GREEK TRAGEDY FOR THE NEW MILLENIUM: PUBLIC TESTIMONY AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN YAEL FARBER´S *MOLORA*

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines *Molora*, an adaptation of the Orestes story by South African playwright Yael Farber set in the context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It considers the play's engagement with restorative justice in relation to the exploration of different forms of justice by Aeschylus in his *Oresteia.* It also examines Farber's play in light of the ideas of the influential Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, noting how the relationship with the classical past has changed in the three decades between the publication of Boal's *Teatro del oprimido y otras poéticas políticas* in 1974 and the *première* of Farber's *Molora* in 2003.

KEYWORDS: *Oresteia*, Aeschylus, *Electra*, Sophocles, Euripides, Farber, *Molora*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, restorative justice, Boal, theatre of the oppressed, Aristotle, *Poetics*, Brecht, Hegel.

Tragédia Grega para o Novo Milênio: testemunho público e justiça restaurativa em *Molora* de yael farber.

RESUMO: Este artigo examina *Molora*, uma adaptação da história de Orestes, pela dramaturga sul-africana Yael Farber, situada no contexto da Comissão de Reconciliação e Verdade, na África do Sul. Ele considera o engajamento da peça com a justiça restaurativa em relação à exploração de diferentes formas de justiça por Ésquilo, na sua *Oresteia.* Ele também examina a peça de Farber à luz das ideias do influente director brasileiro de teatro Augusto Boal, apontando como a relação com o passado clássico mudou nas três décadas entre a publicação do *Teatro do oprimido e outras poéticas políticas* em 1974 e a *première* de *Molora* de Farber, em 2003.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Oresteia*, Ésquilo, *Electra*, Sófocles, Eurípides, Farber, *Molora*, Verdade e Reconciliação, Justiça Restaurativa, Boal, Teatro do oprimido, Aristóteles, *Poética*, Brecht, Hegel.

That action alone is just which does not harm either party to a dispute.
Mahatma Gandhi (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 1958-84, 14, 233)

This paper examines *Molora*, a modern adaptation of the Orestes story by the South African playwright Yael Farber set in the context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission[1]. It considers the play's engagement with restorative justice in relation to the exploration of different forms of justice by Aeschylus in his *Oresteia.* It also examines Farber's play in light of the ideas of the influential Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, noting how the relationship with the classical past has changed in the three decades between the publication of Boal's famous *Teatro del oprimido y otras poéticas políticas* in 1974 and the premiere of Farber's *Molora* in 2003.

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Aeschylus' Oresteia

First performed in 458 BC, nearly 25 centuries ago, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* explores the age-old problem of violence and responses to it. The trilogy presents the shift from *retaliatory* justice to *procedural* justice. Although it offers an aetiology for the Areopagus court and credits Athens with the first trial by jury, it also highlights a fundamental shortcoming of procedural justice. Like retaliatory justice, it operates within an adversarial framework. When the court's verdict is delivered, there is one party that emerges as the winner and the other as the loser. In the *Oresteia*, Orestes and Apollo feel vindicated, but the Furies have suffered *atimia*: they have been disenfranchised and feel dishonored.

What brings resolution to the conflict is *not* the trial itself, but what follows. Athena addresses the angry Furies in a conciliatory tone. And she offers them a place of honor at Athens (Aesch. *Eum*. 829-30, 833):

> σὺ δ᾽εὐπειθὴς ἐμοὶ
> γλώσσης ματαίας μὴ ᾽κβάλης ἔπη χθονὶ…
> ὡς σεμνότιμος καὶ ξυνοικήτωρ ἐμοί·
>
> Be readily persuaded by me:
> do not loose off against this land the words of a foolish tongue…

think of yourselves as being held in august honour and as sharers of my home.
(Translation by A. Sommerstein, 2008)

Athena persists in the face of hostility. The Furies are angry (780, 840), aggrieved (822) and humiliated (789-90, 819-20). As a result of their defeat in the law court, they feel they have been dishonored and disenfranchised (780, 810, 822, 839, 872): *atimia* involves both the loss of social status and the loss of rights and privileges concomitant with citizenship. They are bent on responding with destructive revenge (782, 812-8). Athena recognizes the Furies' agency (825, 867) and treats them with respect (847). She seeks to win them over through persuasion (794, 829, 885) and by adopting a conciliatory posture (800, 824-5). She acknowledges their anger (847), and at the same time reaches out to them unilaterally, offering assurances and benefits that respond directly to their concerns. In particular, she offers them a place of honor at Athens (804-7, 833-5, 854-7, 867-9, 890-1). Despite repeated repudiations, Athena persists (881, 885-7, 890-1):

οὔτοι καμοῦμαί σοι λέγουσα τἀγαθά…
ἀλλ᾽ εἰ μὲν ἁγνόν ἐστί σοι Πειθοῦς σέβας,
γλώσσης ἐμῆς μείλιγμα καὶ θελκτήριον—
σὺ δ᾽ οὖν μένοις ἄν…
ἔξεστι γάρ σοι τῆσδε γαμόρῳ χθονὸς
εἶναι δικαίως εἰς τὸ πᾶν τιμωμένῃ.

I will never tire of speaking to you of these good things I offer…
If you have reverence for the awesome power of Persuasion,
the charm and enchantment of my tongue—
well, then, please stay…
for you have the opportunity to be a landholder in this country,
and be justly honoured for ever.
(Translation adapted from A. Sommerstein, 2008)

Thus it is only when Athena approaches the Furies in a spirit of reconciliation that the impasse is broken and Persuasion can have its effect. Athena offers them a share in the land. And the Furies respond in kind, offering a song of blessing for the city (938-48, 956-67, 976-87, 996-1002, 1014-1020).

At the end of the play, the Furies, now as the Eumenides, are escorted by the Athenians in a torch-lit procession to their new home at the foot of the Acropolis. The cycle of violence has been brought to an end – not through retaliatory justice, not through procedural justice, but through an early form of restorative justice. At the heart of restorative justice is the act of listening with a will to understanding the other's viewpoint. If retaliatory justice *takes* – an eye for an eye – restorative justice *gives*. Athena's act at the end of the *Oresteia* offers only an approximation of restorative justice[2]. It is not Orestes himself who seeks reconciliation with the Furies and offers them benefits (a form of reparations), but Athena as a mediator acting on the behalf of the Athenian citizens. But even in this faint shadow we see glimmers of the possibilities.

2. The Furies' integration into the *polis* is problematized, since they cede their primacy to the male Olympians and assume a position dependent upon patriarchal authority, as ZEITLIN (1978, pp. 149-81) has convincingly demonstrated.

Farber's Molora

These possibilities are more fully explored in Yael Farber's powerful reworking of the *Oresteia* titled *Molora*[3]. *Molora* was first performed in 2003 at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa, directed by Farber herself. Its most famous production was at the Barbican in London in 2008. The play sets the *Oresteia* in the context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Following the collapse of apartheid, the commission was charged by the National Unity government to set up a series of hearings. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the most famous example of the large-scale application of restorative justice. Over the course of two years from 1996 to 1998, these hearings provided the opportunity for victims of gross human rights violations to give statements about their experiences, and to receive support in terms of rehabilitation, healing and reparations. Perpetrators of violence were also invited to give testimony and could request amnesty (public amnesty hearings were extended until 2001). *Molora* bills itself as an adaptation of the *Oresteia*, but it also draws from the *Electra* plays of Euripides and especially Sophocles. Like the two *Electra* plays, its focus is on the relationship between Electra and Clytemnestra. As a young child, Electra witnessed her mother murder her father, then had to cope with her hostility.

3. FARBER (2008a). Molora means 'ash' in Sesotho.

Photo credit © Christian Enger

Molora recreates many of the conditions of the TRC. The set design is a simple and austere room with two testimony tables at which Klytemnestra and Elektra take their seat. The chorus of the original production, composed of seven members of the Ngqoko Cultural Group, are seated in the audience at the beginning of the play (as are Klytemnestra and Elektra). They then rise to take their place in the witness chairs placed in a line at the back of the playing area. The play is composed of a prologue, a series of nineteen short scenes, and an epilogue. Their sequence takes the play back and forth between the past and the present[4].

Molora gives full play to the conflicting allegiances and viewpoints of Klytemnestra, the oppressor, and her daughter Elektra, the oppressed. Klytemnestra has done terrible things to her daughter, and these cannot simply be swept under the table. Reconciliation does not come quickly or easily. The act of giving public testimony is hard for all involved. In the opening lines of the play, Klytemnestra says (p. 22):

> A great ox —
> As they say —
> Stands on my tongue...

Those familiar with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* will immediately note that Farber has given to Klytemnestra the words that in Aeschylus' play were spoken by the Watchman. This reassignment is highlighted by the script's practice of indica-

4. In describing the typical characteristics of workshop plays, Fleishman (1990, pp. 140-8) notes that they are frequently episodic rather than sequentially developed, reflecting the episodic structure of traditional oral folktales; see also analysis of Fleishman's *City of Paradise* by Steinmeyer (2007, p. 110).

ting in its footnotes which lines are taken from the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The transference of lines from one character to another is, I would argue, a deliberate move by Farber to negate the assumption that in situations of violence we can neatly delineate between aggressor and victim[5]. Klytemnestra later reveals to Elektra that she too was a victim of violence (pp. 43-4):

> There are things you do not know about me child:
> A history that was written long before you were born.
> I too was happy once.
> I was not always Klytemnestra who
> carried this curse.
> Before Agamemnon Klytemnestra was married to another man and had a child by him (p. 44):
> I met your father the day he opened up
> my first husband and ripped out his guts.

Agamemnon brutally killed her husband and her infant child, then took her for his wife, a version of the story presented in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* (1148-51). Thus the process of bearing public testimony reveals the complexity of situations in which the aggressor is often also a victim. Klytemnestra continues to harbor hatred towards Agamemnon for what he did to her. And as perpetrator of violence, Klytemnestra is in turn victim of her deeds and desperately needs to make public confession. In scene v (*dreams*), Klytemnestra asks (p. 34):

> What is guilt?
> What is memory?
> What is pain?
> Things that wake me in the night...
> By day I stand by what I have done
> But at night I dream –
> And dreams don't lie.

Elektra also cannot simply let bygones be bygones. For most of the play, she is bent on exacting revenge. After Klytemnestra has finished talking in scene i (*testimony*), Elektra's first words are (p. 24):

5. Other line reassignments include the following: Klytemnestra (p. 41) asks "And where is this man who promises to come… But never resolves," a sentiment repeatedly expressed by Elektra in Sophocles' version (*El.* 171-2, 305, 319); at the news of Orestes, Klytemnestra is given the chorus' words from Sophocles' play (*El.* 764-5): "Now I know – the stock of our ancient masters is perished, root and branch," (p. 54); and Klytemnestra speaks Iphigenia's lines from Euripides (*Iphigenia at Aulis* 1218-9): "Do not kill me before my time. Do not force me to gaze at the darkness in the world below." Sarkin (2004, p. 82) notes the regular blurring of categories of perpetrator and victim in the South African context, adding that these categories did not break along racial lines. For a critique of the conflation of victim and perpetrators in TfD plays, see MARLIN-CURIEL (2002, p. 285).

Ndingasiqala ngaphi isicengcelezo sam ngenkohlakalo yakho?
[With which of your evils shall I begin my recital?]
Kona, ndingayeka phi na?
[With which shall I end it?]

Elektra, along with the other characters in the play except for Klytemnestra, often speaks in Xhosa, although they then usually shift into English for dramaturgical reasons (the play was composed with an international audience in mind). It was a founding principle of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that those who took the witness stand should tell their story in their first language. Thus the first scene incorporates a translator who translates (portions of) Klytemnestra's testimony into Xhosa[6].

In spite of differences in viewpoint between Klytemnestra and Elektra, the play opens up a space in which the two antagonists listen to each other[7]. Revisiting the past requires the cooperation of both victim and perpetrator. Thus it is in the communal process of bearing witness to lived experience, with all the conflicts and contradictions that such a process engenders, that *Molora* sees the resolution to the cycle of violence[8].

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The play contrasts the principles of democratic right to speech and multivalence against the torture techniques of the totalitarian regime: the 'wet bag' method of torture relived in scene viii (*wet bag method*) and the water boarding performed by Klytemnestra on Elektra in scene iv (*interro-*

6. Farber, in an interview with Amanda Stewart Fisher included in the introduction to her 2008 collection of three plays titled *Theatre as Witness* (FARBER 2008b), emphasizes the importance of language choice (p. 26): "It was central to these three plays that authentic indigenous language be intrinsic to the text. When the actor speaks in their vernacular, the actor is deep in their integrity, while the audience is momentarily an 'outsider' who misses out. When the actor then breaks from the vernacular, and returns to English – the audience no longer takes for granted, but is aware that this storyteller is reaching out in a language imposed upon them – which is a profoundly generous act." See also analysis by VAN ZYL SMIT (2010, p. 126); HARDWICK (2007a, pp. 305-28) discusses the relationship between multi-lingualism and multi-vocalism in Greek tragedy in performance. For multi-lingualism with regard to *Molora*, see HARDWICK 2010, pp. 202-3.

7. For the subjectivity of truth in testimony and a critique of the separation of "narrative truth" from "factual or forensic truth" in the TRC, see VAN WEYENBERG (2011, pp. 71-3). Elsewhere, van Weyenberg argues (2008, 32) that story-telling was seen by the TRC as having a therapeutic function both for the individuals stating their personal, narrative truth and for the nation as a whole.

8. Marlin-Curiel (2002, pp. 275-88) analyzes the role of public testimony in relation to three Theatre for Development (TfD) plays about the TRC whose goal is, like that of the TRC itself, to help bring about the "re-humanization and healing of survivors of apartheid... both victims and

perpetrators." The degree to which this goal has been achieved through the TRC is a matter of considerable debate. For an analysis of the evolving role of theatre in South Africa in the wake of the TRC, see BLUMBERG (2009, pp. 238-60).

gation), as she tries to get her to reveal what she has done with Orestes, suppress speech. These torture techniques were practiced in South Africa under the apartheid regime, and this is no doubt the primary context. However, it is clear from the playwright's foreword that she also has other contexts in mind, especially the water-boarding carried out by the CIA in 2002-03 (p. 7):

> Despite the praise Nelson Mandela received from 'First World' leaders for heralding great restraint through this transition in our troubled land, nothing could convince those same leaders to check their own ancient eye-for-an-eye, knee-jerk response and their resulting offensives of 'Shock and Awe' on the women and children of Baghdad. South Africa's relatively peaceful transformation was an extraordinary exception in our vengeful world.

For most of its course, the play *seems* to be heading towards the execution of the age-old principle of blood for blood. As in the *Oresteia,* Orestes returns in secret and prepares to exact vengeance on his mother. Indeed, the play's constant use of lines and motifs from the *Oresteia* and the *Electras* of Sophocles and Euripides *seems* to serve as confirmation of the inevitable. When Klytemnestra pleads for her life in an appeal to Orestes straight out of the *Libation Bearers*, Elektra retorts (p. 82): "This night's end is already written. Our destiny must be played out!" Klytemnestra lowers her head to receive the blow from the axe (p. 82): "Then strike my child – and be done."

And then come scenes xviii (*shift*) and xix (*rises*) with a final coup—not a coup de grace, but a coup de theatre. Orestes throws down the axe, and declares (p. 83) "I cannot shed more blood." But Elektra will not relent (p. 84): "My father's blood will be paid back here tonight. I am from the House of Atreus. I will do what must be done," she replies as she picks up the axe and runs at Klytemnestra screaming. I won't give away the powerful ending. Suffice it to say that scene xix (*rises*), in which the cycle of violence is broken, belongs to the chorus, and attests to the role of the community in effecting the process of reconciliation and restoration.

The role of Greek tragedy in the new millennium

Farber's use of Greek tragedy stands in marked contrast to its rejection by the celebrated Brazilian theatre director and writer, Augusto Boal. In his landmark work, *Theatre of the Oppressed*[9], Boal presented Greek tragedy as the antithesis of his theatre of the oppressed. Following Brecht, he referred to it as 'Aristotelian drama,' a term he used to describe both Greek tragedy and Aristotle's dramatic theory as presented in his *Poetics*. Below I attempt to schematize his analysis to offer a synoptic snapshot for the reader.

SCHEMATIZATION (based on Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed, Chapters 1 + 3)	
'Aristotelian' (Greek) tragedy	Theatre of Boal
Theatre as high art	Theatre as a vernacular form of expression
Theatre promoted by the elite	Community theatre
Subject-matter: set in the mythical past, so projects a narrative of inevitability	Theatre presents contemporary issues to equip community members to effect socio-political change
Protagonist: king/hero, a 'great-hearted individual' separated from the chorus of common people	Everyday people in real-life present-day situations. Actors are members of the community
Greek tragedy justifies social structure; contravening society's norms (hamartia) results in public acknowledgment of culpability (anagnorisis) and reversal (peripeteia)	Theatre of the oppressed critiques society's injustices, resulting in social change; influence of Paolo Freire's conscientizaçâo (perceiving socio-economic contradictions and feeling empowered to take action)
Chorus members are helpless and ineffectual, idealized spectators reinforcing hierarchy	There are no spectators, only spect-actors, everyone has agency
Audience empathy restricted to fictional art, ends in catharsis (purging) of emotions, leads to repose, reinforces status quo	Audience transformed into witnesses; theatre of the oppressed arouses critical consciousness and drives to action
Closed plot: plot resolves itself at the end	Open plot: conflict remains unresolved; Marxist poetics of disequilibrium leading to revolution

For Boal, Greek tragedy as presented by Aristotle is high art sponsored by the elite and used to reinforce a narrative of inevitability rooted in the mythical past[10]. Tragedy strengthens the supremacy of the powerful. Its protagonists are royalty, while the common people are relegated to minor roles and to the chorus.

According to Boal, tragedy reinforces the status quo in staging plots in which the tragic hero suffers reversal (*peripeteia*) as a result of antisocial behavior (his *hamartia*) and then

9. The book was first published in Spanish in 1974 as *Teatro del oprimido y otras poéticas políticas* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor); an edition in Portuguese followed in 1975 (*Teatro do oprimido e outras poéticas políticas.* Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira) and an English translation (*Theatre of the Oppressed*, New York: Theatre Communications Group) in 1979. The page references are to this English version.

10. Boal's analysis of Greek tragedy focuses heavily on his interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. In Chapter 1 of his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, titled "Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy" (pp. 1-50), Boal offers a sustained critique of what he terms the "Aristotelian system" of Greek tragedy, a critique that is directed both at Aristotle's theoretical interpretation of tragedy and at the forms of theatrical performance at Athens that Aristotle describes. For a critique of Boal's reading of Aristotle and Greek drama, see BABBAGE (2004, pp. 46-51).

publicly recognizes his culpability (the *anagnorisis*). Chorus members are excluded from the action of the plot; their role is limited to serving as idealized spectators, thus modeling for the audience a posture of passivity. For Boal, the audience's emotions of fear and pity are contained to the safe space of the performance. When the play ends, audience members purge themselves of these strong passions, and return home with renewed belief in the importance of upholding social norms, thereby preventing such disturbing events from happening in real life. Thus *katharsis* of passions leads to a state of repose, and fosters passivity among citizens. To quote Boal, its "repressive function [is] the fundamental aspect of the Greek tragedy and of the Aristotelian system of tragedy."[11]

11. BOAL (1979, p. 25).

In the third chapter, Boal broadens his discussion to contrast the idealist poetics of Aristotle and Hegel with the Marxist poetics of Brecht. Unlike Greek tragedy, which justifies the social order, Brechtian drama reveals its faults. It arouses the audience member's critical consciousness and drives him to action. In contrast to those of Aristotle and Hegel, the Marxist poetics of Brecht and Boal himself privilege disequilibrium and lead towards transformation. These sentiments prepare the way for his discussion of his own methods and artistic development in the final two chapters (Chapter 4, "Poetics of the Oppressed," and Chapter 5, "Development of the Arena Theatre of São Paulo").

Boal developed new forms of community theatre whose goals were to raise consciousness among everyday citizens and to equip them to become agents of socio-political change. In forum theatre, his most well-known method, the actors perform a scene depicting a social injustice[12]. First they perform the scene without interruption. They then re-perform the scene, this time inviting audience-members to step into the performance, replacing one of the actors and altering the outcome of the scenario. Thus, for Boal, spectator implies passivity and is a "bad word" (p. 155); his theatrical techniques transform the spectator into "spect-actor."

12. For a salient example of forum theatre in action, and its methods and goals, see Ganguly's description of the Jana Sanskriti Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed (GANGULY, 2010, pp. 1-40).

Boal's schematized representation of Greek tragedy is clearly polemical, setting it up as a foil for his theatre of the oppressed. However, Boal's characterization of Greek tragedy is certainly not unique. It belongs to a broader movement that rejected the classics as a vehicle of cultural imperialism. Hel-

lenism had been a marker of high culture through which the educated elites in the 'New World' staked their claim as worthy heirs of Greek culture. In South Africa, for example, *Oedipus Rex* was staged by the National Theatre Organization as part of Pretoria's centennial festivities in 1955. The production used the Afrikaans translation by Theo Wassenaar, which was celebrated as a "great achievement of Afrikaans language."[13] Describing the theatrical milieu in São Paolo when he joined the Arena Theatre in 1956, at exactly this same time, Boal describes its artistic repertoire as "theater to show the world: 'Here, too, good European theater is presented... We are a distant province but we have an Old World soul.'"[14] Boal and his followers turned their backs on the classics of European theatre, developing instead new approaches and staging new works that challenged the hegemony of European culture.

To be sure, Boal's critique belongs to a particular socio-political context, the 1964 military coup d'etat in Brazil and Boal's later arrest, torture and exile[15]. But it is also part of a larger picture, in which, during the social and cultural revolutions of the sixties and seventies, Greek tragedy and classics in general became widely associated with the establishment and were rejected as vehicles of elitism and cultural imperialism. This perception has become firmly entrenched, and it is still alive today.

Times, however, are changing, and so are attitudes to the classical past. Farber's *Molora* represents a new posture towards classical works at the start of the new millennium. This adaptation of the Orestes story strips it of any associations with high culture. Farber employs a number of strategies that demonumentalize the story and remove any ivory tower associations that audience members might bring to Greek tragedy. Klytemnestra, Elektra and Orestes are no longer members of a royal family, a tragic House of Atreus. The description in the prologue's stage directions reveals how Farber presents them as everywoman and everyman (p. 20):

> KLYTEMNESTRA — a white woman in middle age — rises from the audience, crosses the playing space and takes her place at one of the wooden tables. She is here to testify. ELEKTRA — a young, black woman — follows, and sits at the opposite table.

13. Cf. VAN ZYL SMIT (2003, p. 6); van Zyl Smit provides a fascinating survey of key performances of Greek drama in South Africa over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, and traces a shift in relationship with the classical past from one of veneration to one of confident appropriation.

14. BOAL (1979, p. 159).

15. For an excellent overview of Boal's life, socio-political context and formative influences, and an assessment of his *Theatre of the* Oppressed, see BABBAGE (2004, pp. 1-65).

This presentation is made more explicit in Farber's Foreword (p. 7):

> It was the common everyman and everywoman who, in the years following democracy, gathered in modest halls across the country to face their perpetrators across a table, and find a way forward for us all.

Similarly, the chorus are conceived as representative members of the community (p. 13):

> The envisaging of the Chorus as a group of 'ordinary' African women provides the context of the Truth Commission, which witnessed thousands of such 'ordinary' folk gathering in halls across South Africa to hear the details of a loved one's death at the hands of the state.

The divide between characters and chorus has been eliminated. The former are conceived of as individuals in the community encompassing the latter. Farber's adaptation has eliminated all royal trappings. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* the purple fabrics that Agamemnon tramples on as he enters the palace to his death are the primary symbol of violent bloodshed in the House of Atreus, resurfacing in modified form as the robe (πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν, 1383; cf. εἵμασι 921) in which Clytemnestra ensnares and kills him, which Aegisthus later points to triumphantly (1580), and which Orestes in turn uses to shroud the corpses of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, and holds up as proof of poetic justice (*Choe*. 980-8, 997-1006, 1010-5). In *Molora,* the purple tapestries are replaced by a plastic sheet which covers the site where Agamemnon was murdered and buried. In the first stage action of the play, one of the chorus-women slowly and deliberately pulls off the plastic sheet, revealing the mound of red soil of Agamemnon's grave. This sheet is described as "a large industrial sheet of black plastic" (p. 19). It is the kind of makeshift and hastily arranged covering that might be found at the site of a mass killing. Thus Farber deliberately demonumentalizes the symbolic stage props that she inherits from Greek tragedy. Murder is presented in its brutal ugliness, and the viewer can infer that this is just one of many unmarked graves and many acts of violence

that have been covered up. Other stage props receive a similar treatment. The token by which Orestes proves his identity to his sister Electra is a simple stone, not an ornate woven cloth as in the *Libation Bearers* (ὕφασμα, 231) or a signet ring (σφραγῖδα, 1223) as in Sophocles' *Electra.* Calabash bowls containing burning herb and beer are used for the libations.


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The stage setting further reinforces Farber's interest in demonumentalizing tragedy. In most modern productions of the *Oresteia*, the royal palace looms as the backdrop, and it is invested with a brooding grandiosity. Acts of violence occur behind the closed palace doors and out of sight of the audience. According to Boal, this is a closed form of theatre in which the audience is able to maintain its separation from the action. Farber does not admit of this separation. "The ideal venue" for performance, she remarks in the mise en scène (p. 19), "is a bare hall or room – much like the drab, simple venues in which most of the testimonies were heard during the course of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission." Lighting in the testimony scenes is provided by harsh neon lights that flicker periodically. *Molora* recreates many of the conditions of the TRC. The performance area is flanked by two testimony tables at which Klytemnestra and Elektra take their seat in the opening scene. The mise en scène insists (p. 19) that the work "should never be played on a raised stage behind a pros-

cenium arch," going on to explain that the audience must be "complicit – experiencing the story as witnesses or participants in the room, rather than as voyeurs." This involvement of the audience is furthered by the spatial arrangement (p. 19): "The audience is seated in front of and around the performance area, as if incorporated into the testimonies. They are the community that provides the context to this event."

Theatre is not as distant from hearings as might be supposed. Both are forms of *mimesis*, understood as re-performance rather than representation[16]. In the play, we have re-creations of acts of brutality, as in scene viii (*wet bag method*) when Elektra asks Klytemnestra to demonstrate to the commission how she tried to extract information on Orestes' whereabouts through use of the 'wet bag' method. We also witness the torture itself in scene iv (*interrogation*)[17]; in this scene, set in the narrative past, Klytemnestra uses suffocation by water in an attempt to extract this information. In both cases, the verisimilitude is deliberately unsettling, and minimizes the separation between theatre and reality. As Sophie Wield observes in her preface to the play (p. 11), "[t]he theatre represents the world to us."

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The goal of this representation is both retrospective and prospective. Public testimony can help the victim come to terms with the past, and gives voice to the one who was silenced. It is thus an engagement with the past that effects change for the future[18]. This is especially true in *Molora*, in which the victims of violence, Elektra and especially Orestes, claim agency over their lives at the end of the play by choosing to break the cycle of violence.

16. Cf. VAN ZYL SMIT (2010, pp. 124) and COLE (2007, pp. 167-87). One prominent project in which recollections of the TRC became the basis for touring performances by young South Africans who had served as interpreters at the hearings is The Truth in Translation Project (accessed October 2, 2013: http://truthintranslation.org/). Sandile Matsheni (who played Orestes in *Molora*) was also one of the original cast of actors in *Truth in Translation* and helped to develop the piece.

17. For the audience's position as witness to the torture, see ODOM (2011, pp. 55-6).

18. This paper thus intersects with the overarching theme (o futuro do passado, the future of the past) of the XIX Congresso da Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Clássicos in Brasilia at which it was presented in July 2013.

A similarly active role is posited for the chorus. It is a chorus member who undertakes the opening act of the play, uncovering the grave by removing the plastic sheet and thereby initiating the testimony process. It is a chorus member who, in scene i (*testimony*), supplies to Klytemnestra the pot of hot water and washcloth that she uses to tend her daughter Elektra. But the chorus intervenes more directly too. It is Ma Nosomething who saves the infant Orestes from danger in scene iii (*exile*), with the complicity of her fellow chorus-members. It is the chorus who are responsible for raising and educating Orestes and initiating him into manhood in scene ix (*initiation*). And in the final scene, it is the chorus who intervene to prevent Elektra from perpetrating her act of revenge. The contrast with the pitiful helplessness of the old chorusmen in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* as they witness the murder of their king (*Ag.* 1346-71) could not be more marked. In Boalian terms, the chorus have moved from *spectators* (passive witnesses of the events unfolding in the play) to *spect-actors* (active participants).

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Farber's play lives out many of Boal's principles, albeit in modified form. It is Aeschylus' *Oresteia* which constitutes the first performance, the master narrative (pp. 81-2):

> ELEKTRA: *(Circling her mother and brother, axe in hand.)*
> This night's end is already written.
> Our destiny must be played out!

KLYTEMNESTRA: Nothing...nothing is written.
Do not choose to be me. The hounds that avenge all murder will forever hunt you down.
ELEKTRA: This is the son of Agamemnon.
His hour is come at last.
ORESTES: *(In rage and pain.)*
I cannot fight my destiny. You have made me what I am!
KLYTEMNESTRA: *(Lowering her head, ready for the blow from the axe.)*
Then strike my child – and be done.

But as the play accelerates to its *seemingly* inevitable violent end, something surprising happens. It is an intervention of the chorus, described in the stage directions as follows (p. 83):

ORESTES lifts the axe high over his head, but as he prepares to kill his mother, a WOMAN from the CHORUS starts to sing a haunting song. ORESTES tries to shake off the sound of it.
ELECTRA: Yini? [WHAT?] Why do you pause?
He lifts the axe again, but the WOMEN rise and move across the performance area. He tries several times to see the deed through – but cannot.

The ambit of what constitutes a significant act has been expanded. It is not just physical intervention that constitutes action, though the chorus engage in such action on this and other occasions. But bearing witness is an act in itself. The chorus are present throughout the play. At times they respond with silence, a pregnant silence that represents the act of listening so crucial to the testimony process. Often they respond with song, especially the split-tone singing characteristic of Xhosa traditional music. Other musical elements include the calabash bow and friction drum. Singing or instrumental music accompany many of the moments of heightened emotion. They constitute another form of action in the play. Through song and musical accompaniment, the chorus qua community reclaims its voice. In *Molora* music has performative power. The chorus' songs are perlocutionary acts, efficacious through the utterance. In the case of Elektra, as with Orestes, the seeds of reconciliation are sown by the chorus, who lie at the heart of the play. At the same time, the play acknowledges the role of the individual in making choices. In scenes xviii (*shift*) and

xix (*rises*), Orestes, Elektra and Klytemnestra choose to break with the violent past and commit to a different future. As Orestes exclaims to Elektra (p. 83):

> (*Grabbing her.*) There is still time, Sister.
> Walk away.
> Rewrite this ancient end.

For Boal, theatre should draw on the experiences of participants for its subject matter. It should be theatre rooted in context, not theatre that transports its viewers to a fictional world of the mythical past, a charge that he leveled against Greek tragedy. *Molora* is a play that defies this schematization. Its subject matter is drawn from ancient myth. Indeed, a large proportion of its script comprises verbatim translations of words composed by Athenian playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides two thousand five hundred years ago. However, *Molora* follows in a long line of plays by South African playwrights that engage ancient myth to examine contemporary South African contexts. In a 2010 article, Betine van Zyl Smit analyzes *Molora* along with three earlier South African plays that deal with the Orestes myth: Athol Fugard's *Orestes* (1971), written during the apartheid era, and two post-apartheid plays, Mark Fleishman's *In the City of Paradise* (1998) and Mervyn McMurty's *Electra* (2000). Both McMurty and[19] Fleishman draw on the traditions of workshop theatre, a genre that emerged in South Africa in the 1970s as a reaction against the dominant paradigm of European theatre[20].

Although *Molora* is not as directly testimonial as many other plays coming out of South Africa from this period, including Fleishman's *In the City of Paradise* and several of Farber's own works (her trilogy titled *Theatre as Witness*, published in 2008, is based on the lives of the original black South African performers), the playwright did involve the Ngqoqo cultural group in the shaping of the work.[21] It is a production that is rooted in local Xhosa musical and choral traditions. It is the very elements of Xhosa culture that the play draws on—the importance of choral singing and dancing in the life of the community, for example—that capture essential qualities of Greek tragedy lost in most Western productions. Thus *Molora* rejects the dichotomy between elite and vernacular forms of theatre that Boal sets up.

19. VAN ZYL SMIT (2010, pp. 114-35). Fugard's *Orestes*, produced at the height of apartheid, stages the Orestes figure as John Harris, a young white South African who in 1964 detonated a bomb beside a whites-only bench as an act of protest, killing an elderly woman and injuring her grandchild. Harris was tried and executed; thus Fugard's *Orestes*, van Zyl Smit argues, presents the gloomy realities of a South Africa in which there was no prospect of an end to the cycle of violence. Fleishman's *In the City of Paradise* and McMurty's *Electra*, in contrast, belong to the post-apartheid period, and both engage with the context of the TRC hearings. McMurty's *Electra* includes direct quotation of testimony from TRC hearings. See STEINMEYER (2007, pp. 102-18) for a detailed analysis of Fleishman's play.

20. See FLEISHMAN (1990, p. 89) for a description of the characteristics of workshop theatre (also reproduced at STEINMEYER 2007, p. 105). For a salient example of community theatre and its methods and goals, see GANGULY's (2010) description of the Jana Sanskriti Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed.

21. Farber briefly describes this process of developing *Molora* in conjunction with the members of the Ngqoko Cultural Group in an interview with Belinda Otas published on April 29, 2008 in *The New Black Magazine* (last accessed October 3, 2013: http://www.thenewblackmagazine.com/view.aspx?index=1362). For discussions of community and workshop theatre in the context of the National Arts Festival, see BLUMBERG (2009, pp. 238-60) and WALSH (2006, pp. 65-78).

For Boal, Aristotelian theatre was distanced from real life. Quoting Brecht, Boal advocated for theatre that describes the "present-day world" for "present-day people," and in which "truthful representations of life" are presented[22]. Farber's play, however, rejects this dichotomy too. It is a play drawing on the plot, language and art form of ancient Greek tragedy, but its impetus and interests are squarely contemporary. Indeed, Farber's concept of the role of theatre is very Boalian. In his forum theatre, Boal argued, there are no spectators: those not currently performing are witnesses to the action. For Farber, theatrical performance is a form of bearing witness, and bearing witness is an act in itself, not merely a prelude to action. Farber's plays bear witness to audiences across the globe. Indeed, *Molora* has mainly been performed in Europe and North America. We are thus in a position in which a South African playwright is using a Western theatrical medium to take a South African ideology to a Western audience[23]. At the heart of *Molora* is a belief in the importance of reconciliation, wholeness seen in relation to the community, the concept of *ubuntu*, "a person is a person through other persons"[24] presented as a response to violence. This may explain why Greek tragedy is Farber's chosen genre: it has long been seen as a universalizing genre and claimed by others as a shared universal heritage. If Boal mistrusted Aristotelian drama for its universalizing, Farber embraces it for exactly that reason. This leads to a strange mix, since testimony focuses on the lived individual experience, and so testimony plays usually avoid any universalizing tendencies[25].

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22. BOAL (1979, p. 112). Boal quotes throughout from *Brecht on Theatre* (1964), an anthology of essays by Brecht; the quotations included here are from p. 274 and p. 107 of that anthology.

23. In Farber's vision both classical drama and the 'First World' that has often claimed primogeniture as heirs to the classical legacy offer *exempla monenda* (examples to be avoided) rather than *exempla tuenda* (examples to be admired); they serve as backdrops that make the direction that the play takes all the more exceptional. For a compelling riposte to the charge that hybridity and incorporation of classical texts masks and perpetuates colonial oppression, see HARDWICK (2008, p. 241).

24. This definition of the Zulu term is given by Sophie Nield in her preface to *Molora* (FARBER 2008, p. 11).

25. ODOM (2011, pp. 51) seems to recognize this tension, arguing that "*Molora*'s use of space is at once too specifically referential to provide the universal empty canvas of tragedy, too fluid to provide merely a necessary element of action, and too general to provide the sort of space memorialization of events required by the TRC hearings."

Brecht, Boal and many others have criticized modern reperformances of Greek tragedy on the grounds that classical or canonical texts constitute master narratives whose authority cannot be contested, a monologic voice if you will. But Farber's *Molora* is fundamentally dialogic. Like many other works of postcolonial literature, it is marked by multivalence and hybridity[26]. A variety of classical texts are mixed together, adapted, and deconstructed. One of the most interesting aspects of the play is the way in which other canonical texts intrude: namely, lines from Shakespeare and the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. In scene xiii (*home*), Elektra stands over her sleeping mother with axe in hand and declares (p. 72):

> If you prick us – do we not bleed?
> If you tickle us – do we not laugh?
> If you poison us – do we not die?
> And if you wrong us…
> Shall we not revenge?

The lines are, of course, those of Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (Act 3, scene 1). In that play, Shylock's demand for retaliatory justice is foiled by another young female character, Portia, who deconstructs the very principle on which this form of justice rests, that of equivalence, in her famous indictment of the 'eye for an eye' system of justice (Act 4, Scene 1):

> Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh.
> Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more
> But just a pound of flesh: if thou cut'st more
> Or less than a just pound, be it but so much
> As makes it light or heavy in the substance,
> Or the division of the twentieth part
> Of one poor scruple, nay, if the scale do turn
> But in the estimation of a hair,
> Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate.

Another use of a canonical text by Farber is even more bold. In scene iv (*interrogation*), Klytemnestra quotes passages from the Old Testament—adapted from the King James version, of course—immediately after she has tortured her daughter Elektra:

26 For hybridity as a characteristic of South African theatre in the post-apartheid period, see HAUPTFLEISCH (1997, pp. 67-72), WALSH (2006, pp. 65-78), VAN ZYL SMIT (2008, pp. 374-5), and VAN ZYL SMIT (2010, pp. 115).

> And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is thy brother?
> And Cain said, I know not; am I my brother's keeper?
> And the Lord set a mark upon the Cain… Your seed shall be carriers of water and hewers of wood. And your descendants shall remain in slavery… all the days of their lives. For I am a God of vengeance.
> *Straddling ELEKTRA, she pushes the burning tip of her cigarette into the side of her daughter's neck.*
> Where's Orestes? Where's my baby?

The lines quoted are above are from the script used in the 2003 performance at the Kampnagel Festival in Hamburg, Germany. They represent an adaptation and stitching together of Genesis 4:9-10 and Joshua 9:23. In the published script (Farber 2008a), the mark of Cain quotation from Genesis 4 is replaced with Genesis 9:22-25, in which Noah curses Ham after his son sees his nakedness, another text that has been exploited to justify the theory of natural slavery as well as the policy of apartheid. In both of these examples, apparently closed, archetypal texts are introduced to critique them. The characters' use of canonical texts is deconstructed, exposed as a rhetorical turn that fails in its attempt to validate violence.

Yael Farber's *Molora* provides evidence of shifting attitudes towards classical works in the new millennium. No longer seen as exercising a hegemonic grip, they are now called upon as valuable partners in a two-way exchange of stories. In fact, it is precisely in their departure from the tragic script that these retellings derive much of their potency. In the terms of Augusto Boal's analysis of drama, they operate not as Hegelian closed texts whose subject-matter is drawn from the ancient past, but as Brechtian open texts dealing with contemporary issues, in which the past does not determine the future, in which myth is as alterable as the world in which it is rooted. Aeschylus' *Oresteia* engages with issues, such as the role of the Areopagus court, especially topical at the time of its first performance in 458 BCE, though it does so allusively. But *Molora* does more than that: it presents a bold trajectory from violence to reconciliation, it affirms agency, especially communal agency, and it claims a transformative role for theatre as a vehicle for social change[27]. *Molora* presents the process of bearing collective witness to lived experience as central to resolving age-old cycles

27. Hardwick (2004, p. 219), in an article with the subtitle "Decolonizing Classics," posits for Greek drama in general a role "as a catalyst for change. By this I imply the transformative role of drama—its ability to reshape awareness and change perceptions." Drawing on a variety of examples from around the globe, including Fugard's *The Island*, Hardwick sets out to demonstrate (p. 221) "that reconfiguration of Greek drama since the late 1960s has played a significant role in decolonizing the minds of both colonized and decolonizers and that the implications for future perceptions are equally radical." See also HARDWICK 2007b, p. 50. *Molora* is not descriptive of present realities, including the contested record of success of the TRC, but rather presents an aspirational vision of possibilities. For an examination of the optimism of *Molora* in relation to the shortcomings of the TRC, see VAN WEYENBERG 2011, pp. 69-90.

of violence; it sets democratic free speech and multivalence against the suppression of speech by totalitarian regimes; and it offers restorative justice rather than judicial justice as the privileged alternative to retaliatory justice. Thus plays such as *Molora* offer an expanded understanding of the relevance of Greek drama as political drama and reflect a growing democratization in the use of classical texts.

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