturo Brachetti, Lawrence Evans, who doubled with Brachetti, and Harry Towb, who played Sweeper Maws.

the audience reception. Some reviews mention the casting decision, but only in passing, and with no suggestion that it had an impact on their experience or interpretation of the production. Undoubtedly the use of masks helped to obscure the issue of the gender of the actors. Perhaps if, as Harrison had wanted, the audience seating had been segregated by gender, this decision would have resonated louder.[188] At the same time, however, while there may have been little comment on the casting decision outside the backstage halls and dressing rooms of the National, the politics of this decision are relevant to the politics of the play. As noted earlier, Hall was not pedantic about his deployment of 'original practices' opting for role-sharing between a number of actors rather than the strict division between three actors which would have occurred in competition in 458 BC. The play was for most of its run, with the exception of its performances in the ancient theatre at Epidauros, performed indoors under the illumination of electric lighting. There was clearly flexibility in how closely 'original practices' were adhered to. And yet Hall, then perhaps the most powerful figure in British theatre and among the most important in the world, opted to exclude female actors from his stage for one of the most important productions of his career and a monumental production in the history of the National Theatre, despite the obvious discomfort that this decision caused among the National Theatre company members, both female and male.[189] Then to a certain extent this casting decision was obscured for the audience through the use of masks and costume, lessening its performative impact.[190] While there were ritual and cultural reasons for the use of all-male casts in fifth-century Athens, Hall's decision seems a dubious use of directorial prerogative given the state of gender politics in Britain in 1980. Of greater concern though is the fact that the Artistic Director of the National Theatre felt that an appeal to 'original practices' justified the exclusion of female actors from the most ambitious and

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[188] For Harrison's desire to segregate the audience, see Herbert (1991) 282.

[189] It is not clear at what point Hall made the decision to use an all-male cast as Harrison, in the introduction to his translation, writes "As these early workshops included women, the sexual polarization of the trilogy's matter was made brutally clear." Harrison (2002b) 26.

[190] On the importance of designing the body on stage, and the female body in particular, see Chillington Rutter (2001) 104-141.

important production in his company's season. While the gendering of the production may not have reverberated with the audience to the extent that the production team had hoped, this casting decision had real world political consequences within the National Theatre.

Harrison's most obvious individual contribution to National Theatre production of *The Oresteia* was his unique translation. As is clear to anyone who encounters the text, the language of the play is truly remarkable. It is at once English and accessible and yet not-quite English and peculiar. As most Classics students who have attempted to read Aeschylean Greek can attest this is very akin to the sensation one gets when learning to read those texts in the original: the unexpected weighting of the language at times makes the reader feel that perhaps there is an ox upon one's tongue[191] or, more often, fear that an ox-upon-the-tongue might be lurking in the next line. Stephen Fay and Philip Oakes observed, "The sound is not natural; it could hardly co-exist with stage naturalism...without [masks], the words would sound excessively strange."[192] The language of Harrison's translation is perhaps best described as an Anglo-Saxon style rife with neologism and marked by metre, rhythm, and consonantal sounds. Simeon Underwood has concisely described the significant features of the language of the play:

> Within the narrative episodes the metre is mainly anapestic (../) or amphibrachic (./.) or dactylic (/..), with four strong beats to each line…The strong metre is accompanied by extensive use of a strong caesura and emphatic line-end stops…within the narrative sections the basic rhythm is far from regular. And there is clear demarcation between the metre used for narrative and for other purposes. Stichomythia is presented as rhyming couplets. The choruses are given a variety of treatments, including frequent use of iambic quatrains with an *abab* rhyme, each line with three or four beats…The driving and repetitive force of rhythm is strikingly reinforced by alliteration and assonance…More striking still is Harrison's use of nonce-words in the form of disyllabic compounds comprising two monosyllabic nouns…'bloodbond', 'bond-proof', 'waveforce', 'galesqualls', 'wave-grave', 'life-lot', ship-throng' and 'bloodclan'. The technique also forces the listener to re-evaluate established usages structured on the same model, such as 'shipwreck', 'nightmare', and 'sunlight'…In addition,

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[191] Aes. *Ag*. 35-6.

[192] Fay and Oakes (1991) 288.

> Harrison makes use of colloquialisms ('smashed into splinters', 'chewing the cud'), dialect words ('daft sheep'), oral usages (such as the dropped first-person pronoun…) and apostrophized formations ('Menelaus, let's suppose that he's made it'). [193]

And yet for all its Anglo-Saxon peculiarities, rhythmic patterns and nonce-words, the text is astonishingly faithful to the original.

The only large-scale omission in Harrison's translation is the ode to Zeus at the end of the first choral song (*Agamemnon* 160-83).[194] *Eumenides* 405, which refers to

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[193] Underwood (1998) 76-100, 77-79. Underwood's discussion of Harrison's text is helpful when describing the quantitative aspects of the translation, but becomes problematic when discussing qualitative aspects, not least because it is clear that he does not like the translation. In seeking a means of justifying his dislike of the text he has a tendency to make statements that are not supported by the evidence. For example he writes,

> Aeschylus himself 'is essentially a poet of …inspiration and genius' and of natural powers more than acquired skill; and, most important, he is innocent of any true classicism, with its balance, impersonality, flawlessness and understatement. By contrast, the language Harrison develops for his *Oresteia* is a technical artifice, with its compounds invoking existing language and literature and its use of dialect achieving the colloquial rather than the mantic.

While Underwood may be quoting W. B. Stanford on the nature of Aeschylus's poetic gifts, the statement is no less foolish for that. While Aeschylus likely composed his poetry orally, to suggest that skill acquired through training and practice played a minimal role in his poetic craft is a dubious claim, not only because there is no ancient evidence to support this. And while Harrison's language certainly evokes existing language, including the Greek of Aeschylus (see Harrison [2002b] 23-26 for Harrison's own discussion of the literary traditions upon which he is drawing and which he is evoking) the result is anything but colloquial. Indeed this is one of the features that distinguish *The Oresteia* from Harrison's later dramatic works. His later plays all feature predominantly colloquial language despite their verse form. The only passage in *The Oresteia* that has any claim to colloquialism is the opening speech of the Watchman, though even there, while there is an evocation of working-class dialect with words such as "gullet" and "gob" the use of nonce words such as "bloodclan", "bloodkin", "clanchiefs", "star-clans", and "kingstars" within the same speech make it difficult to describe as colloquial. For the related problematic nature of Underwood's criticism of Harrison's language as primitivism, see Taplin (2005) 241-242.

[194] While neither Harrison nor Hall has stated the reason for this passage being cut, it likely was because of concerns that an audience might read in to it overtones of Christian theology regardless of the translator's intentions.

Athena arriving by chariot and horses, was also cut, necessitated by the directorial decision to have Athena enter on foot, presumably following Taplin's argument.[195] Also cut is Electra's recognition of Orestes' footprints (*Choephoroi* 205-11). This too seems to be a cut motivated by Taplin, though he argues not for cutting the lines but for transposing the recognition with Electra's prayer to Zeus.[196] As Underwood notes, there is also a "major transposition, where the long speech Athena addresses to the men of Attica halfway through the trial scene in *Eumenides* (681-706) is moved to the start of the scene".[197] This too follows an argument made by Taplin, but the stage direction that immediately precedes the beginning of this speech in Harrison's translation makes evident the practical function of this transposition in a modern western production when coupled with the on-stage tableau: "*Enter Athena, Jury of twelve Athenians, and a Herald*."[198] While the words spoken during the trial scene remain the same, though as noted Athena's speech is relocated, the physical staging of the scene, especially the use of non-speaking actors, presents to the audience a tableau that unmistakably, to a western audience, represents a trial. It is a scene familiar from film and television which represent the beginning of a trial by having the judge, jury, and bailiff enter, followed by the judge addressing the courtroom. The reordering of Athena's speech and the use of thirteen silent actors clearly signaled to the audience the judicial nature of what was to follow.[199]

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[195] Taplin (1977a) 388-90. For an excellent discussion of places in the production where Taplin's book seems to have influenced production choices, see Parker (1986) 337-357.

[196] Taplin (1977a) 337-8.

[197] Underwood (1998) 76-100, 80.

[198] Harrison (2002b) 163. For Taplin's argument for reordering the text, see Taplin (1977a) 398-401. Parker, (1986) 344, notes that Taplin's repositioning of Athena's speech within the play is both against tradition and less probable.

[199] When Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was first staged in 458 BCE, Athenian juries ranged in size from several hundred up to six thousand, depending on the type of case being heard. A magistrate or magistrates presided over the trial, but neither instructed nor advised the jury. Only the prosecutor and defendant addressed the jury. A verdict of guilty or not guilty was determined by the majority of votes, while a tie was counted as an acquittal. On the Athenian legal system, see Todd (1993). For a discussion of the relationship of the Eumenides to the Athenian legal system, see Braun (1998).

It is moments like this in the translation which distinguish it from most translations of the *Oresteia*: it was written for performance and, while Harrison sought fidelity to Aeschylus, the single most important concern for Harrison, Hall, and the rest of the company was that the play work well on-stage, and be performable for the actors and accessible to the audience.

Related to issues of language and performance is the place of music in the production. As Oswyn Murray noted "music is central to [Harrison's] idea of performance, and one feels more than the usual sense of frustration in attempting to evaluate the written word outside this intended context."[200] Harrison Birtwistle, who was something of a resident composer at the National in the 1970s, wrote original music set to the text. Birtwistle's description of the music for the production makes clear the difficulties for the armchair critic in conjuring up anything resembling the sounds of performance:

> I've used three groups of instruments —percussion, harp and members of the clarinet family — each of which has a specific dramatic function. The percussion governs the way in which the drama is paced, and one of its functions is to keep the rhythm going, like a continuo. The harp has another punctuating role, which is to span the silences, while the wind instruments have sustained notes, and they play in unison in the burst of incidental music that cover entrances and exits.[201]

He has described the intent of the music to Peter Hall as follows: "Instead of classical rallentandos or accelerandos, this new music compresses and extends its pulse by arithmetical progressions… it's very potent and, like a deliberately wrongly cut film, disturbs your expectations all the time."[202] As Taplin noted, Peter Hall's production of *The Oresteia* was a notable exception among recent significant Aeschylean productions,

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[200] Murray (1991) 264.

[201] Fay and Oakes (1991) 289.

[202] Goodwin (1983) 416.

such as those of Peter Stein or Ariane Mnouchkine, in its use of music and metre.[203] The music and the metre of the verse were composed to work together to create a particular soundscape in performance, but the text as it stands is devoid of any sort of musical notation that would provide the reader with any hint of the larger aural context of the words.[204] While the metrical structure of the lines gives some clue as to the rhythm of delivery, they do not reveal the full extent of the percussive nature of words and music in performance in which both delivery and movement were controlled with metrical precision. Hall told his cast, "I don't care what you feel, you're speaking this section to a metronome, and you're playing in masks and you only move on the pulse."[205] Hall meant this quite literally and Parker reports how "Once established, this macropulse was then varied by frequent irregular pauses, changes of speaking pace, and a counterpoint of cross-rhythyms, the complexity and tight control of which can be traced in such minute and precise annotations of the 'bible'[206] as '12 beats before the Herald speaks', 'Old Men look down 4 beats, look up 4 beats', on 4th beat move, 5th beat speak', or for changes in the speaking pace 'pulse 52', 'pulse 126' etc. varying from the 92 beat pulse base."[207] Yet

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[203] See Taplin (2005) 235-251. For a discussion of Stein's *Oresteia* production, see Bierl, (2005) 291-306, esp. 297-301. For a discussion of Mnouchkine's *Agamemnon* production, see Judet de La Combe (2005) 273-289.

[204] Texts for later plays attempt to provide some glimpse into the musical dimensions of the plays with pieces of scores being printed as appendices to *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, (printed in the Delphi text, but not republished in either the volume containing both the London and Delphi texts or in *Plays 5*), *Square Rounds*, *Poetry or Bust*, *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, and *The Labourers of Herakles*. For music for *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, see Harrison (1990a) 73-95; for *Square Rounds* see, Harrison (2004); for *Poetry or Bust*, *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, and *The Labourers of Herakles*, see Harrison (1996a) 58-9, 110-13, 151-2.

[205] Reported in Barber, "Marathon in Masks," *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 November 1981 and cited in Parker (1986) 346.

[206] The "bible" is the production prompt script as of dress rehearsal, which contains notations which are intended to facilitate a performance in which actors, musicians, stage-management and technical (sound, lighting, etc.) are working together with precision. The National Theatre keeps a copy of the "bible" for every production in its archives.

[207] Parker (1986) 346.

while such details are preserved in the 'bible', as indeed are "line by line annotation to indicate correct stresses and lengths of pause", even with his stage-directions, which are often Shavian in length and detail, Harrison's play texts offer little more access to the experience of the plays in performance than do the texts of ancient Greek drama.[208]

The Oresteia and Harrison's later classical productions have in common a lack of stage realism and naturalism. From their work on *The Oresteia* both Hall and Harrison recognized that Greek drama requires a different interaction between actors and audience than is the norm in twentieth-century western theatre traditions, though as with masks, what they take as the most important aspects of this differs. Hall has said:

> There are some very strong rules, which you can feel if you sit in any of the ancient theatres, particularly Epidaurus. You can feel how it works. There is the Orchestra, the circle in which the Chorus works, then there is the Scena, the platform stage where the Protagonists work. The Protagonists never speak to the audience, they only speak to the Chorus or to the gods. The Chorus speak to the Protagonists, to the gods and to the audience, because they represent you, the society. It seems to me that that division of the Orchestra and the upper level is absolutely crucial, and I don't believe you can do a Greek play without that.[209]

For Harrison, on the other hand, there is not a rigid hierarchy between performance areas and performers. For him the primary dynamic exists between performers and audience and is a function of daylight performances and masks. Harrison has written:

> The first thing to observe about Greek drama is that it was staged in the common light of day. A shared space and a shared light… Not only did the audience…see the action of tragedy, not only did the audience see

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[208] Parker provides an example of an 8 line annotated passage from the 'bible', the first four lines of which read:

Méwing wárcries [2] préybirds shrílling [3]
Nést-theft chíldloss [2] wíld frustration [3]
Néstlings snáffled [2] préybirds soáring [2]
Wíldly scúlling [3] swírling aírstreams

Parker (1986) 348.

[209] See "Peter Hall talks to Peter Stothard," National Theatre Platform discussion, <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=2626&tmpl=ntmainprint>.

> the actors and the chorus but the actors and the chorus saw the audience. They were all equally illuminated by the light of the sun.[210]

In this performance space the masked performers spoke outwards, towards the audience, even when their lines were directed to another character on-stage or to the chorus. And it is on these aspects of ancient drama that Harrison pins his performance conventions.

Though most of Harrison's plays have been staged either outdoors in the dimming twilight of the evening, with the aid of electric lighting, or in indoor performance spaces such as the Olivier, with its intricate lighting capabilities, Harrison insists that the audience be made to feel that they are in a communal space where both the audience and the actors exist with no illusory walls between them. Given that Harrison has not been able to have his plays staged in the light of day, despite having pled for just such a performance for *The Trackers of Oxyrhychus* at Delphi in 1988, the only mechanism that he had to create this communal space is direct audience address. Jack Shepherd has recalled how Harrison insisted during the performance of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* "that principals and chorus should interact by talking only to the audience, without ever contacting each other."[211] Harrison has maintained this performance convention throughout his plays, with the actors speaking their lines directly out to the audience, mimicking the delivery conventions of masked theatre, without using the masks themselves.[212]

The Oresteia was important not only for its influence on the later careers of both Hall and Harrison, but also because it marked a significant shift in the place of Greek tragedy on the professional British stage. When John Barton first told Hall that the RSC was intending to stage *The Greeks* Barton asked, "But surely it would be interesting for the two theatres to do the Greeks at the same time?" In his diary Hall records his response to this suggestion: "This, though, is idiocy. I am absolutely shattered. The hopes of four

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[210] Harrison (2004) 4.

[211] See Shepherd (1991) 427.

[212] For discussions of ancient masking conventions, see Halliwell (1993) 195-211; Marshall (1999a) 188-202; Marshall (1999b), 105-131; Vervain (2004) 245-64; Vervain and Wiles (2001) 254-72.

years go down the drain. I can't do it now…"[213] On 1 September 1978 he records having had a telephone conversation with John Barton about their respective projects. Barton "said there could be no question but that my Greek work must open before his. But he also added that he was going to do his next year come what may. I asked him if this meant there might be only a couple months gap. He answered, perhaps. I said I thought that was very damaging -- to both companies…I am going to think this weekend, but I honestly believe *The Oresteia* is now dead as a project for me."[214] Hall, who had founded the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1960 and been Artistic Director until 1968 and who had been the Artistic Director of the National Theatre since 1973, firmly believed that British theatre audiences would be unlikely to attend two major productions of Greek drama in a single year. He was wrong. Peter Lewis calculates that, "Altogether the production must have been seen by over 70, 000 people, a remarkable figure for Greek tragedy."[215] *The Oresteia* ran for sixty-five performances, instead of the scheduled twenty, and the production went on to be performed at the ancient theatre at Epidauros in July 1982, the first foreign production to be staged in that space.[216] And the success of

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[213] Goodwin (1983) 369. The following day Hall's response had shifted from feelings of dismay to feelings of betrayal. His entry for 18 August 1978 reads: "Losing *The Oresteia* plays on my mind though I try not to let it. I am stunned by John Barton, Trevor [Nunn] and the RSC. How can one's friends do that sort of thing, despite ours being a cut-throat, competitive business?" Barton's announcement of his intention to work with Greek drama cannot, however, have come as a complete surprise to Hall, as he had written in his diary in early-July 1973, "I am worried by certain aspects of a talk I had with John Barton. He is now actively engaged on the Greeks as the centre of his work. So am I; *The Oresteia* is actively cooking. I said it seemed pretty daft that we didn't do it together." See Goodwin (1983) 49.

[214] Goodwin (1983) 373.

[215] Lewis (1990) 161. This number includes only the audiences who saw the production in the Olivier Auditorium at the National Theatre and does not include the audiences who saw the production at Epidaurus.

[216] Simeon Underwood, (1998) 76, has suggested that performance on the Olivier stage conferred upon the text "immediate quasi-canonical status". As the majority of plays staged in the Olivier auditorium attest, performance in that space in no way confers anything approaching canonicity to a text. The fate of most plays and translations, staged in the Olivier or elsewhere, is to slip into the footnotes of theatre history or simply into oblivion. This is true of both hits and flops. The one thing that production at the National

The Oresteia changed the landscape for the performance of Greek drama on the British stage in significant ways: theatre companies began to regularly include a Greek tragedy in their season, and major English poets began producing verse versions of Greek tragedies.

Prior to *The Greeks* in 1980, The Royal Shakespeare Company had staged only one classical play, *Hippolytus* (1978: directed by Ron Daniels). The National Theatre between 1963 and 1981 had staged three ancient plays, only two of which were Greek and none of which was straightforward translations for the stage: *Philoctetes* in 1964 (directed by William Gaskill), Seneca's *Oedipus* in 1968 (directed by Peter Brook), *The Bacchae* in 1973 (directed by Roland Joffe). While there were a number of other productions of Greek plays in England, both in ancient Greek and in translation, during the same period, operas aside, the vast majority were staged either by school groups, including universities, or in rare cases by regional or minor London theatre companies. Ancient Greek drama simply wasn't considered to be popular or commercially viable and it had never been produced on a regular basis in translation on the English stage, with the exception of Gilbert Murray's translations at the Royal Court and other theatres.[217] The database compiled by the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama shows a large upswing in the numbers of professional theatres staging Greek drama starting in the mid-1980s. The National Theatre itself staged two classical plays in the 1980s: *Antigone* (1984: directed by Burgess and Gill) and Harrison's adaptation of Sophocles' *Ichneutae*, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1988 in Delphi; 1990 in London). The National had also commissioned Harrison to write *The Common Chorus*, a trilogy consisting of versions of

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Theatre generally does assure is publication. The gap between publication and canonicity, however, is vast.

[217] On the productions of Murray's translations, see chapter 6. The regular productions of Greek drama, both in the original Greek and in translation, at schools, particularly grammar schools, and universities, especially Cambridge and Oxford, raise numerous issues for reception studies due to questions around function (with pedagogy playing a role usually absent in the professional theatre), audience (with a built in audience and less dependence, if any, on ticket sales), and class hegemony, especially prior to the Butler Education Act of 1944 which allowed at least a few working-class children access to the institutions which staged the majority of productions of classical plays in England prior to 1980.

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Euripides' *Trojan Women*, and an original play by Harrison, *Maxims*. Unfortunately the political nature of the script of the trilogy, which is vehemently anti-war, caused such concern among the management of the National Theatre, that the production was delayed, until in Harrison's words "the time for this particular version of the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes [had] passed, with the thankful ending of the fearful Cold War that produced it."[218] The RSC, having done one classical play in its first twenty years prior to 1980, did nine classical plays or adaptations of classical myths in the next twenty.[219] Perhaps more significant than the general increase in the number of ancient plays being staged by the two most prominent non-commercial English theatre companies, was the influence that these companies' decision to each stage a monumental production of a Greek tragedy had on other smaller theatre companies. While there was a marked increase in the number of ancient plays being staged by the RSC and the National Theatre, over the next fifteen years there was an explosion in the number of ancient plays being staged by semi-professional and professional theatre companies. In the first half of 1995 there were more productions of Euripidean plays in London than Shakespearean plays.[220]

In addition to ancient drama, primarily Greek tragedy, finding a prominent place on the British stage following *The Oresteia*, a number of leading British and Irish poets began writing "versions" of Greek plays. This phenomenon ought to be ascribed almost exclusively to the fact that Tony Harrison, through his theatre work in the 1970s and 80s,

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[218] Harrison (2002b) 198.

[219] The following plays were staged at by the RSC between 1980 and 2000: Seneca's *Oedipus*, version by Ted Hughes (1988: directed by Donald Sumpter), Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988: directed by Garry Hynes), Sophocles' *Electra* (1988: directed by Deborah Warner, revived in 1991), Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Thebans* (1991: directed by Adrian Noble), *The Gift of the Gorgon* (1992: directed by Peter Hall), *Ion* (1994: directed by Nicholas Wright), *Phoenician Women* (1995: directed by Katie Mitchell), and T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (1999: directed by Adrian Noble). In 2005 The RSC staged Tony Harrison's translation of Euripides' *Hecuba*. The London production was directed by Laurence Boswell, but the production was reworked by Harrison for its run in Washington, D.C., New York, and Delphi.

[220] Hall, Macintosh and Wrigley (2004) 5.

had redeemed the reputation of non-Shakespearean verse drama in the British theatre, and cleared a space for its performance at the National Theatre, which in turn helped to establish a space for it in other theatres. Poet Laureate Ted Hughes did versions of *Alcestis*, *The Oresteia*, and Racine's *Phèdre*.[221] Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney did versions of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, entitled *The Cure at Troy*, and *Antigone*, *The Burial at Thebes*.[222] Simon Armitage did a version of Euripides' *Heracles*, *Mister Heracles*.[223] Sean O'Brien did a version of Aristophanes' *Birds*.[224] Blake Morrison has produced versions of Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[225] And Alistair Elliot did a translation of Euripides' *Medea*, commissioned by the Almeida Theatre Company.[226] None of these poets earned their poetic reputation working in the theatre, though Hughes had written numerous poorly received verse dramas for stage and radio during his early career, and none of them was able to read ancient Greek, hence the use of 'version' rather than 'translation'.[227] The sudden en masse shift to dramatic verse, and versions of ancient Greek drama in particular, was facilitated both by Harrison's success as a dramatic poet and by the programming decisions made by the National and the RSC to make productions of Greek tragedy prominent in their season.[228] The productions of *The*

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[221] Hughes (1999a), (1999b) and (1998).

[222] Heaney (1991) and (2004).

[223] Armitage (2000).

[224] O'Brien (2003).

[225] Morrison, *Oedipus & Antigone*, double script available for order from Northern Broadsides Theatre Company.

[226] Elliot (1993). Director Jonathan Kent reportedly approached both Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes for a translation of the *Medea* but both refused.

[227] On Hughes' early verse drama and his embracement of Greek drama late in his career, see Marshall (2009) 263-281.

[228] It should also be noted that, with the exception of Heaney, all of these poets are from the north of England. Harrison, O'Brien, and Elliot all live in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Both Hughes and Morrison were born and raised in Yorkshire. Heaney was born and raised in Northern Ireland.

Oresteia and *The Greeks* were a pivotal point in the reception of Greek drama on the British stage, while *The Oresteia* marked a significant moment in the return of English verse drama, by major poets, to the British stage.

The Oresteia was an important moment in Harrison's career and the production remains among the most important productions ever staged at the National Theatre. Yet while the production is important in terms of theatre history and the reception of Greek drama on the British stage, its significance for Harrison's development as a playwright comes from the fact that it marked his return to the Classics – its long gestation period meant that it was Harrison's most prolonged engagement with the Classics since his student days. But there is also a monumental shift between *The Oresteia* and the other classical works that followed it in the 1980s. All of these works, including the unstaged *Medea: a sex-war opera* and *The Common Chorus* trilogy, are marked by the scope of their theatrical imagination. As Richard Eyre commented in his diaries while Artistic Director of the National Theatre, "his show [*The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*] is exhilaratingly ambitious…Tony's nerve is like Victor Hugo's, who wanted to overturn the rigid conventions of French classical theatre and, like Berlioz, emulate Shakespeare."[229] While weaker actors or acting ensembles might struggle with the delivery of the verse, there are no other performance demands that would prohibit a company from staging one of Harrison's early works. The later plays add on top of the issue of speaking verse staging demands that few companies without the resources of the National could accommodate. The chorus of clog dancing satrys leaping forth from the Egypt exploration crates that fall open to create a dance floor in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, would challenge most theatre companies. The live lions and tigers called for in *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* would be difficult to manage, and the trained bear would almost certainly fall afoul of most western countries' animal protection laws. *Fram* calls for a prima ballerina to dance the Stravinsky-esque *Aurora Borealis* and a frozen ship to rise up out of the stage. Despite the arguments put to him by his agent, Harrison has yet to write a two-hander set in a single room; he is not interested in having

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[229] Eyre (2004) 112-3.

his plays frequently performed, but only in staging plays that are demanding on the technical capacity of the theatre, the skills of the actors, and the play's audience.

As the work from the 1980s onwards makes clear this ambitious vision of what is possible in the theatre is an integral part of Harrison's theatrical imagination. Yet something changed in the early 1980s that fostered the creative growth evident in Harrison's work from this period. There are a number of possible factors behind this shift. *The Oresteia* was a monumentally ambitious project that was demanding of everyone involved in the production, not to mention the audience. It set a clear precedent for Harrison in terms of the scope of production that was possible with the resources of the National Theatre. The second factor may simply have been one of opportunity. Harrison's first two original projects, *Medea: a sex-war opera* and *The Common Chorus*, neither of which was in the end staged, were works commissioned by men with whom he had worked closely during the 1970s: John Dexter and Peter Hall. Both men knew Harrison well and were prepared to offer him the resources of The New York Metropolitan Opera and the National Theater respectively for the projects that he was undertaking. Few playwrights who are working on their first original plays are able to write with the knowledge that they will have such vast theatrical resources at their disposal or the steadfast support of Artistic Directors for such ambitious projects. Harrison was also writing these works having spent much of the previous decade working with some of the most talented people in all aspects of British theatre, and thus had a clear sense of the available theatrical talent in addition to the necessary monetary and physical resources. And perhaps it even had something to do with his relationship with opera singer Teresa Stratas, whom he married in 1984.

While there were many factors that may have influenced the development of Harrison's theatrical works in the years that followed *The Oresteia*, his relationship with Herbert must be counted among the most significant. It was during *The Oresteia* that Harrison first worked with designer Jocelyn Herbert and, as I have argued elsewhere, this relationship was of the utmost importance to the development of Harrison's plays from translations to original works.[230] Herbert was one of the most important British designers

[230] Marshall (2007) 109-126.

of the twentieth-century, but her influence extended far beyond the stage and her ongoing relationships with many significant playwrights, such as Beckett, Storey, Wesker, and Hare, and directors, such as John Dexter and Lindsay Anderson, helped mould the very fabric of British theatre in the second half of the twentieth-century. Herbert's designs, and her choice of professional company, make clear that her interest was not in what the theatre was at any given moment in her career, but what the theatre could be. The motivation behind her work was very much in line with that of her frequent collaborator John Dexter, another member of the English Stage Company (ESC) as it existed at the Royal Court under Devine, who wrote, " Do the work for its own sake, not for the empire we may build around it, and for the sake of the people who have the love of the work."[231] For Herbert, whether she was working with a text by Shakespeare or a piece by Beckett, what interested her was what was necessary in the performance space to make the text work in the theatre.

Herbert's approach to the theatre is founded in a belief in the text.[232] This emphasis on the text, and therefore on the author, was a legacy that Herbert inherited from George Devine and the ESC at the Royal Court where she had worked in the 1950s and 1960s.[233] This ideology had its origins in the founding ideals of the London Theatre

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[231] Dexter (1993) 37.

[232] For an example of a production that is not interested in the authorial text one could look at almost any production by director Katie Mitchell. In the program for the 2005 production of Strindberg's *A Dream Play* at the National Theatre, Caryl Churchill, who was advertised as the translator, went to great lengths to make clear to the audience that what they were to see on stage was neither the translated text that she had provided to Mitchell nor in any real sense a representation of Strindberg's play. The text functioned as a starting point for the production but the production was not bound in any way to the text. It is this particular aspect of Mitchell's productions that I am uncomfortable with. Her productions are advertised by author, and frequently translator (her *Oresteia* production in a new version by Ted Hughes for example), but the productions themselves show little to no concern for the authorial text. If you are not presenting the author's text substantially as written, it seems to me to be intellectually dishonest to advertise your wares under his or her name. For a more favorable assessment of Mitchell's work, see Goldhill (2007).

[233] It is immensely difficult to disentangle the theatrical ideologies of Herbert and Devine. Not only had Devine been one of Herbert's teachers at the London Theatre Studio in the 1930s, but they were also to become life partners in the 1950s. Their passion and respect

Studio (LTS) as it had existed briefly in the 1930s under Saint-Denis and Devine, though at The Royal Court there was an increased emphasis on the idea of a writer's theatre.[234] From the very beginning of his role as Artistic Director of the ESC, Devine had set out to present drama which was radically different from the status quo in British theatre with its drawing room dramas in the West End and the turgid poetic drama that was on offer in non-commercial venues. Devine wanted a theatre that would give a home to a new generation of British writers, while also opening the British stage to European drama. To this end the ESC placed ads soliciting new plays from writers – and here Devine had novelists in mind, who he felt had been alienated from writing for the theatre.[235] The ideals of The Royal Court were of central importance to Herbert's approach to design: "The Court was aiming to rediscover good theatrical style and wanted to establish the kind of simplicity in which each element served the text to the greatest extent."[236]

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for each other seems have stemmed in part from their symbiotic approach to the theatre. It says much about their relationship, both professional and private, that *A Theatre Workbook*, edited by Cathy Courtney, was dedicated by Herbert to Devine despite its publication coming nearly thirty years after his death. The only obvious substantive disparity between their work in the theatre is that while Devine was immensely skeptical of contemporary verse drama in the theatre, Herbert was a vocal supporter of Harrison's work. One suspects, however, that had Devine lived to see Harrison's work he too would have become a fervent supporter. It was the poetic English drama of the mid-twentieth century that made him despair and he would almost certainly have agreed with Harrison's assessment that writers such as T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry had fouled the nest of English verse drama. See Haffenden (1991) 237.

[234] Herbert in Findlater (1981) 84.

[235] By the time the first season opened in 1956 they had received seven hundred and fifty scripts, one of which one was deemed to be worth staging: John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. The initial ad resulted in a flood of some six hundred and seventy five scripts and by the opening of the first season that number had swelled to seven hundred and fifty. Devine said of the scripts that he had received, "on the whole the standard of insipidity…is remarkably high and there is a lot of 'phoney' drama – phoney 'poetry'; phoney 'theatrical situations'; turgid wallowings in the mud of the 'poetic' soul which is just about as bad, worse, than conventional ineptitude – such plays have no human interest." See Roberts (1999) 33, 37, and 47.

[236] Courtney (1993), 216-17. Richard Eyre spells out the Royal Court approach in his diaries, (2004) 68, when commenting on the National Theatre's 1989 production of David Storey's *The March on Russia,* writing: "Lindsay [Anderson] and Jocelyn

Harrison has been explicit about how Herbert's belief in the text encouraged him in his own writing, and indeed renewed his faith in the text when at times he wavered. Harrison has said of Herbert,

> Even when I feel discouraged it is Jocelyn, paradoxically, as the designer who reminds me to trust in the text. As you know, it is quite common in modern theatre to do everything else but trust the text, and this lack of faith shows in much design and production. In this atmosphere a poet can feel overpowered and diminished by other elements of a production. This is never the case with Jocelyn.[237]

It is not a coincidence that after *The Oresteia* and until her death Herbert designed all of Harrison's adaptations and original works, with the exception of *Poetry or Bust*, and that all of those plays used ancient works to explore contemporary politics.[238] Harrison has explicitly stated how important his conversations with her were in encouraging him to pursue a new poetic theatre, tied to earlier verse drama traditions but which addressed "the depths and disturbances of our times."[239] She made him believe that such theatre was possible, and she steadfastly worked with him for twenty years as a colleague and as a friend to create a space for this new poetic drama on the modern British stage.

The Oresteia brought Harrison back full-circle to his classical education, to his first foray into the world of verse drama, and to his northern roots and voice. While the 1981 production would in and of itself have been a remarkable work within any poetic career, for Harrison it became a staging point. This would be the last time that his primary role in the theatre would be that of translator, using his poetic voice in service of someone else's dramatic vision. While he would do two further translations over the years, Hugo's *The Prince's Play*, directed by Richard Eyre at the National Theatre in 1996, and Euripides' *Hecuba* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2005, his career

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[Herbert, designer] have done it in what now is a wildly unfashionable style: old Royal Court – unmannered acting, devotion to the text, unostentatious directing, simple and expressive design."

[237] Courtney (1993) 229.

[238] *Poetry or Bust* was written, directed, and designed by Tony Harrison.

[239] Courtney (1993) 232.

from the 1980s onward has been preoccupied with original works for both the stage and television and film. The works that followed *The Oresteia* fully embody Harrison's poetic voice and theatrical imagination. His first decade in the theatre can be seen as an apprenticeship during which Harrison learned from his work with some of the most talented and important figures in the British theatre in the second-half of the twentieth century. He emerged from *The Oresteia* a master craftsman in his own right and the works that followed represent a wholeness of his poetic imagination.

Chapter 3: *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*

> What I would normally say is 'look at this version of an ancient play.' I am now saying 'this is my play, which has an ancient heart.'[240]
>
> Tony Harrison in *The Guardian*

Prior to *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* the posters advertising Harrison's works at the National Theatre always noted that Harrison's authorial role was subservient to another author: *The Misanthrope* by Molière in an English version by Tony Harrison; *The Oresteia*, the trilogy by Aeschylus in a version by Tony Harrison. While reviewers such as Sheridan Morley might write that these versions owed as little to their originals as Shakespeare to Holinshed[241], Harrison was not perceived to be the primary author, and Harrison's theatrical imagination was constrained by his sense of loyalty to the text that he was translating, and by the theatrical vision of the director for whom he was producing the translation. *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* freed him from both. Not only was the play his own, built around the fragments and inspiration of the Sophoclean play, but it was also under his artistic control, with Harrison stepping into the role of director. It was the first play that he had both written and directed, and it inaugurated a new era in his career, something of a second debut.

Harrison had artistic control over this project in a way that he had never had before. He created a team, many of whom would become long-term collaborators. The most significant of these was the stage-designer Jocelyn Herbert with whom Harrison had worked on *The Oresteia* and with whom he would continue to work until her death in 2003.[242] *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* was the first play on which Harrison worked with stage manager Trish Montemuro and they too developed an ongoing relationship that

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[240] Lennon (1990).

[241] See Morley (1975).

[242] On Herbert's relationship with Harrison, see Marshall (2007) 109-126.

spanned nearly two decades. Harrison also for the first time wrote parts for specific actors[243] – in this case two Yorkshire actors with whom he had worked before: Jack Shepherd[244] and Barrie Rutter.[245] From *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* onward Harrison wrote for specific actors and specific spaces: "In the theatre I most admire, poets, and I stress poets, wrote for actors they knew and for a space they knew…It is more than half the battle of creation to know the instruments you are writing for."[246] Harrison also worked closely with composer Stephen Edwards ensuring that the music reinforced the text in ways that meaningfully supported the themes of the play. Harrison was working towards creating a company and the play was a collaborative company production. Edwards observed, "the first draft of *Trackers* was simply offered up as a point of departure. Composer, designer, stage manager, actors were asked to respond to this draft from their various points of view."[247] For Harrison the point of creating a theatrical company was not tyrannical control over the final product, but surrounding himself with exceptionally talented artists who were committed to his vision of a new kind of Public Theatre.

As Harrison gained creative control over his dramatic work he also became much more assertive about his beliefs as to how the theatre should function. Harrison's

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[243] Harrison had written/translated/adapted the role of Lysistrata with Glenda Jackson in mind, but in the end *The Common Chorus* was not produced and the role was not tailored to her the way it would have been had it gone through the necessary steps for production.

[244] Shepherd first worked with Harrison on a version of *The Mysteries* for *The South Bank Show*, participated in workshops for *The Oresteia* in 1980, and appeared in the complete cycle of *The Mysteries* in 1985. On Shepherd's relationship with Harrison, see Shepherd (1991) 423-428.

[245] Rutter worked with Harrison in *The Passion* (1977), *The Oresteia* (1981), and *The Mysteries* (1985), before becoming the actor for whom Harrison would write a number of lead roles. Harrison's firm belief that dramatic verse could be delivered with a northern accent led directly to Rutter establishing his own theatre company, Northern Broadsides, which is dedicated to performing verse drama in a northern voice. On Rutter's professional and personal relationship with Harrison, see Rutter (1991) 416-22.

[246] Harrison (2004) 18.

[247] Edwards (1991) 466.

understanding of how the theatre can and should work draws heavily on his understanding of how drama functioned in fifth-century Athens, while being influenced by more modern theories of the theatre such as those of Brecht on the relationship between the audience and the actors, especially as mediated through the Royal Court Theatre as it had existed in the 1950s and 60s.[248] In his presidential address to the Classical Association Harrison said:

> The first and most obvious fact about Greek tragedy is that it was played in the full light of day. To this is due a great deal of its unique character. It helped, first and foremost, to create what Harbage also found in the theatre of Shakespeare and called an 'obvious reciprocity'. This ancient theatre, this *theatron*, this place for seeing, was not only where the audience saw actors bringing dark events *eis to phos*, to the light of day as Sophocles himself puts it in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the audience also saw each other, everyone else, so that the bearing of terror was not only shared but seen to be shared, and that is very important. As it was seen to be shared so was it communally endured. The audience were not segregated by arm rests and darkness into individual pockets of anxiety and troubled thought in the face of tragedy. Our lights are always dimmed, except by fire regulation for the EXIT signs…[249]

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[248] Harrison's theatre is related to the theatre of Brecht not only through some degrees of shared ideology but also through a shared working relationship with Jocelyn Herbert and John Dexter. Devine had first met Brecht and Helene Weigel while on tour in Germany with the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Noguchi's *Lear*. Both Herbert and Dexter had been at the Royal Court Theatre in the 1950s when it was the first British theatre to stage a play by Brecht, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, and the entire company had been overwhelmingly influenced by the Berliner Ensemble's performances of *Mother Courage* when they had visited London in 1956. The theatrical ideas of Brecht were hugely influential at the Court – from visual style to how to treat the theatrical text – and spread from the Court to the new National Theatre in the 1960 and 70s through directors such as John Dexter and Bill Gaskill. On the influence of the Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble of Devine, see Wardle (1978) 169-70; on the Royal Court more generally, see Roberts (1986) 17 and Gaskill (1988) 11-14, 19-20, 52-61.

[249] Harrison (1991e) 441-42. There is a similar passage in the introduction to *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, see Harrison (2004) 4-7.

Harrison had wanted to produce *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* at the ancient stadium in Delphi during the light of day, but the festival rules precluded that.[250] While Harrison was not able to insist on the daylight performance that he had wanted, he could, as director, insist that the principal actors and the chorus should interact only by addressing the audience, and never each other, as though they were wearing masks.[251] Harrison's notions regarding the relationship between the actors and audience came not only from his ideas about the relationship between actors and audience in the ancient Greek theatre but also the experience of *The Mysteries* in performance in 1985. Michael Billington wrote in his review of *The Mysteries*, which ran in *The Guardian* on 21 January 1985: "…the result, for all present, was an unforgettable piece of communal theatre. But the interesting question is why, in an age of skepticism, an audience should be so stirred by a piece of medieval religious drama…But what is most extraordinary about *The Mysteries* is that, through the sheer imaginative power of the production, it penetrates and sometimes even shatters the agnostic detachment of a modern audience." The performance of *The Mysteries* proved that communal theatre was still possible in the late-twentieth century, and that even a secular audience could be deeply engaged and moved by religious verse theatre. Harrison's theatre breaks the traditions of twentieth-century British theatre in a number of ways: his use of verse, especially verse that is at once colloquial and yet formal; his use of space, breaking boundaries between audience and actors, and between the interior theatre space and the space immediately beyond the

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[250] In the end it was probably a good thing that the play was staged in the cool evening temperatures as the scorching daytime temperatures in mid-July were taxing on both the cast and equipment. Jack Shepherd reports that the temperatures were into the hundreds [Fahrenheit] everyday, and that during rehearsals they were forced to stop before eleven every morning, by which point the cast would be dehydrated from performing in the heat. See Shepherd (1991) 427. Stage manager Trish Montemuro has said in conversation that the heat created technical difficulties, as the electronic equipment for the sound and music constantly malfunctioned. Eventually a fridge was rented to help deal with the problem. In antiquity the dramatic festivals in Attica were held in the cooler months of December through March.

[251] Harrison's insistence on this method of delivery strained relations between himself and the actor Jack Shepherd, who was playing Grenfell/Apollo, almost to the breaking point as Shepherd felt that Harrison was depriving the actors of their primary source of energy. See Shepherd (1991) 427.

theatre, and the required style of acting, insisting that they interact with the audience rather than with each other, which is very demanding of actors. In a column in *The Guardian* newspaper on 18 July 1988, Rosemary Burton wrote: "…actors with only four weeks experience working with [Tony Harrison] spoke of having their whole approach to their craft revolutionized. They had to learn to speak in rhythm with the pulse of his verse and after the initial difficulties soon discovered the power of this beat to carry a play forward at a thrilling and sometimes frightening pace."[252] It is clear from Stephen Edwards's essay on his collaboration with Harrison on *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* that the play was discussed by those involved with it in terms of creating a new style of "Public Theatre".[253] Under Peter Hall's directorship there had been attempts to give Harrison something of a permanent position and company, but it never came to fruition.[254] *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* marks the beginning of something resembling a theatrical company with Jocelyn Herbert, Trish Montemuro, and Barrie Rutter taking central roles in design, production, and performance respectively alongside Harrison the poet/director. The stability and strengths of this pseudo-company allowed Harrison to continue to further develop his theatrical ideas and ideals, especially in regard to his adaptations of classical materials.

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[252] The actor Brian Glover who played God in *The Mysteries* and baby Hermes in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* wrote in a column in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* on 2 March 1990: "Tony Harrison's poetry is very much like a steam engine. It's strong, hard, polished, sensual, makes wonderful sounds, and is very life enhancing, because there is always this thrusting beat in the verse, like some heartbeat, which makes you feel that if it stops you'll die..."

[253] See Edwards (1991) 465-69.

[254] Peter Hall briefly notes in a diary entry for 20 June 1977: "What I would like to do is give Tony Harrison a regular salary, But how can I?" Goodwin (1983) 302. Tony Harrison has said in an interview: "Originally I went into the theatre with the idea that I should work with a company and turn the energies I'd acquired from rehabilitating a classic into creating new work. But the way companies are formed and maintained doesn't allow it, and I was always let down by the National Theatre. I was left a little high and dry when I devised ways of tapping these energies into modern work, and wasn't allowed to do it." See Haffenden (1991) 238. An attempt was also made to establish a permanent company at Salts Mill in Yorkshire, but the plan was scuttled by the untimely death of David Silver who owned the mill.

Having creative control of both the text and the production Harrison was able to create a piece that came much closer to embodying the entirety of his theatrical vision than any of his earlier works. While the ideas behind *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (textual transmission, high and low art, and social division and exclusion) might for most people be very loosely connected if connected at all, for Harrison they are closely bound together. The epigraph to his poem "Art & Extinction" is a quote from Theodore Roosevelt that reads: "When I hear of the destruction of a species I feel as if all the works of some great writer had perished."[255] It could equally be an epigraph to *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. For Harrison, Sophocles' dramatic imagination cannot be understood by looking exclusively at the tragedies, while ignoring the satyr plays, nor can fifth-century Athenian drama be understood without taking into account the cultural and social context. In the same way Harrison's own dramatic imagination cannot be understood by reading the plays, but not the published verse, or the translations but not the original dramatic works or by ignoring their social and cultural contexts. For Harrison, "All of my work comes out of the same preoccupation – it's *one* writing, but it's difficult to explain exactly how they are linked."[256] *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* comes closer than perhaps any of Harrison's other works in linking all of his writings, and as such it is a central work in understanding the wholeness of Harrison's imagination as he seeks to "strip away the élitist, esoteric perceptions which dog his art form and embrace and engage a far wider audience."[257] *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* marks the first moment when Harrison's drama began to look not only backwards to the earlier poetic theatrical traditions, but also squarely in the face of modern society, "seeking to find in our past and present a common wholeness, a common illumination, a common commitment to survival."[258]

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[255] Harrison (2007a) 204.

[256] Garofalakis (1991) 202.

[257] Edwards (1991) 469.

[258] Harrison (2004) 19.

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus (1988/1990) was the first of Harrison's classical plays to reach the stage after *The Oresteia* in 1981. As a result *The Oresteia* and *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* are frequently discussed as being part and parcel of the same artistic agenda. As I suggested in chapter one, however, these plays, while both drawing on ancient Greek dramatic sources, represent different aspects of Harrison's theatrical career. As discussed in chapter two, *The Oresteia* is a translation, the fundamental goal of which was to represent the Aeschylus' Greek for a modern English audience.[259] While *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* incorporates translated text, its primary identity is not that of a translation. It is also a mistake to think of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* as following directly on the heels of *The Oresteia*. There are in fact two intervening dramatic works by Harrison which are translations and adaptations of ancient Greek source material: *Medea: a sex-war opera* and *The Common Chorus*. Both of these works were written for performance in the 1980s but for various reasons never made it to the stage.[260] The libretto for *Medea: a sex-war opera* was commissioned from Harrison by the New York Metropolitan Opera; however, it did not reach the stage because the composer, Jacob Druckman, failed to complete the music.[261] *The Common Chorus* was commissioned by the National Theatre in the 1980s but again never made it to the stage.[262] The primary

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[259] Harrison has said, "I always have that urge to make any play my own, but at the same time I am very conscientious as a scholar." Haffenden (1991) 239.

[260] A form of *Medea: a sex-war opera* was performed at Edinburgh in 1991 by Fern Smith, who would later star in Harrison's *Prometheus*, and her Volcano Theatre Company. Volcano's version, *Medea: sexwar*, interwove parts of Harrison's libretto and ideas of Medea with text from the SCUM Manifesto. The SCUM Manifesto is an anarcho-feminist text written by Valerie Solanas –famous for shooting Andy Warhol – which presents a radical programme of feminist changes. The full text of the manifesto is available on-line at <www.womynkind.org/scum.htm>.

[261] Harrison's libretto was published first in 1985 by Bloodaxe Books and then republished in 1986 by King Penguin.

[262] In 1992 Faber published Harrison's adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* under the title *The Common Chorus*. They republished it alongside his translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women* in *Tony Harrison: Plays 4* (2002) as *The Common Chorus: Parts I and II.* A reworked version of the third play in the trilogy, originally entitled *Maxims*, was both produced at the National Theatre and published by Faber under the title *Square Rounds* in 1992.

reason was concern about its politics and "by the time various managements had lingered over this text the tension of a topical present and a tragic past had leached away into oblivion."[263] Both works are important, however, in tracing the development of Harrison's engagement with classical drama.

Medea: a sex-war opera and *The Common Chorus* both, to a certain extent, anticipate *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* in the mingling of classical dramatic sources with original material. In *Medea: a sex-war opera* Harrison draws together a variety of extant source materials, at times quoting literary sources in ancient Greek, Latin, and French, in order to create a new original work. In *The Common Chorus* Harrison coupled two translations/adaptations of ancient Greek plays with a third original play. *The Common Chorus* also anticipates *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* in its having the characters in one play become the characters in another play – the men and the women of *Lysistrata* (the first play in the trilogy) perform Euripides' *Trojan Women* (the second play in the trilogy). *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* is unusual because it situates a translation of a fragmentary play within a larger dramatic context – faithfully representing the original but at the same time distorting it and changing its meaning through the larger context.

That larger context is very different from Harrison's other plays, and the conflict within the play is not the gender conflict which lies at the heart of all of Harrison's previous classical plays. *Medea: a sex-war opera* picks up on the theme of gender conflict which Harrison tried to emphasize in his translation of *The Oresteia.* Gender conflict had also been a central theme of his first dramatic venture, co-written with Irish poet James Simmons, *Aikin Mata*.[264] And in *The Common Chorus* the gender conflict is embodied within the texts that Harrison chose for this trilogy: Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Euripides' *Trojan Women*, and Harrison's original play *Maxims*. Each of the plays

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[263] Harrison (2002b) 197-8. Taplin also attributes the non-performance of *The Common Chorus* to Harrison's failure to complete the script for *Maxims* on time. See Taplin (1991) 458.

[264] Harrison and Simmons (1966). See chapter 5 for a discussion of *Aikin Mata* and *The Common Chorus*.

examines the different attitudes of women and men towards warfare and the different ways in which war impacts male and female lives. The conflict of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, however, is a conflict between art and sport (in the Delphi text), literacy and non-literacy, and above all class. This is the first play in which Harrison fully embraced in his dramatic poetry the themes that he had been addressing in his published verse. The theme of the reclamation of poetry for a northern voice had been touched on in Harrison's 1977 production of *The Passion,* in which Harrison reclaimed the York Mystery cycles for the Northern voices in which they had originally been performed.[265] However, while *The Passion* made the point that verse drama need not be performed in a Received Pronunciation accent, that was not the theme of the plays. In its use of regional dialects *The Passion* challenged the conventions of the English theatre but it did not aggressively challenge the audience, its cultural values, and its societal divisions.

Two texts of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* have been published.[266] The Delphi text was written for a single performance in the ancient stadium at Delphi on 12 July 1988, and the National text was a substantially rewritten version prepared for a run at the National Theatre, on London's South Bank, opening 27 March 1990. While the central

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[265] *The Passion* became part of the larger *The Mysteries* which was staged by the National Theatre in 1985. Harrison has said: " When I saw [*The Mysteries*] as a child, God and Jesus spoke in posh Southern RP voices, and only the comic roles had a local accent. I was fired up to reclaim them for northern actors, which I did in this theatre. It was also part of the journey which led into *The Oresteia*, which was also very northern, for other reasons." *Faber playwrights* (2005) 56.

[266] Harrison's private papers, however, contain a number of unpublished variant scripts that were produced for the different locations of performance. Barrie Rutter comments on Harrison's habit of changing the text for each new location, writing: "Tony can't wait to get his teeth into that situation and alter *Trackers* accordingly. (Dear Tour Manager, make sure we've enough days off to learn the new stuff.)" Rutter (1991) 421. These variant texts are different from pre-performance drafts, which also exist in abundance. As Astley has written: "[Harrison's] plays do not exist until they have gone through this process, and the text is not finalized until a week before performance. Much of what he writes is thrown away, or completely changed: if it doesn't work in rehearsal, if the actors can't speak it or if it doesn't mesh with the music, it goes in the bin, like the drafts of a poem. Astley (1991) 10.

cast remained the same,[267] with Jocelyn Herbert responsible for the stage design and Tony Harrison directing both productions of the play, the physical and cultural spaces in which the plays were performed were very different, resulting in texts that are related yet distinct from each other.

The play, in both versions, begins with the historical narrative of Oxford papyrologists, Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, on site in Egypt in 1907 identifying and cataloging papyri fragments dug out of the ancient Oxyrhynchus garbage dump, while other fragments are being packed in crates to be shipped back to Oxford.[268] Both men are obsessed by the task at hand, but Grenfell is possessed by the god Apollo who instructs him to find a play in which he had a leading role:

> He heard Apollo yammering for scraps and tatters
> of some lost play of Sophocles: *The Tracking Satyrs.*
> 'Grenfell, Hunt!' he heard the voice abjure,
> 'prevent Apollo's favorite play becoming mere manure.'
> Night and day the voice went. 'Grenfell, Bernard Pyne,
> hunt for my papyrus. This order is divine!'[269]

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[267] While Jack Shepard and Barrie Rutter played the central roles there were some minor changes. A number of chorus members were played by different actors in the London production. This was largely unnoticeable except for the absence of the black satyr – whose costume, with its black instead of red fabric and larger phallus, had been specially made at the request of the actor Clive Rowe who played the role at Delphi. Cast lists for both the Delphi and National Theatre productions are printed at the beginning of each text.

[268] Grenfell and Hunt began their excavations at Oxyrhynchus in 1896 and continued to work together at the site until Grenfell's death in 1920. The papyri finds at the site were so voluminous that the translating, editing, and publication of the texts is an on-going project based at Oxford where the papyri are housed in the Sackler Library. To date seventy-two volumes of edited Oxyrhynchus papyri have been published by the Egypt Excavation Society. For the Oxyrhynchus papyri on line, see <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/>.

[269] The Delphi text reads slightly differently in the second line and includes an additional couplet:

> He heard Apollo yammering for scraps and tatters
> of some lost Sophoclean play called *The Tracking Satyrs.*
> 'Grenfell, Hunt!' he heard the voice abjure,
> 'prevent Apollo's favorite play becoming mere manure.'
> Grenfell! Hunt! The god's voice went on speaking
> Putting Grenfell in a panic of papyri-seeking.

Grenfell literally becomes Apollo, and Hunt the lead satyr, Silenus, as they act out the extant fragments of Sophocles' lost play, which they have excavated. Silenus offers the services of his chorus of satyrs to help track down Apollo's missing cattle in return for riches and their freedom. They successfully track the cattle and discover that the cows are in the possession of the infant Hermes who, as in the Homeric Hymn, when he is discovered by Apollo, has just invented the lyre.[270] Apollo agrees to forgive the theft of his cattle in exchange for the wondrous new instrument. Enchanted by the beautiful music produced by the lyre the satyrs want a turn. Apollo, however, refuses, claiming that the music of the lyre is high art, suited to a god, and relegates the satyrs to low art, which should not aspire above its position.

> My advice is stick to being satyrs
> and don't go meddling with musical matters.
> …
> Your capers and your clogs' staccato clatters –
> exactly the racket expected of satyrs.[271]

While the satyrs are denied use of the lyre, they are given the riches and freedom they had been promised for helping to track the cattle, though neither is what the satyrs had expected. Their riches are gold bars – ghettoblasters wrapped in gold-foil, that play music to which the satyrs cannot dance. Disenfranchised from the world of art the satyrs flee, only to return as hooligans who destroy the papyrus that brought them back to life after twenty-five hundred years. The Delphi satyrs use the papyrus to make a soccer ball and begin to play a football match.[272] The National satyrs use it to make bedding for their

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> Night and day the voice went. 'Grenfell, Bernard Pyne,
> hunt for my papyrus. This order is divine!'

Harrison (2004) 30 and 95.

[270] The Homeric Hymn to Hermes also contains as part of its narrative the story of the baby Hermes stealing the cattle of Apollo and inventing the lyre. See Shelmerdine (1995) 108-119.

[271] Harrison (2004) 70-71 and 131-2.

[272] Harrison (2004) 81.

makeshift homes under the stage where they are sleeping rough.[273] Both groups of satyrs have discovered that there is no place for them in twentieth-century art where high and low culture do not meet.

At the heart of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* are the fragments of Sophocles' satyr play *Ichneutae*. Satyr plays were written by the tragedians to be performed as the fourth play in their tetralogies in competition at the Greater Dionysia, but they were of a very different nature than the tragedies that preceded them.[274] Our only complete extant satyr play, Euripides' *Cyclops*, suggests that satyr plays were much shorter than tragedies, and that while the language is metrically and stylistically very similar to tragedy, the general tone was more raucous and celebratory.[275] Even the peculiar case of the fourth place non-satyric *Alcestis* by Euripides again suggests that fourth place plays were shorter and of a different tone than tragedies.[276] Sophocles' *Ichneutae* appears to conform to what we know about satyr plays in that it seems to have been relatively short and to contain a normative plot pattern in which the satyrs are captive but earn eventual liberation, often through association with marvelous civilizing inventions – in this case the lyre, but in other plays inventions such as fire or wine. Yet while something is known about the general length and plot line of satyr plays, there is little understanding of their function in relation to tragedy, or the audience's experience of these plays following ancient Greek tragedy.

Nevertheless, Harrison clearly articulates his interpretation of the place and function of the satyr play:

> Without the satyr play we cannot know enough about the way in which the Greek spirit coped with catastrophe. The residue of a few tragedies might give us the illusion of something resolutely high-minded but it is a distortion…the shriveled private scope of readership rather than presence in shared light and space made both parts of the Greek spirit harder to accommodate. The essential catholicity of Greek drama, the unity of

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[273] Harrison (2004) 146.

[274] On satyr plays, see Krumeich, Pechstein, Seidensticker (1999) and G. Harrison (2005).

[275] On Euripides' *Cyclops*, see Seaford (1984).

[276] On Euripides' *Alcestis*, see Conacher (1988), and Marshall (2000) 229-38.

> tragedy and satyr play, has been betrayed into divided and divisive categories, 'high' and 'low'….the loss of satyr plays is both a symptom and a consequence of this division. What is lost is a clue to the wholeness of the Greek imagination and its deep compulsion to unite sufferer and celebrant in the same space and light.[277]

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus, though not in and of itself a satyr play, clearly manifests this interpretation of the place and function of the satyr play. As Taplin has pointed out, "*The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* is a satyr play which is also a tragedy, but the tragedy of Caliban and of the have-nots rather than of the great king."[278] For Harrison tragedy and satyr plays are inextricably linked, and we cannot understand the joy and celebration of one without witnessing the catastrophe of the other. There is a fragmentary satyr play at its heart, but the play as a whole is an examination of the ways in which the literature of the past comes to us and the place that literature finds in modern culture. Harrison is not writing in an ancient genre – he is creating a modern play about the place of an ancient genre and its mediating effect on perceptions of high culture. On the most obvious level the play examines the process of textual transmission of literary texts from antiquity to the present. The play begins with the most important historical excavation of papyri from what had been an ancient garbage dump in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, which disinterred fragments and virtually complete texts from a large number of literary works that had hitherto been thought to have disappeared from circulation in late-Antiquity, if not before. However, the play also examines the role of culture in deciding which texts are preserved and how widely they are disseminated.[279] Harrison argues that while tragedy

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[277] Harrison (2004) 8-11.

[278] Taplin (1991) 464.

[279] Jonathan Rose, in his book *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* takes Barbara Herrnstein Smith to task for saying that it is "fact that Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare do not figure significantly in the personal economies of these people [those who have not received an Orthodox Western education], do not perform individual or social functions that gratify their interests, do not have value for them." Rose's rebuttal is that "this theory has no visible means of support. If classic authors have no 'transcultural or universal value', as Smith alleges, they would never be translated into other languages. And how can Smith explain Will Crooks, Labour MP? Growing up in extreme poverty in East London, Crooks spent 2d. on a secondhand *Iliad* and was dazzled: 'What a revelation it was to me! Pictures of romance and beauty I had never dreamed of suddenly

has come to be esteemed in the view of western cultural ideals, the accompanying satyr plays have been by and large excused and discarded with a fair amount of apologetic embarrassment. Harrison sees this as emblematic of larger cultural divisions within modern society which are often divided by degrees of literacy, with those who possess greater degrees of literacy deciding what is of cultural value both for themselves and for those possessing lesser degrees of literacy.[280] This leads to the third part of the play which examines what happens to those who are excluded from literacy and who are marginalized by society and it is in this third part that Harrison's work in the theatre becomes wed to his political poetry.

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus challenged its audience in a way that none of Harrison's previous writing had and there are a number of factors that contributed to the overtly political challenge. In part it represents a fairly natural progression in Harrison's classical plays developed over the course of the 1980s. While some of the plays never made it to the stage, the progressively political intent is obvious from the published texts. Another factor in the development of Harrison's poetry was his relationship with his mother and father who died 1978 and 1980 respectively. Despite Harrison's desperate desire to communicate with his parents, they had not read his published verse after his mother's tearful dismay at his first volume of poems in the early 1970s. The poetry that his parents were not reading was, as the 1970s progressed, increasingly exploring the class divisions that exist in Britain through the lens of Harrison's own experience as a grammar school scholarship boy from a working class family.[281] In an interview Harrison

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opened up before my eyes. I was transported from East End to an enchanted land. It was a rare luxury for a working class lad like me just home from work to find myself suddenly among the heroes and nymphs of ancient Greece.'" See Rose (2001) 4-5. In his book Rose piles up example after example of this sort of passion for and engagement with classic literature by the British working class, with evidence suggesting that for many it is an issue of denied access to rather than a perceived lack of value.

[280] Harrison, with deep regret, has noted in interviews that the classical education that he received at Leeds Grammar School is no longer available to children of his class as it had been to gifted working class children of his generation through the Butler Education Act of 1944. See *Faber playwrights* (2005) 69.

[281] See the introductory chapter for a discussion of the impact Harrison's scholarship to Leeds Grammar School had on his family dynamic and his poetry.

acknowledged the truth of his mother's statement that he had not been brought up to write such things, and its juxtaposition to the reality of the life that he has chosen for himself; "And I wasn't brought up to write such mucky books, but I went on to write them."[282] The only way in which Harrison's poetry was accessible to his parents while they were alive was through his dramatic poetry – they came to all his plays. Not only did they come to his plays, but his plays functioned for them exactly as Granville-Barker had dreamed that the repertoire at a National Theatre would: as a library of living drama made accessible to everyone, including the working class. After the deaths of his parents Harrison brought together both the published verse and the dramatic poetry so that the cultural issues that he had been exploring in his published verse could reach a wider and more diverse audience, which at an earlier time might have included his own parents. But he was also free to write 'mucky' things for the stage without fear of his parents turning away from the one medium in which they had enjoyed his work and taken pride in his profession.

The most significant factor that contributed to the overt politics of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* was the critical and popular response to Harrison's poem "v." and the poem/film version that was broadcast on the U.K.'s Channel 4 on 4 November 1987. "v." was originally published in the *London Review of Books* on 25 January 1985 and was reprinted as a Bloodaxe book in December of the same year. While the poem was well reviewed, Bloodaxe sold only approximately 2100 copies of the poem in its cloth (400) and paper (1700) first editions.[283] Not dismal sales for a volume of poetry, but at the same time not spectacular either. The larger public paid the poem no heed whatsoever, until in 1987 Channel 4 announced its intention to broadcast a film/poem of "v." directed by Richard Eyre. Following this announcement a public furor erupted with newspapers, tabloids, MPs, and other public figures joining in the debate as to whether "v." was literature or obscenity; whether it was high or low art.

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[282] Interview with John Tusa on BBC Radio 3 (on-line transcript).

[283] Byrne (1998) 67.

"v." describes Harrison's reaction when he stops to visit his ancestral tomb on Beeston Hill in Leeds and discovers that it has been desecrated by football hooligans, who are intimately related to the hooligans and London homeless who function as a chorus at the end of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, who have marked the grave with, among other things, words like "CUNT, PISS, SHIT and (mostly) FUCK!"[284] The poem is about much more than the desecration of graves, however, as the graffiti move Harrison to meditate upon the fate of the Leeds working class buried in the graveyard, whose tombstones are now listing due to the worked out coal pit beneath them, and their working class descendants whose fate, in the aftermath of the bitter Coal Miners' strike of 1984/5,[285] seems also to be about to sink into oblivion leaving the working class youth of Leeds with no hope for the future. As the phantom skinhead that Harrison enters into dialogue with in the graveyard says to the poet:

> *Ah'll tell yer what really riles a bloke.*
> *It's reading on their graves the jobs they did –*
> *butcher, publican, baker. Me, I'll croak*

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[284] Harrison (2007a) 265.

[285] In 1984 the British coal industry was in a period of decline. In response to this decline the National Coal Board decided to close twenty mines. While the contract that had been negotiated as a result of the 1974 miners' strike theoretically prevented the closure of the mines, the National Coal Board argued that the 1974 contract was no longer valid due to changes in the British economy. Not only was the National Coal Board unwilling to honor the contract but the Conservative government, under Thatcher's guidance, was determined to curb the power and influence of the British Labor Unions, including, if not especially, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). On March 12 Arthur Scargill, president of NUM, called on the miners to strike, starting a strike that would last almost a year. The 1984/5 miners' strike was one of the most bitter strikes in the history of the country. Scargill did not call a ballot for the national strike action. Under new laws, which required unions to ballot members on strike action, the strike was ruled to be illegal. NUM's assets were seized and miners were denied state benefits and their wages. The government mobilized the police in huge numbers to deal with the picket lines. During the course of the strike 11,291 people were arrested and 8,392 were charged with offences. In March 1985 NUM voted to return to work without a new agreement with the National Coal Board. Ultimately the strike allowed the government to accelerate the closure of a number of mines. In the two decades since the strike one hundred and fifty-six mines have closed. The few British coal mines that remain are privately managed. In the twenty-first century the National Coal Board no longer exists and NUM has all but been destroyed.

doing t'same nowt ah do now as a kid.

'ard birth ah wor, mi mam says, almost killed'er.
Death after life on t'dole won't seem as 'ard!
Look at this cunt, Wordsworth, organ builder,
this fucking 'aberdasher Appleyard!

If mi mam's up there, don't want to meet 'er
listening to me list mi dirty deeds,
and 'ave to pipe up to St fucking Peter
ah've been on t'dole all mi life in fucking Leeds!

Then t'Alleluias stick in t'angels' gobs.
When the dole-wallahs fuck off to the void
what'll t'mason carve up for their jobs?
The cunts who lieth 'ere wor unemployed?[286]

The words are vulgar, but they powerfully evoke cruel aspects of the British class struggle which Harrison would return to in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*.

Like *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, another central theme of the poem is the power and value of words. The poem begins with an epigraph from Arthur Scargill, head of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) during the miners' strike: "My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on your power to master words."[287] "v." seeks to use words to articulate a vast array of versus/verses in life, including that deep conflict that existed in the United Kingdom under Thatcher's government – especially between the northern working class and the southern ruling class and business class – but also within the context of Harrison's own personal life – his relationship to his parents, to his wife – Canadian opera singer Teresa Stratas, to the city of Leeds in which he was raised, and the young men who, were it not for Harrison's grammar school education and poetic vocation, might have been his peers. The poem is very much in the tradition of Harrison's earlier published verse – indeed it draws part of its power for those familiar with his poetry from the fact that he is visiting the grave of his parents who figure so prominently in his sonnet sequence, *The School of Eloquence*.

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[286] Harrison (2007a) 270-1.

[287] *The Daily Express* misrepresented the epigraph as a dedication to Scargill. Harrison (2007a) 263.

Harrison had already elucidated the divisions that existed in his own family which were caused by education and articulation or the lack thereof, and he would go on to explore those same divisions in British society on a larger scale in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. What is new in "v." is the frequency and vigor of obscene words and the deep anger they express, as well as his despair for the future of a united England in the wake of the divisive events of the previous year.

Through its broadcast on Channel 4 and the reprints in various newspapers, the poem reached a larger audience than perhaps any other poem written in the latter half of the twentieth century.[288] The entire experience, however, was very disruptive for Harrison, both personally and professionally. Despite the intimate personal access to his private life that Harrison allows his readers in his poems he is a very private man who avoids publicity, gives infrequent interviews, and chooses to live his life outside of the public spotlight. The furor over "v." resulted in reporters camping out behind his house, and the reporting of details from his personal life that had nothing to do with the poem. While the attention to his private life was not welcome, most distressing was the nature of the public debate about the poem itself. Harrison felt that the whole affair was an artificially created storm which had resulted largely because "the offensive words have been taken out of context by people who have neither seen the programme nor read my poem."[289] As Byrne has written: "Harrison does not ignore offensiveness, he uses it, but *v.*'s invective is directed less against aerosolling skins than against the policies which deprive them of education and employment."[290] In the public debate surrounding "v." there was no discussion of such policies. By and large the debate focused on whether a

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[288] Jonathan Barker has suggested that "when broadcast on television *v.* was experienced by more people than possibly any single poem before or since." Barker (1991) 52. While this is likely not the case when one takes into account a poem such as *The Iliad*, it is very possible that the poem within a single month in 1987 reached a larger audience than any other poem that had never been set as part of a school or university reading list and which had never been anthologized.

[289] Comments reported in a column by Geordie George in *The Sunday Times* on 18 October 1987. The column is reprinted in Harrison (1989) 51.

[290] Byrne (1998) 69.

poem which contained so many obscenities could be considered literature, have any merit, or be anything other than a sign of the decaying moral and literary standards of the late-twentieth century, and whether it ought to be censored. Almost no one expressed concern about the youth of northern England who were poorly educated and saw little prospect of gainful employment in their future. These issues, however, were and still are very real for northern coal-mining communities, and as subsequent studies have shown the mine strikes and closures had and continue to have serious social repercussions for the working-class families and the larger communities in which they live. [291]

In *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* Harrison would reframe his argument to insist on a public discussion of cultural division between high and low, literate and illiterate, and the corporate responsibility of the literate haves for the illiterate have-nots. The national furor surrounding "v." caused Harrison to examine the relationship between his dramatic poetry and his published verse.[292] Each was acceptable, and indeed acclaimed in its own realm, but the published verse became political and divisive when put into the realm of the general public, though not for the politics and divisive issues contained within the poem itself. The dramatic verse was praised within theatrical circles as heralding the revival of English verse drama, but it provoked little discussion of issues outside the world of art until *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*.[293] For Harrison, however, his dramatic

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[291] A 2001 study concluded: "The consequences of industrial contraction are negatively experienced at all levels of community life. Among those miners affected by pit-closure, psychological well-being is impaired by the consequent loss of identity, both as worker and principal breadwinner, by uncertainty and isolation, and by the intrusion of threatening experiences… The brunt of male frustration and anxiety is often borne by their spouses and families. Female partners find themselves buckling under the burden of having a depressed male around the home, while their children may become emotionally alienated from their parents with possible repercussions for their schooling. Across the community as a whole, relationships break down as rituals are abandoned…and youth disaffection is expressed in criminality, drug-taking and disrespect toward traditional pillars of authority." Waddington and Parry **(**2001).

[292] The response to the broadcasting of "v." is documented in the 1989 Bloodaxe edition. Harrison (1989).

[293] A selection of reviews of Harrison's plays up to and including *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* are reprinted throughout Astley (1991).

poetry and published verse were not separate entities – both were integral parts of his poetic imagination and both were facilitated by the nature of his education and his socio-economic background. Harrison wrote, in a letter to *The Times* in response to the furor in general, and to a particular letter from Mr Hector Thomson, "that without the many years I spent acquiring Latin and Greek I should never have been able to compose my poem *v*."[294] And while Harrison's affiliation with classical literature is largely an association made with his theatrical translations and adaptations, his first two publications of translations of classical literature after *Aikin Mata*, which was published by OUP in Ibadan, were translations of the Greek epigrammatist Palladas (1975) and the Latin epigrammatist Martial (1981). Classical literature was not a new subject for Harrison, but the intimate relationship between his classical training and his non-classical published verse, such as "v.", was not obvious until *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*.[295] "v." had turned Harrison's published verse about his parents, which had hitherto been of a private intimate nature despite publication, into extremely public verse. *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* took the class politics of "v." and turned it into the sort of public poetry that had been accessible to his parents and which they appreciated, with the result that his dramatic poetry was now fused with his published verse.

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus stands directly in the classical tradition through its use of the veil of myth and history for political purposes. At the same time this play is also firmly rooted in the present through the politics that it addresses.[296] While Harrison maintains a loyalty to Sophoclean dramaturgy throughout the play, as I will discuss later in this chapter, it is in the titular chorus that Harrison's poetic concerns and Sophocles' original are most closely woven together. The chorus was an integral part of fifth-century Athenian drama, both tragedy and comedy, but for most modern productions of ancient

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[294] Letter to *The Times* Tuesday 3 November 1987. Reprinted in Harrison (1989) 69.

[295] Harrison received a degree in Classics and a diploma in linguistics from Leeds University, where he also began a Ph.D. dissertation on verse translations of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

[296] While Harrison's *The Common Chorus* also uses the veil of myth and history for radical political purposes, the trilogy was never performed.

Greek drama the chorus is a problem that needs to be solved.[297] There are a number of issues which contribute to the problematization of the chorus, and two that are, in my view, particularly significant. The first is that the function of the chorus, which was integral to the ancient experience of fifth-century Greek drama, is completely alien to the modern experience of theatre, not only in its dramatic function, but also, most especially in its political, civic, and social role which extended well beyond the dramatic performances themselves.[298] The second is that ancient Greek theatres were constructed specifically for performances involving choruses, with the orchestra built to accommodate large choral performances.[299] Modern western theatres, with a couple of notable exceptions, are not built to accommodate choral performances.[300] Harrison, however, does not perceive the chorus as a problem to be solved, but rather as a theatrical resource that is to be embraced, and he writes for spaces that can readily accommodate a chorus, such as the ancient stadium at Delphi and the Olivier Theatre.[301]

Harrison's embrace the chorus is directly tied to his conception of the function and power of drama, especially tragedy, in fifth-century Athens, and what he is striving

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[297] On difficulties with the modern approach to the chorus in ancient drama, see Taplin (1997) 172.

[298] Secondary literature on the Greek chorus published in recent years includes: Golder and Scully (1996) 1-114 and Wilson (2000). On the Sophoclean chorus specifically, see Gardiner (1987).

[299] The Greek orchestra was not only large enough to accommodate the choruses of tragedy (12-15 chorus members) and Old Comedy (24 chorus members), but also the dithyrambic choruses (50 members), which performed in competition at festivals such as the City Dionysia.

[300] The Olivier Theatre is an exception, with its design having been based on the ancient theatre at Epidaurus. While the Olivier is readily able to accommodate choral performance most theatres are not. I attended a performance of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* at Stratford, Ontario, a number of years ago where the chorus constantly appeared to be in danger of falling off the edge of the stage.

[301] Bierl, (2005) 291-306, discusses recent approaches to the chorus in productions of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

to achieve with his own dramatic verse.[302] Oliver Taplin ascribes the appeal of the chorus for Harrison to their resilience. The chorus bears witness to the suffering of tragedy and often participates in the suffering but, unlike the central characters in tragedy, the chorus always survives: "And in the theatre this experience is passed on to the audience also. Like the chorus, the audience lives through the tragedy, suffers with it and survives. For Harrison, the audience is not invited to be blandly entertained, but should expect to be put through the emotional and mental mangle, and to come out the other side."[303] In Harrison's theatre the chorus serves as a bridge between the performance and the audience where traditionally there has existed only a wall. Harrison's goal is for an audience's evening at the theatre not to consist simply of watching a play, but rather of experiencing the play – being forced to associate the politics of the play with the world in which the audience live.[304]

In both the Delphi and National productions of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* the most significant definitions of the theatrical space, and the audience's relationship to that space, were accomplished through the chorus, and through the chorus leader Silenus. It is the chorus who play a large role in defining, or at least suggesting location.[305] In the case

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[302] *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* is not the only play in which Harrison uses the chorus. All of Harrison's translations and adaptations of ancient Greek drama provide a substantive role for the chorus. See: *Oresteia* (1981), *Medea: a sex-war opera* (1985), *The Common Chorus* (1988), *The Labourers of Herakles* (1996), *Prometheus* (1998), and *Hecuba* (2005). On Harrison's use of the chorus, see Taplin (1997) 171-187.

[303] Taplin (1997) 173.

[304] Harrison describes his perception of how Greek tragedy functions in the following manner: "Most Greek tragedy shifts its timescale from immediate suffering to some long-term redemption through memorial ritual or social amelioration, or simply through the very play being performed. The performed suffering was old, the redemption contemporary. The appeal to futurity is not simply that 'time heals' because it brings forgetfulness and oblivion, but because creative memory is at work, giving new form to allow the suffering to be shared and made bearable across great gaps of time." Harrison (1998) vii-viii.

[305] The set-design was typical of Jocelyn Herbert's style, in being both visually arresting while spare in its use of objects. She has said: "What's interesting is that if you want to give a feeling of period you don't have to build a set. The kind of chairs you use, or the type of doorway can give a feeling of Spain, or whatever you want." *platform papers*

of Delphi the fellaheen, the local Egyptian workers hired to assist on the dig, through their costumes and actions (digging through piles of sand for papyri, then passing the papyri pieces along to Grenfell and Hunt) invoke the world of Egypt,[306]and through their relay race they define the space within the stadium[307] and evoke the sporting theme.[308] When it is time for the chorus to re-emerge as satyrs, Silenus has the audience help him chant the first words of the satyrs' lines from the fragmentary *Ichneutae*.[309] The audience's chant is echoed by the ghosts of the eight thousand spectators at the ancient Pythian games, connecting the present performance to the ancient past.[310] It is the emergence of the chorus of satyrs from the Egyptian Excavation Fund crates, upon which they immediately begin to do a Yorkshire clog dance, which leads the audience to accept that they have entered the world of ancient Greece and are witnessing a satyr play which has not been performed in twenty-five hundred years.[311] At the end of the play it is the satyrs who reintroduce the present and its politics when they emerge as hooligans, wearing the red and white football jerseys, and burn the papyrus backdrop, thus transforming the stadium into a football pitch.[312]

(1993) 45. It was precisely this style of design that allowed *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* to move effortless through time and space – from Egypt in the early 1990s to ancient Greece and back to the here and now.

[306] Harrison (2004) 27-34.

[307] Most productions staged in the stadium use only a small portion of the stadium's length, which is almost 600 feet long (177 metres). *The Trackers of the Oxyrhynchus*, on the other hand, used most of the length of the stadium, erecting papyri screens 300 feet apart with a substantial performance space for the chorus and actors in front of the first screen.

[308] Harrison (2004) 39.

[309] Harrison (2004) 45-6.

[310] Harrison (2004) 47.

[311] Harrison (2004) 47.

[312] Harrison (2004) 81-85.

The National production varies from the Delphi production in how it uses the chorus and the chorus leader to define the space and the audience's relationship to that space. The fellaheen are again used to help evoke an Egyptian archaeological dig, though this time there was no need, or opportunity, for a relay race to define the playing space within the Olivier Theatre.[313] Silenus still has the audience chant lines from Sophocles' *Ichneutae* in an attempt to call forth the chorus of satyrs, but there are no ancient ghosts roaring in the National.[314] The clog-dancing satyrs again evoke the world of ancient Greece.[315] At the end of the play, however, the National satyrs return the audience to a different present than was evoked in Delphi. At the National the chorus of satyrs brings the world of the South Bank homeless, which in the late-1980s and early-1990s existed literally on the doorstep of the National, inside to the audience.[316] In both plays the audience accompanies the chorus, as they come to represent the socially and culturally disenfranchised of each time and place.[317]

At first the choruses of the Delphi and National productions seem to be representative of different social problems: the Delphi chorus, of European football hooliganism; the National chorus, of the social problems, particularly homelessness, of Thatcher's Britain. For Harrison, however, these are not separate issues, but rather different faces of a single issue: the social divisions, especially class divisions, which exist in and are perpetuated by European culture. Much of Harrison's poetry is driven by social divisions, and a need to reveal them despite the resulting discomfort, with the hope

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[313] Harrison (2004) 91-99.

[314] Harrison (2004) 109.

[315] Harrison (2004) 110.

[316] Harrison (2004) 146.

[317] Grant (1991) 107, has described Harrison's poetry in the following way—and I think it is equally applicable to *Trackers*: "…Harrison's deeply personal theme is first generalized through contemporary English culture and then projected onto the wide screen of history, as the poet offers to speak not just for himself and his own class but for people everywhere and at all times who have been condemned to silence—and impotence: 'the dumb go down in history and disappear' ('National Trust')."

of surmounting these divisions. Richard Eyre has said, "Tony wants the whole body of society, not just its head to be involved in art. He wants art to be accessible to everyone, for the distinction between High and Low to be annulled, and for art to be removed from the clutches of class distinction."[318] The chorus leader Silenus identifies the role of the satyrs as:

> Deferential, rustic, suitably in awe
> of new inventions is what your satyr's for.[319]

It is Silenus, however, who in this play gives an awe inspiring performance, fulfilling his own description of his fellow satyr Marsyas — a description equally apt for Harrison himself:

> It confounds their categories of high and low
> when your Caliban outplays your Prospero.[320]

Both choruses are used by Harrison to examine the divisions between High and Low, and the relationship between those artistic and social divisions. The Delphi text examines the issues through underlining the modern division between art and sport. There is another element to these divisions, however, that while not apparent in the text was apparent in performance.

The costumes of the chorus continually emphasized the class distinction between chorus and central characters. In each production the first two sets of costumes for the chorus were the same. Their first costume is that of the fellaheen, the local Egyptian workers, who are criticized by Grenfell and Hunt, the Oxford papyrologists, for their ignorance of the value of these literary papyri:

> If one of our backs were turned our fellaheen
> would be sloshing Bacchylides on their aubergine.
> If we're not double-quick the local folk

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[318] Eyre (1997) 45.

[319] Harrison (2004) 78-9. These lines do not occur in the National text.

[320] Harrison (2004) 80 and 137. The Delphi text reads slightly differently from the National text: "It confounded the categories of high and low / when Caliban could outplay Prospero."

> will mix Homer and camel dung to grow their artichoke.[321]

The second costume is that of satyrs. Their half human/half-animal appearance immediately puts them in a sub-human category.

> You don't need lyres. You're natural celebrators
> stuck between animal and human status.
> You need no consolations of high art.
> Your human pain's cancelled by your horse/goat part.[322]

The third set of choral costumes differ between the two productions. In the National production the chorus at the end of the play appeared on stage as South Bank homeless, carrying their satyr costumes in plastic bags. Their social status was clear as they curled up to go to sleep in the crate city that they had built outside the National Theatre and the Royal Festival Hall. In the Delphi production the chorus appeared at the end not as homeless, but as football hooligans. While football hooligans in Europe are generally perceived to come from the lower end of the social scale, the costume the chorus wore made clear their social status. These hooligans wore not the yellow and black jerseys of the middle-class AEK Athens football club, but the red and white jerseys of the rival Olympiacos team, a team favored by the working class.[323]

Harrison has used the chorus to revive Sophocles' ancient satyr play and address the modern cultural division of high and low, but he is also commenting on class divisions, as he frequently has in his poetry. The Delphi chorus and the National chorus can be seen as facets of the Yorkshire skinhead with whom Harrison converses in his poem "v.". In "v." Harrison is torn between rage at the desecrators, and sympathy for these youths trapped by the British class system.

> 'Listen, cunt!' *I* said, 'before you start your jeering
> the reason why I want this in a book

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[321] Harrison (2004) 29.

[322] Harrison (2004) 71 and 131.

[323] While the published photographs from performances of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* show only the satyr costumes, see Harrison 1990 and 1991, drawings of the fellaheen and Delphi hooligans can be found in Courtney (1993) 128-131.

’s to give ungrateful cunts like you a hearing!’[324]

Despite Harrison’s striving to give voice to the troubled working class of Leeds —indeed Harrison is most often praised as being the first truly working class British poet —the skinhead ungraciously refuses to allow the hyper-articulate poet to defend him with his voice:

> *Don’t talk to me of fucking representing*
> *the class yer were born into anymore.*
> *Yer going to get ’urt and start resenting*
> *it’s not poetry we need in this class war.*[325]

The interaction between the audience and chorus in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* parallels that between Harrison and the skinhead in *“v.”* We are at first shocked by their crudeness; then we begin to sympathize with their plight, only to be rejected, cursed at, and alienated by them.

In both versions of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* the chorus of satyrs, near the end of the play, begin to resent their inferior status.

> Feellaheen, phallus-bearers only for farce.
> Well, show us a tragedy we’ll show you our arse.
>
> Aeschylus, Sophocles, gerroff our backs.
> We’re hijacking Culture and leaving no tracks.[326]

The satyrs, however, turn not against characters like Apollo, who insist that they be mindful of their lowliness, but against the lead satyr, Silenus, who speaks for them and who is trying to preserve them and lift them beyond their station. As the satyrs move to

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[324] Harrison (2007a) 271.

[325] Harrison (2007a) 273.

[326] Harrison (2004) 83. The National text, 140, reads:

Satyr 1:	Fuck! Fuck!
	Who gives a fuck?
	Who wants a place in papyrus or book.
Satyr 2:	Fuck! Fuck!
	Fuck being part
	Of all that poncy Apollonian art.

destroy the papyrus backdrop which has brought them back to life, Silenus pleads with them not to do it:

> Don't burn the papyrus. We're all inside.
> Don't burn the papyrus. It's satyricide![327]

The chorus of satyrs, however, refuse his pleas saying, "Either fuck off, old feller, or give us a hand." And when Silenus remains still they spurn him saying, "Then fuck off, old feller, back to fairyland." [328] The endings of both versions offer a slightly different take on the situation of the satyrs now that they are bereft of the papyrus fragments from which they emerged. In the final moments of each play Harrison raises the issue of freedom. In both versions Silenus occupies the middle position between Apollo, who has refused the satyrs any place in the world of "high art", and his fellow satyrs, who resent the place in "low art" to which Apollo has relegated them and which they now seek to destroy. In the Delphi production Silenus, having been unable to prevent his fellow satyrs from burning the papyrus fragments which have given them renewed life, says:

> Apollo promised freedom. And free you now are
> but Apollo didn't intend it to go so far.[329]

In the National version Silenus again points to the role of Apollo in the plight of the satyrs. The satyrs believe they are willfully rejecting and destroying Apollonian culture in the form of the papyrus. Silenus sees it differently:

> They don't see it, do they, silly young fools
> how divine Apollo divides us and rules.[330]

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[327] Harrison (2004) 83. The National text, 140, reads:

> You've had your fun there. Don't harm that bit!
> Keep that intact, or we're all in the shit.
> Don't harm the papyrus. Don't blur one iota
> or we'll never again have a home we can go to.

[328] Harrison (2004) 84.

[329] Harrison (2004) 84.

[330] Harrison (2004) 144.

The chorus of satyrs may be crude, destructive, and unappreciative of culture, but Apollo bears responsibility for their behavior as well.

Harrison does not stop here, but forces the audience to consider their own role in social and cultural divisions. As one reviewer described his experience of the play: "It all makes for a vigorous, embattled evening that turns Sophocles' *Trackers* into a tract for our times."[331] Another reviewer remarked: "Personally, this view of the world is news to me, as is the notion that culture actually depends on torture. And yet, and yet…"[332] If one can go by the reviewers, Harrison has achieved his goal, which he described in an interview as follows:

> I think that one of the things I've always tried to build into the way I either take on a former classic, or do a play, or write a poem or make a film of my own, is to realize that somewhere there's a privilege of participation involved, and that there are people outside this privileged participation, who, if I am not able to bring them into the theatre, I can make those who are participating in the privilege, aware that the theatre has glass walls so they see those who are not participating.[333]

Harrison has invited us into his private dialogue, which he has been carrying on for years in his verse, through his public dramatic poetry. At first we are delighted to have been invited to share this hyper-literary world with this poet. Few people are as widely read as Harrison, and even fewer as articulate, but there is a desire when immersed in his poetry to believe that we share a common bond. But to desire to belong to his world is to forget the profound divisions which exist within it.[334] Harrison does not excuse himself from the

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[331] Billington (1990).

[332] Peter (1990).

[333] Interview with John Tusa on BBC Radio 3 (on-line transcript).

[334] While the divisions within Harrison's world are clearly articulated within Harrison's poetry, his poetry is also able to elicit equally divided response. Among the phone calls made to Channel Four the night it broadcast "v." were the following: "11.44. Lengthy call from anon female shouting about that awful man saying C.U.N.T. and F.U.C.K. which she repeated again and again. He was a right trouble maker, you can tell how rotten he was. In her day people were brought up properly." 21.00 Mr. W (London), "I have just finished watching V on my video, and I am so moved the tears are running

discomfort of, and complicity in, the class divisions which exist in Britain and in which literacy plays a large part. The audience of the Royal National Theatre should not be surprised when Harrison makes them uncomfortably complicit in the social and class divisions perpetuated by British society. And yet many in the audience of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* were both surprised and wounded by just that suggestion.

Harrison is open about what he is attempting to do with this play. The chorus of satyrs comes to resent and destroy the literary creation which has given them life and which the audience has come to see. Harrison says, "I use the Oxford papyrologists, who are committed to a higher ideal of Greek culture, in a way, being overthrown by their own discovery. If they follow the logical conclusion of their discovery it should give them a certain sense of insecurity."[335] It should by extension make the audience who experience the play feel insecure. It certainly makes Harrison himself feel insecure and divided. Harrison is committed to a higher ideal of Greek culture. Yet Harrison, too, has been overthrown by his own discovery of ancient Greek literature. Frequently in both his poetry and in interviews Harrison has discussed the internal struggle that resulted when as a "promising" boy from an uneducated and inarticulate family he was sent to a Grammar school, where, by the age of eleven, he was studying ancient Greek. Harrison is keenly aware of what literacy and articulation have given him, and by extension what was not given to those amongst whom he grew up, and like whom he could so easily have become. When the skinhead in "v." has finished cursing Harrison and his 'fucking poufy words' he turns back to his task of defacing the gravestones, and Harrison observes:

> He aerosolled his name. And it was mine.

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus is at once a celebration of text and literacy, and yet at the same time the play mourns for those who have been excluded from this world and who have come to resent it. The chorus defines more than the performance space; they define the world that Harrison inhabits, and also the place of satyr plays within the traditional reception of ancient drama.

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down my cheeks still, so full of compassion, most moved, please accept my deepest appreciation." See Harrison (1989) 72.

[335] Interview in McDonald (1992) 130-131.

A reviewer of the National Theatre production said of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* that, "Sophocles would not have understood Harrison's play."[336] That statement is true in one very specific sense: Sophocles would not have understood the political divisions, between tragedy as high art and satyr plays as low, between poetry and athletics, and, perhaps, between social classes that *Trackers* presents. He likely would have been astounded by the number of audience members who were offended by a play asking them to engage critically with their cultural heritage and its impact upon the world in which they lived. There is little else that Sophocles would not have understood, for Harrison with this play is working very much in the tradition of Sophoclean theatre, more so than most productions of Sophoclean plays. Both are poets extraordinary for their ability to write exquisite poetry, and to tie that poetry to specific spaces, compose it for specific actors, and use stage-design to create memories of unique performances that have the ability to transcend the transient nature of performance while thoughtfully engaging with the political and social context of the world in which they live. Text, stage-design, and performance and the larger societal context are inseparable in the experience of the audience, in the plays of both Tony Harrison and Sophocles.

Since Taplin's book *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* came out in the late 1970s there has been a great deal of research on the stagecraft and dramaturgy of fifth-century Athenian drama, in terms of both general practices and the specific practices of individual authors.[337] Segal firmly established Sophocles' use of significant objects as a prominent aspect of his stagecraft.[338] It is possible to see the degree to which Harrison is engaging with Sophocles by examining the use of visual symbols in significant objects in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* in comparison to their use in Sophoclean plays. These symbols embodied in objects are different from memorable visual scenes or moments. The symbols recur throughout the play becoming increasingly significant rather than relying on a single image for their theatrical impact. In virtually all first-hand accounts of *The*

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[336] John Peter in *Sunday Times*, 1 April 1990.

[337] Taplin (1977).

[338] See Segal (1980) 125-142.

Trackers of Oxyrhynchus, the first appearance of the chorus of satyrs bursting forth from the Egypt Excavation Fund crates stands as the most prominent image that audience members take with them as they leave the theatre. It is a use of distraction (the audience had been led to expect that the chorus would appear from behind the papyrus screen) which is paralleled in Sophocles' *Ajax*, when the character of Ajax apparently commits suicide on stage in front of the audience, requiring the actor playing Ajax to somehow be spirited off stage in order to appear as a different speaking character, adhering to the rule of three speaking actors. Similarly in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, the entrance of Apollo, accomplished in full view of the audience as Grenfell becomes the god, and Hunt emerging from the tent into which he had recently entered as Silenus complete with a very large phallus, are visual surprises comparable to Sophoclean entrances. These visual surprises, which clearly delighted the audience, make their theatrical effect in an instant, and the ability to craft such moments is an important aspect of both Harrison and Sophocles' stagecraft. Visual symbols, on the other hand, build their meaning as the play progresses, often resulting in an overwhelmingly ethical effect, rather than an emotional or pathetic effect. This ethical effect is something that Charles Segal isolates as being a peculiarly Sophoclean trait amongst the ancient tragedians.[339] There are two significant objects in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*: papyri and the lyre.

The papyri constitute the 'fabric' of the play, so to speak. The papyri have several functions, even serving as diapers for baby Hermes.[340] Most visibly, however, they form the backdrop for the play. In Delphi two large papyri screens were erected three hundred feet apart in the ancient stadium.[341] In the Olivier Theatre in London a single papyri screen was the backdrop for the play. This backdrop is important since all the major characters who appear on-stage are defined through their relationship to papyri. The most immediate Sophoclean parallel for such a use of a backdrop is the cave in *Philoctetes* which Segal characterizes as being "expressive of the hero's ambiguous relation to

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[339] Segal (1980) 137.

[340] Harrison (2004) 64, 128.

[341] See Herbert (1991) 285.

civilized society."[342] Philoctetes, a Greek hero was abandoned by his fellow Greek warriors on the way to Troy due to a foot injury that left him with a festering wound that caused him to scream in pain and be a poor traveling companion in general. Abandoned on the island of Lemnos, cut off from civilization Philoctetes has taken up residence in a cave. The only other figure that lives in a cave in extant fifth-century Greek drama is Polyphemus the titular cyclops of Euripides' satyr play and a character with an extremely liminal relationship to civilization. In *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* Grenfell and Hunt are present because of their search for papyri. Grenfell is literally possessed by his desire to find literary papyri, as opposed to the more common documentary papyri, such as receipts and bureaucratic correspondence. Apollo is seeking the papyri that contain Sophocles' lost satyr play *Ichneutae* in which he appears. The satyrs' existence is dependant on the existence of the same papyri fragments. The almost constant presence of the papyri screens serves as a visual reminder that all the characters on-stage are bound in their own ways to the papyri and to the notion of text. The use of papyri over the course of the play, however, comes to represent more than a physical object; it comes to represent the ambiguous relationship of the characters on-stage to culture and art in the twentieth-century.

The visual symbolism of the papyrus backdrop is also significant in terms of entrances. Only divine beings can enter through the papyri – only those who have a place in the artistic world of Apollo. The chorus of satyrs is trapped behind the papyri screens. In both the Delphi and the National Theatre productions the shadowy figures of the satyrs appear behind the papyri screen, but they never enter through it.[343] The only relationship that they are allowed to have with it is to hold up the stage in front of it[344] or tear it down.[345] The literary papyri represent an impenetrable wall for the satyrs. The only

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[342] Segal (1980) 126. See also Robinson (1969) 34-7.

[343] Harrison (2004) 44-6, 108-110.

[344] Harrison (2004) 54-62, 116-125.

[345] Harrison (2004) 83, 146.

characters who enter through the papyri screen are Kyllene[346] and Hermes.[347] Only Silenus in the Delphi production, when he plays at being in a tragedy, can enter through the papyri screen.[348] While not a specifically Sophoclean practice, a parallel can be seen in the fifth-century Athenian practice of having an area of the playing space reserved for the appearance of deities, which provided a visual symbol of their superiority over the other characters on stage, whether this was accomplished through the *mechane* or the *theologeion*.[349]

The papyri backdrop also comes to symbolize the inarticulate anger that the satyrs feel, having been disenfranchised from the world of literary art. It is the papyri screens that the hooligans destroy in their frustration at their disenfranchisement at the end of the play. In the Delphi production the satyrs, despite Silenus' pleas, destroy the papyri screens.[350] They leave only the bare frames from which the papyri screens hung, looking like goal posts, and a now visible space between those goalposts which is marked out like a football pitch, upon which the satyrs begin to play a game with a ball made out of papyrus.[351] In the National Theatre production it is Silenus who destroys the papyrus backdrop, arguing that it can be put to better uses, such as providing bedding for the South Bank homeless, saying:

> And if I'm stuck here in this freezing void
> that papyrus up there can be better employed.[352]

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[346] Harrison (2004) 54, 118.

[347] Harrison (2004) 64, 128.

[348] Harrison (2004) 76-7.

[349] On the use of the *skene* roof and the *mechane* in relation to the presentation of the gods in 5th century drama, see Mastronarde (1990) 247-294. See also Ashby (1999) 81-96.

[350] Harrison (2004) 83.

[351] Harrison (2004) 85.

[352] Harrison (2004) 146.

While the papyrus is being used to try to provide some warmth and comfort to the homeless as they build their crate city out of the Egypt Exploration Fund crates, images of the National Theatre and Royal Festival Hall are projected onto the bare wall of the Olivier Theatre which the papyrus had recently covered.[353] The papyrus comes to represent a physical divider between the world of art and the world inhabited by football hooligans and the homeless. In the world inhabited by these hooligans and homeless poetry has no value, and serves instead as material for makeshift footballs or makeshift beds on the South Bank.

A Sophoclean parallel can perhaps be seen in the use of the robe in *Trachinae*, a play that tells the story of Herakles' return home following the completion of his twelve labors, and his death by means of a poisoned robe sent to him in blind love by his wife Deianira. As Segal says, the robe "is the physical link between their two worlds [those of Herakles and Deianira], the enclosed realm of the house and the wild places where Herakles battles monsters and sacks cities."[354] Deianira intends for the robe to be a symbol that will secure her relationship with Herakles. Fearing that her role as wife will be taken over by the captive princess Iole, whom Herakles has sent home ahead of him, Deianira sends a robe, smeared with what she mistakenly believes to be a love potion, to Herakles as a homecoming gift. The robe is intended to function in the same way that the papyri function at the beginning of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*; it is meant to revive what Deianira fears is lost – her place in Herakles' marriage bed (*Trach*. 531-587). Yet, like the papyri in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* it comes to symbolize not the union of their two worlds, but the destruction of both. The robe once donned cannot be removed and begins to burn Herakles alive. Deianira, belatedly realizing what she has done, commits suicide, knowing that she is responsible for the very thing that she had long feared: the death of Herakles.

Aside from the almost ever-present visual symbolism of the papyri screen backdrops there are also the supposedly insignificant pieces of papyri, which in themselves prove significant, such as the:

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[353] Harrison (2004) 147.

[354] See Segal (1980) 129.

> Petition, petition, receipt, receipt, receipt
> orders for the payment of supplies of wheat.[355]

These are significant because these pieces of papyri are of no interest to Grenfell who is only seeking poetic papyri. He is scarcely more respectful of these papyri than he accuses the fellaheen of being towards literary papyri:

> These chaps, our Fellaheen, can't see what's unique
> about scraps of old papyri in ancient Greek.
> We ship back papyri and decipher them at Queen's
> but the natives used to use them as compost for their greens!
> …
> Though I'm peeved to report so far this expedition's
> pretty short on poetry but piles up these petitions.[356]

Even when the documentary papyri take on more *pathos* in the Olivier production, recording the plight of those who are "poor and alone", Grenfell has no interest in them. Hunt says: "So many petitions!" To which Grenfell replies:

> And not much Sophocles!
> You sort out your ancient waifs and strays
> and I'll concentrate my energy on poetry and plays.[357]

Grenfell's division of the papyri into those which are important and worthwhile, from those which are not, is representative of the class issues which dominate the end of the play. In the National Theatre production Apollo is specific that the literary papyri are his domain and that the satyrs will have to made do with the papyri petitions which represent their own fate in the twentieth-century Apollonian world of art:

> To those whose snouts were made to sniff turds
> I bequeath Greek petitions and four-letter words…
> I prophesy cloggies are condemned to speak
> only the hopeless petitioners' Greek.
> *μη μεταναστης*… 'don't make me a stray'
> Cry the vagrants evicted out of their play.
> *μη μεταναστης* …they'll find every street
> strewn with petitions like that to repeat.

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[355] Harrison (2004) 31.

[356] Harrison (2004) 94.

[357] Harrison (2004) 97.

> I'll keep the poetry and cloggies like those
> will have to exist on petitioners' prose.[358]

Another function of the papyri in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* is to bring the ancient past of the stadium to life. In the Delphi production it is the lines from Pindar's paean for the people of Delphi, chanted by the fellaheen, which calls forth Apollo.[359] It is the chanted fragments of Sophocles' *Ichneutae* which call forth the ghosts of the ancient audiences.[360] It is also the chanted fragments of the *Ichneutae* which call forth the chorus of satyrs.[361] In Harrison's world, papyri, when given voice, have the power to bring the ancient, lost past to life.

The second significant object in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* is the lyre. Before the invention of the lyre in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* all of the music is pitchless, based on what the composer Stephen Edwards calls "elemental rhythms".[362] Those elemental rhythms are intricately tied to the rhythmic footfalls of the clog-dancing satyrs. The introduction of the lyre disrupts these elemental rhythms, and introduces a new pitch-based music to which the satyrs cannot dance.[363] It is the lyre that disenfranchises the satyrs from the world of art. In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* the lyre becomes Hermes' bargaining chip with Apollo, and in part is the means by which he negotiates a place for himself among the Olympians. In *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* the lyre becomes the symbol of the world of refined art, held firmly in the grip of Apollo, who will not allow the chorus of satyrs to even touch the lyre,[364] let alone be a part of the world which it

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[358] Harrison (2004) 133-4.

[359] Harrison (2004) 40.

[360] Harrison (2004) 46.

[361] Harrison (2004) 46-7, 109-10.

[362] See Edwards (1991) 467. The 1990 Faber and Faber edition of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, which contains only the Delphi text, has an appendix that provides samples of the musical score for the play. See Harrison (1990a) 73-95.

[363] Harrison (2004) 75, 136.

[364] Harrison (2004) 70-2, 131-2.

represents. In *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* the lyre is a symbol of power, in the same way that Herakles' bow is a symbol of power in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.

The audience is told at the beginning of the latter play that, according to an oracle, unless Odysseus and Neoptolemus gain possession of Philoctetes' bow, a gift from Herakles, the Greeks will not be able to take Troy (*Phil*. 68-9).[365] Once this information is imparted to the audience whoever holds the bow has the position of superior power on stage – much like Apollo with the lyre. These significant objects have the ability to determine the future world order, and to possess them is to have power. There is, however, an important difference in the symbolic resolution provided by each of these significant objects at the end of their respective plays. In *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are bound together by trust and heroic friendship under what Segal calls "the sign of the bow."[366] The lyre in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, however, creates a "dreadful schism" without any resolution.

John Peter in his review in the *Sunday Times* said that he considered complaining about the fact that "Harrison has written a play of exclusion, division and dissent, whereas Sophoclean drama is finally one of inclusion, union and consent."[367] While this is a fair categorization of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, it seems not adequately to characterize Sophoclean drama. *Oedipus Tyrannus* ends with voluntary self-exclusion (*OT* 1517-21). In *Antigone* inclusion only occurs after three people die as a result of Creon's errors of judgment and the resulting exclusion of Antigone (*Ant.* 1261-1353). In *Philoctetes* the inclusion is forced by the divine intervention of Herakles when trickery and force have failed (*Phil*. 1409-1471).[368] What Sophoclean drama provides rather is a more complete sense of resolution than Harrison. The difference between Sophocles and

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[365] On the ambiguity of the oracle and conclusion of *Philoctetes*, see Robinson (1969) 45-51.

[366] Segal (1980) 133.

[367] Peter (1990).

[368] For the attempted use of trickery, see *Phil*. 70-120; for the attempted use of force, see *Phil*. 981-1044; See further Garvie (1972) 213-26.

Harrison lies not in the kind of drama that they are writing, but in audience expectations. Sophocles' audience was going to the theatre for a religious/cultural/political experience in a common space and light that addressed the experience of the entire *demos* – Sophocles included. Harrison's audience went to theatre to sit as individuals alone in the dark where they expected to be entertained. They did not expect to be brought with the rest of the audience into a common space to share in a common debate about culture in modern society. Harrison and Sophocles are far closer in the theatrical realization of their poetry than many might at first perceive. It is, I think, in audience expectation and reception that the poets differ most. Harrison, to the extent that he is able, imposes his conception of the Athenian theatre experience on his modern audience.

It is in large part because of Harrison's commitment to the ideas about the historical performance context, conditions, and language of ancient Greek drama that as his plays have moved away from translation to more original work his critics have become increasingly vocal. One of the central complaints voiced by some Classical scholars is that the contemporary politics of Greek tragedy were veiled by myth, unlike Harrison's explicit politics. Harrison's translations and close adaptations, however, are not explicit in their politics. It is as Harrison's work has moved away from strict translation to more original verse drama that the political voice has become explicit. Part of the reason for this move towards explicit contemporary politics in the plays was an intense desire to draw the audience, willingly or unwillingly, towards public poetry that addresses the issues of the citizen body. Harrison is committed to the idea of public poetry, drawing heavily on his understanding of the ancients who wrote their poetry to be performed in a communal setting, and to provoke contemplation and discussion in a public setting. He firmly believes in the political value and power of public poetry, but as he has said: "You have to work with what you've got if you want to create a public voice for poetry. I am interested in how you speak publicly as a poet. That is why I wrote *The Trackers*. It is emblematic of how the past comes through to us. What I would normally say is 'look at this version of an ancient play.' I am now saying 'this is my play, which has an ancient heart.'"[369] While *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* incorporates a translated

[369] Lennon (1990).

text, its primary identity is not that of a translation and its approach to the performance of politics is that of Harrison.

Chapter 4: *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* and *The Labourers of Herakles*

Are we still strumming the right lyre
to play us through the century's fire?

From *The Gaze of the Gorgon*[370]

Harrison's poetic output was prolific between 1990 and 1995. He produced four film/poems[371] and four plays.[372] All of these works share an increased geographical and political scope and an obsession with the construction and deconstruction of memory.[373] Of these works two were plays built upon classical models, which Harrison and his team staged in the summer of 1995. *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*[374] was given two performances in the Roman amphitheatre of Carnuntum/Petronell just outside Vienna on 2 and 3 June. *The Labourers of Herakles* was given a single performance on the site of what would

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[370] Harrison (2007b) 162.

[371] Harrison's work has pushed poetry into forms that require their own description of genre, from poems such as "The Cycles of Donji Vakuf" written for *The Guardian* that are front-line reports on the war in Bosnia (on Harrison's work for *The Guardian*, see Rusbridger), to poetry written specifically for the medium of film. The texts of the film/poems, like movie scripts, have lines interspersed with directions for images, actions, and camera shots. Without the accompanying images the poems lose the immense emotional effect that is gradually built through both word and image. The film/poems from this period are: *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992), *Black Daisies for the Bride* (1993), *A Maybe Day in Kazakhstan* (1994), and *The Shadow of Hiroshima* (1995).

[372] The plays include: *Square Rounds* (1992), *Poetry or Bust* (1993), *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* (1995) and *The Labourers of Herakles* (1995) were not, however, his first plays produced since *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. The number of plays goes up to five if one counts the National Theatre version of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1991).

[373] For a short discussion of Harrison's artistic development during this period, see Kustow (1996) vii-ix.

[374] While the play was published under the title *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, the title on the program and tickets was Tony Harrison's *Marcus Aurelius*.

become the new theatre of the European Cultural Centre of Delphi (ECCD) on 23 August. These were Harrison's first classical plays since *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* had its final run at the National Theatre in 1991, but they differ from their predecessors because of their engagement with non-canonical classical authors (Martial and Phrynichos) and their site-specific nature. Both are concerned with cultural memory; each play sought to reassert something that Harrison perceived to have been lost. In Delphi he resurrected the memory of the fifth-century Athenian poet Phrynichos whose work survives only in a small number of fragments, but who, according to the ancient historian Herodotus, wrote a historical tragedy about the fall of the Greek city-state Miletos to the Persians which so upset the audience that the poet was fined and his play banned.[375] For Harrison it represents the loss of a play that faced up to the suffering and horrors of the world for which it was written, and the loss of the memory of a poet who insisted that in their time of celebration at the festival in honor of Dionysus his audience recognize the collective failure of humanity. In Carnuntum, also known by the modern name of Petronell, Harrison resurrected the long forgotten emperor Commodus to reconsecrate the Roman amphitheatre as a place for killing, and to reassert the ugly violence of Roman Imperial power, which he suggested was being willfully whitewashed by modern caretakers and patrons. Both plays examine poetry, the mythic heroes that populate it, and the cultural functions of both.

The Kaisers of Carnuntum

The Kaisers of Carnuntum is unique among Tony Harrison's classical plays in that its subject matter is Roman rather than Greek. Harrison is forthright about his dislike of Roman Imperial culture. He has said in an interview:

> I loathed the way the Romans adapted almost every ancient Greek theatre into a killing place. Even the great theatre of Dionysus in Athens has marble slabs which are clearly blood-guards so that people in the front row didn't get splashed. For the Greeks, when something terrible happens a messenger would come on and tell you about it in spellbinding language. The ear goes much closer

[375] Herodotus 6.21.2.

> than the eye would ever accept. Their masks always had the eyes and mouth open.
>
> But the Romans used to get prisoners out of the prison, dress them up as Hercules and literally burn them. It was snuff theatre. It was an expression of power to kill 100 rare ostriches in a morning, but after the Greek theatre, it was such a failure of the imagination.[376]

It is surprising in light of such comments that Harrison chose to write a Roman play.[377] I would argue that this play, however, is a poetic response to his dislike of Rome and all it represents, and a lament for the death of the poetic imagination, which he perceives the realities of Roman Imperial power made inevitable. It is not Roman art or literature that Harrison objects to – he devoted a number of years of his life to study of Vergil's *Aeneid* – but rather what Roman Imperial power did to art, something that arguably began with the *Aeneid*. The play is an examination of this point of view of art in Roman society through both the historical narrative of Commodus, and the use of a number of source texts, the most important of which I will argue is epigram 24 from Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum*, a collection of epigrams written to celebrate the opening games of the Roman Colosseum, known in antiquity as the Flavian Amphitheatre.

Harrison has explicitly associated Martial's *Spect*. 24 with his own play *Kaisers*.[378] The epigram in its entirety reads:

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[376] Wroe (2000).

[377] Marianthe Colakis, (1998) 25, has argued that Harrison intended this play to be "a Senecan tragedy for today". This interpretation, however, misses the central argument of the play which is that poetry fundamentally failed in the face of Roman Imperial power. I have no doubt that Harrison would insist that this was equally true, if not more true of Senecan drama, which even if it was performed, was certainly not performed in a common space and a common light, but rather for an elite audience who all were a part of and benefited from the Imperial governing structure. This argument also seems to miss the implicit criticism of the life of a Stoic philosopher, by which one such as Marcus Aurelius could not only produce a son like Commodus, but would willingly pass control of the empire into such a monster's hands, a criticism which is equally appropriate to Seneca and his pupil Nero. Far from emulating the art forms produced by Imperial Rome, Harrison is pointing to the fundamental failure of its art and literature, from poetry to philosophy to public performances, to face the horrors of the world in which it existed.

[378] Harrison (2001) 15.

Quidquid in Orpheo Rhodope spectasse theatro
dicitur, exhibuit, Caesar, harena tibi.
repserunt scopuli mirandaque silva cucurrit,
quale fuisse nemus creditur Hesperidum.
affuit immixtum pecori genus omne ferarum
et supra vatem multa pependit avis,
ipse sed ingrato iacuit lacerates ab urso.
haec tantum res ut est facta, ita ficta alia est.[379]

Martial, *Liber Spectaculorum*, 24 (21)

Harrison points to his borrowing from the final line of the epigram for a couplet spoken by Commodus:

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[379] I have given the final line of the epigram as Harrison cites it in his essay *The Tears and the Trumpets*. However, this is not the generally accepted reading of the last line, which is corrupt in all extant manuscripts. Housman, (1901) 154-5, argued that the line should be amended to read:

haec tantum res est facta, παρ᾽ἱστορίᾳ.

This emendation has been universally accepted as correct. Harrison appears to be citing a text that predates the emendation, though I would not go so far as to argue that Harrison himself is unaware of the emendation. Kathleen Coleman translates the epigram as follows in her commentary on Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum*:

> Whatever Rhodope is said to have seen in one of Orpheus' stage-performances, Caesar, the amphitheatre has displayed to you. Cliffs crawled and a wood ran forwards, a wonder to behold; the grove of the Hesperides is supposed to have been just like that. Every kind of wild beast was there, mixed with domesticated animals, and above the minstrel there balanced many a bird; but he fell, torn apart by an unappreciative bear. This was the only thing that happened contrary to the story.

See Coleman (2006) 174, 174-181.

On page 499 of Harrison's *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* notebooks is the following poem, attributed to T. H. after Martial:

Caesar, your arena nowadays displays
the wonders Orpheus did in Thracian days—
rocks move to music, the very trees uproot
themselves and dance to the magician's lute.
Every beast man knows is drawn
and every creature of the upper air,
but the singing bard gets literally torn
to pieces by the lyre-deaf Scottish bear.

Everything before was all pretend, an act
we take feeble fiction, make it fact.

> Greek blood shed is all *ficta*, ours is *facta*
> we Romans really kill the fucking actor.[380]

The associations between Martial's epigram and Harrison's play, however, go far deeper than the borrowing of the *ficta*/*facta* contrast for a single couplet. It is my argument that the entirety of *Kaisers* is engaging with this particular epigram and Harrison's own interpretation of it. The play is a gladiatorial battle between art (*ficta*) and reality (*facta*), in which *ficta* finally attempts to avenge itself against the bloody realism of the Romans.

The influence of Martial, and *Spect*. 24 specifically, on *Kaisers* is not, at first glance, obvious. The central character in the play is the emperor Commodus who came to the imperial throne nearly eighty years after the death of Martial.[381] However, the play deals with themes that are central to Harrison's interpretation of Martial's poetry and *Spect*. 24 in particular. Harrison reads Martial's epigrams as a poetic response to the reality of Roman imperialism. Martial did not live in the golden age of Catullus, Horace, Vergil and the other Augustan poets, an age when poets could look to Roman imperialism as a potential solution for Rome's multitude of political and social troubles. Martial arrived in Rome in the final years of the emperor Nero's reign.[382] He was witness to the harsh *facta* of Roman Imperialism. It is Harrison's interpretation that the weight of Roman imperial history led Martial to the conclusion that he could not write the hopeful elegiac poetry of his predecessors. So while Martial's epigrams are infused with allusions to earlier Golden age Latin poets, particularly Catullus and Ovid, their tone has much in common with his fellow disillusioned Silver age poets, such as Juvenal, Lucan, and Statius. In *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* Harrison explores a world in which "all roads lead to the Colosseum and to the blood-curdling charade of the death of Orpheus literally and

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[380] Harrison (1996a) 76.

[381] Lucius Aurelius Commodus was the sole emperor of the Roman Empire from 180-192 AD, having co-ruled with his father, Marcus Aurelius, from 177-180 AD. Martial is thought to have died between 101 and 104 AD.

[382] Epigrams 10.103 and 104, which date to 98 AD, report that Martial had been living in Rome for thirty-four years. If this is an accurate biographical detail, it would indicate that Martial came to Rome in 64 AD, the year before the Pisonian conspiracy and four years before Nero's suicide.

fatally enacted before 50,000 Romans."[383] That is to say a world in which all roads lead to the moment during the opening games of the Colosseum which Martial immortalized in *Spect*. 24.

Structurally there are three parts to *Spect*. 24. The first couplet, compares the theatre of Orpheus to the Flavian Colosseum. The next two couplets describe the power of Orpheus' poetry. The final couplet addresses the death of Orpheus. In what follows I will discuss the relationship of *Kaisers* to each part of the epigram.

The first part of the epigram reads:

> *Quidquid in Orpheo Rhodope spectasse theatro*
> *dicitur, exhibuit, Caesar, harena tibi.*

Orpheus was said to have been born on the slopes of Mount Rhodope. As a result Orpheus is at times referred to as *Rhodeopeius* (Ovid, *Met*. 10.11-12, *Ars Amatoria* 3.321, Sid. *Carm*. 9.287) and Rhodope is associated with the music of Orpheus. The opening lines of the epigram claim: "Whatever Rhodope is said to have seen in the theatre of Orpheus, Caesar, the amphitheatre has displayed to you."[384] The conceit in the couplet is common throughout the epigrams in the collection: the Flavian amphitheatre offers up to Caesar and the audience all the wonders of the world. The final line of *Spect*. 1 says that Fame shall speak of the amphitheatre in lieu of all other wonders of the world, while *Spect*. 6 claims that whatever Fame sings of, the arena will present.[385] The opening line of *Spect*. 24, however, is a study in incongruity. What Rhodope witnessed in the theatre of Orpheus was a display of harmony in nature. As Harrison has noted "Orpheus is the first non sword-wielding hero in the myths."[386] Everything that Orpheus

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[383] Harrison (2001) 14.

[384] Translated by Coleman (2006) 174.

[385] *Spect*. 1.8: unum pro cunctis Famam loquetur opus.
"Fame will tell of one work instead of them all." Translated by Coleman (2006) 1.
Spect. 6 (5).4: quidquid Famam canit, praestat harena tibi.
"whatever Legend sings, the amphitheatre offers you." Translated by Coleman (2006) 62.

[386] Harrison (2001) 6.

represents— man in harmony with nature, the ability of music and poetry to conquer death — is slaughtered in the gladiatorial arena. What Rhodope witnessed was a display of man and nature becoming one. What was witnessed in the Flavian amphitheatre was a display of Imperial Rome's conquest of both man and nature.

The Kaisers of Carnuntum begins in many ways just as *Spect*. 24 begins, with Orpheus in the amphitheatre playing his lyre. Not only is he in the Roman amphitheatre of Petronell/Carnuntum in Austria, but he is in a space where all roads literally lead to the Roman Colosseum. The stage directions described the performance space as follows: "The amphitheatre has four tribunes of modern seating. Behind each is a scaffolding 'border tower' of the kind recently familiar to this part of the world. In the centre is a map of the world as conquered by the Romans; in the very centre of this, in Rome, is the Colosseum. Under each tribune, covered with Roman gladiatorial mosaics, are cages which contain lions and a tiger."[387] The play opens with Orpheus in the middle of this space, quieting the lions and tigers with his music, and "playing a kind of threnody for all the slaughtered beasts."[388] Performance space and text come together to imbue each other with additional meaning and resonance.

Harrison frequently draws attention to performance space in his productions and uses the space to create meaning in the play. As discussed in chapter three, in the Delphi and National Theatre productions of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, for example, the different performance spaces were used to complement the central themes of the play. The Delphi production emphasized the lack of division between art and sport in the ancient world, while the National Theatre production addressed the social divisions present in Thatcher's England. Harrison uses space to create meaning in a similar way in *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*. Harrison uses the physical space and performance history of the Roman amphitheatre to evoke the imperial brutalism of the Roman Empire. As Commodus says:

> This space wasn't built for tragic plays,

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[387] Harrison (1996a) 65.

[388] Harrison (1996a) 65.

for your Sarah Bernharts and your Lord Oliviers
….
Not for your *Cosis* or your sopranos trilling,
but for just one purpose: killing, killing, killing![389]

However, through the use of "border towers" behind the audience seating areas, the space comes to signify both ancient and modern imperial powers. Harrison examines our collective cultural memory of the past, and indeed our collective response to similar contemporary imperial reigns. Harrison uses the Roman Colosseum and the amphitheatre at Carnuntum as *lieux de mémoire*, to use Pierre Nora's term; sites of memory endowed by the collective cultural imagination with a symbolic aura.[390] Nora noted "that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications."[391] In this play, as in other works, Harrison is engaging with the metamorphic nature of mythic characters, texts and sites that provide him with spaces endowed with significance by both the past and the present; spaces in which collective and cultural memory has been repeatedly constructed through the centuries.[392] He uses the physical space of the Roman Colosseum and other Roman amphitheatres to force the audience to reconcile the reality of the use of those spaces with modern idealized reconstructions of both the spaces and the culture that produced them. He writes:

Oh why
This modern squeamish need to Disneyfy
this space that was made for men and beasts to die?[393]

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[389] Harrison (1996a) 75.

[390] Nora edited the seven-volume project *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992) which sought to examine the construction of French national identity. An English translation of his introductory essay, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*", was published in *Representations* 26 (1989) 7-24.

[391] Nora (1989) 19.

[392] On Harrison's engagement with Greek and Roman mythology and history as *lieux de mémoire*, see Marshall (2008) 221-236.

[393] Harrison (1996a) 75. A variant line from Harrison's *Kaisers* notebooks, page 409, that was not included in the final version, articulates the same idea slightly differently: "a Disneyfication of the past / where beasts weren't slaughtered or men weren't gassed."

The Roman amphitheatres, both in Rome and in the Roman provinces, were intended for one purpose: to display the power and wealth of Rome.

Harrison made the association between the Roman Colosseum and the provincial amphitheatres, as well as their function, in a number of ways. The audience was first made aware of the dangerousness of the original function of the amphitheatre through the presence of live, caged lions and tigers under the audience seating, and the "border towers" behind them. Harrison also drew attention to the association between the amphitheatre in Carnuntum, in which the audience was watching *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, and the Roman Colosseum through the set-design of Jocelyn Herbert. On the floor of the amphitheatre was painted a map of the entire Roman Empire.[394] In the centre of this map was a miniature model of the Roman Colosseum, the most famous of all Roman amphitheatres. The audience is invited to associate the amphitheatre in which they are sitting with the amphitheatre in Rome, and to associate their cultural and political functions as well. The final way in which Harrison reminded the audience of the amphitheatre's function was through Commodus' speech after he has killed the sign-maker who decorated the sign for the amphitheatre with comedy and tragedy masks.[395] Commodus insists that the Romans did not use these spaces to put on plays but rather for slaughter. Indeed, Commodus goes so far as to tell the audience that they have been deceived into coming to see a play, when in fact they are going to witness a gladiatorial show.

> The idiot deserved to die. He led you all astray
> and deceived you into thinking you were here to watch a play
> …
> I, by shedding this fresh blood, hereby
> reconsecrate this place as one where creatures die.
> As the great emperor/gladiator, I hereby restore

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[394] It is not entirely clear from the textual description what was included in this map. No date is specified for the Roman Empire envisaged by this map. Over the course of the Empire its boundaries were in a fairly constant state of flux as new provinces were conquered and old provinces rebelled.

[395] Harrison (1996a) 74.

this Roman ruin to is real function: GORE![396]

While that is not true on a literal level (no one really dies), it is true on a representative level. As I have already said the play is a gladiatorial battle between art (*ficta*) and reality (*facta*). The play ends when *ficta* (Orpheus) finally attempts to avenge itself against the bloody realism of the Romans (Commodus) by killing it. The space added meaning beyond what was in the text, dismantling the tourist friendly construction of the amphitheatre as a place for the performance of comedies and tragedies and insisting on the brutality of the amphitheatre's original function and the reality of the brutality that has historically accompanied all imperial power.[397]

The use of space to create poetic meaning is very important in terms of the relationship between *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* and Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum*. *Liber Spectaculorum*, at its core, is all about the symbolic meaning of space. The purpose of the epigrammatic collection was the celebration of the opening games of the Colosseum, and thereby a celebration of Imperial power. As Martial notes in the second epigram of the collection, the Flavian amphitheatre was built on what had been the site of the lake of Nero's *Domus Aurea*. Nero's *Domus Aurea*, or Golden House, had been built on land conveniently emptied of other structures by the great fire of 64 AD and was notorious for its extravagance.[398] The Flavian emperors who built the Colosseum were reclaiming land for the people of Rome, which many felt had been stolen by a previous emperor.[399] At the same time, however, the Colosseum was a symbol of Rome's power

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[396] Harrison (1996a) 75.

[397] It was seeing a new signpost which bore the masks of tragedy and comedy while on a visit to the Roman amphitheatre at Carnuntum that inspired Harrrison to write *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*. He said in an interview (*The Guardian*, 27 May 1995), "This irritated me because it was not a theatre. It was a place for killing. I thought: 'Ah, they are trying to sanitise this space. This is a signpost to a sanitised version of history'. There is a great temptation in this part of the world to sanitise history. They want Mozart, but they don't want Hitler."

[398] For a discussion of this epigram, see Coleman (2006) 14-36.

[399] The Colosseum was begun under the Emperor Vespasian and completed under Titus.

over their provinces and subjects.[400] Within the Colosseum the Emperor sponsored spectacles that contributed, through the provision of free entertainment which could also serve as a deterrent against dissent, to his status and popularity.[401]

Harrison on the other hand is questioning modernity's tendency to venerate imperial monuments from both antiquity and more recent times. To venerate these monuments necessitates whitewashing their nature and purpose. The Colosseum was paid for with booty from the province of Judea after it was crushed for revolting in 70 AD. No one (by analogy) would venerate a monument built by the Nazis with booty taken from Jews in the Second World War. Yet Harrison sees in the reconstruction of a sanitised memory of the Colosseum and its provincial counterparts the human propensity toward a revised collective historical memory which in time would allow for the veneration of modern monuments built by means gained through human savagery, including the Holocaust. It is not coincidental that Harrison chose to stage this play in Austria where the collective memory has since the Second World War been fashioned and refashioned to present itself as a victim of Nazi expansionism, rather than a complicit collaborator in and beneficiary of Nazi policy.[402] It is, or at least should be, ominous that Mussolini saw his reign as a direct heir of Augustan imperialism, and that he attempted to use ancient imperial monuments to build up his own status and popularity.[403] As Nora argued, "Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived."[404] In Europe there is no space that is

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[400] The Roman Colosseum was paid for with part of the booty acquired by the Romans through the crushing of the revolt in the province of Judea. See Alföldy (1995) 195-226.

[401] On the social function of gladiatorial games, see Coleman (1990) 44-73. See also Futrell (2000).

[402] On memory and the Second World War in Austria, see Ludi (2004) 116-152.

[403] Painter (2007).

[404] Nora (1989) 8.

without history. Harrison certainly is not advocating pulling down the spaces whose history we do not like, but he is arguing that it is imperative that we accurately remember their history. There are places where horrific acts have been committed in the name of consolidating political power; and Harrison would like us to remember that the Colosseum, and other Roman amphitheatres, are among them.

The second section of the epigram is about the purported power of Orpheus:

repserunt scopuli mirandaque silva cucurrit,
quale fuisse nemus creditur Hesperidum.
affuit immixtum pecori genus omne ferarum
et supra vatem multa pependit avis,

The first line claims that, "Cliffs crawled and a wood ran forward."[405] This is compared in the second line to what the grove of the Hesperides was said to be like.[406] The third line states that there was a mixture of wild and tame animals present, while the fourth line adds birds to the list of flora and fauna. What exactly is being described here is not entirely clear. As Kathleen Coleman warns, "Any reconstruction of the enactment in the arena has to be entirely hypothetical." Nevertheless, she suggests that, "Mobile scenery was perhaps wheeled into the area from the perimeter into the centre…For the 'Orpheus' display we should probably envisage wooden platforms on which actual rocks and saplings were displayed …[or] a combination of three-dimensional props and painted flats."[407] Any description of the animals present must be similarly hypothetical. Coleman argues that *genus omne ferarum* must surely be an exaggeration "given the pandemonium that would have resulted if it were anywhere near true."[408] While the particulars of the

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[405] Coleman (2006) 174.

[406] The Hesperides were nymphs who guarded a tree of golden apples that Gaia gave to Hera when she married. The sisters, whose reported numbers range from three to seven, were renowned for their singing. Kathleen Coleman suggests that the comparison in these lines comes from the association of the singing abilities of the Hesperides with the abilities of Orpheus. On the mythology of the Hesperides, see Gantz (1993) 6-7, 410-13.

[407] Coleman (2006) 174.

[408] Coleman (2006) 174.

performance are not clear the general gist is: in the middle of the arena was a man holding a lyre, surrounded by rocks and trees, that by some means have been given locomotion, and by a variety of animals and birds, some wild, some tame, but most certainly including a bear.

Harrison also used live animals in his play. Caged lions and tigers were under the audience bleachers.[409] Orpheus enters at the end of the play leading a live bear.[410] Other, now dead, animals are represented symbolically through lumps of meat and fake ostrich heads.[411] Harrison, however, expands the association with the amphitheatre and animals far beyond the context of *Spect*. 24. Harrison associates the hacked up bits of meat from Commodus' murderous exploits with the human slaughter wrought by other more recent dictators. In the most moving speech in the play Commodus' mother, Faustina says:

> Sometimes when I imagine that I hold
> my Commodus again a one-year-old,
> I cradle carcasses whose eyes can't close,
> to whom no gentle rocking brings repose.
> I find my blood-flecked arms are full
> of hacked up bits of bear and bull,
> meat bundled up in bloody rags
> of boldly flown, but now abandoned flags,
> and I have to add my bitter mother's cry
> to this abattoir's black lullaby,
> along with Klara and with Rosa,
> each a *mater dolorosa*,
> cradling Adolf's or Benito's tons
> of other mothers' meat that once was sons,
> and with Yekaterina, whose cradled darling
> sucked milk, and then sucked blood as Joseph Stalin.[412]

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[409] Harrison (1996a) 65. The use of live animals is an impediment to the play being restaged in the western world where animal protection laws would in most cases prohibit such uses of animals in performance.

[410] Harrison (1996a) 104.

[411] Harrison (1996a) 82-84.

[412] Harrison (1996a) 99-100.

The slaughtered animals of the gladiatorial arena are associated with the millions of humans slaughtered in Europe by twentieth-century dictators. While the Colosseum might contain the horrors of imperial power on small scale in both animal and human blood, in the amphitheatre in Carnuntum Harrison asked his audience to recognize that the map of Europe has been drenched by bloodshed for which modern civilization has been the audience.[413]

The final two lines of this epigram provide the punch-line.

ipse sed ingrato iacuit lacerates ab urso.
haec tantum res ut est facta, ita ficta alia est.

As Coleman translates it, "he fell, torn apart by an unappreciative bear. This was the only thing that happened contrary to the story." She notes that "the idyllic scene of Orpheus' charming nature is transformed into an enactment of *damnatio as bestias*…The particular irony here is that the bear that tore 'Orpheus' apart can be characterized as showing a lack of appreciation for his spell-binding music."[414] The structure of this epigram has been characterized as the "rule and exception" type in which a rule is stated (here the traditional version of the myth), followed by an exception (the presentation in the arena).[415] To this straightforward analysis of this epigram, Harrison would add a more poetic reading. He has written: "It is a shocking and blasphemous enactment of where the triumph of *durus* over *mollis* (I think inevitably) leads. I have always read it as an elegy for the death of the imagination, and with the death of the imagination the death of compassion."[416]

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[413] An uncomfortable moment for the audience came when Commodus, played by Barrie Rutter, encouraged the audience to give a thumbs up or down to save or slay the victim in the gladiatorial arena. As he had the audience repeat the gesture over and over it came to closely resemble a Roman salute, which since World War II has been associated with Nazism and Fascism. Having enticed the audience into enthusiastic salutes, Commodus' commented, " Your collective wish is my command. / All you have to do is show it with your hand. / You see how democratic dealing death can be." Harrison (1996a) 87.

[414] Coleman (2006) 174.

[415] See Coleman (2006) 174.

[416] Harrison (2001) 15.

The Kaisers of Carnuntum could also be said to follow the "rule and exception" type. Everyone knows that imperial power triumphs over poetry. It was this realization that lead W.H. Auden to write, "For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives…".[417] For those in the audience who were not familiar with Martial *Spect*. 24, Commodus summarizes it not once but twice near the end of the play, first saying:

> They dressed a man as Orpheus and a bear
> ripped him to pieces though he played
> with panicky desperation a lyre serenade.[418]

And finally:

> I saw my first man killed by a wild bear.
> The man was dressed as Orpheus, whose guitar
> didn't save his guts or get him far.[419]

There should be no doubt for the audience that the result of Orpheus being put in the gladiatorial arena with a bear will be Orpheus's death. But at the end of the play, contrary to expectation, Orpheus kills, or appears to kill, Commodus in the middle of the miniature Colosseum. For a brief moment poetry seems to be victorious. Orpheus wielding his lyre has struck a blow for poetry. Yet as Tony Harrison enters the arena to do the same, Commodus comes back to life and chases the representatives of poetry out of the arena. We may want poetry to change the world, but those who are armed with nothing but music and poetry have no hope against swords and clubs.

Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum* 24 is not the only text that Harrison draws on for *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, but is structurally and thematically the most significant. Harrison is enamored with the figure of Orpheus, and understandably so. Orpheus did not wield a sword, bow, or club like the other Greek heroes, but was armed only with a lyre and his voice. Harrison associates Orpheus with poetry detached from the heroic ideals, and with poetry that "gives scope for frailty, tenderness, doubt, tears, and sorrow."[420] He

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[417] W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats."

[418] Harrison (1996a) 101.

[419] Harrison (1996a) 104.

[420] Harrison (2001) 7.

sees Orpheus' poetry as the voice of human tenderness and fragility which has no place in the heroic martial world. Orpheus' song laments the dead, it does not valorize death as a necessity on the road to imperial splendor. Yet at the same time Orpheus, especially as manifested in *Spec*. 24, is also emblematic of the ineffectuality of poetry in the face of the carnage wrought by the quest for imperial power. Harrison has written, "The torment of Orpheus bloomed into a tenderness unknown in the heroic world, and impossible to maintain for more than a moment among martial clamor. We shouldn't forget how brass, the *aera cornua*, and percussion drown out the magic lyre of Orpheus in *Metamorphoses* 11. 15-17:

> *sed ingens*
> *clamor et infracto Berecyntia tibia cornu*
> *tympanaque*

How can the lyre make itself heard above the din of clashing steel, the killing and screaming?"[421] *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* suggests that the only way for a poet to make himself heard in such circumstances is to join in the killing. The nature of poetry, however, is not *durus*, the hardness required by murderous war, but rather *mollis*, softness. When a poet is asked to write poetry celebrating a monument such as the Roman Colosseum, Harrison might argue that it is inevitable that they would produce an elegy lamenting the death of the imagination and compassion. Harrison wants his audience to remember, and give careful consideration to the fact that Orpheus cannot survive in places like Roman amphitheatres, nor can the poetry or dramatic arts that he represents. The amphitheatres were built for men like Commodus and they are monuments to their murderous reigns. Humanity and poetry might fail to stop reigns of brutality, but they both have the power of memorial construction to enable the truth to survive.

Herakles/Hercules in *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*

Both *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* and *The Labourers of Herakles* are in different ways about Herakles, known in Latin as Hercules, and were conceived of by Harrison as

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[421] Harrison (2001) 7.

part of a trilogy of plays examining that figure. Harrison had first begun to explore the reception of Herakles in *Medea: a sex-war opera*. Harrison's primary interest in that work was in comparing how differently Herakles was remembered in later centuries from Medea, despite the fact that there were considerably more works in antiquity which explored his misdeeds and frequently monstrous behaviour, including the slaughter of his wife and children, than there were about Medea, whose infanticide may have been a Euripidean innovation in 431BCE.[422] As the title expresses, *Medea: a sex-war opera* is about issues of gender and associations between gender and violence. Gender continues to be an important aspect of Harrison's exploration of Herakles, but these plays focus far more on what it means to venerate this figure, associating the violence of his mythology with the violence of both the past and the present, and again exploring the malleability of collective cultural memory.

In both *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* and *The Labourers of Herakles* the figure Herakles is intimately associated with the bloodsoaked history of Europe, both ancient and modern. As with the Colosseum, the narrative of Herakles has been santised. In his modern incarnations, from weekend live action and cartoon television fare to feature-length animated films, Herakles has become synonymous with modern conceptions of heroism, defined by good, usually self-less, deeds and is presented as a clean cut, remarkably hairless, do-gooder. In some instances his mythology has been so sanitised that there is little left beyond his superhuman strength and divine parentage. In antiquity, however, Herakles was a much more complex and ambiguous figure. To quote M. S. Silk:

> Herakles was the greatest and the strangest of all the Greek heroes. A long list of superhuman acts of strength and courage stood to his name, and above all else the famous twelve labours, which began with the Nemean lion and ended in the capture of the monstrous watchdog Cerberus in Hades. He was a great slayer of monsters, also a great civilizer, founding cities, warm springs, and (as Pindar was fond of reminding his audiences) the Olympic festival. He suffered

[422] On Medea and the Medea myth before and after Euripides, see Mastronarde (2002) 44-70. See also Gantz (1993) 358-373. For the mythology of Herakles see 374-466 in the same volume.

> prodigiously, and he maintained prodigious appetites, for food, drink, and women. He may have had friends, but none close (as, say, Patroclus and Achilles were close), but he did have one implacable and jealous enemy, the goddess Hera. He had two marriages: the first set of wife and children he killed in a fit of madness; the second brought about his own death. He was the son of a mortal woman, Alcmena, and the god Zeus, with Amphitryon as a second, mortal, father; and after his death (by most accounts) he became a god himself and lived on Olympus.[423]

This description, however, downplays the antisocial aspects of Herakles. As Jameson has put it, "On his approach one may expect the livestock to be devoured, the dinnerware to be smashed and one's maiden daughter to be impregnated. Somehow the efforts of teachers, both ancient and modern, to portray Herakles as the champion of civilization versus bestiality and barbarism are not wholly convincing."[424] It is this dichotomy of description, to which one might also add the dichotomies of his life which encompass god/mortal, male/female, saviour/destroyer, conqueror/ slave, most individualistic of Greek heroes/most widely worshipped of Greek heroes, that seems to fascinate Harrison, in addition to the means by which Herakles accomplished all of his feats. Regardless of whether Herakles was committing a civilizing act or a destructive act both were accomplished by the same use of brutal superhuman strength. From cradle to grave it was violence that defined the narrative of Herakles.

The figure of Herakles was in antiquity one of many facets, and these facets were exploited on the Athenian stage in tragedy and comedy alike. Among our very limited extant plays Herakles appears as a tragic character in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* and *Philoctetes*, and Euripides' *Herakles*. In *Philoctetes* he appears as benevolent saviour, a *deus ex machina* to bring resolution to the play's central conflict (*Phil*. 1408). *Herakles* and *Women of Trachis* are clearly engaging with each other, though the direction of that engagement is unclear due to the fact that neither play can be securely dated, and each presents a disparate account of the hero. In Euripides' play, Herakles, having been driven

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[423] Silk (1985) 1.

[424] Jameson (2005) 15-35.

by the goddesses Madness, under instructions from Hera, to slaughter his family (822 - 935), explicitly rejects his divine parentage in favour of human relationships: the friendship of Theseus and parental love of Amphitryon (1261-68). In Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, on the other hand, he is stripped of any vestige of humanity, including his physical flesh that is being burnt away by the robe of Nessus in the second half of the play.[425] His presence in other, now lost, tragedies is well-attested.[426] He appears as a comic figure with a penchant for food, sex, and violence in Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Frogs*, and Silk claims that "he was the single most popular character in Attic satyr-drama…and he was apparently the mainstay of the Sicilian Epicharmus' mythological burlesques".[427] In Euripides' *Alcestis* he appears on stage in two of his guises: comic buffoon with gluttonous appetites and the superhuman accomplisher of heroic deeds. Herakles also had a large presence in the ancient world aside from his depiction in a variety of guises on the Athenian stage. He appears in the earliest extant Greek literature in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in which Homer tells his audience that Herakles slaughtered Iphitus, despite being a guest in his house, and stole his horses (*Od*. 21.31-8). He also appears in other ancient Greek poetry of a wide variety of genres. He received worship as both a god and a hero throughout the Mediterranean world. Despite there being numerous heroes in the ancient world that had well-developed mythologies and who received cult worship, the stature of Herakles and the mythology that surrounded him was such that he was the hero that Alexander the Great chose to publicly present himself as an incarnation of, as would the emperor Commodus centuries later.

Commodus was not the first emperor to seek to associate himself with Hercules in the public eye, but he seems to have been the first, with the possible exception of Alexander the Great, to completely elide political propaganda and personal identity,

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[425] For a discussion of these two plays and their relationship to one another, see Silk (1985) 1-22.

[426] For a list of lost plays in which Herakles may have appeared, see Silk (1985) 3-4.

[427] Silk (1985) 4.

perhaps himself failing to perceive the line between reality and state sponsored fiction.[428] Different emperors emphasized different aspects of Hercules' mythology. Trajan encouraged orators to associate himself and Hercules, and was presented by Dio Chrysostom as a Herculean "helper and protector of [the Roman] government."[429] Domitian preferred to emphasize how deserving of deification Hercules was, and therefore, how much more deserving he would be.[430] Commodus, while undertaking the usual acts of association such as having new coins minted that explicitly associated Commodus and Hercules and erecting statues which depicted Commodus in Herculean garb, also appeared in public dressed as Hercules, at times fighting in the gladiatorial arena in this costume.[431] The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, a collection of biographies of Roman emperors, records that not only did he appear in the gladiatorial arena dressed in a lion skin and carrying a club, but also dressed in women's clothing, thus imitating Hercules in the period in which he was enslaved to Omphale, queen of Lydia, and forced to wear women's clothing and do women's work.[432] Commodus, however, preferred to kill lions and men while dressed up in this outfit.[433] The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (9.6) also tells how he gathered up men who were lame or could not walk and wrapped up their legs from the knees down in order that their legs might be serpentine so that they would look like giants, which the ancients imagined had serpents for legs. Then

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[428] On Trajan, Domitian, and Hadrian's use of Herculean imagery and associations as propaganda, see Hekster (2005) 205-208. For a broader survey of the use of Herculean imagery and imperial rule, see Palagia (1986) 137-51.

[429] Dio Chrysostom, *On Kingship* A, 84.

[430] See Martial, *Epigrams* 5.65.

[431] For Commodus' use of coinage and statues to associate himself with Hercules, see Hekster (2005) 210.

[432] See Gantz (1994) 439-442.

[433] clava non solum leones in veste muliebri et pelle leonina sed etiam homines multos adflixit. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae,* 9.6.
Translation by Magie (1922) 289: "He struck with his club, while clad in a woman's garment or a lion's skin, not lions only, but many men as well."

reenacting the battle between Hercules and the giants, he shot them with arrows or beat them to death with his club.[434] These performances were an extension of his life-long fascination and active participation in gladiatorial battles. It is said that he fought a thousand gladiatorial battles and that he killed thousands of wild animals, including elephants, with his own hands.[435] Such performances have led many to suspect that Commodus had but a slight grip on reality.

Hekster, however, has argued that the evidence suggests that Commodus had a coherent programme in his use of rhetoric, iconography, symbols, and ceremony to present himself to the Roman populace as the god-emperor Commodus-Hercules.[436] It is exactly this coherent programme of mythic analogy for the purpose of imposing political control through violence – modern, historical, mythical and the ways in which all three of those intersected in the gladiatorial arena – that interests Harrison. *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* in large part examines what happens when these mythic narratives are appropriated by those who wield tyrannical power. In the play he is specifically examining the case of Commodus, but by extension he is also examining Mussolini, Hitler, Milosovic and other European dictators who have used "coherent programmes", often built around mythic and historical narratives, to inflict violence more brutal and horrorific than Commodus' gladiatorial games upon the people of Europe.[437]

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[434] Dio (73.20.3) also tells a version of this story in which the men were given sponges that looked like rocks to throw at Commodus while he killed them with his club. Dio also adds that after this Commodus wanted to reenact Hercules' defeat of the Stymphalian birds, his sixth labor, but that many avoided the arena for fear that they themselves would be shot by the emperor's arrows.

[435] *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, 12.10-12.

[436] Hekster (2005) 213.

[437] One such example was the deliberate modeling of the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on the Roman Colosseum for the 1936 Olympic Games by the Nazi party under the leadership of Adolf Hitler. Genocide scholar Ben Kiernan (2007) has argued that cults of antiquity are one of the markers of genocidal regimes.

The Labourers of Herakles

The Labourers of Herakles was produced for a single performance at Delphi on 23 August 1995. Harrison had originally intended to produce his long-planned version of Euripides' *Alcestis* at the Delphi festival.[438] However, when the necessary funding was not forthcoming, Harrison scaled back his ambition from the entirety of Euripides' *Alcestis*, to a production built around the only extant fragment of Phrynichos' *Alcestis*. The fragment consists of five words:

σῶμα δ'ἀθαμβὲς γυιοδόνητον τείρει[439]

The play itself displays the evidence of its fragmentary source texts, and its hasty composition. It is the least polished of Harrison's work. Oliver Taplin wrote,

> *Labourers* is not likely to go down as Harrison's greatest theatre work. Both text and performance betray signs of being put together under pressure. At Delphi it met with a 'mixed' reception from its predominantly Greek audience. To some extent they may have been defeated by the characteristic verbal and dialectal virtuosity. But they may well have also found the didactic message of Phrynichos, played by the poet himself, too overt. And there was, arguably, an excess of esoteric allusions. Arguably, even, Harrison failed to fulfill his own admirable maxim: that the play should be self-sufficiently accessible, without requiring any homework or footnotes (no matter how many may have gone into the *poiesis*.)[440]

At the same time, however, the lack of polish also provides insight into Harrison's composition process.

With this play one can catch glimpses of the mechanics and stages of Harrison's composition habits. As Taplin alludes to in his comments on the play, a great deal of research goes into Harrison's plays. Not only does Harrison research his topics in detail,

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[438] For a brief discussion of this play in the context of the reception of Euripides' Herakles, see Riley (2008) 340-342.

[439] For a discussion of the fragment see Dale (1954) xiii-xiv, and Parker (2007) xv-xvi. It is difficult to make sense of the fragment for which Taplin, (1997) 224, has suggested the translation, "He [Thanatos?] wears out his [Herakles'?] fearless, limb-shaking body."

[440] Taplin (1997) 182. For a more enthusiastic assessment of the play, see Kustow (1996) xxi-xxiii.

but he also then uses the sources and evidence that he has compiled to make his own forceful argument, frequently arguing not only for how his audiences should 'read' his play, but also how they could and perhaps should read his intertexts. When Harrison graces a volume of his work with an introductory essay, frequently the range and breadth of this research can be glimpsed, as well as the argument in which the work is intended to engage. For example in the introduction to his feature length film-poem *Prometheus*, Harrison discusses not only the expected text, the Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound*, but also Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, as well as other works by Shelley and Byron. In addition he comments on the critical response to Shelley's drama by scholars such as H. S. Mitford and H. H. Anniah Gowda, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Karl Marx, various authors who have associated Byron with Prometheus, various works that associate Prometheus with industrialization, psychoanalytical works on fire, fire in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, fire at Auschwitz, the association between fire and film, and film and poetry. Those are the major threads of the discussion, amidst which there are numerous smaller threads. As is typical of Harrison's work, however, even when he points his audience towards his major intertexts, it is frequently difficult to identify them within his final production, or if they are readily identifiable to disentangle them from both the other intertexts and the argument for which Harrison is employing them. This is not true for *The Labourers of Herakles*.

Amidst Trish Montemuro's file for the production of *The Labourers of Herakles* there are photocopied pages from Harrison's notebooks as well as correspondence with the ECCD. There are articles on the history and composition of cement, images of different models of cement mixers, an article on the principles of lime burning, passages from various ancient works such as Herodotus' *Histories* and the fragments of Phrynichos, entire articles and excised passages from secondary scholarly works on these and other ancient sources, images of the early twentieth-century excavations at Delphi, images of refugees in Bosnia, newspaper articles on the political situation in Bosnia, the appendix "Genocide in our lifetime" from Ed Vuilliamy's book *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia's War*,[441] a map upon which Harrison has worked out the distance

[441] Vuilliamy (1994).

between Athens and Miletos, and Delphi and Bosnia, among numerous other small passages and bits of correspondence. Unlike Harrison's other works, however, *The Labourers of Herakles* does not integrate this research in a particularly cohesive way, and frequently the ideas and the sources stand side by side in the text, in contrast with Harrison's usual tightly woven text. The ancient texts referred to each stand on its own, and these texts are readily identifiable from Herakles slaughtering his children in the messenger speech of Euripides' *Herakles* (*Her*. 922-1015) to the fatal cloak given to Herakles by his wife Deianira in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*. The fragments of Phrynichos are explicitly identified as such by the actors.[442] Then, having laid out his primary texts one by one, Harrison begins his own composition, starting primarily with the speech of the Spirit of Phrynichos, in which he argues for how the audience should interpret and respond to those primary texts: namely that ancient Greek drama responded to the world in which its audience lived and addressed some of its darkest moments, and that modern production of Greek drama should not ignore modern suffering, especially the suffering endured by women in times of war.[443]

In its concern for modern suffering and its use of fragmentary dramatic texts *The Labourers of Herakles* resembles *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. Like *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* it continues the momentum of Harrison's work moving away from the 'translations' of his early career towards the original but profoundly intertextual work of his later career. It was written to be performed in Delphi, and is built around the fragments of a fifth-century Athenian play. At the same time there is substantially less of the ancient text, and substantially more of Harrison in this play both figuratively and literally. While *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* provided the audience with translations of most of the Greek used in the play, and a fairly close translation of the extant remains of Sophocles' *Ichneutae*, *The Labourers of Herakles* provides no translations of the fragments and testimonia upon which it is built. Even the text of Harrison's play is fragmentary, dependant in many places on the stage directions for the meaning and intent of the lines to become clear. And, while frequently choices made in production can

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[442] See Harrison (1996a) 134-142.

[443] On Harrison's speech as the Spirit of Phrynichos, see Rylance (1997) 147.

convey a clear meaning and intent for lines and actions, this lack of clarity was also at times evident when the play was performed.

The Faber text begins with nearly five pages of stage directions, occasionally interspersed with fragments of ancient Greek – what remains of the ancient tragedian Phyrinchos.[444] From Phrynichos' *Alcestis* comes the fragmentary line, "*σῶμα δ'ἀθαμβὲς γυιδόνητον / τείρει*".[445] From *Women of Pleuron*, Harrison uses the largest extant fragment of Phrynichos' work:

> *στρατός ποτ' εἰς γῆν τήνδ'ἐπεστρώφα ποδί,*
> *Ὕαντος ὃς γῆν ναῖεν, ἀρχαῖος λεώς,*
> *πεδῖα δὲ πάντα καὶ παράκτιον πλάκα*
> *ὠκεῖα μάργοις φλὸξ ἐδαίνυτο γνάθοις.*[446]

At no point in the play are these fragments translated or even paraphrased in English for the sake of those in the audience who do not know Greek.[447] This is one of the points of inaccessibility pointed to by Taplin. In other plays that incorporate Greek it is usually translated or glossed for the audience, particularly when the meaning of the Greek is intrinsic to the play. For example in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* the petitions are both read aloud in Greek and translated:

> Hunt: Petitions to some proconsul sent from Rome
> not to be evicted from their Oxyrhynchus home.
> *μη μεταναστης.....μη λειμω συναπολυμαι.*

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[444] I follow Harrison in using the transliteration which most closely reflect the Greek in spelling Phrynichos, as opposed to the Latinized Phrynichus. When quoting other scholars, however, I maintain the spelling found in their text.

[445] For the complete fragments of Phrynichos, see Snell (1971) 69-79.

[446] The text used for page reference is that of the Faber text, which is likely to be the text of reference for most readers. The Greek, however, is taken from Snell (1971) 74. Snell's text differs from the *Arion* text, which also includes accents and diacritical marks which are absent from the Faber text, though they are in the texts that Harrison sends to his publishers, in that line 2 in Snell Ὕαντος ὃς where Harrison's text reads Ὕαντος δὲ. This is a copying error that has reduplicated the δὲ from line 3 in place of ὃς in line 2.

[447] Translation by C.W. Marshall: An army that dwelt in the land of Hyas [Boeotia], an ancient host, once invaded the land with infantry, and a swift flame consumed all the fields and the seaside plain.

Grenfell: Apollo!
Hunt: No, *συναπολυμαι*. . . 'Don't let me die!'
λειμω. . . 'of hunger' . . . it's quite a constant cry
with *μη μεταναστης*. . . 'Don't make me homeless, please!'[448]

More recently in *Fram* Harrison had the character of Gilbert Murray quote a line from Euripides' *Herakles* and then explain its meaning and significance to the audience:

> *Ουκ αν τις ειποι μαλλον η πεποωθαμεν* (*Herakles*),
> one of the greatest tragedies of the great Euripides.
> The messenger enters. His first words in Greek are these:
> *Ουκ αν τις ειποι μαλλον η πεποωθαμεν*.
> What he is saying's that the horror that's occurred's
> too terrible for anyone to put into mere words.
> And then from line nine-two-two to ten-fifteen
> he lets us know in detail the horrors that he's seen.
> Ninety-three lines in graphic, passionate succession
> giving the unspeakable poetic expression.[449]

In contrast to these examples, in *The Labourers of Herakles* the Greek is neither translated nor glossed. The stage action provides no assistance in deciphering the possible meaning of the Greek and the scattered fragments reveal nothing of the stage action, which involves a group of labourers at a construction site in Delphi preparing to pour cement for what will be the foundation of the new theatre at the ECCD, a statue of Herakles rising up from beneath the construction site, and one of the Labourers becoming possessed by the madness of Herakles and killing his 'children', bags of cement from which red scarves are pulled forth.[450] Finally, after a "long 'dumb-show' – perhaps

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[448] Harrison (2004) 97. In the Delphi text of *Trackers* there are passages of ancient Greek, Pindar's "Paean for the People of Delphi" for example, that are not translated, but the surrounding context provides sufficient information regarding its content for those in the audience unable to comprehend the Greek. See Harrison (2004) 34-35.

[449] Harrison (2008) 10.

[450] Harrison (1996a) 122. The scene is reminiscent of the images contained in Harrison's sonnet "Fire Eater" which tie together comedy and violence, and knotted scarves pulled from guts with the need to bear witness to things profoundly difficult to speak of. See Harrison (2007a) 182.

fifteen minutes' worth", Labourer 1 comes to life as the statue of Herakles.[451] This is all before the first lines written by Harrison have been spoken.

When Labourer 1, now speaking as Herakles, finally begins to speak Harrisonian verse his words do not explain what had come before, but rather begin to describe the role Heracles played during the Persian Wars:

> When Greece squared up to Persia, the one and only shrine
> They sought protection from was Herakles's, mine.
> …and my huge figure rose
> out of the swamps of Marathon to help defeat your foes. [452]

Herakles then brings in the Athenian playwright Phrynichos, whose play *The Fall of Miletos*,[453] a response to the sack of Miletos by the Persians in the wake of an unsuccessful revolt, resulted in the playwright being fined:

> Medizing appeasers banned THE FALL OF MILETOS
> and fined, for his politics, the poet, PHRYNICHOS.
> Though this poet wrote me four plays for myself

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[451] Taplin (1997) 182.

[452] Pausanias (1.15.4) describes the depiction of the battle of Marathon painted on the wall of the Stoa Poikile in the Athenian Agora, constructed in the fifth century BCE during the reconstruction that followed the Persian Wars. The final painting in the stoa reportedly displayed Athena accompanied by four heroes who either were reported as visible in the battle, Theseus (Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 35.5) and Ekhetlaios (Pausanias 1.32.4), or who received cult worship at Marathon, the eponymous hero Marathon and Herakles. Herodotus (6.116) also tells us that the Athenians, having drawn up and then departed from the sacred precinct of Herakles in Marathon, then camped at the sanctuary of Herakles at Kynosarges when they returned to Athens in order to prevent a second Persian landing there. Bowden has argued that while Herodotus may not be explicit in regard to divine intervention by Herakles on behalf of the Greeks in the Persian Wars, that this insistence on the importance of the army camping in the sanctuaries of Herakles, along with the evidence of the Stoa Poikile, as well as other sources, clearly suggests that Herakles was perceived to have provided aid. See Bowden (2005) 1-13. It is not clear where Harrison has taken the image of Herakles rising out of the swamps from. Plutarch (*The*. 35.5) tells us that Theseus was seen assisting the Greeks in battle, and Pausanias (1.32.4) describes Ekhetlaios's appearance in battle dressed as a farmer and carrying a ploughshare. I can find no source, however, that describes Herakles as appearing during battle with the Persians.

[453] The title of the play is also frequently translated as *The Sack of Miletos*, and some translations prefer the Latinized place-name Miletus.

(which I trust are on everybody's library shelf!)[454]

It is Herakles and the lost plays of Phrynichos which the ideas of the play centre around, and to which other ideas accrete.

There is not really a plot to the play, which is typical of Harrison's non-translation works. Harrison's original theatre is fundamentally a theatre of ideas, in which the development of the play is not about the advancing of an event or events or the development and motivations of a character or characters, but which typically builds itself around an examination of human nature (usually its darker side) and the response of art to that nature and its place and function in the world created by man. Taplin has written that, "This play is centrally concerned with the female chorus of Greek tragedy."[455] The invention of the female role in Greek tragedy (a development ascribed to Phyrinchos by the *Suda*) and the function of women within fifth-century Athenian tragedy certainly is one of the themes of the play, but it is one theme among many, all of which build towards an argument about what the function of Greek drama ought to be. What is unique about the themes of this play is that for the most part they stand side by side, one leading into the other, but not woven together in the polished style typical of Harrison's other plays. The first important theme introduced is the physical Greek theatre. The second is the character of Herakles. Herakles in turn introduces the theme of war and then the idea of drama as a response to war, which also incorporates the invention of the female role on the Athenian stage. All of these themes come together in the speech of the Spirit of Phrynichos, delivered by Harrison himself.

While it is easy to miss, the nature of the physical ancient Greek Theatre is a central theme. The nature and purpose of the performance space is emphasized in the first lines of the stage directions:

> *A construction site in Delphi, where the foundations are being laid for a new theatre for the next millennium. It is to be based on the familiar shape of the ancient Greek theatre with a central*

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[454] Harrison (1996a) 126.

[455] Taplin (1997) 179.

circular orchestra.[456]

The play was performed on an excavated site on the grounds of the ECCD where the Centre planned to build a new outdoor theatre: The Phrynichos Theatre.[457] Harrison has articulated his view that a central feature of the ancient Greek theatre was that the plays were performed "in a common light".[458] Of course, *The Labourers of Herakles*, like all plays performed at the Delphi festival was performed in the darkening dusk.[459] Nevertheless, for Harrison the communal space of the Greek theatre is intimately tied to the chorus, which was performed in "a shared space and a shared light" in which not only did the audience see the action and actors, but the actors and chorus also saw the audience, creating a theatre of reciprocity.[460] *Labourers* explicitly discusses this reciprocal relationship between audience and performers and the lack of reciprocity in the modern theatre as they begin to pour the concrete that will be the foundation of the orchestra in the new theatre:

> Attention! Attention! We are now about to lay
> the concrete orchestra where choruses will play.[461]

Having poured the concrete though, the chorus become stuck in it. While considering the plight that they find themselves in the Labourers discuss what the function of the space

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[456] Harrison (1996a) 119.

[457] While dramatic performances have been held regularly at the ancient stadium at Delphi, concerns had repeatedly been expressed by some that these performances would lead to the degradation of the archaeological sites used. The new theatre was intended to address these concerns. Construction began in 1995 and was completed in 2005. The opening production in the theatre was the final performance of Harrison's translation of *Hecuba* for the RSC.

[458] Harrison (2004) 5-6.

[459] Harrison had attempted to have his first production in Delphi, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, staged during the day, but was vetoed by the festival organizers who insisted that it be performed in the late-evening as were the rest of the plays.

[460] Harrison (2004) 4.

[461] Harrison (1996a) 130.

will be (theatrical performances), who the audience will be (not the Labourers who would "sooner watch the fucking football on TV"[462]), and the audience's failure to intervene in the stage-action:

> Labourer 4: What about that lot over there?
>
> Labourer 2: All they're allowed to do is sit and stare.
> However deep the sorrow, or severe the pain,
> they think we're only here to entertain.
>
> …
>
> Labourer 1: No audience in Delphi, Athens, Epidaurus
> has ever been more useful than the helpless chorus
> at saving Agamemnon from the fatal chop
> or yelled at Clytemnestra, 'Stop! Stop! Stop!'
> or stopped wide-eyed Cassandra from being hacked.
> They're audience. They're not allowed to act.
>
> …
>
> Labourer 3: Not one of them's ever going to intervene.
> They've been programmed not to stop the scene.
>
> Labourer 4: Even to save us from starvation?
>
> Labourer 5: Ay!
> They're just going to sit there and watch us starve.

To a certain degree *The Labourers of Herakles* is an impassioned plea for the kind of interventionist drama that Harrison believes the new theatre should be used for; a theatre that does not just restage ancient Greek plays, but that uses the plays performed in it, both ancient and modern, to address the horrors of the world in which we live:

> Once more the mourning women trudge the roads
> Of murderous Europe. Look at them, and sing your odes.[463]

It is not only a plea for the Phrynichos Theatre to use its space to perform a certain kind of drama, but it's also pleading that it not be used for the sort of performances being staged at the Roman amphitheatre in Carnuntum; the plays must be aware of the realities

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[462] Harrison (1996a) 131.

[463] Harrison (1996a) 145.

of the space in which they exist, both past and present, the culturally edifying and the morally reprehensible. For Harrison, the theatrical space reaches far beyond the perimeter of the physical theatre space to encompass the geographical location of the performance space on the doorstep of the Balkans. Like *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, as discussed earlier in this chapter, this play advances the argument that European drama should address the blood-soaked history of Europe, stretching back to antiquity, as well as its ongoing modern horrors. For Harrison, in resurrecting the ghosts of antiquity there is a moral obligation in how and what we remember that is owed to both the past and the present.

It is the fragmentary plays of Phrynichos that Harrison uses to introduce the ability of drama to address contemporary horrors. Phrynichos was an early Athenian tragic playwright. The notoriously unreliable *Suda* tells us that he won his first victory between 511 and 508 BCE, he was the first to introduce female characters in tragedy, and was the inventor of the trochaic tetrameter.[464] Based on the chronology provided by the *Suda* Lloyd-Jones has suggested that Phrynichos must have been born before 530 BCE, and that his career was long, as he was competing as late as 476 BCE when he won a victory.[465] Aristophanes' *Frogs* (908-10; 1298-1300) tells us that at the start of Aeschylus' career Phrynichos was his rival.[466] What remains of Phrynichos is a very scant handful of fragments and a number of titles.[467] Yet despite the lack of any substantial piece of Phrynichos' poetry, he looms large in the history of Athenian drama

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[464] The *Suda* or *Suidas* is a historical encyclopedia compiled around the end of the tenth century AD. Few primary texts were consulted and the book is primarily a compilation of passages derived from earlier compilations. Despite its flaws and at times obvious errors, it is an extremely important work for Classical scholars as it preserves a great deal of information from both early and learned sources which are now lost. See Wilson (1983) 145-7.

[465] Lloyd-Jones (1990) 230.

[466] Aristophanes also tells us in *Wasps* (219-20) and *Birds* (737-) that Phrynichos' melodies were honeyed and delightful. Phrynichos was also famous for his dances, and one of his dance movement seems to be parodied at the end of *Wasps* (1490-2). See Lloyd-Jones (1990) 225-237, 236.

[467] On what is known of Phrynichos' plays, Lloyd-Jones (1990) 231-236.

because of the story told by Herodotus (6.21.2) about his play *The Fall of Miletos*. The play was apparently based on a very recent historical event, the sack of Miletos in 494 BCE following a failed rebellion against the Persian occupation. Athens had initially sent twenty triremes to assist the rebellion, but they withdrew their support well before the rebellion failed. In response to the revolt the Persians sacked Miletos, which had previously been the centre of Greek culture in the ancient world. Most of its men were slain and the women and children were taken as slaves (Herodotus 6.19.3). It is not entirely clear what the plot of the play was, but according to Herodotus (6.21.2), the play was banned and Phrynichos was fined a thousand drachmas.[468] This anecdote is often used to explain the lack of historical tragedies on the Athenian stage, with the argument being that plays about heroes and gods allowed the audience the mythic distance necessary to examine the culture in which they lived.[469] And it is in part against this view of drama that Harrison is arguing, suggesting that drama's value lies not in its ability to entertain, but rather in its ability to face up to the very worse things that humanity can imagine, especially when those horrors are reality in some parts of the world in which we live.

There are two parts of Phrynichos' biography that Harrison picks up on: the Athenian response to the *Fall of Miletos* and the invention of the female role in Greek

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[468] Herodotus (6.21.2) says: *καὶ δὴ καὶ ποιήσαντι Φρυνίχῳ δρᾶμα Μιλήτου ἅλωσιν καὶ διδάξαντι ἐς δάκρυα τε ἔπεσε τὸ θέητρον καὶ ἐζημίωσάν μιν ὡς ἀναμνήσαντα οἰκήια κακὰ χιλίῃσι, καὶ ἐπέταξαηκέτιν μηκέτι μηδένα χρᾶσθαι τούτῳ τῷ δράματι.* Translated by Purvis in Strassler (2007) 435: "when Phrynikos composed his play on the capture of Miletus and produced it on stage, the audience burst into tears, fined him 1,000 drachmas for reminding them of their own evils, and ordered that no one should ever perform this play again." As Roisman, (1988) 15, has pointed out a great deal of information is missing which would allow us to understand precisely what happened. "It is unclear when Phrynichos' play was performed, why it caused the Athenians to shed tears, and how the Athenians' show of grief is related to the fine they imposed upon the poet and their banning of his play."

[469] The only extant historical Greek tragedy from the Classical period is Aeschylus' *Persians*, which tells of the Athenian victory over the Persians from the Persian point of view. This interpretation of the reasons for Phrynichos' punishment of course presumes numerous things about the nature and function of Greek tragedy, which is a large and on-going debate in classical scholarship. For two points of view on this debate, see Griffin, (1998) 39-61 and Seaford (2000) 30-44.

tragedy. The first speech of Herakles/Labourer 1 in the play introduces both suggesting that it was in this play that Phrynichos first brought on women:

> and, though I applaud he wrote Milesian scenes
> to sting the cowardly appeasers, I'm not keen on the means
>
> he used to do it. He, Phrynichos, the first
> to bring on wailing women...[470]

It is in the speech of The Spirit of Phrynichos, delivered by Harrison, that Harrison makes clear what he perceives the significance of both of these events to be and how closely they are intertwined.

> …Phrynichos, who gave theatre a start
> in redeeming destruction through the power of art
> and, witnessing male warfare, gave the task
> of mourning and redemption to the female mask…[471]

Harrison goes on to associate past and present, drawing links between the tragedy of Miletos in 494 BCE and Bosnia in the 1990s. The play ends with Labourer 3 singing:

> *Halosis Miletou*
> a title with no play
> but the text's in front of you
> in Bosnia today.[472]

Harrison also seems to argue that there are certain events that are so awful that mythic narratives would serve to allow the audience too much distance from them:

> The Spirit of Phrynichos cries out, 'Cast aside
> mythology and fables and look at genocide!
> Cast aside mythology and turn your fearful gaze
> to blazing Miletos, yesterday's, today's.

For Harrison Phrynichos serves as the reminder that the theatre has a social obligation to present to its audience horrific stories that it is inclined to turn away from, especially the horrors of Europe's history which many would like to forget.

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[470] Harrison (1996a) 126.

[471] Harrison (1996a) 143.

[472] Harrison (1996a) 150.

Herakles in *The Labourers of Herakles*

In *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* Harrison examined how Herakles was received by the Romans in general, and the emperor Commodus in particular, foregrounding aspects of his mythology, such as cross-dressing and murder, which the cultural tradition has tended to forget. *The Labourers of Herakles*, on the other hand, does not seek a single aspect or representation to focus on, but picks up multiple strands of the Herakles narratives, focusing on how he was received in fifth-century Athens. As the earlier discussion of Herakles suggests, there was not one conception of Herakles in fifth-century Athens, but many, frequently conflicting, conceptions. The first reference to Herakles in the *The Labourers of Herakles* is derived from the scholarly interpretations of the extant fragment of Phyrinchos' *Alcestis*, quoted earlier. The fragment is generally taken to belong to a passage describing Herakles wrestling with death and so to the virtually undecipherable Greek of the fragment, delivered by The Voice from the Silo, Harrison has used editorial suggestion of Snell regarding the possible context of the fragment as a verbalized stage direction Heraklhw Yanaton palaivn nika . . . , delivered by Labourer 1.[473] Labourer 1 then mimes Herakles wrestling with Death. This is followed by the collapse of the timber planks in the centre of the cement mixers which reveals an ancient statue of Herakles. The stage directions tell us, "*It is as if the statue has come up through the silo from the underworld, where Herakles has been wrestling with death for the body of Alkestis*."[474] The statue, which itself draws upon the excavations at Delphi which took place in the early twentieth-century, provides the segue from the Herakles of the Phrynichos fragment to the Herakles of Euripides' play.

The statue having appeared amidst the Labourers, "*Labourer 4 becomes possessed with the madness of Herakles and launches into a manic percussion solo…Finally he transfers his madness to Labourer 1, who had been assuming the pose of the Classical statue.*" It is not clear how we are to interpret the percussion solo of

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[473] Snell (1971) 73. Translation: Heracles, wrestling, defeats Death (?).

[474] Harrison (1996) 122.

Labourer 4. Perhaps this scene represents the potential for artistic creation which resides in Herakles' violence. This interpretation is, I think, supported by the scene that follows which clearly represents the destructive element of Herakles' violence. During Labourer 4's percussive interlude, Labourer 1 has assumed the pose of the statue and has positioned his shirt to resemble the lionskin and his shovel to resemble the club of the statue, the iconographic markers of Herakles.[475] Once Labourer 4's scene is over, Labourer 1 destroys the statue of Herakles with his shovel and then begins to attack bags of cement, "*hauling out of the ripped open stomachs yards of red and white barrier tape, like guts*."[476] Having established the murderous violence of Herakles, the scene then moves on to depict the central horror of Euripides' *Herakles*; the murder of his children by his own hands, here depicted by the slaughter of two small cement sacks. His spree of violence completed, Labourer 1 returns to the pose of the statue of Herakles, while Labourers 2, 3, 4 and 5 enter. The dumb-show then moves from the figure of Herakles to an association between modern mass burials in war-torn cities and the grieving female chorus from Phrynichos's *Fall of Miletos*.

The first English lines of the play, and the first original lines, excluding the clarifying pseudo-stage direction explaining the fragment of Phrynichos' *Alcestis*, are spoken by Labourer 1/Herakles. This speech is firmly rooted in Herodotus' account of the Persian Wars and the Athenian response to Phrynichos' *Fall of Miletos*. The Herakles presented in this speech could almost be described as a post-Persian wars proto-Athenian male. That is to say he is immensely proud of the Athenian (and its allies) defeat of the Persians, he views the appeasers as having been weak and dangerous, and he is not just a little misogynistic. He explains how he helped the Athenians defeat the Persians in the battle of Marathon, how he opposed the appeasers who were willing to let the captured Greek cities remain under Persian control, how, while he opposed the appeasers, he disapproved of Phrynichos' means of shaming them by bringing on a male chorus who played mourning women:

While I don't share the sacred appeasers' view,

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[475] On the iconography of Herakles, see Vollkommer (1988).

[476] Harrison (1996a) 122.

> Or their reasons for banning *Halosis Miletou*,
> I believe that men dragged-up as women undermined
> The military effort, so I'd've had him fined.[477]

This speech is far more about Athens and how men in war present their victories as an unequivocal good, than about the mythical Herakles and historical perceptions of that character. Though this of course is tied to how Herakles, most violent of heroes, comes to be remembered as the greatest of heroes with later ages frequently downplaying the violence and inhumanity of many of his actions. What is noteworthy here is that what the audience has already seen before this speech, with the exception of the percussive frenzy, is that Herakles' violence, whether mad or sane, is destructive to women and children. So while Herakles presents the worst part of the war as being Phrynichos' presentation of men in drag on stage, the preceding dumb-show has suggested that far, far worse things are begotten by violence.

The next speech by Herakles/Labourer 1 at the end of the play explicitly describes the human cost of Heraklean violence. Trapped in the concrete Labourer 1 complains that he is getting cold and asks that someone pass him his shirt if they can reach it. When he dons the shirts he lets out a blood-curdling cry as it is the robe of Nessus, which Harrison's stage directions describe as "the shirt of modern Europe's agony".[478] In the duet between Labourers 2 and 3 which follows Labourer 1's scream, they describe the shirt as having been made by "Muslims that are mouldering in mass-execution trenches…The fingers of the raped girl who wove herself a noose…Sarajevo children his shells made amputees…The mother of the mortared mosque's dismembered muezzin, assisted by the convoys of the cleansed of Knin."[479] This scene is clearly drawing on

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[477] Harrison (1996a) 127.

[478] Harrison (1996a) 146.

[479] Harrison (1996a) 147. These lines are in striking contrast to the images of Bosnia presented in Harrison's "Three Poems from Bosnia" which move the reader by their ability to find humanity in war, from the father taking home a (looted) bike as a present for his son in "The Cycles of Donji Vakuf" to the young couple courting amidst the war-ravaged cityscape, to the Croat deciding which of his books he can or cannot bear to destroy so that he can cook his food. See Harrison (2007a) 337-341.

Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* in which Herakles' wife Deianira sends him the fatal robe believing it to be a love charm. In perhaps the most moving speech of extant Greek tragedy Deianira describes how the centaur Nessus, as he lay dying, shot by Herakles with a poisoned arrow for having tried to abduct and rape his new bride, told Deianira to take a piece of cloth covered with his blood, to hide it away from the sunlight, and to use it as a love charm if ever she thought she was losing her husband to another woman (*Trach*. 553-77; 680-692). Feeling that her marriage bed is being threatened by the lovely Iole, whom Herakles had sent ahead of him to his house in Trachis, Deianiria has followed the centaur's instructions and smeared the blood on a robe which she has sent to her husband (*Trach*. 531-87). Like all poisoned robes in Greek tragedy, once Herakles had donned the robe he was unable to remove it, and was slowly burned alive (*Trach*. 763-771), killed in a manner that three times over fulfilled the prophecy that he had received from Zeus that he would be killed by something which no living thing could kill (*Trach*. 1166-74).[480]

Now Herakles, who in his first speech in *The Labourers of Herakles* had been associated with fifth-century Athenian men, is associated with Europe's ethnic cleansers who burn in Europe's conscience – though I think many would argue that it is Europe's conscience that burns rather than the consciences of men like Slobadan Milosovic, "Butcher of the Balkans". But he is also associated with all those in power, who have either committed crimes against humanity or failed to intervene:

> And officials with the suits and ties of Nessus on
> Walk the corridors of power in Washington and Bonn,
> In London and in Paris, in New York at the UN,
> The shirt of fire's the fashion for flame-tormented men.[481]

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[480] Herakles was killed by the Hydra (whose slaughter was his second labour) in whose poisonous blood his arrow tips had been dipped, the centaur Nessus whose blood, poisoned by Herakles' arrow, was smeared on the robe, and by Deianira, who upon sending the fatal gift had realized her error (*Trach*. 680-704), and committed suicide. In the end Herakles was conquered by those whom he himself had conquered by force. For another example of a burning unremovable robe in Greek tragedy see the messenger speech in Euripides' *Medea*.

[481] Harrison (1996a) 148.

The argument of the play and the meaning of each scene is not always clear. The parallel here seems to be an association between those Greeks and Athenians who were willing to do nothing to help the Greek cities such as Miletos, culturally the most important centre of the ancient Greek world before it was destroyed by Persia, in order to appease the Persians, and those in modern seats of power who fail to intervene in other countries during times of war.[482] The role of Herakles in this play is somewhat ambivalent and muddled. The final image of the play is of Tony Harrison entering the performance space carrying the club of Herakles which Labourer 1 lights with a match, thus turning it into a torch. Fire is an image of which Harrison is extremely fond precisely because of its ambivalent nature: it can both destroy and sustain. Harrison in this scene seems to be making the same claim for Herakles' club: as a weapon it is destructive, as a torch it can illuminate and be "a beacon for the future with its ambiguous light."[483]

I would argue that in *The Labourers of Herakles* Harrison is not only drawing attention to the ambiguous nature of fire, but also to the ambiguous nature of memory. Like *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, this play presents a narrative of cultural forgetfulness and raises moral issues associated with such memorial failure. While *The Kaisers of*

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[482] The policy of intervention or non-intervention is a much debated issue in international affairs, which has received increased press in recent years due to a number of horrific events, from the genocide in Darfur, to Mugabe's ongoing decimation of Zimbabwe, to most recently the refusal of Myanmar's junta to allow in foreign aid in the wake of a devastating cyclone. Many a genocidal dictator has used as a shield Article 2, paragraph 7 of the UN Charter, which states that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state." For some of the discussion of these policies and their future, see Totten (2004) 469-490. Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, who was Force Commander of UNAMIR, the United Nations peace-keeping force in Rwanda during the period in which nearly one million Rwandans were killed over the course of one hundred days, embodies Harrison's description of a man whose body has been "torched red- raw by torturing remorse". Despite his pleas for adequate reinforcements to stop the genocide, the UN Security Council refused his request, largely due to US opposition, favoring a policy of non-intervention in any country's internal affairs. On June 20, 2000 he was found intoxicated under a park bench in Ottawa, and his personal enduring struggles with the failures of humanity that he had experienced in Rwanda were made public, as well as the personal blame he felt for the failures of his mission. For Dallaire's own account of his mission in Rwanda and its aftermath, see Dallaire (2003).

[483] Harrison (1996a) 149.

Carnuntum focused largely on Roman culture and questions of its imperial legacy in the early-twentieth century, *The Labourers of Herakles* focuses on both ancient and modern failures to come to terms with genocide through Phrynichos' lost tragedy on the fall of Miletos and our own cultural difficulties in coming to terms with similar modern horrors. For Harrison the horrors cannot be undone, and human nature is such that these sorts of crimes will continue to take place, but what we can and must do is remember. In *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* Harrison suggests that poetry can do nothing in the face of brutal Imperial power, yet the myth of Orpheus tells how even after he was dismembered his disembodied head continued to sing:

> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its making where executives
> Would never want to tamper, flows on south
> From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
> Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth.[484]

The Labourers of Herakles warns, however, that poetry does not come into being nor does it survive on its own; it requires cultural support through spaces for performance, such as the Phrynichos Theatre, through funding agencies, such as the European Cultural Centre of Delphi, and through audiences who will respond to works that try to memoralize the catastrophes of history, for which they themselves may bear some responsibility, not by fining the poet and banning his works, but by preserving them and passing them on from generation to generation. As Marcus Aurelius sings in *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*:

> Every empire, Reich and Raj,
> no matter how well armed or large,
> is but a moment's brief mirage.
>
> All the emperors old and new,
> Caesar, Stalin, Ceausescu,
> transients all passing through.
>
> What are they now? Mere tales to tell…[485]

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[484] W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats."

[485] Harrison (1996a) 66-7.

For Harrison the dark tales should not be left untouched except by those who would reuse them to create their own blood drenched mythologies, but held up in a common space and common light for all humanity to contemplate.

Chapter 5: Tony Harrison and Old Comedy

It's a simple thing to grasp: when we're all dead
there'll be no further pages to be read,
not even leaflets, and no peace plays like these
no post-holocaust Aristophanes.

From *The Common Chorus*[486]

Most discussions of Tony Harrison's classical plays focus on their relationship with Greek tragedy. This chapter seeks to rebalance the place of genre within the discussion of Harrison's plays. Sandie Byrne has written that in Harrison's poetry, "conventions of forms as well as themes are transgressed or combined" and this is also true of his use of dramatic genres.[487] Chapter 3 examined the use of genre in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* pointing to the use of both satyr play and tragedy. This chapter in turn examines the use of Old Comedy, arguing that not only does Harrison draw on Old Comedy in his two translations/adaptations of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (*Aikin Mata* and Part I of *The Common Chorus*) but that the influence of Old Comedy can be traced throughout Harrison's classical plays.[488] For Harrison Old Comedy is an integral a part of the fifth-century Athenian dramatic imagination as tragedy, and in his post-*Oresteia* plays Old Comedy becomes a central part of Harrison's classical plays as he attempts to convey the wholeness of the Athenian imagination to modern audiences. This chapter explores and compares Harrison's explicit engagement with Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and also argues that Harrison's *Fram* engages with Old Comedy generally and Aristophanes' *Frogs* specifically.

The term "Old Comedy" is limited to comedies produced in Athens in the fifth-century B.C. While the genre is represented by the extant works of a single poet,

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[486] Harrison (2002b) 242.

[487] Byrne (1998) 6-7.

[488] For a list of the extant Old Comedies, all by Aristophanes, and a brief bibliography of works on Old Comedy, see Chapter 2, note 34.

Aristophanes, and fragments of other poets, a general description is still possible. The plots of Old Comedy are normally fantastic. For examples, in *Birds*, two Athenian exiles set up a new city with the birds in the sky, which makes its power and influence known by intercepting the burnt offerings from the cities below which are intended for the gods on Mount Olympus above. Unlike fifth-century tragedy, which seems to have largely observed unities of time and space, Old Comedy observed no such boundaries.[489] Characters move freely through vast geographical spaces, from earth to the underworld in *Frogs*, crossing the Stygian swamp along the way, from earth to Cloudcuckooland in the sky in *Birds*, and from earth to Mount Olympus in *Peace*. Rarely is there a clear timeline for the events occurring on-stage, though many plots suggest that the events are taking place over a substantial period of time. Nor does Old Comedy concern itself with issues of logic, plausibility, or even the laws of physics. The dead can be brought back to life in *Frogs*, humans can become birds in *Birds*, one can grow dung beetles large enough to carry a man to Mount Olympus in *Peace*, individuals are able to make peace treaties with enemy city-states in *Acharnians*, and, most ridiculous of all to an Athenian audience, women can publicly engage in and influence Athenian politics in *Lysistrata*. Unlike tragedy, where characters seem to have never explicitly acknowledged that they were performing in a play, in Old Comedy the actors at times acknowledge the audience (see for example the opening lines of Aristophanes' *Frogs*) and in the *parabasis* the chorus can suspend any sense of dramatic illusion and directly address the audience in the voice of the poet. While many scholars believe that fifth-century Athenian tragedy was engaging with contemporary culture and politics, that engagement is never explicitly stated within the play. In Old Comedy, on the other hand, the engagement with contemporary society is explicit, with prominent Athenians being caricatured, such as Socrates in *Clouds* and Euripides and Agathon in *Thesmorphiazusae*, contemporary events discussed, such as the Peloponnesian War and specific events within it, and political decisions queried. It frequently combines a fantastic plot with political and

[489] Though Lowe (2006) argues that these differences between genres have been overstated.

cultural satire, exploring what it is to be Athenian and actively exhorting its audience to make political decisions that are in the best interests of Athens and its citizens.

Harrison's first work for the theater was an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.[490] Like many young aspiring academics Harrison assumed that his primary income would be earned by teaching at a university, though he had been actively writing and publishing poetry throughout his time at the University of Leeds. In 1962 he took a position at the newly opened Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria, where he taught until 1966, alongside Irish poet James Simmons, who had also been a fellow student at the University of Leeds.[491] In 1964 the two poets collaborated on an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* for a student production. The resulting play, *Aikin Mata*, was published by Oxford University Press in Ibadan in 1966. As the foreword explains, the play was written for a particular group of students at the university.

> *Aikin Mata* was written for a specific group of student actors at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The year before the same group had won the first prize in the Students' Drama Festival at Ibadan with a production of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. This group and other local groups had, between them, performed most of the published plays by Nigerian dramatists, and they wished to do something different, and yet they were not prepared to tackle Shakespeare or any of the classics of English Theatre. They liked the mixture of drama, mime, music and dance in *The Lion and the Jewel*. An adaptation of Greek Comedy seemed the best solution, and in particular the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, with its great basic plot, particularly

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[490] Harrison had written and performed in revue sketches while a student at the University of Leeds, along with fellow student Wole Soyinka, but *Aikin Mata* was his first full-length play. While these sketches did not launch either Harrison or Soyinka's career in the theatre, as similar revue sketches did for fellow Loiner Alan Bennett and other participants in *Beyond the Fringe*, the presence of and participation in such a performance tradition clearly influenced a number of playwrights of this generation when they were first contemplating a career in the theatre.

[491] Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian writer, poet, playwright, was a student at the University of Leeds at the same time as Harrison and Simmons, and was friends with both. This friendship almost certainly played a part in the poets' decision to move to Nigeria to teach. While Harrison and Simmons were teaching at the Ahmadu Bello University, Soyinka was worked at the University College in Ibadan and the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife. Soyinka was the first of the Leeds-educated poets of this generation to embrace writing for the theatre.

> relevant in a country where women have not yet reached political equality with men, and where the 'sex-war' is a recurrent source of humour.[492]

The goal of Harrison and Simmons was to translate the play into Nigerian terms. In places the play is a close translation of Aristophanes, while in others it is a loose adaptation.

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* was produced in 411 B.C. at one of the dramatic festivals in Athens, either the Lenaea or the Greater Dionysia.[493] The basic plot of the *Lysistrata* is that its title character organizes a sex strike by women from various Greek city-states in order to bring an end to the Peloponnesian War, which in 411 had been ongoing for nearly twenty years, despite a few brief interludes, such as the Peace of Nikias in 421 B.C. At this point the war was going very badly for Athens. Two years earlier, in 413 B.C., Athens had suffered a massive blow to its military might, suffering disastrous naval losses in the ill-fated Sicilian expedition. And to make matters worse many city-states which had been part of the Athenian Empire, and thus contributors of money and manpower to the war effort, were revolting. And so in Aristophanes' play, once the women have sworn an oath to uphold the sex strike, they occupy the Athenian Acropolis, which held the treasury and thus the necessary funds to continue the war. As MacDowell observes, taking control of the Acropolis " means two things. It is a symbol that they are taking control of Athens, and in practical terms it obstructs the men's access to public money."[494] In the end, following confrontations with male government officials, elderly male citizens and blue-balled husbands, the strike is successful and the Athenians and Spartans come together to sign a peace treaty ending the war.

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[492] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 9.

[493] The Hypothesis to the play, an introductory note written by an ancient scholar, tells us the year in which the play was produced and who the *didaskalos* was, Aristophanes' frequent collaborator Callistratus, but does not specify the festival at which it was produced. Most scholars now agree that it was produced at the Lenaea, the smaller and more local, of Athens two major dramatic festivals. See Sommerstein (1990) 1.

[494] MacDowell (1995) 233.

Harrison and Simmons saw in the play a number of features that they felt would work well for the actors involved in the project. They saw that it would be possible by translating the play into Nigerian terms to draw upon local performance traditions with the music and dance being derived "from various traditional dances" accompanied by "an inter-tribal variety of instruments… just as Attic and Doric modes were mingled in Greek Comedy."[495] The production also drew upon the mask tradition of Nigeria with the masks used being "a studied compromise between Nigerian and Greek traditions."[496] By incorporating these local practices the poets hoped that "the play itself could be performed in a manner nearer to the Greek than the kind of productions one has in European theatre and on radio with effete angelic choral speaking and emasculated dancing."[497] And while these features of Old Comedy are not specific to *Lysistrata*, but are a defining aspect of the genre, Harrison and Simmons found in *Lysistrata* a linguistic division between Attic and Doric Greek for which a parallel could be found in Nigeria with the distinction between 'Standard' English and Pidgin English. In the play the Northerners speak Standard English, a substitute for the Aristophanes' Athenians and their Attic Greek, while the Southerners speak Pidgin, a substitute for the Spartans and their Doric Greek.

The distinction between dialects in both Aristophanes' play and in Harrison and Simmon's Nigerian version were not, however, an exact parallel for the language divisions of Nigeria. Attic and Doric Greek were dialects of ancient Greek, but like Standard English and Pidgin English, both are clearly the same language, intelligible to

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[495] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 10.

[496] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 10. Unfortunately no known photographs of the production survive, but Harrison does have copies of the program.

[497] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 10. While Harrison and Simmons do not discuss its influence in their introduction, one particular aspect of the production, which has left no textual trace, saw Harrison and Simmons crossing the stage in a donkey costume, suggesting the influence of British pantomime. Harrison was the back half of the donkey and was responsible for increasing the length of the donkey's phallus as they progressed across the performance space. (Personal conversation with Tony Harrison.)

others who speak the language though in a different dialect.[498] When Aristophanes represents non-Greeks on stage, the Persian ambassador Pseudartabas in *Acharnians* (100-7), the Triballian god in *Birds* (1615-5, 1628-9, 1678-81), and the Scythian archer in *Thesmophoriazusae* (1001-end), the language that they speak, regardless of origin is gibberish. As Stephen Colvin has noted it is clear that barbarian speech is mocked by the playwright, yet it seemed to exist for the Athenians in a larger hierarchy of foreignness, which placed, depending which dialect you spoke, other Greek dialects on the continuum of foreignness between themselves and the barbarians.[499] By contrast the ethnic groups presented in *Aikin Mata* speak different languages, within which there are regional and tribal dialects. Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are all official languages in Nigeria (Hausa in the north and Yoruba and Igbo in the southwest) and are the most common languages, in a country in which more than five hundred languages are spoken. The languages are tied to pre-colonial societies which were yoked together under colonial rule despite their deep cultural differences, including language. To a certain extent the use of dialectical variations of a single language in *Aikin Mata* obscured how deep the cultural divisions in Nigeria run.

The assignment of language within the play was a far more resonant distinction than either Harrison or Simmons were aware. They write in their foreword that this use of language "helped to emphasize the spirit of inter-tribal parody as a basic ingredient of the comedy of the adaptation, and since we had no real wars to draw upon for the parallel to the Peloponnesian War, we had to make it imaginary, drawing upon latent or blatant

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[498] Colvin notes, however, that "The Greeks did not think of other dialects of Greek as imperfect approximations of their own dialect…but we can add that…there seem to have been (social) varieties of Attic which were regarded as less correct than others." Colvin, (1999) 307. Attic Greek was largely limited to Athens and a few islands in the Aegean, while other Greek dialects, such as Doric, Ionic, and Aeolic were much more widespread. It is the literary documents produced in fifth-century Athens, such as the Old Comedies of Aristophanes, that have resulted in the prominent place of the Attic dialect in the historical record. The more prevalent Doric dialect of the same period, on the other hand, due to the limited number of literary texts and inscriptions produced and extant in it is poorly attested in the historical record. On Greek dialects, see Buck (1955).

[499] Colvin (1999) 36-8.

tribal rivalries."[500] In hindsight the naivety of that statement is remarkable. In 1967 civil war broke out in Nigeria, which had gained its independence from Great Britain only in 1960, as the south-eastern part of the country attempted to secede. The conflict was the result of numerous tensions, not least of which were the tribal and ethnic differences which Harrison and Simmons had picked up upon in *Aikin Mata* three years earlier. As was the case in many regions of Africa, difference originating in pre-colonial religious and governmental traditions led in short order from independence to civil war. In Nigeria the civil war erupted very much along the lines of the cultural divisions identified by Harrison and Simmons in *Aikin Mata*.

Between the auditions and performance some "European members" of the University raised objections to the production of the play. Some of the objections were to the prurient elements in the play: though the poets had cut the crudest scene in Aristophanes play, the vulgar discussion amongst the male peace negotiators as to how they would divvy up the various regions of the naked female personification of Peace.[501]As Harrison and Simmons report in their foreword:

> All kinds of fearful speculations about the effects of such a bawdy play were aired, ranging from the farcical, that outbursts of self-indulgent sexuality would occur on the campus, to the traditional outcries leveled against the stage since the theatres were closed in England during the seventeenth century. The basis of the objection was that the plot of the play presumed in the audience a knowledge that husbands sleep with wives and are likely to suffer if their wives refuse sexual intercourse over a prolonged period.[502]

Some objections, however, had to do with issues of cultural sensitivity and might well carry weight with some censors within university administrations today. Among these objections, the most serious was that the Muslim community would be grossly offended by a scene in which Muslim women swear an oath over a calabash of wine.[503] The Vice-Chancellor of the university's response to these concerns, both the valid and the

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[500] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 10.

[501] *Lys.* 1114-1187.

[502] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 11.

[503] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 24-6.

ridiculous, was "that censorship in any form was inimical to the whole idea of a University."[504] And so the play went on. In the end the audience, Muslim and non-Muslim received the play in the spirit of comedy, with apparently the most enthusiastic reception coming from the very small body of female students who were attending the university in 1964.[505]

Despite the looming civil war that the play's divisions foreshadow, the play itself is charming. While details have been altered to fit the Nigerian context, the plot follows Aristophanes' original with precision, apart from the absence of the naked figure of Peace in the resolution. The language of the play is of marital strife not military strife. In Aristophanes' play the war being addressed was the Peloponnesian War which by 411 BC pervaded all aspects of Athenian life. While *Aikin Mata* was picking up on real tensions, the devastating consequences of those tensions erupting into war had not yet been felt. Throughout the play the conflict is domesticated, and the resolution is very much about reconciliation between husbands and wives, rather than a peace treaty for a war that has dragged on far too long. The final choral song emphases the reconciliation between husbands and wives[506]:

CHORUS^{w}
Like ripe fruit on the tree.

CHORUS^{m}
Reach yourself down to me.

CHORUS^{w}
On the parched desert ground.

CHORUS^{m}
Let the sweet rain come down.
After long journeys, tired out, nearly dead.

CHORUS^{w}

[504] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 11.

[505] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 12.

[506] The ascription of lines for the double chorus, half male and half female, are indicated by a superscript letter indicating the gender of the chorus to speak.

Love let me be the pillow for your head.

CHORUS[m]
Imprisoned by desire for so long.

CHORUS[w]
You'll soon be free
Unless you call your wife's soft arms captivity.

While peace is achieved between the northern and southern delegations the emphasis of the final reconciliation is private and romantic, privileging domestic concerns over state concerns, and unaccompanied by the sort of public celebration that usually greets the end of war.

Harrison's second treatment of *Lysistrata* is very different from his first. *Aikin Mata* had taken Aristophanes' original and created a charming comic narrative with an emphasis on the domestic aspects of the play, focusing more on the sexual deprivations suffered by the men at the hands of their wives than on the wars which were the motivation for the sex-strike. The *Lysistrata* play of Harrison's *The Common Chorus* trilogy, on the other hand, dispenses with the domestic marital aspects of the play and focuses on the politics of war as they existed in Britain in the mid-1980s. The trilogy was to be set at the US Cruise Missile Base at Greenham Common, around which a protest camp had been established in 1981 by women who objected to the siting of nuclear missiles anywhere on British soil.[507] At its peak the camp welcomed 30-50 000

[507] The Greenham Common protest began in August 1981 when a group of thirty-six women, part of "Women for Life on Earth", began walking from Cardiff, Wales, to Greenham Common in Berkshire, England, to protest the locating of nuclear Cruise missiles at the American Forces base there. The walk took ten days, and when they arrived the women demanded a televised debate between themselves and government officials on nuclear arms. The government ignored the women and their demands, and so the women set up camp at Greenham Common and their numbers began to grow. In December 1981 the women took their first serious action, preventing sewage pipes from being laid. The following March two hundred and fifty women blockaded the base, resulting in the first arrests associated with the women's camp. Actions and arrests would steadily escalate from this point onward. The number of the women at the camp also continued to grow, invited by chain letters to join the protest, and spurred by the news coverage. On the early stages of the protest, see Liddington (1989) 1-2. For a time line of events and actions associated with the Greenham Common Women, see Harford and Hopkins (1984) "Dateline" in unnumbered introductory pages.

women who undertook various acts of protest: at one point 30 000 women joined hands to encircle the base; in January 1983 forty-four women entered the base and danced on the Cruise missile silos; on one occasion the women managed to bring down parts of the fence which surrounded the base; and on another occasion they padlocked the main gate.[508] Harrison set *The Common Chorus* amidst these women in the early 1980s during the height of protest activity, though the camp lasted in one form or another for nearly twenty years.[509] In this adaptation the conflict is not between the women and their husbands, but instead between the women protesting outside Greenham Common and the soldiers, British and American, who were on the other side of the fence, both literally and ideologically, manning the base and its weapons.

Where *Aikin Mata* is charming, *The Common Chorus* is ugly – and it is undoubtedly its ugliness that caused the National Theatre management, in Harrison's words, to "linger over the text [until] the tension of a topical present and a tragic past had leached away into oblivion."[510] The trilogy was commissioned by the National Theatre but it was never staged in its entirety.[511] The management may have been made wary by the court case brought against director Michael Bogdanov by Mary Whitehouse over the National Theatre's 1980 production of *The Romans in Britain*. The play

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[508] The specific illustrations here are but just a few of the actions taken by the women. For a detailed list of actions and dates, see Harford and Hopkins (1984) "Dateline" in unnumbered introductory pages. For pictures of the women encircling the base, dancing on the silos, and taking down the fences, among other photos, see the unnumbered photo section in the same volume, located between pages 95 and 96.

[509] The last nuclear missiles were removed from the base in 1991, but the protest camp lingered on until 2000, when permission was given for a memorial to be built on the site. In 1992 the Ministry of Defence sold the land occupied by the base to the Greenham Common Trust and the Newbury District Council. Sasha Roseneil reports that "The buildings which had once housed military personnel and weaponry are now leased out as a gym, a café and light industrial units, manufacturing bubble bath and assembling computers; the silos are being used as a mushroom farm." Roseneil (2000) 310.

[510] Harrison (2002b) 197.

[511] A revised version of the third play in the trilogy, *Maxims*, was staged at the National Theatre in 1992 under the title *Square Rounds*.

contained a scene in which a Roman soldier raped a druid, and on account of this scene Bogdanov was privately prosecuted by Whitehouse for "procuring an act of gross indecency", on the basis that he had cast the actors involved in the scene.[512] Eventually the prosecution was dropped, but it had gone far further than anyone at the National had anticipated. Nor was the National's management the only ones who had concerns about the play. *The Partisan Review*, published out of Boston University, solicited a draft of Part I of *The Common Chorus*, the adaptation of *Lysistrata*, prior to performance with a view to publication. Eventually Harrison received a letter from the journal's editors saying that while they thought his version was wonderful they had come to the conclusion that it was "too pacifist, and too obscene" to publish.[513] The National Theatre's management were almost certainly all the more cautious due to the public uproar that had greeted the broadcast of a film version of Harrison's poem "v." which contains a number of four-letter words. *The Common Chorus* almost certainly could have and would have added to that public discussion by illuminating the difference between crude words and obscenity.

The same vulgar language, which had caused so much consternation in regard to "v.", is employed in *The Common Chorus* by the guards at the base shouting at the women outside. Its use suggests that Harrison is deliberately extending the debate about obscenity which surrounded "v.", in response to which he had said, "If we want to debate some of the obscenities in our culture…we must represent them."[514] In *The Common Chorus* the language is both offensive and abusive, and purposefully so. Early in the play the guards at the base chant:

GUARD 1

Cock!

GUARD 2

Nob!

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[512] Peter Hall, (2000) 313-16, discusses the production and the subsequent legal proceedings.

[513] Harrison (1991) 449.

[514] *Daily Telegraph*, Tuesday 13 October 1987.

GUARD 3
Dick!
GUARD 1
Christ, but I could do with a screw.
Too long on this job, my balls are turning blue.

GUARD 3
I tell you, mate, doing this patrol
doesn't give a bloke much chance of hole.

GUARD 1
And if you spend too long on this fucking wire
you'll find someone's been at home poking the wife's fire.

GUARD 3
Back there the cunt's all Yankie and its booked
so far as fucking fucking goes you're somewhat fucking fucked.[515]

Later in the play, the guards add a bit of music to their crude repertoire, singing:

Are you out there, Phyllis, come give us a fuck?
Are you out there, Cynthia, come and give us a suck?

Camp-followers are yer, after military cocks
sucking off a sentry in his sentry box?

How would you like a nice shot of warm come
right down your tonsils, up your cunt, your bum?
The semen of he-men's superior to that
your stubby little hubby squirts into your twat.

Oh I can feel their little fannies start to ooze
when I unzip my flyfront and flash 'em my cruise!

Are you out there, Phyllis, come give us a fuck?
Are you out there, Cynthia, come and give us a suck?[516]

Like so many of Harrison's plays just where one thinks that he is embellishing the historical narrative that he has found for dramatic effect, it is there that the play is perhaps most firmly rooted in reality. The Greenham Women were constantly exposed

[515] Harrison (2002b) 199-200.

[516] Harrison (2002b) 207.

to this sort of sexually abusive language by the guards on the other side of the wire fence, especially at night when they were trying to sleep. In his introduction to *The Common Chorus* Harrison quotes Caroline Blackwood's book on Greenham, *On the Perimeter*:

> 'I am so tired,' said Pat. 'We had such an awful night with the soldiers. They shouted at us all night. They just couldn't stop. It was sexual, of course. It's always sexual.'
>
> …
>
> What is the matter with these soldiers, I wondered when I later heard them bellowing their horrible obscenities. Presumably they didn't carry on like dirty-minded schoolboys at home. Yet the peace women brought out everything that was sadistic and infantile in these men. The sex war that was raging on the perimeter was a very ugly and cruel one.[517]

And lest anyone think that he was exaggerating the vulgarity of the guards, Harrison also reprints songs included in a publication for sale from the United States Air Force 77th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Upper Heyford. The following song is representative of the general tone and content:

> I fucked a dead whore by the roadside
> I knew right away she was dead
> The skin was all gone from her tummy
> The hair was all gone from her head.
>
> As I lay down there beside her,
> I knew right away I had sinned.
> So I pressed my lips to her pussy
> And sucked out the wad I'd shot in.
>
> Sucked out, sucked out.
> I sucked out the wad I'd shot in, shot in,
> Sucked out, sucked out,
> I sucked out the wad I'd shot in.

The language *of The Common Chorus* is in places crude and vulgar, but it was not nearly as offensive as it might have been in light of such exemplars.

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[517] Harrison (2002b) 195-6.

Having established both the setting and tone of the play, *The Common Chorus* moves on to an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, which like *Aikin Mata* varies from a fairly close translation in some places to a loose adaptation in others. The Greenham women, like Aristophanes' women, under the leadership of Lysistrata agree to go on a sex strike, occupy a site of military importance (part of the military base), and face down all the males who challenge them, from the chorus of old men (World War One veterans), to the police inspector and Kinesias (the frustrated husband of one of the protestors) and, with Peace presiding over the situation, reconciliation between all parties is attempted. The reconciliation breaks down in the final songs of the play when in response to the women's song of rebirth the male guards sing, to the tune of Rule Britannia:

Bless the women,
the women lead the way,
women, women, women, women lead the way.

Thank you ladies,
Lysistrata was a scream
but a

1
stupid
2
stupid!
3
Stupid!
ALL
DREAM.
Well, that's enough of ancient Greece.
We've got to live in our own age.
Tell those who won't join in your peace

(They raise three walkie-talkies out of which comes a repetitive US VOICE.)

US VOICE
We'll nuke 'em back to the Stone Age.
We'll nuke 'em back to the Stone Age.
We'll nuke 'em back to the Stone Age.[518]

[518] Harrison (2002b) 278.

At which point the Police Inspector enters with police and bailiffs, who begin to tear down the women's camp, and announces:

Right, I'm nicking the lot of you for breaching the peace![519]

And it is in this ending that Harrison diverges most substantially from his Aristophanic model, thwarting the fantastic notion that a peaceful protest by women could achieve disarmament, and substituting the more realistic ending of arrest and imprisonment. This of course also reflects the realities of the Greenham Common Women who were frequently arrested as a result of their protest actions, while military activities continued as usual at the base.[520] The reality of this line is reflected in a letter written by Lynne Jones, distributed as pamphlet, in the aftermath of a protest by a group of Greenham Women at the Falklands Victory Parade on October 12, 1982. The protest by the women involved them turning their backs in silence on the parade while holding up a banner that read: "Women Turn Their Backs on War". While the women's action was peaceful and silent, the crowd around them was outraged, and the response of a nearby police officer was, "Right, you dirty cow, I'm taking you to the police station where scum like you belong."[521] Again, Harrison's text has toned down the language of conflict. It is clear that his Police Inspector fundamentally disagrees with the women, yet he is not made out to be a villain through his use of crude language, like the harassing soldiers, but only through his ideological opposition to the women and their protest.

Lysistrata is the only play that Harrison has returned to. Significant scenes point to how Harrison is able to use language and imagery to reframe the narrative for his audience. In *Aikin Mata* Harrison and Simmons follow Aristophanes' text closely in the scene where the women have tired of their sex-strike and are seeking to escape, if even

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[519] Harrison (2002b) 278. Arrests were frequent at the Greenham camps, as was the forcible destruction of the camp, including the makeshift tents, known as benders.

[520] The first arrest of the female protestors at Greenham Common occurred on 22 March 1981. Thirty-four women were arrested as result the first blockade of the base. Arrests were a regular occurrence from this point onward.

[521] See Harford and Hopkins (1984) 74-77.

briefly, from the Acropolis. In Aristophanes' play one of the women feigns a pregnancy and labour pains:

> THIRD WOMAN
> O Lady Hileithya, keep the baby back till I've got to a non-holy place!
>
> LYSISTRATA
> What are you blethering about?
>
> THIRD WOMAN
> I'm going to give birth any minute!
>
> LYSISTRATA
> But you weren't pregnant yesterday.
>
> THIRD WOMAN
> But I am today. Send me home to the midwife, Lysistrata, right away!
>
> LYSISTRATA
> What's this tale your're telling? What's this hard thing you've got there?
>
> THIRD WOMAN
> The baby's a boy.
>
> LYSISTRATA
> By Aphrodite, no – its quite plain that all you're carrying is something hollow and made of metal! I'm going to find out.
> You ridiculous ass – holding the sacred helmet, and saying you were pregnant![522]

In *Aikin Mata* Harrison and Simmons retain this scene but substitute a calabash gourd for the helmet.[523] This version privileges the domestic aspects of the play over the martial aspects, and the use of a gourd here is one way that is accomplished. The calabash can be harvested early and used as a vegetable or be allowed to mature at which point its hard exterior allows it to have multiple purposes around the household, especially as a bottle.

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[522] Translation by Sommerstein (1990) 91-93.

[523] See Harrison and Simmons (1966) 47-8.

It was on a calabash full of wine that the women had sworn their oaths earlier in the play.[524] It is, in all of its uses, a domestic object, closely associated with the female realm.

In *The Common Chorus* this scene is also retained, but Harrison here uses a World War One military steel helmet to create the illusion of pregnancy.[525] This is of course closer to the Aristophanic original, and like the original the choice of helmet invites associations with the realities of war for their intended audiences. For the Athenians the helmet of Athena, taken from the statue of Athena Promachus on the Acropolis, had associations with war and Athenian democracy. What Athena had little to do with, however, was sex or the domestic sphere.[526] There is a certain amount of irony for one of the striking women to feign her pregnancy with the helmet of the one female goddess in the Olympic pantheon most closely associated with war and men, who herself had experienced neither being born of a woman nor bearing children herself. She was protector primarily of the *polis* but not the *oikos*.

The steel helmet used in *The Common Chorus* has a similarly wide and significant range of associations. The steel helmet is closely associated with the imagery of World War I when it was reintroduced, first by the French and then soon after by the British and other European armies, after having fallen out of favor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The reintroduction of steel helmets was a response to increased use of heavy artillery that had resulted in large numbers of lethal head wounds caused by shrapnel. This use of imagery from the First World War is also tied to one of the slogans used on banners by the Greenham Women: Remembrance is not enough. The slogan picks up the word "Remembrance" from the various ceremonies and holidays held in numerous countries on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month to mark when the armistice that ended World War I came into effect. World War I was frequently billed

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[524] That earlier use of the calabash coupled with its latter use evokes yet another Aristophanic scene from the *Thesmorphiazusae* in which a woman attending the festival has snuck in a skin full of wine by pretending that it is her baby.

[525] Harrison (2002b) 255-6.

[526] On the mythology of Athena and her role in Athens, see Burkert (1985) 138-43 and 232-3.

as the War to End All Wars, and remembrance of the lives sacrificed in the war as a means to safeguard against future wars. The women of the peace movement in the 1980s sought to point out that as a prophylactic against war remembrance was an abject failure. In one act of protest they unveiled a "Remembrance is not enough" banner at the London cenotaph, the site of the annual national service of remembrance. In this feigned pregnancy scene Harrison juxtaposes imagery of the First World War, which decimated the European male population, with casualty rates among mobilized men over fifty percent on both sides, with the image of fertility. As was the case with the Aristophanic original, the helmet evokes many associations but none relate to fertility or domesticity.

Harrison also picked up on the use of the Aristophanic phallus and adopted it in each play to suit the play's focus. In *Aikin Mata* it is closely associated with pestles. The first on-stage image of an erect phallus occurs when the figure of the magistrate, Alkali (the title of a Hausa official), is wound up in the shawls of the women, and the pestle, which he had been given earlier, in order to do women's work, and with which he has tried to fend off the women, "projects like a phallus from the winding sheet."[527] Magajiya, the Lysistrata character in this version, associates the action of grinding corn with the pestle and mortar to sex:

> First yams and guinea corn: we grind your corn,
> The sweet and not so sweet; we pound together,
> Ramming down the pestle hard….Oh, you must know
> The to and fro of love, the press of bone
> Upon a bone like grinding stones, the feel
> Of gristle like a pestle softening the flesh.
> We pulverize between two pelvic stones
> Your corn.[528]

The male chorus similarly associates the mortar and pestle with sex later in the play when they chant, in response to the women:

> CHORAGOS[w]
> Love's a combat.

[527] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 41-2.

[528] Harrison and Simmons (1966) 39.

CHORUS^{w} I
Love's wrestle.

CHORUS^{w} II
Love's a mortar…

CHORUS^{m}
…and a pestle.

CHORAGOS^{m}
You were born; and you; and you.

CHORUS^{m}
Out of *pounding*…

…

CHORAGOS^{m}
Men and women were both born

CHORUS^{m}
Out of *grinding*…

The women, however, seek to domesticate the male chorus' sexual innuendo, reappropriating the image by completing the male chorus's lines with a food substance: fufu, ground cassava, in the first instance and guinea-corn in the second.

In Part I of *The Common Chorus* phalluses are associated with missiles. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is associated with castration. In his first speech the police Inspector, filling the role of the Aristophanic magistrate, says, "they try to castrate us by stopping wars." [529] Indeed the first association between missiles and phalluses comes in the opening lines of the play when the guards, standing behind the letters CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) chant "Cock, Nob, Dick" (followed by a discussion about the fact Nob ought to begin with a K).[530] And of course there is the guard who explicitly associates his penis with a cruise missile in the song previously cited, singing: "Oh I can feel their little fannies start to ooze / when I unzip my flyfront

[529] Harrison (2002b) 238.

[530] See Harrison (2002b) 199, 200, 201, 204, 207.

and flash 'em my cruise!"[531] As in *Aikin Mata* the first erect phallus is that of the figure of the magistrate, here the police inspector, who gets a hard-on when the women begin discussing how even old, decrepit, unattractive men can get nubile young women.[532] As was the case in *Aikin Mata* the women reappropriate the phallic imagery for their own purpose, here associating the Inspector's hard-on with *rigor mortis*:

> Your hard-on's the first sign of rigor mortis
> an exit sign not one of excitation.
> …
> Go, die while you can keep your male illusion
> your cock-bound fantasies of right and wrong
> before corpses fuse in chaos and confusion.
> Go, and we'll see you off with a sad song.[533]

At this point the women bury the Inspector and his hard-on in separate coffins made from discarded police riot shields, presenting a metaphorical disarmament. Kinesias reinforces the association between phalluses and weapons when he greets the herald with, "If your concern is PAX / why the weapons peeping from your macs?"[534] The association between phalluses and missiles is also made towards the end of the play when Lysistrata says:

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[531] Harrison (2002b) 207.

[532] Harrison (2002b) 248. This section of the play is a clear example of how Harrison, even when not providing a close translation of Aristophanes' text, clings closely to the original. Aristophanes' text reads (*Lys*.595-7):
ὁ μὲν ἥκων γάρ, κἄν ᾖ πολιός, ταχὺ παῖδα κόρην γεγάμηκεν·
τῆς δὲ γυναικὸς μικρὸς, κἂν τούτου μὴ 'πιλάβηται,
οὐδεὶς ἐθέλει γῆμαι ταὐτην, ὀττεθομένη δὲ κάθηται.
A man comes home, and even if he's grey-haired, he's soon the husband of a young girl. But for a woman the time of opportunity is fleeting, and if she fails to seize it, no one wants to marry her, and she's left sitting at home clutching at any straw of an omen. (Translation – Alan Sommerstein).
Compare with Harrison's lines for Lysistrata:

> Yes, but look what happens when you do.
> Bald, decrepit, toothless a man still gets
> Into the knickers of nubile nymphettes.
> But for a woman once she's over the hill…

Harrison (2002b) 248.

[533] Harrison (2002b) 248-9.

[534] Harrison (2002b) 267.

> I'd better act. Or in a couple of ticks
> they'll be tickling one another with their pricks,
> or getting up one another's bum
> or blowing one another into Kingdom Come.[535]

In addition to the verbal associations, Harrison also intended for there to be visual associations on stage, with the phalluses of the Inspector and Kinesias rising in imitation of missiles being prepared for launch.[536]

While there are a number of other points where comparisons could be made between Harrison's two versions of *Lysistrata*, these two example are, I think, sufficient to illustrate the similarities between the plays and their relationship to their Aristophanic model, while at the same time illustrating their differences, particularly in terms of tone. These differences in tone can be attributed largely to the differences between the intended performances and their cultural and political environs. In many ways *Aikin Mata* is an anomaly among Harrison's classical works given its gentleness, and its aim to humour its audience, while avoiding offensiveness. The play trades in the sort of humour long associated with British pantomime, which Peter Hall describes in his autobiography when recalling the delight his children took in a National Theatre Christmas pantomime production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*:

> It was rude, crude, and high-spirited…There was community singing when the audience joined in the lyric, 'Bums and tits, bums and tits-– having it away'. At a later performance this was objected to by a lady as chauvinism; she led the audience in an alternative version, 'bums and pricks'. I sat at the preview in some trepidation. Christ, I thought, this is the National's family Christmas show! But the packed house of children, my own among them, were helpless with giggles and adored it. Indeed Edward and Lucy sang 'bums and tits' for some time regularly at breakfast. It was obviously a children's dream-come-true to sing rude words in public at the National Theatre; and to see adults being rude as themselves. I wondered who would write to the chairman about it. Surprisingly, no-one did.[537]

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[535] Harrison (2002b) 270.

[536] Harrison (2002b) 248 and 266.

[537] Hall (2000) 290-91.

It is this kind of gentle and inclusive rudeness that *Aikin Mata* trades in; *The Common Chorus* on the other hand aggressively seeks to divide its audience along the lines of gender and politics.

From *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* onward Harrison has delighted in, if not offending his audiences, at least irritating them, by invoking modern politics on the stage. Some in the audience of *Trackers* expressed their annoyance with Harrison saying that they did not go to the theatre to be lectured about British social issues. Others have criticized Harrison for failing to maintain the mythic distance of Greek tragedy. For this to be a fair criticism Harrison's plays would have to be straightforward tragedies. It is, however, my argument that after *The Oresteia*, with the exception of the works that are straightforward translations, such as *The Prince's Play* and *Hecuba*, Harrison's plays transgress and combine genres. Harrison is acutely aware of the demands of tragedy and he has specifically said that when he is working as a translator he resists the urge to tamper with the play and make it his own. All of his close translations of tragedy bear this out, with none of them making explicit reference to modern politics. At the same time all of Harrison's adaptations of classical works are political, and explicitly so. This stark division in Harrison's works suggests that there is far more to Harrison's classical works than a belief that Greek tragedy was politically radical, and therefore an appropriate vehicle with which to address modern politics. *The Common Chorus* provides the clearest example of the ways in which Harrison treats the genres of Attic drama differently.

The Common Chorus trilogy was to consist of Harrison's adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, his translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, and his own original play *Maxims*, which focused on the development of modern weapons of war. The conceit is that the Greenham Commons women are performing *Lysistrata* and *Trojan Women* for the guards at the military base. Side by side the differences in approaches to the two originals are glaring. Harrison's adaptation of *Lysistrata* is at many points extremely close to its original in its structure, including plot, characters, and dialogue, but the contextualizing narrative makes the whole a very different play from the Aristophanic original. It is not an archaizing piece attempting to perform Greek drama in English, as

was the case with *The Oresteia*. Harrison instead looked to Old Comedy as a generic model that would allow for explicit political engagement with topical issues, and also a model that would, to a certain extent, allow for didacticism in regard those issues. For example, from Lysistrata's confrontation with the magistrate on civic policy in the original Harrison produces a confrontation between his Lysistrata figure and a police inspector on Defense spending:

INSPECTOR
You've locked these gates, madam. May we inquire why?

LYSISTRATA
Because the weapons in there bleed the country dry.

INSPECTOR
Locking the gates though. It doesn't make any sense.

LYSISTRATA
It's a protest against the money wasted on Defence.

INSPECTOR
O so we're a paid up economist are we miss. I see.
The FT index is all Greek to me.
Tell me if you're an economist, miss,
about the money that gets wasted policing all this.
Have you ever thought about the cost to the nation
of policing your protest and your little demonstration.

LYSISTRATA
You won't need to do it once they withdraw
the missiles, and we've put an end to War.
The money stockpiled in that Acropolis…

INSPECTOR
Acro…Acro…is that some foreign lingo, miss?
English is all I ever need to speak.

LYSISTRATA
OK then, no more reference to anything Greek!
The money represented by this wire fence
could be used on education if men had any sense.
The millions of pounds in your barbed wire barricade
could go on education here, or for Third World Aid.
The billions committed to your missile base

> could go towards helping the human race.
> These destructive systems waste enormous wealth
> better spent on Housing, Education, Health.
> The billions behind that guarded silo door
> would feed more than 5, 000 if we got rid of War.
> Those millions in missiles and US personnel
> could be spent on healthcare and making people well.
> Those millions on missiles that you pour
> along with human blood down the open drain of War.
> Those millions, those billions stored in that concrete
> could let the world's hungry learn to eat.
> We protest against those billions that are poured
> into payloads that the nation can't afford.
> Cash that's needed to house, feed, clothe, heal, teach.[538]

Compare this with the Lysistrata's speech to the magistrate in Aristophanes (*Lys*. 574-586):

> First of all, just like washing out a raw fleece, you should wash the sheep-dung out of the body politic in a bath, then put it on a bed, beat out the villains with a stick and pick off the burrs; as for those people who combine and mat themselves together to gain office, you should card them out and pluck off the heads. Then card the wool into the work-basket of union and concord, mixing in everyone; and the immigrants, any foreigner who's friendly to you, and anyone who's in debt to the treasury, they should be mixed in as well. And yes, there are also states which are colonies of this land: you should recognize how you now have them lying around like little flocks of wool, each one by itself; so then you should take the human flock from all of them, bring them together here and join them into one, and then make a great ball of wool, and from that weave a warm cloak for the people to wear.[539]

The specific content of Lysistrata's objection to war may differ as does her vision of female governance, but the nature of Old Comedy provided Harrison with a genre that fostered explicit political discussion and didacticism, couched in comedy rooted in gender roles, sex, and obscene language.

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[538] Harrison (2002b) 239-40.

[539] Translated by Sommerstein (1990) 77.

It is not until the second play in the trilogy that the women's use of *Lysistrata* and their insistence on associating their actions with the events presented on-stage in Athens in 411 BC take on a deeper resonance. It is more than a pacifist play and more than an obscene play. It is fundamentally about remembrance:

> ..there's no difference between there and here…
> In the Third World War we'll destroy
> not only modern cities but the memory of Troy,
> stories that shaped the spirit of our race
> are held in the balance in this missile base.
> Remember, if you can, that with man goes the mind
> that might have made sense of the Hist'ry of Mankind.
> It's a simple thing to grasp: when we're all dead
> there'll be no further pages to be read,
> not even leaflets, and no peace plays like these
> no post-holocaust Aristophanes.
> So if occasionally some names are new
> just think of the ground that's under you.
> If we're destroyed then we
> take with us 411 BC.[540]

Trojan Women likewise is about remembrance, both circa 415 BC and 1986. Even for its original Athenian audience the events depicted in the play were the stuff of legend set in the distant past. For Harrison's purposes in this trilogy the play resonates on a couple of levels. At its heart it is a play about the suffering of women in war; women who have watched their loved ones, husbands, sons, and grandsons be slaughtered, only to survive themselves that they might be raped and enslaved. But it is also a play that raises issues about the function of drama, both in fifth-century Athens and in our own times. As David Thelan has written, "People develop a shared identity by identifying, exploring, and agreeing on memories."[541] Whatever else we might want to claim in regard to the

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[540] Harrison (2002b) 242. While the real women of Greenham Common did not associate themselves with the characters in plays of either Aristophanes or Euripides, they did associate themselves with earlier historical periods, particularly the persecuted witches of early-modern Europe and the radical Diggers and Ranters of the seventeenth century who had advocated for "common ownership of all land, the abolition of private property and an end to the power of master over servant, father over child and husband over wife." See Roseneil (2000) 16-21.

[541] Thelan (1989) 1122.

function of Greek tragedy, it is clearly investigating, negotiating, and creating communal memories. Harrison is to a large extent echoing the Shakespearean query, "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?"[542] Harrison's answer is that Hecuba is the embodiment of remembrance and that this sort of historical and cultural remembrance is an integral component of our humanity.[543] To quote Lewis Lapham,

"Unlike moths and goldfish, human beings deprived of memory tend to become disoriented and easily frightened. Not only do we lose track of our own stories (who we are, where we've been, where we might be going), but our elected representatives forget why sovereign nations go to war."[544] Humans define themselves, their culture, their history through remembrance, and Harrison in this trilogy is arguing that the developments in warfare that have taken place over the course of the twentieth century have allowed war to threaten the very existence of memory.[545] Only when there are no humans left will there be no memory.

Where Part I of *The Common Chorus* provides a rational political argument from the women as to why war should be ended, Part II serves as a narrative example of the horrific experience of women in war zones. With the exception of Cassandra's bridal songs, the play is largely a line-for-line translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Cassandra, with her ability to foresee the future, echoes the language of the male soldiers in Part I of *The Common Chorus* to the tune of "Here Comes the Bride":

> Light up all sides!
> The God of Brides!
> At the king's side

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[542] *Hamlet* 2.ii. 559-60.

[543] On the importance of memory to Tony Harrison's poetry, see Marshall (2008).

[544] Lapham (2008) 12.

[545] Part III of *The Common Chorus*, *Maxims*, which became *Square Rounds*, takes as its theme the development of military weapons. Equating science with magic, the play meditates upon the power of man's imagination, in all its ingenuity and all its cruelty, through a discussion of the history of the invention of military weapons.

the Argos bride!

O I'm in luck –
a royal fuck!

Here comes the bride
of genocide.
…
Dance after me
Please 1-2-3.

Sing! Sing! Sing! Sing!
for the bride of the king.

Bouquet and veil
veil and bouquet.
Blood marks the trail
to my wedding day.

Cock, Nob and Dick
hard as a stick
into Cassandra and over with quick.

Cock, Nob and Dick
…[546]

Harrison alters the wedding hymn of Cassandra so that a modern audience can hear the perversion of ritual that is present in Euripides' play, and fully comprehend the horrific insanity of equating rape by a genocidal enemy with marriage. What is happening to the women of Troy of course goes far beyond rape and enslavement. They are experiencing what women in war zones have experienced throughout history – the use of sexual violence to effect a complete physical and psychological destruction. Hecuba suggests that the only redemption for such depth of suffering is that unlike others who have suffered less and been forgotten, their suffering ensures that they will be remembered in song.[547]

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[546] Harrison (2002b) 295-299.

[547] Harrison (2002b) 339.

Read side by side, however, Parts I and II provide another parallel narrative for war, from a masculine point of view. In Part I of *The Common Chorus* the Guards in response to the prospect of the abolition of war say,

> War, it'll only survive in old soldier's stories.
> All our heroic deeds, our military glories.
> …
> The Greeks resisting though outnumbered by the Persians.
> Memories like that though help to form a nation.
> …
> History'll come to a dead end. I mean
> wars, that's all history's ever been. [548]

From this perspective one can read *The Trojan Women* as a victor's narrative. It is the story of the Greeks' absolute victory over the Trojans. Over the course of the play we see the destruction of the Trojan religious system, with the last priestess being dragged from her temple and handed over to be a sex-slave in the house of Troy's conqueror, the appropriation of the surviving female family members of Troy's greatest hero, Hector, to be slaves in Greek households, with his wife, Andromache, becoming a sex-slave to Neoptolemus, and his mother, Hecuba, a household slave to Odysseus, the death of his son, Astyanax, the last Trojan male, Troy itself burned to the ground, and the reclamation of the lost property over which the war had been waged in the first place. This utter destruction of the enemy as a victor's narrative finds a parallel in Aeschylus' *Persians*, where a royal figure entering in rags is an unequivocal good.[549] And of course it finds a parallel historical narrative in the Athenians' own actions in Melos in 416 BC.[550]

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[548] Harrison (2002b) 275.

[549] On Aeschylus' *Persians*, see Hall (1989) and (1996).

[550] Thucydides 5.84-116 tells how the Athenians in 416 BCE gave the hitherto neutral island of Melos the option of either paying tribute to Athens and the Delian League or being invaded during the Peloponnesian War. In the Melian dialogue, as presented by Thucydides, the Melians argued that the law guaranteed their right to neutrality among other arguments in favor of their position. The Athenians dismissed the substance of their arguments with the statement that the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must. When the Melians refused to offer tribute and resisted occupation, the Athenians took the island by military force, executing all adult males and enslaving the women and children.

Through the gendered debate of Part I of *The Common Chorus* Harrison facilitates these parallel readings of Part II. He explicitly acknowledges that men and women can and often do construct different memories from the same events. This is important to the argument that Harrison is making with these plays. He is saying that memory is important to all humans, regardless of how those memories are framed. Whether you are Hecuba or Odysseus the memory of the Trojan War matters; the sufferer and the celebrant share the same space. What is pointed to in the first play and examined in detail in the third play is the fact the developments in military weapons in the twentieth century have led to the possibility of a war that will leave no survivors and no memories. Modern weapons are so powerful that they have the ability to erase what the passing of more than three thousand years has been unable to erase – the memory of Troy. That is what the Greenham women of *The Common Chorus* are protesting. They are drawing on their memories, and larger cultural memories, to make a political argument against war, revising *Lysistrata* to state their case and then presenting *Trojan Women* to present a narrative that invites an emotional response to war.

Reading parts one and two of *The Common Chorus* side by side is, I think, the key to understanding the nature of Harrison's original works and their relationship to Attic drama. In writing about *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* Harrison has discussed what he refers to as the wholeness of the ancient Athenian imagination in which comedy, both satyr plays and Old Comedy, stood alongside tragedy as integral parts of Dionysian worship and the celebration of the Athenian *polis*. From comedy Harrison takes the overtly political didacticism, and from tragedy the mythic exemplar. In this trilogy they are set alongside one another, but in future works, from *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* onward, both parts of the Athenian dramatic tradition are brought together in Harrison's plays. In his two plays from the summer of 1995, *The Labourers of Herakles* and *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, Harrison himself appeared on stage delivering speeches that share features with the *parabasis* of Old Comedy. In his feature film/poem *Prometheus* the central figure is an Aristophanic hero, a long-john-clad grizzled coal miner who is willing to take on Zeus and his henchman Hermes, for the sake of Prometheus. His most recent play *Fram* owes far more to Aristophanes' *Frogs* than to any Greek tragedy, despite the prominent discussions of the messenger speeches of Greek tragedy and the specific use of

Euripides' *Herakles*. Harrison admires fifth-century Athenian drama in part because it allowed the sufferer and celebrant to share the same space. In his original works Harrison tries to make that same accommodation. A pessimist by nature – Diana Rigg referred to him as Northern Gloom[551] –Harrison's plays never provide the happy ending that we expect from comedy – his peace protesters go to jail instead of ending a war. But Old Comedy pervades Harrison's adaptations and original plays just as much a Greek tragedy.

The Common Chorus and *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* in different ways display how Harrison was grappling with his conception of the wholeness of the fifth-century Athenian dramatic imagination, especially the issue of multiple genres, as presented at the City Dionysia. Both *The Common Chorus* and *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* provide different solutions to the problem of how to incorporate all the genres into a single production. Subsequent plays favor the model of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, which incorporated multiple genres into a single play, as opposed to the multiple plays of *The Common Chorus* with different genres set side by side. These later plays take a number of formal structures from both fifth-century Athenian tragedy and Old Comedy, most notably the messenger speech and the *parabasis*. The messenger speech is a central part of Greek tragedy in which an actor delivers a tour de force speech at great length describing some action, frequently horrific and often difficult, if not impossible, to stage, which has occurred off-stage. As Harrison has Gilbert Murray describe it in *Fram*:

> … A messenger speech
> Reaches depths in the hearer mere pictures never reach.
> If the messenger's on target, the mind's eye of the hearer
> More than vision itself brings horror even nearer.[552]

This insistent on the function and power of the messenger speech is then illustrated when Sybil Thorndike delivers a seventy-two line messenger speech describing the suffering and horrors of the Russian famine.[553] Harrison uses the messenger speech in all of his

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[551] Dexter (1993) 38.

[552] Harrison (2008) 55.

[553] Harrison (2008) 59-62.

classical adaptations and original works. So in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, Silenus delivers a horrifying a 107- line speech about the torture and death of his fellow satyr Marsyas who was flayed alive by Apollo for daring to compete against him in a music contest.[554] In *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, Faustina, in a seventy line speech, addresses the rumours of her infidelity while describing horrific Cassandra-like visions of her arms full of men butchered, not only by her own son, but also by more recent twentieth-century European rulers.[555] These speeches become a signature of Harrison's verse drama, just as they are of fifth-century Athenian tragedy, but their prominence has led critics to emphasize the influence of Greek tragedy on Harrison's plays, while ignoring the significant influence of Old Comedy.

These messenger speeches are paralleled by Harrison's use of the parabasis in which either a character in the play, or the poet himself, speaks directly to the audience about both the play but also its larger societal context. In Old Comedy the parabasis marks a point in the play in which the chorus step forward and the chorus leader speaks directly to the audience. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* for example, the chorus leader steps forward and explicitly says, "It is right and proper for the sacred chorus to take part in giving good advice and instruction to the community", before proceeding on to give the audience specific advice and instruction about the state of things in Athens.[556] Hubbard has argued "that the Old Comic parabasis provides the central point of access to the complex and manifold ironies of the comic poet's relation to his audience, to the social themes of his drama, and to society as a whole...the parabasis…both reflects and deconstructs the drama that surrounds it and the society that surrounds the drama."[557]

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[554] Harison (2004) 136-139. On the ancient sources for the myth of Apollo and Marsyas, see Gantz (1993) 95. Harrison's telling of the myth is also influenced by Zbigniew Herbert's poem "Apollo and Marsyas", and excerpt of which was included in the program for *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. For the poem in its entirety, see Herbert (2007) 165-6.

[555] Harrison (1996) 97-100.

[556] Sommerstein (1996) 93.

[557] Hubbard (1991) ix.

Aristophanic parabases differ greatly in content. Some, such as the two parabases in *Birds* deal primarily with the identity of the chorus and the society that they are creating in Cloudcuckooland, while others, such as that of *Frogs*, are concerned with giving political advice to the citizens of Athens. All of Harrison's parabatic speeches, are, I would argue, far more akin to the parabasis of *Frogs* than to those of other plays: "the poet [is] not a passive transmitter of social realia, but [is] a creative individual who is as much at war with his social environment as he is inevitably a part of it. Through his parabases Aristophanes invites us to see himself in this very way."[558] This I would argue is also true of Harrison's use of the parabatic structure in a number of his plays.

Parabases of this kind invite the audience to associate the poet with the politics of the stage action and to associate him with particular characters. The unusual first-person voice in the parabasis of *Acharnians* has encouraged many to closely associate the central character Dicaeopolis with Aristophanes himself. In Harrison's plays this association of action and character with Harrison himself becomes increasingly pervasive in the plays that come after *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. In *The Labourers of Herakles* there is a parabatic scene in which Harrison himself interrupts the action of the play in order to step forward and address the audience directly, claiming to speak on behalf of the poet Phyrnichos, appealing for art that addresses not the mythic past divorced from the present, but the plight of the modern world.[559] Harrison also appears in the performance space in *The Kaisers of Carnuntum*, where instead of inserting a speech that purports to represent the view of the poet, Harrison repeats the actions of Orpheus, who has attempted to kill Commodus having said, "since you seem untouched by music's charms, you will have to be subdued by force of arms."[560] I would argue that this scene is closely related to the parabatic scene in *The Labourers of Herakles* where Harrison becomes conflated with an earlier poet (Phyrnichos) who both presents an ideal of poetry in action, but whose words also summarize the central concern of the play, which in both plays is

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[558] Hubbard (1991) vii.

[559] Harrison (1996a) 143-45.

[560] Harrison (1996a) 106-9.

about what art can and cannot do and what it ought to do. In *Fram* Harrison is never physically present on stage, and yet he is omnipresent in the play through the characters of both Gilbert Murray and Hjalmar Johansen. While the play is presented as a play by Gilbert Murray about Nansen, it is in fact a play by Tony Harrison, and from the beginning the audience is encouraged to conflate the identity of the two poets. But they share more than authorship, they also share an enduring optimistic faith in the power and relevance of Greek drama for the modern world, as well as a mutual loathing of T.S. Eliot. Yet at the same time that the audience is being invited to associate the perhaps naïve optimism of Murray with Harrison's own views, the audience is also invited to associate Harrison with Johansen, the "drunk, depressive, suicide" who was the dark side of Nansen's soul and who had serious doubts about the efficacy of art in the face of the polar winter let alone the worst suffering that humanity has been forced to endure.[561] The voice of the poet speaking to the themes of the play has been expanded from the single scene of *The Labourers of Herakles* into the entire fabric of the play as Harrison has continued to work toward creating plays that seamlessly integrate the tragic and comic aspects of the fifth-century Athenian theatre. The poet is never presented on-stage and not a single character ever steps forward and purports to speak on behalf of the poet, and yet in *Fram* two separate characters—one the optimistic celebrant, the other the dark pessimist—are unmistakably representing Harrison, his view of art and its ability to engage with and inform politics, while speaking directly to the audience and challenging them to consider their own role in the problems that the play is addressing.

Harrison's *Fram* engages with Aristophanes' *Frogs* much more pervasively than just in the influence of the parabasis. The play is modeled to a certain extent on the plot of *Frogs* and explores some of the same thematic concerns about the function of dramatic verse in the face of the harsh realties of the world in which we live. In Aristophanes' play, the god Dionysus is struck by a longing for the recently deceased tragic poet Euripides, and so disguised as Herakles he sets off to the underworld in order that he might retrieve the poet. Once in the underworld Dionysus becomes the judge of a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides as to who should have the seat of honor among the

[561] Harrison (2008) 18.

tragic poets. The contest, however, soon evolves into a contest as to which of the poets can give the best advice to the city of Athens regarding their political situation and how verse drama might assist in the city-state's salvation. In Harrison's play the poet-scholar Gilbert Murray comes back from the dead and calls forth a cast, also from among the dead, for his new play, *Fram*. And while the play is ostensibly about Fridtjof Nansen, the Norweigan explorer, it is, at heart, about what art can do in the face of the horrors witnessed in the twentieth century, and how art can present those horrors to an audience in a way that makes them feel the necessity of action.

Like *Frogs*, which centers on Dionysus and his slave Xanthias in its first half, and Euripides and Aeschylus in the second half, the action for much of the play centers around two pairs, Gilbert Murray and Sibyl Thorndike, and Fridtjof Nansen and Hjalmar Johansen. *Frogs* begins with Dionysus and his slave, Xanthias, going down to the underworld in search of Euripides to bring him back, presumably in order to write new plays. *Fram* begins with Gilbert Murray rising out of his grave at Westminster Abbey and calling forth Sibyl Thorndike so that they might perform Murray's new play *Fram*, about Nansen, both as Arctic explorer, but also as a humanitarian campaigner. As in *Frogs* the geographical location of the play is fluid. It begins in Westminster Abbey, from which Murray and Thorndike travel across the River Thames and along to the National Theatre on the Southbank where they will stage the play in the Olivier auditorium. This journey is cleverly effected with projections, which carry the audience along with Murray and Thorndike as they ostensibly walk from the Abbey to the National, despite the fact that the audience have not left their seats, and the actors playing the roles have traveled only from backstage to the entrances to the stall seats in the Olivier auditorium. Over the course of the play, without clear act breaks or scene changes, the Olivier becomes lecture halls throughout England, the arctic north, a London drawing room, an unspecified New York theatre, and the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. Time is similarly fluid with events which occurred over decades seamlessly flowing into one another with no explicit marking of the passage of time nor any attempt at a probable or plausible chronology. Parts of the play are set in 2008, some during Nansen's attempt to reach the North Pole

between 1893 and 1896[562], and others in 1922, with occasional scenes set during intervening years. Not only do the characters explicitly acknowledge the geography of London, and the National Theatre itself, they also explicitly acknowledge the structure of the Olivier, the presence of the audience and the price of the majority of tickets for the play:

> SYBIL THORNDIKE
> (*entering Olivier stalls through right aisle*)
> Gilbert! This is so inspiring! The Olivier!
> I can't wait to walk onto that stage and do your play.
>
> GILBERT MURRAY
> (*entering Olivier stalls through left aisle*)
> Just imagine, Sybil, this space we see before us
> was inspired by the theatre of ancient Epidaurus.
> But the balcony's scarcely authentic ancient Greek.
> Remember someone's up there, though, every time you speak.
>
> SYBIL THORNDIKE
> Gilbert you're addressing one who was renowned
> throughout her lifetime for her clarity of sound.
> Everything I utter will be crystal clear.
> Even those in ten-quid seats have a right to hear.[563]

The play consistently breaks the dramatic illusion, acknowledging the audience and discussing the artifice of the play, both the conventions of the production and the structure of the play. Sybil Thorndike comments on the lack of set, and her need for a costume, and make-up.[564] And while Thorndike points to the practical issue of theatrical production, Murray points to the structure of the play itself, announcing that he will

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[562] For a detailed account of Nansen's arctic explorations, see Nansen (1897).

[563] Harrison (2008) 8-9. Since 2003, when Nicholas Hytner became Artistic Director of the National Theatre, Travelex has sponsored a number of plays within each season. The financial subsidy offered by the company permits two-thirds of the seats for every show to be sold for 10 pounds, while the remaining seats are sold for 27.50. Harrison had insisted that *Fram* be one of the Travelex shows, allowing tickets for the play to be as affordable as possible.

[564] Harrison (2008) 9.

deliver the prologue, which he then begins by explicating the function of the messenger speech in Greek tragedy.[565] Murray's prologue here, however, is in fact his second prologue, as we shall see. While the messenger speech at first seems an arcane topic with which to begin the prologue to a play, it is in fact the theme of the play: how can we address the horrors that the twentieth century has witnessed? Murray, and Harrison through the character of Murray, advocates following the model of the ancient Greek tragedy, which they argue gave "the unspeakable poetic expression."[566]

Harrison, however, is not only using the model of Greek tragedy in this play. While the idea of Greek tragedy, and the use of the mask and poetic speech in particular, figure large in the play's discussion of how we ought to address the darkest of events, such as the 1921/2 Russian famine, the play couches this discussion within a framework that has far more in common with comedy than tragedy. Almost all of the characters that appear in this play are historical, the exceptions being Sheldon and the American Relief Administration (ARA) men.[567] Greek tragedy rarely presented historical figures on stage, and in the rare cases when they did, it was always in the context of a historical narrative.[568] Old Comedy seems to have regularly depicted historical figures on stage, be it poets (Aeschylus and Euripides' in *Frogs* or Cratinas putting himself onstage in his *Pytine*), politicians (Cleon famously took Aristophanes to court for how he was depicted in *Babylonians*), or philosophers (Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*), but always in the context of fantastic, not historical, plots. In *Fram*, the historical figures are not characters

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[565] Harrison (2008) 8, 9-11.

[566] Harrison (2008) 9.

[567] The American Relief Administration was a historical entity, established in the wake of World War I under the directorship of Herbert Hoover, that provided relief to Europe, and in the early-1920s, Russia.

[568] There is only one extant historical tragedy from fifth-century Athens: Aeschylus' *Persians*, which is set at the Persian Royal Court as news arrives from Greece of the Persian defeat at the battle of Salamis. According to Herodotus (6.21.2), the tragedian Phyrnichus also wrote a historical tragedy, *The Fall of Miletos*, but it upset the audience so much that the play was banned and its author fined. For a longer discussion of Phyrnichus, see chapter 4.

in a historical narrative, though parts of the narrative, those involving Nansen and Johansen's artic explorations and Nansen's presentations as part of the Russian famine relief efforts, are based on real events. These historical figures are all playing roles, as themselves, in Murray's play that he has come back from the grave to stage. The events of the play are part of a larger metatheatrical framework that has no parallel in Greek tragedy, but finds parallels in Aristophanic comedy.

Old Comedy seems to have frequently drawn attention to the conventions of theatre performances, both tragic and comic. In *Thesmorphoriazusae*, the women of Athens are plotting against the tragedian Euripides, because, according to the women, he is a misogynist who publicly reveals their secrets.[569] Euripides, having failed to convince his effeminate fellow poet Agathon to infiltrate the women on his behalf, convinces a male relative to do so.[570] The relative's disguise is discovered by the women, and the second half of the plot involves the relative using various escape plots from Euripidean tragedies in an effort to escape the angry mob of women. *Frogs* also engages with metatheatrical discussions about the nature of theatre performances, particularly in the *agon* between Aeschylus and Euripides for the seat of tragedy as they debate their use of metre, music, character, etc. There is no sense in these Old Comedies of dramatic illusion. The actors and chorus acknowledge the presence of the audience, and one suspects that the audience voiced their approval or disapproval when directly engaged by the performers. The conventions of performance, including costumes and masks, are explicitly acknowledge, as in *Thesmophoriazusae*, as is the convention of female roles being played by males.

Fram also trades in Old Comedy's penchant for *ad hominem* jokes, though they are all literary rather than political. There are frequent jokes about or references to

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[569] For a general discussion of *Thesmophoriazusae*, see MacDowell, *Aristophanes and* (1995) 251-273. For a far more detailed discussion see the introduction to Austin and Olson (2004).

[570] Agathon, a tragic poet who was active in the late-fifth century, also appears as a guest in Plato's *Symposium*.

Murray's nemesis T.S. Eliot who, in his essay "Euripides and Professor Murray", had savaged Murray's translations of Euripides.[571] In that essay he wrote of Murray's work:

> The Classics have, during the latter part of the nineteenth century and up to the present moment, lost their place as a pillar of the social and political system – such as the Established Church still is. If they are to survive, to justify themselves as literature, an element of the European mind, as the foundation for the literature that we hope to create, they are very badly in need of persons capable of expounding them…And we need a number of educated poets who shall at least have opinions about Greek drama, and whether it is or is not of any use to us. And it must be said that Professor Gilbert Murray is not the man for this. Greek poetry will never have the slightest vitalizing effect upon English poetry if it can only appear masquerading as a vulgar debasement of the eminently personal idiom of Swinburne. These are strong words to use against the most popular Hellenist of his time; but we must witness of Professor Murray ere we die that these things are not otherwise but thus.[572]

Near the end of the play, Harrison has Murray, at the urging of Sibyl Thorndike, let out his long-pent-up anger at Eliot, shouting:

> Eliot, you fucking desiccated cat-exploiting Yank!
> It's a pity you ever left your day job at the bank.[573]

But it is not only the rivalries between long-dead figures that are made light of, but also writers who are very much alive. Early in the play, when Murray and Thorndike first arrive at the Olivier, Murray complains,

> [Aeschylus'] *Oresteia* was played here, and my question is why,
> when my own was in existence, was the version by…
> (permit me, I beg you, my peck of peevish pique)
> a grubby Yorkshire poet with a bad degree in Greek![574]

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[571] Eliot (1920) 36-43; reprinted (1951) 59-64.

[572] Eliot (1950) 63.

[573] Harrison (2008) 82.

[574] Harrison (2008) 10. Similarly towards the end of the play Murray laments,

> I don't for a minute imagine that I dare aspire
> to a National Theatre revival of my Oresteia.
> I'm more than disgruntled to see they only use
> Bloody Yorkshire roughnecks like Harrison and Hughes.

The poet, the use of whose translation Murray is lamenting, is of course Tony Harrison, whose *Oresteia* had been staged in the Olivier in 1981.[575] Murray also takes a jab at the late twentieth-century fad of "translations" produced not from reading the text in the original, but rather by working from literal cribs and other translations:

> Mmm, the *Oedipus* 'translated' by W. B. Yeats!
> Doesn't know a word of Greek yet he still 'translates'!
> They all do it now. I doubt if any poet speaks
> the language they 'translate' from and most certainly not Greek.[576]

In the National Theatre production a line about theatre critic/playwright Nicholas de Jongh also got a laugh, though the line does not appear in the published text.[577] Many of these jokes require knowledge of theatre history, both performance and criticism, and knowledge about the reception of classical drama on the British stage in the twentieth century. Like the authors of Old Comedy, Harrison assumes that a substantial portion of his audience are frequent and knowledgeable theatre-goers, and he engages metatheatrically with this knowledge.

Fram is explicitly metatheatrical in a fashion similar to Old Comedy, at times querying how drama functions. Near the beginning of the play Murray announces to Thorndike that he is going to deliver a prologue: "You'll appear after the Prologue I myself deliver."[578] Murray's prologue here, however, is in fact his second prologue.

Harrison (2008) 80. The National Theatre staged Ted Hughes' version of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* in 1999.

[575] On Harrison's *The Oresteia*, see Chapter 2.

[576] Harrison (2008) 83.

[577] None of Harrison's published texts correspond exactly with the performed text. The texts are generally published in advance of opening night and do not reflect any additions or cuts that were made in between the text going to the press and the dress rehearsal, a point up until which Harrison's text tend to be quite mutable. Jasper Britton, who played Nansen in *Fram*, had recently performed the role of John Gielgud in de Jongh's *Plague Over England*.

[578] Harrison (2008) 8.

When he first appears at the beginning of the play in Westminster Abbey, he delivers a prologue which explains that he, Gilbert Murray, has come back from the grave after fifty years to stage a play that he had composed about Fridtjof Nansen in both his role as arctic explorer and his humanitarian efforts during the Russian famine. This first speech functions as a prologue to Harrison's play, setting out for the audience where the play is set, at least in its opening scene, and who its central characters are going to be, and what events it plans to describe. The second prologue functions as a prologue to Murray's play within a play, and it sets out the paradoxical theme of the play: how can words, and poetry in particular, express suffering that is indescribable? Murray repeatedly returns to the messenger speech and the open-eyed and open-mouthed Greek mask as the mechanism by which drama can address the worst of horrors in the most affective and effective way:

> The tragic mask for me has come to symbolise
> the art of facing horror with always-open eyes.
> No eyelids on a tragic mask. It has no choice but see
> and its mouth is always open to utter poetry.
> …
> A messenger speech
> reaches depths in the heart mere pictures never reach.
> If the messenger's on target, the mind's eye of the hearer
> more than vision itself brings horror even nearer.[579]

The play shows us the dramatic conventions that it is using, arguing about their function and value, making no attempt at realism, with the actors speaking their lines outwards to the audience, thus insisting that the discussion about the nature of function and art is not just between the characters on stage, but is intended to engage the audience too.

But Harrison's play does not just limit itself to theoretical discussions of how art can describe the indescribable; it repeatedly illustrates its point using explicitly non-naturalistic means to do so. Early in the play Nansen describes the *aurora borealis* whose beauty and magic he is trying to capture with pastels, pointing to the inability of the supposedly realistic medium of photography to do them justice: "How can you hope to

[579] Harrison (2008) 45, 55.

capture that fantastic light / in photographs that show it in only black and white?"[580] Later in the play a ballerina dances part of the *Aurora Borealis*, which the stage directions describes as "a ballet that should seem as if composed by Stravinksy, designed by Chagall and danced by Pavlova…".[581] Through both drawing and dance, Harrison provides two illustrations of how art can depict the seemingly indescribable. More daringly, however, Harrison hangs the success of his play on his belief that the messenger speech works as he says it does. At the end of the first half of the play, Sibyl Thorndike and Gilbert Murray become engaged in a lively debate about how to best convey the horrors of the Russian famine to potential donors. Everyone else present at the meeting believes that the relatively new medium of film, silent still in 1922, has supplanted the word as a means of showing others the reality of human sufferings. Nansen asks Murray:

> But do you really think poetry's the right thing to address
> the horrors we are witnessing in times like these,
> horrors quite unknown to your friend Euripides?
> You know I value poetry quite as much as you:
> I survived the Arctic winter by reciting poems I knew,
> but could your Greek tragedians, even if they speak
> the brilliant English you found for all their Greek,
> ever hope to accomplish a poetical narration
> of the plight of millions threatened by starvation?
> Surely even your tragedians would be bound to fail
> to put into poetry a horror on this scale.[582]

It is not Murray, however, but Thorndike who disabuses everyone, audience included, of this belief, delivering a horrific messenger speech describing in vivid detail what it is like to experience a famine in Russia. The speech is extraordinary, and Sian Thomas' delivery

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[580] Harrison (2008) 25.

[581] Harrison (2008) 37. Harrison names these three artists because they had all at one time or another been the recipients of Nansen Passports. These passports, developed by Fridtjof Nansen in 1922, were issued by the League of Nations to stateless refugees, allowing them to travel. It was for its work with and on behalf of refugees that the Nansen International Office for Refugees, a wing of the League of Nations, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1938.

[582] Harrison (2008) 46-7.

of it breathtaking, but Harrison refuses to allow the audience to forget that it is a theatrical speech. Thorndike begins her speech:

> I happen to believe that the theatre permits
> an actress to play hunger and still have fleshy tits.
> The only thing an actress like me needs to do
> is say on stage I'm starving and you'll believe it's true.
> She says, 'This is the Volga', she says, 'I'm starving there,'
> though she's obese of body and the boards she treads quite bare.
> The collective imagination of the audience will summon
> The freezing snows of Saratov, the starving woman.[583]

And then having delivered a horrific tour de force, she concludes by snapping at her dinner companions, "Sorry if I'm not *actually* starving", and flounces off for champagne at the Savoy. Like so much of the play the scene is working on multiple levels. On one level it provides the most compelling description of the human suffering that motivates Nansen's humanitarian efforts, while the metatheatrical narrative provides a clear articulation of what art can in fact represent and the value of such things being represented in art. Like Aristophanes, Harrison believes that art contains the possibility of redemption. While Harrison is contemplating the destruction of the world, rather than the fall of Athens, both argue that verse drama has advice to offer, and are explicitly didactic about it.

In *Fram* the messenger speech does not stand alone as one scene in the play, rather the entire play is engaged with the function of the messenger speech in Greek tragedy: how to convey to an audience horrors that almost defy the imagination? At the same time the entire play is also engaged with the function of the parabasis: how does a poet speak directly to an audience in the context of a play in such a way as to push them forcefully enough to do something about the social and political problems being addressed in the play? Like *Frogs*, *Fram* is not just about humorous journeys to and from the underworld and debates about the mechanics of art and the merit of different approaches. Both plays are about the very serious issue of a society on the cusp of failure. Dionysus isn't joking when he says that Athens is in need of a savior. Athens is about to lose the Peloponnesian War and Old Comedy and tragedy, as they existed in fifth-century

[583] Harrison (2008) 59.

Athens, are also about to apparently cease production. In *Fram* Harrison seems to be arguing that we are also facing cultural perils. He suggests that the western world in the late-twentieth century is faced with the failure of the imagination. The real images of photographs and films have replaced the written word as the primary means of conveying suffering, but they have proved a failure when it comes to evoking a compassionate response in their audience who have become astonishingly inured to images of human suffering at its very worst.[584] But Harrison also suggests that it is much worse than just the failure of the reality of human suffering to move an audience, but that the western wealthy imagination is similarly failing, whether it be the impulse for exploration exhibited by Nansen and Johansen, or Nansen and Murray's belief that through institutions such as the League of Nations the plight of the world's most unfortunate would be improved. As with the ending of his *Lysistrata* in *The Common Chorus*, Harrison refuses the revelry and resolution that typically ends Old Comedy, and insists that his audience associate the problems presented with the cultural and political structures of the world in which we live and which in a democracy we ought to take some responsibility for. Nansen and Johansen equate the necessity of sharing their body heat when they were trekking north to the succor that all humanity needs in times of darkness, and which the wealthy west systemically refuses to the poor and suffering in other parts of the world, through the failure to adequately deal with the millions of refugees in need,

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[584] *Fram* uses two true stories of stowaways to make Harrison's point about how images have inured us to the suffering endured in other parts of the world, as well as the power of words to move. The first is the story of Mohammed Ayaz who fell from the wheel bay of a plane where he had stowed away into the car park of a B&Q store. The store clerk who found the body mistook him for a passed out drunk, thinking the brains that had poured out of his split skull were vomit. Harrison (2008) 87. See:<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4223470,00.html>. Harrison also refers to is the horrific story of Yaguine Koita and Fodé Tounkara, who at the age of fourteen stowed away on a plane flying from Guinea to Belgium in the plane's wheel bay where they froze to death. They were easily identifiable despite the advanced state of decomposition because they were carrying a plastic bag in which were their birth certificates, school report cards, family photographs, and a letter signed by both boys addressed to those in power in Europe asking for help for both themselves and the other suffering children of Africa. The text of the letter, which was widely reported in media at the time, is available on-line: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaguine_Koita_and_Fodé_Tounkara>.

or to give work and immigration visas to the poor. It is a deeply uncomfortable ending, but it insists that the audience recognize a problem which the philosopher Adam Morton has identified as one of the greatest ethical issues of the modern world, where borders and citizenship more than anything else divide the world into haves and have nots.

Aristophanes was both a political and dramatic poet – the two were inseparable for the poets of Old Comedy. The same is true of Harrison. While Harrison had been accused of violating the mythic distance of tragedy by explicitly engaging with politics, what he in fact has violated is the generic boundaries between tragedy and Old Comedy. For him both genres are essential to understanding the fifth-century Athenian experience of drama and how it functioned in their society. Tragedy and Old comedy were part of the same festival and were written for the same audience. What Harrison has attempted in a variety of ways in different plays is to recreate for a modern audience the range of the dramatic experience in fifth-century Athens where all the dramatic performances contributed to the cultural and political discussion. Harrison takes from each genre attributes that he believes to be integral to how fifth-century drama functioned in performance. From tragedy he takes the messenger speech and the deep belief that words can convey even the virtually unimaginable, and from comedy he takes the didactic insistence that drama is not just about the world of the play, but about the larger society in which the audience and poet both live.

Chapter 6: classical plays and verse drama in the 20th century

– all translations date.
I don't for a minute imagine that I dare aspire
to a National Theatre revival of my Oresteia.
I'm more than disgruntled to see they only use
bloody Yorkshire roughnecks like Harrison and Hughes.

–Gilbert Murray in *Fram*[585]

Professional performances of classical drama in translation[586], have become commonplace in Britain since the National Theatre's 1981 production of *The Oresteia*. This is a phenomenon of the twentieth century, and largely the late-twentieth century. Aside from a brief flurry of professional productions in the early-twentieth century, classical drama had not since antiquity been performed as public drama, accessible to all who could afford the cost of admission to the theatre. As discussed in chapter one, plays with classical content had been performed on the professional stages of Britain since the 1500s, but classical plays largely as written by their authors, though in English translation, did not reach those same stages until the twentieth century. There are numerous factors that contributed to the sudden popularity of these plays in the British theatre in the twentieth century: the rise of general public interest in the classical past due to the excitement surrounding archaeological excavations in the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as those of Heinrich Schliemann at Troy; the birth of socialism which led to changes within British society causing cultural shifts that would lead to the foundation of the Labour Party, and manifested in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century movements such as the Fabian Society; shifts in scholarly trends with scholars,

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[585] Harrison (2008) 80.

[586] Many of these productions do not in fact use 'translations' as production texts, as their purported translators are unable to read the original language. Such texts might better be referred to as versions. They are frequently advertised to the public, however, as an English production of a work by an ancient author, not as an adaptation by a modern author. It is this manner of public presentation that unifies these plays, despite the fact that their fidelity to the original texts varies.

such as Gilbert Murray, publishing works on classical culture that made it accessible to a wider audience beyond Classical scholars, and which drew associations between fifth-century Athenian drama and modernity; and, the initiatives undertaken by members of the British theatre community, such as Harley Granville-Barker and G.B. Shaw, to establish a National Theatre that would function not primarily as a commercial venture, but rather as a performed public library of dramatic literature. These factors combined to open a place for classical drama on the professional stages of England and to find audiences for the plays in the early-twentieth century. Yet by the end of World War II the nature of British theatre had changed substantively and the theatres that had been looking beyond the borders of England both geographically and chronologically largely disappeared for a time. Arthur Miller described the British theatre of this period as being hermetically sealed off from life.[587] Though to be fair the reality of life in Britain in the wake of two devastating wars in less than forty years was not necessarily something that an audience would want to spend their evening out at the theatre reflecting upon. With a handful of exceptions, classical drama disappeared from the professional British stage until the last twenty years of the century, when it suddenly became even more prolific than it had been in the first twenty years of the century.

Tony Harrison's work, despite being written in the final decades of the twentieth century, is most akin to the plays of Gilbert Murray in form, scholarly grounding, and ideological conceptions both of the plays in their original fifth-century context but also in terms of what those plays offered to a modern audience. Both men translated the ancient Greek plays into rhyming English verse, their interpretation of the plays rooted in current scholarship, with the firm belief that the ancient poets were using their plays to critically examine the world in which they lived and the decisions that were being made by the Athenian citizen body, and that these plays offered a model for modern drama to engage with their society and audience in similar ways. And both men, through the success of their translations of classical drama on the contemporary stage, cleared the way for others at a time when Greek drama in translation had been unfashionable.

[587] Eyre and Wright (2000) 242.

Murray had begun his theatrical career not with translations, but with an original play entitled *Carlyon Sahib* (1895) followed by his original play *Andromache* (1897). His turn to productions of translations had something to do with the lack of success of his original plays; *Carlyon Sahib* has been staged with some success but *Andromache* had only received a non-professional staging.[588] But it also owed much to the encouragement of Granville-Barker, who shared Murray's belief that making translations of classical drama available to all who were interested was a public service that at some level would improve the nation. Whether Murray's translations had any edifying effect on the nation is unclear, but as James Morwood has noted, "a key aspect of Murray's achievement was that his translations served as a channel, conveying the overwhelming power of this and other Greek tragedies to modern theatre-going audiences in the same way that Chapman's Homer unlocked the greatest of Greek poets for Keats."[589] Against the background of the success of the productions of Murray's translations there were some who argued "that the true Euripides was to be found in the performances in Greek by schoolboys at Bradfield in Berkshire."[590] This criticism in and of itself points to the success of Murray's campaign to popularize Greek drama. With exclusion through educational policy being circumvented, those who were invested in the apartheid of knowledge were forced into arguing for the relative value and authenticity of schoolboys performing Euripides in the original Greek. This of course necessitated a change in the articulation of the function of original language performances in academic settings from the traditional view that it was not about performance but rather teaching the students rhetoric, cultural and moral values, to foregrounding the performance and audience, with claims of authenticity and therefore performative value. Murray on the other hand presented his scholarly work and his work in the theatre as sharing a single goal: "I am trying to understand the plays more closely and thoroughly and to help English readers to do so."[591] In this he was

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[588] Smith and Toynbee (1960) 134.

[589] Morwood (2007) 134.

[590] Morwood (2007) 135.

[591] Morwood (2007) 136.

spectacularly successful, though time has largely forgotten his success thanks to the criticisms of T.S. Eliot.

Eliot too had some success on the contemporary stage with his veiled adaptations of classical plays. Eliot's plays were rooted to a degree in contemporary scholarship on classical drama. But where Murray was interested in understanding the plays and what their authors had been trying to say to their fifth-century audiences, Eliot was interested in the ritualistic underpinnings of ancient Greek drama, drawing on the work of the Cambridge ritualists, and philosophic ideas of how drama functions, following Aristotle's *Poetics*. Eliot was searching for a drama that could incorporate the spiritual and ritual into non-heroic verse drama that depicted ordinary modern life. For Eliot it was not about bringing classical drama to the modern stage, but using the model of classical drama to revivify English verse drama, which he felt had lost its way through both a failure of form and content. His vitriol against Murray seems to have stemmed in large part from his perception that Murray's translations were contributing to the further debasement of English verse drama. He wrote in response to a production of Murray's *Medea* translation:

> I do not believe, however, that such performances will do very much to rehabilitate Greek literature or our own, unless they stimulate a desire for better translations…Greek poetry will never have the slightest vitalizing effect upon English poetry if it can only appear masquerading as a vulgar debasement of the eminently personal idiom of Swinburne.[592]

Eliot of course had equally strong opinions about what sort of translations would meet his criteria, unfortunately they had a weak relationship to their Greek originals and an even weaker relationship to the stage.

In that same essay on the *Medea* production at the Holborn, Eliot advocated the translations of the American poet H. D. who at this point had translated the choruses from Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Hippolytus*, and who would go on to produce versions of *Hippolytus* and *Ion*.[593] Eliot wrote, "The choruses from Euripides by H. D. are,

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[592] Eliot (1950) 71-2.

[593] H. D. (2003).

allowing for errors and even occasional omissions of difficult passages, much nearer to both Greek and English than Mr. Murray's."[594] He also goes on to praise the work done by Pound on the Renaissance Humanists and translators.[595] The works that Eliot chose to single out here are instructive in a number of ways. The obvious point is that both writers belong to the modernist poetry movement, which sought to strip English poetry of excessive verbiage, and of which Eliot himself was a member. The other important point, however, is that the work of H. D. and of Pound neither sought to be "popular" nor could be considered as such. It was the work of a small group intended for a fairly exclusive and elite audience. And perhaps most importantly, the translation work here praised by Eliot as what ought to be striven for has absolutely nothing to do with the stage – these were strictly literary exercises. These were not poets writing for the theatre, but rather poets engaging with dramatic models for poetic rather than theatrical purposes.

By the end of the Second World War verse translations of classical plays, while still frequently being performed in academic settings, had disappeared from the professional stage, except for the occasional production of one of Murray's translations or a translation or version by another author.[596] There were also no professional poets in England actively engaged in producing new translations or versions of classical plays for the stage. This was not for lack of interest on behalf of poets, however. T.S. Eliot wrote that "the majority, perhaps, certainly a large number, of poets hanker for the stage…" And he went on to claim, "…and…not a negligible public appears to want verse plays."[597] While it is difficult to establish the portion of the public who were interested in plays that were not being written or staged, the reception of classical plays in verse

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[594] Eliot (1950) 77. This is a standard of excellence which every struggling Greek student dreams of.

[595] Pound produced a version of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* which was published in 1956.

[596] Director Michel Saint-Denis staged Yeat's translation of *Oedipus Rex* at the Old Vic in 1945, with Laurence Olivier taking the title role, and J.T. Sheppard's translation of *Electra* in 1951. In the Old Vic's 1948/49 season Anouilh's *Antigone* was produced by Laurence Olivier.

[597] Eliot (1950) 60.

translation in the second half of the twentieth century supports his claim about poets hankering for the stage.

At the end of the twentieth century Tony Harrison was far from alone in working as a poet producing classical plays for the contemporary stage. A surprising number of prominent poets writing in English have done versions of classical plays written specifically for production in the last three decades of the twentieth century, among them: Wole Soyinka, Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney, Simon Armitage, Blake Morrison, Sean O'Brien, and, of course, Tony Harrison. Not all of these works are alike, however, in the place of the work or works in the poet's career, the nature of the work produced, and its place in the British theatre tradition. At the same time, however, all of these plays are distinctly different from the work of Gilbert Murray and T.S Eliot in the first-half of the twentieth century, falling in between the two distant poles of close translation and veiled adaptation. While Harrison's translations at times come close to those of Murray, though never obscuring the translator in the way that Murray had, his original works are very different, existing in the space between translation and veiled adaptation. The other poets, however, have produced works that claim a closer relationship to the original than the works in fact often have owing to the authors' lack of Greek, while claiming a larger authorial role than Murray. Where Murray desired to make Greek drama a living dramatic tradition for English audiences, and Eliot saw an idealized Aristotelian model that he could use to create verse drama for modern audiences, the poets of the late-twentieth century seem to have different reasons for engaging with classical drama. In many cases, it seems to have been primarily an economic issue; they were commissioned by theatres to produce translations of specific plays. Poetry is a difficult vocation to earn a living from, and the opportunity to make a living wage while plying one's craft is rare for most poets. It also offered the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of some of history's greatest poets and write for the stage. Harrison saw in classical drama the model for building a new kind of public theatre that engaged its audience in political and cultural debates and for him it was a vocation to write theatre poetry, and theatre poetry that specifically engaged with classical drama. For the others, however, it seems largely to have been the seizing by non-dramatic poets of an opportunity that arose as a result of

trends in the British Theatre at the end of the twentieth century, trends created in no small part by Tony Harrison.

Wole Soyinka has some commonalties with some of the other poets who have produced classical plays in the late-twentieth century, while at the same time writing from a substantially different, non-European perspective.[598] He wrote an adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, which was produced by the National Theatre in 1973 as *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*.[599] The play was commissioned and produced while Soyinka was in a period of exile from Nigeria, having been released after nearly two years in prison for his political activities during the civil war. It is the reality of Soyinka's life that separates his use of classical drama from the other poets listed above. His version of Euripides' play maintains the plot of its original but it becomes a tale of post-colonial Africa with its complex power struggles.[600] The chorus become African slaves, Pentheus an African military dictator, and Dionysus an African revolutionary "who strives to free his people from the yoke of political and religious oppression."[601] Soyinka is writing about the realities of Africa, political and religious, but for the European stage, drawing upon European ritual drama and tying it intimately to the living ritual theatre traditions of his homeland. Unlike other European writers and directors, who frequently use Greek drama to try to recapture some form of ritual theatre, Soyinka is primarily engaged not with the distant past but with the very immediate struggles of African identity in a post-colonial Africa, as well as in a new era of civil rights for those

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[598] Soyinka's career, in fact, has close ties to that of Tony Harrison, though their classical plays are very disparate in both content and the chronology of their production. Both poets were students at the University of Leeds at the same time, and they there became friends. Later Soyinka worked as a script reader at the Royal Court Theatre, where his play *The Lion and the Jewel* was staged in 1966, with the design by Jocelyn Herbert.

[599] Soyinka (1976).

[600] While Soyinka had studied ancient Greek in his youth, as he put it "a twenty-year rust" on his language skills made it necessary for him to consult other translations when preparing his own version, specifically identifying the translations of Gilbert Murray and William Arrowsmith. See Soyinka (1976) x. For a discussion of the influence of Murray's translation on Soyinka's *Bacchae*, see Macintosh (2007) 145-165.

[601] Dominik (2007) 122.

of African heritage in the United States. The National Theatre commissioned this work from Soyinka, undoubtedly hoping that like his earlier play *The Lion and the Jewel*, he would draw upon his Yoruba heritage and his own experiences as a Nigerian studying in England, to present a Greek tragedy full of song and dance and presenting a timely telling of cultural conflict between cultures and generations. It is not clear, however, that the National either anticipated the political nature of Soyinka's version or were willing to foreground it in performance, leaving Soyinka reluctant to permit future productions.[602] This use of Greek tragedy to engage with modern political and cultural strife looks forward to how Greek tragedy would come to be commonly used from the late 1980s onward by those writing for the British stage, but was at odds with the limited number of productions of Greek tragedy in the late-1960s and early-1970s which tended to privilege ideas of ritual, generally detached from any living tradition of ritual.

The National Theatre's two productions of verse adaptations of classical plays in the late 1960s and early-1970s, Seneca's *Oedipus* in 1968 and Euripides' *Bacchae* in 1973, are both notable for their emphasis on ritual. Ted Hughes' first foray into classical drama, with his version of Seneca's *Oedipus* for Peter Brook's production at the National Theatre, inserted phallic ritual into a play where there was none originally.[603] Hughes was belatedly called in by Brook to replace or fix the translation of David Turner, which Brook had decided was unworkable.[604] The memorable aspects of the play had little to do with the text and everything to do with the staging decisions. There were actors tied to

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[602] Director Ahmed Yerima recounted in an interview with the Nigerian newspaper *Punch* how Soyinka had been reluctant to give permission of the play at Nigeria's National Theatre because of his unhappiness with how the play had been interpreted in its original production at London's National Theatre. See Lasisi (2008) *Punch*.

[603] Sheridan Morley describes the set as being "dominated by a vast golden phallus" and he repeats the story that on the first night this phallus was "greeted from the stalls…by a piercing whisper from Coral Browne: 'Nobody we know, ducky." Morley (2002) 369. Morley (409) also reprints a passage from a conversation between Gielgud and Ralph Richardson that had originally run in the *Observer*, in which Gielgud described the fights between Brook and Olivier over the production, including the golden phallus which Olivier feared would result in the Old Vic being closed down by the police.

[604] For a detailed discussion of Hughes' *Oedipus*, see Talbot (2009) 62-80. See also Hardwick (2009) 49-53.

pillars in the dress circle moaning and groaning as the audience entered.[605] A large gold phallus dominated the set. Jocasta committed suicide by impaling herself vaginally on a large wooden sword, which had been fixed, point upwards, on the stage.[606] This production was part of Brook's shift away from his earlier work as a theatre director, which had mesmerized through stage magic, towards his self-fashioned identity as theatrical guru, with a strong focus on anthropological ideas. Tynan characterized the work of this period, as being "ritualistic misanthropy" and complained, "I don't want to hear Peter on anthropology any more than I would have wanted to hear Houdini on spiritualism. It's as if he had come to despise his real gifts, to regard them as superficial, whereas in fact the shocks he was capable of inflicting on an audience's susceptibilities set up vibrations that linger permanently in the memory. His theories, on the other had, dissolve overnight like melting snow."[607] It was undoubtedly their shared interest in anthropology that helped to cement the professional relationship between Brook and Hughes. Following *Oedipus*, they worked together on a film of *King Lear*, and again in 1971, on the play *Orghast*. *Orghast* was loosely based on the story of Prometheus and used a language invented by Hughes, Brook, and the actors; "Brook thought the play could be made comprehensible to primitive peoples across Africa if his actors learned the correct skills."[608] Both *Oedipus* and *Orghast*, belong to the kind of work that Soyinka has referred to as, "the current white avant-garde…groping towards the ritual experience

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[605] Ralph Richardson apparently infuriated Peter Brook by attempting to purchase a program from one such actor. See Morley (2002) 411.

[606] Kenneth Tynan, (2001) 84, recalls the best theatrical impromptu that he had ever heard originating from this scene during dress rehearsal: "Irene Worth as Jocasta had to pretend to impale herself vaginally on a large wooden sword…To do this she went through a lot of protracted squatting motions, with appropriately agonized expressions. At the dress rehearsal she stopped in mid-squat and, shading her eyes, peered out into the auditorium. 'Peter,' she said, plaintively. 'The last time I did this it was much larger and it was on a plinth.' 'Plinth Charles?' said John G. 'Or Plinth Philip?'"

[607] Lahr (2001) 298-9.

[608] Feinstein (2001) 183.

(alas, only too often comically misguided)."[609] Given the emphasis on ritual and cruelty in both Soyinka's *Bacchae* and Hughes' *Oedipus*, it is tempting to see them as similar kinds of adaptations, but the reality is that they are immensely different. Soyinka is using the mythic framework of Euripides to explore contemporary circumstances in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular, tying it to the living performance traditions of the Yoruba. For Hughes and Brooks, their adaptation of *Oedipus* and, later, their *Orghast*, were intellectual exercises rooted in anthropological theory, but detached from any ritual tradition that either man had personal experience of, and in the case of *Orghast*, detached from common sense and tinged with more than a little racism and overtones of cultural superiority.

Eliot had criticized Murray for his antiquated verse that harkened back to the Victorian age and Swinburne, but it was accessible and "popular". As the twentieth century progressed verse drama in England steadily moved away from anything that could be construed as "popular".[610] The work of Brook and Hughes, both with their production of Seneca's *Oedipus* and their later production *Orghast*, can be linked to the experiments of The Group Theatre, but were even less accessible to the general public than the Group Theatre productions had been. Modernist poetry and much of the poetry that followed was not well-suited to the theatre by the simple fact that it was not accessible to the general public, and indeed some of it might not even be recognized as verse by the average working-class citizen. As Burian observes, "…the large audience for Murray's work serves to remind us that the great majority of theatre-goers and readers in the period between the World Wars remained to be convinced of the triumph of modernism."[611] Verse drama of every earlier period had been accessible to heterogeneous audiences. This was true of the ancient Greek theatre and the Elizabethan and Jacobean

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[609] Soyinka (1976) 6-7.

[610] Arguably this was equally true of English poetry in general. Over the course of the twentieth century the amount of poetry, especially new poetry, being purchased by the average reader has steadily declined. Popular and accessible poetry, both in print and on stage, was dwindling, and the poetry that replaced it, whatever its literary merits, did and does not appeal to a large enough audience to fill a public theatre on multiple evenings.

[611] Burian (1997) 273.

theatre. Even the Restoration theatre, with its emphasis on wit and word play, had plots that even a country wife could follow. The shift of poetic drama towards the symbolist and then modernist was almost inevitably bound to curtail the audience for such plays, just as it had for poetry in general.

And yet despite it often being said that English verse drama is dead (along with the production evidence to support such claims) the last two decades of the twentieth century saw, if not a rebirth of English verse drama, at least a surprisingly hale final gasp, most often in the form of translations and adaptations of classical plays by prominent poets. Tony Harrison had begun laying the groundwork for this revivification with his translations and adaptations of verse drama in the 1970s at the National Theatre. In 1973 he had produced a translation of Moliere's *Le Misanthrope* for director John Dexter, followed by his adaptation of Racine's *Phèdre* in 1975. The critical response to these productions makes clear that many were surprised at how vital non-Shakespearean English verse drama could be on the modern stage. Through the 1970s Harrison produced numerous verse dramas for the National Theatre, and in doing so he established his reputation as a significant English poet, becoming the first major English poet to establish his reputation primarily through stage performance in a very long time. Then, as outlined in chapter two, in 1981 the National Theatre staged a production of Harrison's translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, directed by Peter Hall, which was seen by approximately 70 000 people. Its success seems to have drawn the attention of other writers and directors, who could now argue that a classical play in the season need not result in losses at the box office.

Prior to this pivotal moment in 1980 when both the Royal Shakespeare and the National Theatre decided to stage monumental classical productions, cumulatively they had staged only *Hippolytus* in translation (RSC 1978: directed by Ron Daniels, translated by David Rudkin)[612], and adaptations or versions of *Philoctetes* (NT 1964: directed by

[612] Given the close chronological proximity between the production of Harrison's version or Racine's *Phèdre* at the National Theatre in 1975 and the RSC production of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, which was the source of inspiration for Racine's version, one suspects that the success of the first production had much to do with the decision to commission a translation of the second play.

William Gaskill, adapted by Keith Johnstone), Seneca's *Oedipus* (NT 1968: directed by Peter Brook, version by Ted Hughes), and *The Bacchae* (NT 1973: directed by Roland Joffe, adapted by Wole Soyinka).[613] The near decade between Soyinka's *Bacchae* and Harrison's *The Oresteia*, had seen a sea-change both in terms of culture and theatre. The RSC, having done one classical play in its first twenty years prior to 1980, did nine classical plays or adaptations of classical plays in the next twenty.[614] Perhaps more significant than the general increase in the number of ancient plays being staged by the two most prominent non-commercial English theatre companies, was the influence that these companies' decision to each stage a monumental production of a Greek tragedy had on other smaller theatre companies. While there was a marked increase in the number of ancient plays being staged by the RSC and the National Theatre, over the next fifteen years there was an explosion in the number of ancient plays being staged by semi-professional and professional theatre companies. In the first half of 1995 there were more

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[613] Kenneth Tynan, in his role of Literary Manager of the National Theatre, produced a list of plays that he thought suitable for production, ranging from the ancient Greeks to plays written in the 1960s. He included all the plays of Aeschylus, all of Sophocles, except *Ajax*, all of Euripides, except *Rhesus* and *Children of Herakles*, and all of Aristophanes. Of these plays the National has produced Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, all of Sophocles, except *Electra* and *Women of Trachis*, Euripides' *Trojan Women*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and *Bacchae*, and Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Frogs*. Only *Bacchae* and *Philoctetes* were produced, in adaptation, prior to the 1981 production of the *Oresteia*. All the other productions post-date 1981. Tynan also lists a number of Roman plays: nine plays by Plautus, five by Terence, and seven by Seneca. Of these only Seneca's *Oedipus* has been produced. The number of productions of Greek drama compare favorably to National Theatre productions of non-Shakespearean Jacobean drama. Tynan's list, with a notation of which plays have been staged at the National, is available on-line through the National Theatre archives.

[614] The following plays were staged at by the RSC between 1980 and 2000: Seneca's *Oedipus*, version by Ted Hughes (1988: directed by Donald Sumpter), Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988: directed by Garry Hynes), Sophocles' *Electra* (1988: directed by Deborah Warner, revived in 1991), Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Thebans* (1991: directed by Adrian Noble), *The Gift of the Gorgon* (1992: directed by Peter Hall), *Ion* (1994: directed by Nicholas Wright), *Phoenician Women* (1995: directed by Katie Mitchell), and T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (1999: directed by Adrian Noble). In 2005 The RSC staged Tony Harrison's translation of Euripides' *Hecuba*. The London production was directed by Laurence Boswell, but the production was reworked by Harrison for its run in Washington, D.C., New York, and Delphi.

productions of Euripidean plays in London than Shakespearean plays.[615] Classical plays were being staged so frequently that it was possible for director Katie Mitchell to establish her reputation in the British theatre in large part through her productions of classical plays, first at the Gate Theatre and then at the National.

Not only did ancient drama, primarily Greek tragedy, begin to occupy a prominent place on the British stage following *The Oresteia*, a number of leading British and Irish poets began writing versions of Greek plays. This phenomenon ought to be ascribed almost exclusively to the fact that Tony Harrison, through his theatre work in the 1970s and 80s, had redeemed the reputation of non-Shakespearean verse drama in the British theatre, and cleared a space for its performance at the National Theatre, which in turn helped to establish a space for it in other theatres. Poet Laureate Ted Hughes did versions of *Alcestis*, *The Oresteia*, and Racine's *Phèdre*.[616] Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney did versions of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, entitled *The Cure at Troy*, and *Antigone*, *The Burial at Thebes*.[617] Simon Armitage did a version of Euripides' *Heracles*, *Mister Heracles*.[618] Sean O'Brien did a version of Aristophanes' *Birds*.[619] Blake Morrison has produced versions of Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[620] And Alistair Elliot did a translation of Euripides' *Medea*, commissioned by the Almeida Theatre Company.[621] None of these poets earned their poetic reputation working in the theatre, though Hughes had written numerous poorly received verse dramas for stage and radio during his early career, and none of them was able to read ancient Greek, hence the use of

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[615] Hall, Macintosh and Wrigley (2004) 5.

[616] Hughes (1999a); Hughes (1999b); Hughes (1998).

[617] Heaney (1991); Heaney (2004).

[618] Armitage (2000).

[619] O'Brien (2003).

[620] Morrison.

[621] Elliot (1993). Director Jonathan Kent reportedly approached both Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes for a translation of the *Medea* but both refused.

version rather than translation.[622] The sudden *en masse* shift to dramatic verse, and versions of ancient Greek drama in particular, was facilitated both by Harrison's success as a dramatic poet and by the programming decisions made by the National and the RSC in to make productions of Greek tragedy prominent in their season.[623] The productions of *The Oresteia* and *The Greeks* were a pivotal point in the reception of Greek drama on the British stage, while *The Oresteia* marked a significant moment in the return of English verse drama, by major poets, to the British stage.

This trend, however, also provides strong reason to believe that classical drama will soon lose its allure in the professional theatre. There is no good reason for most of these poets to have engaged with classical plays, or at least with Greek plays, almost to the exclusion of other verse drama. They do not know the languages, despite their work frequently being passed off either by themselves or by their publishers as translations. There seems to have been a convergence between the theatres seeking to produce seasons that they believed would be successful — banking on the combination of a classical play, which the National Theatre had proved could be artistically and financially viable, and a famous poet's name on the playbill. In recent years, however, most productions of this ilk, while not disasters, have been far from box office successes. This may have much to do with the fact that the British theatre, particularly the National Theatre, over the course of the 1990s moved steadily away from the model of a writers' theatre which had been inherited from the Royal Court under George Devine, towards a director's theatre, where the text is subservient to the director's vision. This certainly seemed to be the case with the premiere production of Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes*, in which director Lorraine Pintal did not concern herself with the Irish underpinning of Heaney's play, which he has said was in no small part motivated by his personal recollections of the burials that followed the deaths of the IRA hunger strikers in 1981 while in British custody.

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[622] On Hughes' early verse drama and his embracement of Greek drama late in his career, see Marshall (2009).

[623] It should also be noted that, with the exception of Heaney, all of these poets are from the north of England. Harrison, O'Brien, and Elliot all live in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Both Hughes and Morrison were born and raised in Yorkshire. Heaney was born and raised in Northern Ireland.

In the model of Greek tragedy Heaney found a vehicle for his poetry that allowed him to speak to current events through the veil of mythology, and as such offered a fairly natural progression from the poetry he had been writing to verse drama. The problem with both Heaney and Ted Hughes' texts, however, is that they seem to have been created from a poetic impulse, but not from any real theatrical vision. As a result while some passages in the plays are marvelous poetry, they are somewhat tone deaf to the dynamics of the theatre required to carry an audience from beginning to end. And while it would be possible to make production decisions, such as costume and set design, that would help the audience associate the actions of the play with the historical events which motivated Heaney to write it, the text does not insist on a production that makes these associations. This of course means that the director needs to impose a sense of theatricality on a text that does not demand it, and in the case of the first production of this play the director chose not to follow the poet. As Michael Billington wrote in his review of the Abbey's production of *The Burial at Thebes* in *The Guardian*, "Seamus Heaney says that his new translation of the *Antigone* was partly inspired by Bush's war on Iraq – in particular the argument that you are either for state security of an advocate of terrorism. I just wish something of that political animus had informed Lorraine Pintal's production…"[624] It is clear both from this production at the Abbey Theatre and the production of Hughes' *Oresteia* at the National Theatre that without the director and poet working closely together the text and whatever poetic and/or political impulses might have lain behind it are made subservient to those of the director, and may not be in any way discernable to an theatre audience. It is the distinction that Michael Kustow has made between a poet writing for the theatre and a theatre poet.[625]

Like Hughes and Heaney, most of the poets working in the theatre are producing versions of classical plays, and few show any inclination towards original plays. Among those who have attempted to write original works, such as Sean O'Brien, none except Frank McGuiness is attempting to make a career in the theatre, publishing other poetry on the side, as Harrison does, and as had most verse dramatists in previous centuries. They

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[624] Billington (2004).

[625] Kustow (1996).

were and are poets dabbling in theatre, with the rare exception of poets such as Soyinka, who wrote his classical play well before classical plays became faddish, and who is better known for his non-classical plays. The impulse seems to be, just as Eliot had suggested, that "the majority, perhaps, certainly a large number, of poets hanker for the stage…"[626] These poets are not, however, men of theatre – they write texts, frequently working from a literal crib and/or from the translations of others who have read the play in the original language, which they then hand over to the director for production. And while this is an aspect of the reception of classical drama that classicists tend to tread carefully around, perhaps for fear of seeming elitist, it is problematic. As David Rudkin has put it, "Many so-called 'translations' are offered in the theatre and on radio now are done at second hand, a poeticizing of the scholarship of someone else, a risky process – and is it honest?"[627] Perhaps more problematic for the future of verse drama, the popularity of such plays, which trade largely on the reputation of the poet and of the original play, offer little space for longevity. As Harrison has Gilbert Murray say in the passage quoted as an epigraph to this chapter, "all translations date."[628] Translations of original works, with a

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[626] Eliot (1928) 60.

[627] Rudkin (on-line). The issue of intellectual dishonesty is one that is not given enough attention, by either scholars or critics. As Rudkin points out, an earlier text "possessed by a modern author in some resonant modern way, …can be a valuable contemporary work." The passing off, however, of a work as being either the work of an author whom you have not in fact read and whose work you do not have the ability to read, as a work that is intimately related to such an author's work is problematic. One would never accept from students that having viewed the movie version of a literary work allows them to write knowledgably of what the original author wrote. Translation, like film-making, is in itself a creative act that cannot help but set a work at some remove from its original. No matter how faithful such works attempt to be, they require numerous acts of interpretation. One sees in the same time period in theatre history a similar relationship between directors and texts, whereby they advertise their production under the name of a famous author and the title of a famous work, but what they stage in fact bears little relationship to the original work. The rise of classical plays in the professional theatre in the last decades of the twentieth century has coincided with a pervasive attitude that it is acceptable to co-opt a dead author's name and work to advance one's own career, with absolute disregard for the author and their work. Sometimes it is great theatre, but it is not Euripides or whoever else the author being advertised might be, and selling it as such is intellectually dishonest.

[628] Harrison (2007) 80.

few famous exceptions, rarely become canon and plays that do not become canon often disappear within a generation. In some cases these plays will survive as literary texts because the non-dramatic poetry of their 'translator' becomes canonical, occasionally referred to in order to see what light they might shed on their author's non-dramatic poetry.

Conclusion

From the early 1980s it became common for major theatre companies to include at least one classical play in their season, and many of these productions were verse. Two productions of classical drama in translation are pivotal in the reception of classical drama on the professional stages of the British theatre in the twentieth century: the 1904 production of Murray's translation of Euripides' *Hipploytus* at the Court Theatre, which introduced such works to the professional theatre; and the 1981 National Theatre production of Tony Harrison's translation of *The Oresteia*, which revivified verse translation of classical plays in the British theatre, and convinced theatre companies that such productions could be commercially viable. What the fate of both verse translations of classical plays, and verse drama more generally, on the British stage in the twenty-first century will be remains to be seen. Harrison has suggested that both are in their dying phase. Unlike the productions of Murray's translations, which had both a significant social and theatrical impact, and the 1981 production of Harrison's *Oresteia* at the National, which had a significant theatrical impact and pushed Harrison towards writing original verse drama, the productions of classical drama currently being staged for the most part demonstrate little creative theatrical impulse. The original verse plays, perhaps at times adapting or inspired by classical plays, that might have some longevity and therefore keep the tradition of English verse drama alive are few and far between. The popularity of Greek drama in the late-twentieth century will likely be looked back upon by theatre historians as a fad, fed in turn by artistic directors, who generally follow the lead of the programming choices of other successful artistic directors, and poets with a nostalgic hankering for the stage, but little experience of the theatre.

At the same time, however, Tony Harrison's career provides clear evidence that it is possible for a theatre-poet to unexpectedly rise out of the ashes of English verse drama. When Tony Harrison began his career in the theatre the outlook for verse drama was far bleaker than it is now. Verse drama then was most prominently and successfully represented by the works of Christopher Fry and T.S. Eliot, and when verse drama was staged by the new National Theatre and by The Royal Shakespeare Company it was the canonical verse drama of earlier centuries. While much of the verse drama currently being staged may not have great literary merit, it exists in a theatrical environment that readily incorporates non-Shakespearean verse plays into theatre seasons at every level, from the commercial theatres of the West End, to non-commercial public theatres such as the National Theatre, The Royal Shakespeare Company, and The Globe, to semi-professional and amateur theatres. The obstacles to becoming a theatre-poet are far less daunting than they were in the early-1970s for Harrison, in no small part because of his work. It is probable that the fad for translations of classical plays will come to an end, but classical plays will continue to influence verse drama in England. As described in chapter one, classical drama has influenced English verse drama from its very beginnings, but its influence takes different forms in each century. In the sixteenth-century classical drama made its presence felt in the school system where it was performed in its original languages, and influenced some of the earliest English plays, such as Nicholas Udall's *Thersites* and *Ralph Roister Doiseter*. By the late-sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century, with the rise of the public theatres, it provided models for theme and tone, such as the influence of Seneca's plays on revenge tragedies; plot, such as Shakespeare's borrowing from Plautus for *The Comedy of Errors*; and even occasional translated passages, such as Thomas Heywood's use of Plautus' *Amphitruo* in his *The Silver Age*. In the late-seventeenth through to the nineteenth century classical plays offered material for adaptation, sometimes explicit sometimes not, and later, material for burlesques. How classical drama was being used and how it was influencing English verse drama changed from century to century, but its influence was continuously and pervasively felt. That will almost certainly be true of the twenty-first century as well. Classical drama in English verse translation was a peculiar phenomenon of the twentieth century in Britain that arose out of particular social, cultural and artistic trends. What this

gives way to in terms of the reception of classical drama in the British theatre of the twenty-first century is not at all clear in the first decade of the century, but the only surprising trend would be an absence of influence.

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