



Which audience does Euripides address? The reception of the poet in respect to the political intelligence of his audience.

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ABSTRACT: There have been many different approaches to the subject of Euripides' reception by his contemporary audience. The present article focuses on the aspect of the audience's political education and experience, as a parameter for the discussion about the reception of Euripides' plays.

KEY-WORDS: *Euripides, Tragedy, Political Thought, Athenian Politics*

The reception of Euripides' works in his time is a topic that has been discussed at length. Most methodological approaches focus mainly on the attempt to decipher the poet's intentions, as they could be possibly detected in the surviving texts. A parameter, however, which should be further explored, is the identification of his audience. Recent studies dealt with the approximate reconstitution of the emotional experience of this audience. A series of articles by Ismene Lada-Richards maps this attempt.¹ One must however wonder, which audience Euripides writes for.

¹ Cf. the publications by I. Lada-Richards (1993), (1996) about the emotional reaction of spectators in ancient drama, a process which does not distinguish between the "political" and the "public". Lada, I.,

One factor that may further shed light on Euripides' relationship to his audience is the role of the political education of his spectators.

Edith Hall argues that Aristotle's *Poetics* is functional, precisely because it addresses a wider audience, an audience the philosopher addresses without the intention of forming an urban conscience, in a "transhistorical and apolitical sense".² Could the same be said for tragedy, and more specifically of Euripides' works?

The first methodological issue that should be clarified is the distinction of the terms "political" and "social" in regard to the study of the works of Euripides. These are terms which are, more often than not, used without consideration of the magnitude of the words themselves.³ Many scholars, however, distinguish a special "social" agenda (war, a woman's place, position of slaves) from a clear "political" agenda (the nature of authority, the relationship of the citizen with the body of governors, the foreign affairs of a city-state etc).⁴

The second issue to be considered is our sources for Euripides himself. The truth is that not much is at our disposal. Satyrus' 3rd century B.C. *Life of Euripides*, and a biographical Γένος και Βίος, are essentially compilations of biographical information assembled from different eras and at times later than Satyrus;⁵ As another source, of course, we also have Comedy.⁶

As for the way in which Aristophanes presents Euripides, the longstanding dispute in contemporary criticism has exposed the basic problems in interpreting the great

"Empathetic Understanding": Emotion and Cognition in classical dramatic audience-response', *PCPS* 39 (1993) 94-140; Lada, I., "Weeping for Hecuba": Is it a "Brechtian" act?, *Arethusa* 29 (1996) 87-124. Lada, I., "Emotion and Meaning in Tragic Performance", in M. S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic*, Oxford 1996 b, 397-413;

² Hall (1996) 306-6.

³ Gregory (Oct. 2002) 145-46.

⁴ Romilly (1986) [Here utilized the translation in Greek by A. Stasinopoulou-Skiada, Kardamitsa editions, Athens, 1979] 225ff.

⁵ Stevens (1956) 88.

⁶ There are views that counter the use of Comedy for the enlightenment of the social and political dimensions appearing in Tragedy, e.g. Gregory (2002) 147. However, it is a fact that Comedy is presented to the same political and social environment with Tragedy, to the same audience and both genres actually share a common element: they are both created by the citizens, and presented to the citizens. As for the comment by Pelling that Tragedy does not include such sharp fluctuations in style as Comedy does, nor such imaginary distortions of the society that bore them [Pelling (1997) 1-19], I will merely cite Euripides' *Bacchae*, so one can reflect on how both the elements that Pelling believes belong to Comedy, are actually those which form the meaning and the plot of this piece of work by Euripides. Cf. Seidensticker (1982) Paper, DM . 54 and Seidensticker, B., (Autumn, 1978) 303-320.

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comedian's attitude. I will summarize my opinion by referring to Wycherley, who offers the best analysis not only of the political dimension of Euripides, but also of how we should assume the comedian was perceived by his audience: "the apprehension which Aristophanes felt for the annoying influence of Euripides, was probably greater than any personal distaste towards Euripides' ideas or dramatic methods. Aristophanes was a witness of great change, change which meant the overthrowing of any previous sense of order in Athens. He knew that Euripides not only reflected this change but had actively taken part in it."⁷

After all, Euripides is one of those tragic poets who, more often than not, *invites* his spectators to participate in a more direct approach of the events taking place on stage. David Bain refers to "tragic *parabasis*"⁸ in a related article of his, indicating the way in which Euripides would often *disrupt the illusion of the theatrical act*,⁹ by converting the spectators into participants—not, perhaps, with a direct call to the audience,¹⁰ but via the prologues or by using a possessive case in plural that expands the object of address on stage to a large, almost total mass.¹¹

Aristophanes refers to Euripides' mass impact. The comic function of the comment should be ignored and one should focus on the important piece of information concerning the mass reception when, in *the Frogs*, he accuses Euripides of having sailors talk back to their leaders. The *parrhesia* of the *demos*, with the distinct political role of the sailors after 480, must surely be taken into account.¹²

The political dimension of his works is a matter of great scholarly dispute.¹³ In order to decipher this dimension, one needs to take into consideration the audience, which is the recipient of these works. The way people responded to Euripides' plays

⁷ Wycherley, R. E., "Aristophanes and Euripides", *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 15, No. 45 (1946) 98-107, 106.

⁸ Bain, D., "Audience address in Greek Tragedy", *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 25, No. 1 (May 1975) 13-25, 16 -17.

⁹ Bain (1975) 22.

¹⁰ Bain (1975) 18.

¹¹ For instance, Eur. *Suppl.* 949, *ὡ ταλαίπωροι βροτῶν*, or Eur. *Elec.* 383-5.

¹² Cf. Saxonhouse, A. W., "The emergence of the female political actor in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*", *Social Political Theory*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Aug. 2005) 472-494.

477, about the "democratic" views of Euripides.

¹³ P. Giles asserts that politics is of great importance to the poet [P. Giles, "Political Allusion in the *Supplices* of Euripides", *The Classical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Mar., 1890), pp. 95-98], whereas Di Benedetto claims that although there is an intention of political comment in Euripides' works, a gradual distancing from the contemporary, to him, political reality is observed. (V. Di Benedetto, *Euripide: teatro e societa*, Turin: Einaudi, 1971).

during the 5th century B.C. in Athens, as in other cities both in Greece and outside the Greek domain, could be the result of the the identity of the citizen in these cities. Who, however, is this ideal *citizen* that is simultaneously a spectator of Euripides' dramatic performances?

The first parameter for framing or detecting the identity of the ideal citizen is, as Christian Meier has pointed out, the peak of tension “between the de facto inequality and the potential equality offered by the participation in the affairs of the *polis*.”¹⁴ Especially after the reforms of Cleisthenes, a kind of people’s republic/democratic republic emerged, with the institution of the demes, the tribes, and the council of 500, which gave citizens the ability of self-confidence and the capability of making their intentions known to Athens.¹⁵ However, the most significant institutions that formed the citizen’s identity are, without a doubt, equality (*isonomia*) and the right to express oneself freely (*isēgoria*).¹⁶ Meier also refers to intense rationalism in the public life of the city-state. “*Isonomia* was not only an exceptionally rational construction; the guarantee of a cosmic theory was missing, not to mention that which a myth provides. It was thus quite vulnerable... For the first time the politically correct word had spread so extensively.”¹⁷ Lada-Richards argued in favor of the view that “the audience of tragedy was mainly a mass audience with a large proportion of spectators who came from less privileged social classes and thus had (in the best of cases) minimal education.¹⁸ We should not, however, regard this mass audience as homogenous.

Certainly, the citizens of Athens did not constitute “a completely unaltered mass of democratically equal citizens”¹⁹ and there is no reason why they should be considered as such simply because these citizens happened to turn into spectators. Their categorization is manifold. There exist amongst them citizens and non-citizens

¹⁴ Meier (1993) [Here utilized the translation in Greek, by F. Manakidou, Kardamitsa editions, Athens 1997] 36. Politics were established as the solely accepted area for prominence and social rise. The fact that the state was small and self-reliant allowed its citizens to shape their political life. Σακελαρίου (2000) 407, for the elimination of any traces of political power outside the *demos*.

¹⁵ Meier (1997) 39.

¹⁶ Sakelariou (2000) 323-25.

¹⁷ Meier (1997) 42.

¹⁸ Lada (2008) 486.

¹⁹ Wilson (2000) 173.

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(metics and visitors from different parts of the Greek domain).²⁰ Additionally, the citizens would have to be further subdivided, according to gender,²¹ age,²² social status, even according to their tribe (phyle). Their level of education is most probably the result of their social status and this categorization surely constitutes a significant criterion on its own.²³ The representatives of these categories would watch plays through a wide range of different perspectives, from the religious to the social, and from the existential to the political. Through these multiple topics, would the audience be in a position to detect political allusions or interpret the meaning of a drama on a political level?

What must also definitely be taken into consideration is the fact that the experiences of Euripides' audience are different from those of Aeschylus and Sophocles'. The citizens of 490 and 480, especially the representatives of the middle classes, with their faith in the gods, the institutions and the people who won the glorious victories against the Persians, are in fact the people who are praised by Thucydides' Themistocles; it is he who states that if the Spartans intend to send delegates, then they should do so while keeping in mind that the Athenians are in a position to distinguish what is in their own and the general best interest.²⁴

²⁰ On the nationality of the spectators at the Dionysia and the presence of allies [Rusten (2011) 408: 27A, 27B, 27C]. Foreigners were absent from the Lenaia (Aristoph. *Acharn.* 504-8). Also, D. K. Roselli, *Theater of the People: Spectators and Society in Ancient Athens*, University of Texas Press 2011, pp. 118-125.

²¹ On the gender of the audience, cf. Rusten (2011) 408-410, who has gathered testimonials from the ancient texts as well as extracts which confirm either the presence of a male audience exclusively- at least in comedies [Aristoph. *Peace* 50-3, Pickard-Cambridge, Gould & Lewis, 1988, 264), Menand. *Dysk.* 965-7, Pickard-Cambridge, Gould & Lewis, 1988, 264)], or about the presence of women [Aristoph. *Peace.* 962-7, *Eccl.* 22, Scholia ad. Loc (Csapo & Slater, 1995, 300-1, Nr. 155, *DFA2* 265), Pollux. 9.44 Csapo & Slater, 1995, 300-1, Nr. 156, Pickard-Cambridge, Gould & Lewis, 1988, 269). On the presence of women in tragedy, there is a comment by Plato *Gorg.* 502d, *Laws* 2.658a= Nr. 29 Rusten (2011) 409, 7.817c (Pickard-Cambridge, Gould & Lewis, 1988, 165). Additionally, the comment by Pollux that some women actually had a miscarriage at the performance of the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus (*Life of Aeschylus* 9, Pollux 4.150). For the inclusion of women and boys among the audience cf. E. Csapo & W. J. Slater (1994) 286-293. Also, Roselli (2011) 158-194.

²² On adolescences attending performances at least in Comedy cf. Rusten (2011) 410, who refers to Aristophanes *Clouds.* 537-9, *Peace* 765-6 and an extract by Eupolis (ex. 261) the comment by Aristotle (*Pol.* 7.17.1336b20), which mentions that boys should not be permitted to watch comedies or iambus, before reaching the age when they can attend symposiums and after having acquired the appropriate education which can protect them from the harmful effects of comedy. Obviously Aristotle does not object to the attendance of tragedies by adolescents.

²³ Lada-Richards (2008) 466-67.

²⁴ Lada-Richards (2008) 466-67.

The Athenians are the trained citizens of a new order of things. However, after the reforms of 460, when the *thētēs* took over the role of those who governed the city's affairs, it meant that people with no education or experience lay exposed to the allurments of any orator or any dispositions or passions.²⁵ This does not necessarily mean that these people who were in need of guidance were inexperienced in politics, since more and more institutions included them in the city's administration and thus gradually cultivated their political sensibilities. These people were Euripides' audience.²⁶

As far as the question whether they were capable of understanding the content of the tragedies is concerned, Meier has already provided the answer. "They definitely knew the matter at hand, they did not suffer from information overload and as they were participants in a fundamentally oral education and had also practiced in public meetings, parliamentary sittings etc, they must have had a relatively heightened ability of perception".²⁷

It is, of course, prudent to retain a cautious attitude when referring to such a methodology as a dogmatic means of studying the political reception of Euripides' works, especially when the dimension of political *education* through theatrical plays is put forward. The response of a spectator to the political meaning of some of Euripides' lines does not necessarily mean the transfer of this experience to the site of the Assembly (Ecclesia) or the Agora. It is this exact observation that impels Isocrates to wonder how:

Against these ills no one has ever protested; and people are not ashamed to weep over the calamities which have been fabricated by the poets, while they view complacently the real sufferings, the many terrible sufferings, which result from our

²⁵ Meier (1997) 44.

²⁶ Meier (1997) 47. Of course this audience consisted of individuals without political training, like metics and women [Goldhill in P. E. Easterling (ed.) (1997) 54-68, page 63, examines the possibility of slaves' attendance, too). As for the presence of women in the audience of a tragedy, the scientific community is still divided, although it is somewhat irrational to consider their exclusion from an all-included, public event of religious worship as is the context of theatrical competitions. Goldhill (1997) 54-68, stands for the participation of women in the audience of a tragedy, by mainly referring to the very persuasive articles of Henderson (1991) 138 and Podlecki (1990) 27-43. In the most recent account to this matter, Rusten (2011) n. 7, p. 409, discloses facts in relation to the possible participation of women in the audience of tragedy. (Plato, *Gorg.* 502d, *Laws* 2.658a = nr. 29).

²⁷ Meier (1997) 85.

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*state of war; and they are so far from feeling pity that they even rejoice more in each other's sorrows than in their own blessings..*²⁸

There is certainly a portion of the audience that focused on the superficial (which is not to say petty) elements of a performance, “to that element of tragedy which participated less in the art – i.e. the element which was based on the skills of the actors and dancers²⁹ or the sum of money which the contributor would provide”.³⁰ It is one thing to assume that an audience is able to decode political insinuations or apply the meanings and excerpts from the mythological tradition that are dramatized on stage to a political level. It is quite another to expect this same audience to form a political view on the basis of a theatrical performance.³¹

Using the above claim as a methodological basis, in Euripides’ works one can trace the political word that allows him to communicate with the citizens watching his works.³² Of course, the means of communication between the tragic poet and his spectators is speech, *logos*. The rationalism of political life, which Meier has

²⁸ Isocr. *Panegy.* 168. Cf. the narration of Plutarch (*Pelopidas* 29.5 και *Ethics* 334a-b) about the tyrant of Ferae, Alexander who was well aware of the paradox between the relentless, cruel, almost without human feelings public image of his, and his status as a spectator who is touched and tears fill his eyes as he follows the drama on stage (*Isocrates*. *Isocrates with an English Translation in three volumes*, by Norlin (1980).

²⁹ See. Arist, *Poetics* 1450b 16-20. Segal (1995), 205 convincingly argues that the recurring parody of Aristophanes is a reliable indicator of the impact of visual techniques of tragedy on the audience. [footnote by από Lada-Richards (2008) 488]. Segal, C, “Spectator and listener”, in J.-P. Vernant (ed.) *The Greeks*, transl.. C. Lambert & T. L. Fagan, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 184-217.

³⁰ Lada-Richards (2008) 488. Cf. Pelling (1997) 17.

³¹This viewpoint is best summarized by Simon Goldhill who tones down his views, as far as the political aspect of the performances is concerned, by pointing out that “I do not imply that every member of the audience left the theatre deeply troubled and eager to reevaluate the nature of his political ideology, however the notion of an audience that was solely interested in “pleasure” and “entertainment” is equally commonplace. Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology”, in J. J. Winkler & F. I. Zeitlin (ed.), 1990, 97-129, 115.

³² The relationship between tragedy and politics has generally divided philologists of the last decade. As Gregory (Oct. 2002) 145-162, 145-46 summarises, on the one hand Jasper Griffin’s viewpoints (1999) n.2, 92 [Griffin, J., “Sophocles and the democratic city”, in J. Griffin (ed.), *Sophocles Revisited: Essays Presented to Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones*, Oxford 1999, 73-94] would stand out and on the other hand the views of G. de Romilly, (1979) 225-70 which connect Euripides with contemporary political and social reality. In addition, E. Degani’s views (2001) 232, would expand the gradual shift of Euripides’ political views, especially in relation with his stance towards Pericles’ politics. - Degani (2001) 175-372.

referred to, has also formed the theatrical word.³³ Aristophanes had already expressed his opinion on the language that Euripides uses in the *Frogs* (l. 940-4) as he compares its simplicity against the grandiose and more poetic language of Aeschylus. Aristophanes admitted that Euripides had introduced rationalism in the way he addressed his audience. Verses 971-78 demonstrate this in a precise manner:³⁴

Euripides

*Well, to ponder such things, I
instructed these folks here,
putting logic in my art
and scrutiny, so now they notice
everything and know through and through
most especially how to run
the household better than before,
and they inquire, "How's this doing?
Where's this? Who took that?"*

Euripides' language is the immediately intelligible language of the Agora. This is further confirmed by Euripides himself, when he claims in the same play how he formed the dialectical relationship with his audience, how he taught the citizens to speak.³⁵ These spectators who judge the poet's art are primarily those citizens who judge the affairs of the city at the Assembly (Ecclesia) and the courts. The mass participation of citizens at the theatre is not on the opposite side of the stage, all by itself. "Approximately a thousand Athenians were mobilized for the manning/recruitment of the chorus just at the *Great Dionysia*, where 17 plays and 20 dithyrambs were presented.... The plays in competition were judged by critics

³³ There is surely a contradiction between the "rational language which characterized the conversations in public life to that language which was learned and spoken at home, with the myths with which the women were potentially raised and then passed on to their children" Meier (1979) 42.

³⁴ Ar. *Frogs* 971-78. Most surely a lot has been written about Euripides and the *Theatre of the Irrational*. However, the "irrational" constitutes an integral part of the rational organization of society. (Meier, 1997, 43).

³⁵ Ar. *Frogs* 959-961

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chosen from among the citizens in successive lots. Every tribe would draw ten of its members... For two reasons the critics' opinion corresponded with the opinion of the majority of the spectators: firstly, they themselves were chosen randomly and represented the average Athenian, secondly, they would be affected by the display of opinion for or against the presented works of the writers. After the conclusion of the *Dionysia*, the *Demos* would assemble at the theatre of Dionysus for the assessment and review of the proceedings.”³⁶ Therefore, not only does the citizen retain his capabilities as a spectator, but he confirms them – when, after the conclusion of the conference, he participates in an assessment that reminds us a great deal of the assessment of the archons' work at the end of their term in office.

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The political element becomes obvious and is enhanced by two apparently irrelevant events that take place before the performances begin. Firstly, the allied contributions amounting from 350 to 900 talents from different city-states were presented at the orchestra.³⁸ Secondly, the orphans of citizens killed in battle, who had been raised by the state, were led with honours to particular seats in the theatre. A herald would then announce that since their fathers had been killed, they were now exempted from service to protect the deme.³⁹ The first event validates the foreign policy of Athens, and thus the successful administration of its archons in cooperation with the citizens; the second literally introduces the theatre to the adolescents, who constitute the citizens of tomorrow.⁴⁰ Both events serve to illustrate the clear directions for the political dimension of the entire festivity and the awakening of the quality of the citizen in the spectators, which, due to the religious character of the theatrical plays, could theoretically have become a secondary priority.

³⁶ Sakelariou (2000) 467

³⁷ Sakelariou (2000) 192

³⁸ Meier (1997) 81, Sakelariou (467)

³⁹ Meier (1997) 81, Sakelariou (567)

⁴⁰ Scholion to *Birds* 794 (=Suda, s.v. *Bouleutikos*). Cf. Lada-Richards (2008) 474, notes 33, about the way in which we may interpret the works in accordance with the institution of *adolescence*, and note 34, about the importance of certain plays and heroes to the special audience of adolescents who are introduced to the theatre.

When the spectators watch Euripides' plays, it is not difficult to appeal to their political education in order to decode the meanings of the play. As J. De Romilly points out, when it comes to Euripides, "the political and social problems are directly included in the play, giving it colour and orientation."⁴¹ Romilly successfully summarizes the way in which general political notions permeate a dramatized myth: "Something good or bad about a Greek city is said at some point: it is not by accident. Somebody expresses himself in a hostile manner against Sparta and praises peace: that seems to correspond to times when war against Sparta has caused troubles or exhaustion. When a modified traditional genealogy is found (as is the case of Ion): is it not to spread propaganda? Somebody talks about exile: a very well known or notorious person living in exile could be on everyone's mind. A demagogue may be presented and condemned for his actions: all the spectators would have had a name in mind... In other words, if (with the help of Thucydides' history) one reads Euripides whilst keeping this in mind, the insinuations seem to emerge in every step."⁴² Romilly continues by presenting works of national propaganda like *Herakleidae*⁴³ and *Suppliants*,⁴⁴ works in which "Euripides, like Thucydides, developed the praise of Athens in detail."⁴⁵

I will mention *Phoenician Women* briefly; from a political point of view, it is a play against civil war and for reconciliation.⁴⁶ If I wanted to emphasize how the more subtle political meanings of a Euripidean work were perceived, I would take *Medea* as my example. The attempt to determine the meanings of works with contemporary historical occurrences and events is not always successful, and many philologists avoid doing so. Nevertheless, with this specific work, I believe the reconstruction of the original performance context indicates the audience's reaction to it.

A few months before the start of the Peloponnesian war in 431, Euripides staged the *Medea*, introducing, probably for the first time, the element of conscious

⁴¹ Romilly (1979) 226.

⁴² Romilly (1979) 227.

⁴³ Spranger (Ju.-Oct., 1925) 119-28.

⁴⁴ About the political dimension of this play cf Michelini (Summer 1994) 219-252.

⁴⁵ Romilly (1979) 229. Cf. Yunis (Summer, 1991) 179-200, 187. On the relationship between Thucydides and Euripides, cf Rusten (1985) 14,17,18, n.26 and mainly Finley (1938) 38.

⁴⁶ Saxonhouse (2005) 472-94.

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and deliberate infanticide.⁴⁷ Even if he was not original as far as infanticide is concerned, one wonders why a tragic poet presents such a version of a myth when his city is on the verge of war with another Greek city. The reconstruction of the political experience of Euripides' audience is not impossible and surely includes the poet's own experience. Here I will highlight the main characteristics of this era as Diamantopoulos puts it:

1. "The era, the months before the war when Euripides wrote *Medea*, were a time in which the formal and sacred oaths of the libations of thirty years were betrayed, and in which many Greeks who thought like Euripides awaited the boons of peaceful financial growth and prosperity. This was the beginning of many disasters in the immediate historical background of this tragedy; and this was also the beginning of evil in the tragedy itself: sacred oaths are betrayed by Jason, too, and the reaction to his betrayal is hatred, which led to the intended and calculated infanticide.
2. The exclusion of the Megarians from all the markets and harbours of the Athenian League, and from the opposing side, similar retaliations from the Dorians, such as the deportation of foreigners from the Peloponnese, were among the main causes that poisoned the relationships between Athens and its neighbours the Corinthians and Sparta's other allies. Moreover, in Euripides' tragedy of 431 the expulsion of Medea by Creon, the king of Corinth and her exclusion from every place on earth where she had stood and carried out her poisonous actions in the past, surely has something in common with the historical deportation in the hostile economic and political camps of Greece."⁴⁸

I have already referred to the simple language used by Euripides, the everyday language of the Agora. Actually, Euripides does not just use the language of

⁴⁷ Syropoulos (2001-2002) 126-38, for an overview of the contradicting/conflicting views, as far as the originality of Euripides in the adaptation of the myth or the original study of the infanticide Medea's psychic elements, as Neophon had already presented them. For the philological elements for the original adaptation by Euripides, cf Mills (Oct. 1980) 289-296, 290, n. 8, Page (1938) xxi-xxv and Newton (Winter, 1985) 501 are also placed for the originality of the myth. Finally, apart from anything else, infanticide would surely deter the spectators from liking Medea too much, who could have otherwise made a good impression with her sensational monologue of lines 213-266, 465-519 and in every other emotional exacerbation by a mother when referring to her children.

⁴⁸ Διαμαντόπουλος (1978) 31ff.

the Agora, but literally transfers it to his works. No fewer than five times in the play⁴⁹ Medea complains about the betrayal of sacred oaths that Jason has sworn,⁵⁰ and she complains three times about her deportation (*xenēlasia*) by Creon.⁵¹ These numbers are not negligible. To an audience that could hear these particular nouns explaining and escalating the political situation, just as they had heard them the previous day in their daily conversations at the *Agora* and the *Ecclesia*, they would sound extremely familiar and significant. Even today, in the era of grave economical strains within Europe, the less informed citizen in politics will make associations if he hears the terms *elongation*, *restructuring*, *debt*, *loan*, or *repayment* in any philological, non-political text.

Like his audience, Euripides surely numbered among those citizens who, on the eve of war, would listen to Pericles at the *Ecclesia*, advising the Athenians to show their strength and refuse to capitulate to the enemies' demands, to honour the *εὐκλειαν*⁵² (glory, good reputation) and not to become a laughingstock to their enemies. When, therefore, Medea tries to justify her heinous act with the irrational phase "the laughter of one's enemies is unendurable, my friends",⁵³ to many it must have sounded absurdly familiar. Perhaps, killing one's children, to avoid being ridiculed by his enemies, would sound equally irrational with the decision to engage in a war for the exact same reason, literally forcing a city to consciously sacrifice, just like Medea did, its citizens in the same line of reasoning.

From the very moment that a language creates its first connotations in a politically educated audience, it is easy for those connotations to expand. In a questionable bit of rhetoric in which he tries to justify his abandonment of Medea for a princess, Jason reminds us of Aegeus, the opportunistic politician of that era, through his intervention and offer of asylum in exchange for selfish services. The

⁴⁹ Eur. *Medea*, 21, 160-63, 169-70, 209, 492. In line 1392 too, Jason is characterized as a perjurer. The oaths in Thucydides are presented more than 40 times. More specifically: 3.82.7.4, 4.19.2.4, 4.86.1.2, 4.87.1.3, 4.88.1.5, 5.18.4.6, 5.22.3.2, 5.42.1.7, 5.56.3.3, 6.34.5.6.

⁵⁰ Easterling (1977) 180, where it is pointed out that the legitimacy of the relationship between Jason and Medea is not questioned anywhere in the text. The vows exchanged were equivalent to a marriage.

⁵¹ Eur. *Med.* 704. The same verb is also used by Jason in line 1408. In Thucydides, the issue of deportation is presented at least twice. Thucydides, *Hist.* 1.44.2.4, 2.39.1.3.

⁵² Thuc. *Hist.* 2.44.4., 3.58.2.3.

⁵³ Eur. *Med.* 797.

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Athenian foreign policy may be judged directly here in the name of this great Athenian.

The hatred that pervades the whole play is one of the dominant emotions of the time. Lastly, it is a play in which everything—values like maternity, hospitality and sacred beliefs—is overturned.⁵⁴ At the end, after Medea has committed such a *δυσσεβέστατον έργον* (l. 1328), she escapes unpunished. Euripides' spectator would have left the theatre after having watched the most depressing of all tragedies. Other parents have also killed their children however in a state of madness. Agave killed Pentheus, mistaking him for a lion, but at the end of the play Dionysus gave an explanation for what had taken place. Hercules too killed his children in a state of madness, but Theseus offers purification and consolation at the end of the play. Here, however, Euripides offers no explanation or consolation to his spectators. What he does want to state is that in the case of premeditated infanticide, there is no justification or hope of catharsis – just as in the premeditated crimes of involvement and sacrifice of citizens by their own city.

Euripides came last in that competition, finishing after Sophocles and Euphorion, the son of Aeschylus, who was awarded the first prize. Unfortunately, the plays by which these poets competed are lost. However, if Euphorion competed by exhibiting plays of his father, then his old *choregos*, Pericles, might have seen in them a more favorable stance towards his policy. If indeed a latent criticism regarding the foreign policy of Pericles was latent in the *Medea*, and if the audience, excited by the recent speeches of the polis' first citizen, had the ability to detect this criticism, then it makes sense that Euripides was not chosen as a winner.

At the end, are we totally certain about the audience's reaction to the stage-action? Can one arrive at universal conclusions as far as the reaction of the spectators is concerned in the works of Euripides based on their political perceptiveness? Surely not. The theories of the last decade vary, from the disinclination of Jasper Griffin to regard tragic audiences en mass,⁵⁵ to the defense of the opposing view, offered in response to Griffin, by Richard Seaford⁵⁶ and Lada-

⁵⁴ Syropoulos (2010) 77-87, 82 -84.

⁵⁵ Griffin (1998) 39-61, n.2, 40-2.

⁵⁶ Seaford (2000) 30-44.

Richards.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, whilst trying to avoid extreme viewpoints, according to the above mentioned, one can securely say that at least a large proportion of the audience, which consists of experienced citizens in the appreciation and analysis of the political speech,⁵⁸ was in a position to decode some of Euripides' plays, thanks to a cultivated way of thinking found and on evidence in the *Agora* and in the assemblies at the *Ecclesia*.

The audience of this theatre, this setting "where," as Goldhill has said, "all the citizens were actors – as the city itself and its prominent citizens are exposed publicly,"⁵⁹ surely proved the political intellect of Euripides in practice, just as he had perceived it through the dramatization of the traditional myths which the tragic poet chose to analyze. The wide dispersion? of his works, the fact that the city never refused to grant him a chorus, and his likely participation in a diplomatic mission (if Stevens' hypothesis in his article from 1956 is correct)⁶⁰ reveal the appreciation of a large portion of his audience.

Thereby, it remains for us to decide whether Euripides was consciously a potential political reformer. In 1991 Justina Gregory, in her book *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians*, tried hard to discover the political function of at least five tragedies of Euripides, and pointed out that he took his role as a political tutor very seriously.⁶¹ I tend to agree with J. de Romilly who said that "Euripides, with all his hints against the vanity of social discrimination, not once was he directly or indirectly a revolutionary. When the city gravely disappointed him, he did not attempt to contribute to reforms or rebellion: he praised the quiet life, the arts and

⁵⁷ Lada-Richards (2008) 486.

⁵⁸ Aristophanes most probably exaggerates when he accuses the people of incompetence in actively participating in politics, and presents a citizen who is more interested in earning the *triobolon* instead of matters of the state (Ar. *Acharn.* 392-5, *Eccl.* 181-87, 289-99, 303-10). Citizens who get drunk during the assembly (Ar. *Eccl.* 134-44) or who are victims of politicians (Ar. *Knights.* 115-19, 1340-43). Even if we do admit that in 389 when *The Ecclesiazusae* was performed, democracy was not how the Athenians of Pericles had come to know it and it was gradually declining, so Aristophanes' heroine would be correct. Is it possible that the same situation existed in 429 when the *Knights* was put on and when in this very play the administration of the state is ridiculed and the archons were accused, they who had ruled wisely and had also waged a horrendous war the failure of which the knights and oligarchs of Athens had actually wished for?

⁵⁹ Goldhill (1997) 57.

⁶⁰ Stevens (1956) 91.

⁶¹ Gregory (1991). Gregory deals in detail with the analysis of five plays: *Alcestis*, *Hippolytus*, *Hecuba*, *Hercules* and *Trojan Women*. Most analyses had already appeared in the form of former articles.

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peace of mind".⁶² Euripides, like any other creator, reflected his time. He emphasized it to the citizens through his work. That is far from being characterized as a reform.

As far as his audience is concerned, for those citizens who then sat on the theatre's benches, it is safe to conclude that the determining factor for the reception of Euripides' works was their political intellect. That can determine not only the works that became popular both in Athens and outside of it⁶³ and can additionally serve as the key to understanding the reception of Euripides by contemporary societies, including our own.

S.S.

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⁶² Romilly (1979) 268-9.

⁶³ Cf. William Allan Source, «Euripides in Megale Hellas: Some Aspects of the Early Reception of Tragedy», *Greece & Rome*, Second Series, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Apr., 2001), pp. 67-86.

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