

POLLUTION AND CRISIS IN GREEK TRAGEDY

Pollution is ubiquitous in Greek tragedy: matricidal Orestes seeks purification at Apollo's shrine in Delphi; carrion from Polyneices' unburied corpse fills the altars of Thebes; delirious Phaedra suffers from a 'pollution of the mind'. This book undertakes the first detailed analysis of the important role that pollution and its counterparts – purity and purification – play in tragedy. It argues that pollution is central in the negotiation of tragic crises, fulfilling a diverse array of functions by virtue of its qualities and associations, from making sense of adversity to configuring civic identity in the encounter of self and other. While primarily a literary study providing close readings of several key plays, the book also provides important new perspectives on pollution. It will appeal to a broad range of scholars and students, not only in Classics and literary studies, but also in the study of religions and anthropology.

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*To my family,
the recently deceased and the newly born*

... on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things ...
(Percy Shelley, *Ozymandias*)

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Preface and acknowledgements

Pollution has a way of sticking with you. It's certainly exciting in view of the subject matters that usually come with it. Ancient Greece is no exception. We enter a strangely beguiling world here, far removed from the 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' Winckelmann once found embodied in Greek sculpture. Instead of solemn white marble, we encounter the gaudy universe of murder and violence, sex and death, blood and demons. Instead of mighty Laocoön, a muted sigh of fortitude on his lips as he suffers intolerable pain, we encounter Theophrastus' endearingly eccentric 'Superstitious Man', who will not go near a woman in childbirth, for fear of pollution.

Greek tragedy's pollution has, in my case, proved particularly adhesive. To be sure, tragedy is often 'grand', though never 'simple'; the pollution we encounter in it adds, if you will, that touch of the exotic and eccentric. Not that this is in general something to be smiled at. Tragic pollution is often frightening and disturbing. Polluted Oedipus brings the plague to Thebes and 'woes beyond reckoning'; Polyneices' disintegrating corpse spreads pollution, and with it an atmosphere that even for the armchair academic, safe and sound in his cosy lair, feels suffocating. It's oddly fascinating, all the more attractive for its uncanniness.

The strange fascination of (tragic) pollution certainly goes some way towards explaining the origins of this book (though you will find that it has very little to do with 'feelings' and 'atmospheres'). Its existence, however, is owed to the powers, not of horror, but of inspired teaching, sage guidance and friendship. This book is the revised version of a PhD dissertation submitted at Freie Universität Berlin. First thanks accordingly go to my 'Doktormutter' Renate Schlesier. Her support in every endeavour and perspicuous academic advice are one thing; quite another the model she has provided as the forever caring, rigorous, untiring and formidably learned poet-scholar that she is.

Others have directly contributed. I had the great pleasure to work with Albert Henrichs during a year as a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University. His enthusiasm was truly contagious; I never left any of our extended lunch (or dinner) reunions without having discovered afresh the beauty of tragedy. Robin Osborne has been extremely generous in sharing his insights on a variety of matters and read various parts of the manuscript; his own work has been an inspiration in the depth and breadth of its inquiry. Bernd Seidensticker, the second examiner of the dissertation, read, and commented on, the manuscript with great care and to my profit; so did the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press, who suggested valuable improvements. It goes without saying that I take full responsibility for remaining mistakes and idiosyncrasies of interpretation.

Less direct, though no less important, has been the influence of a number of teachers during formative years at Gymnasium Fridericianum Erlangen; and thereafter at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where I benefited from the wisdom and support of several individuals. In particular I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Barrie Fleet, who has lastingly deepened my love of the classical languages (and of sparkling wine); Neil Hopkinson, whose supervisions in the Clock Tower of Trinity – fireplace, sherry and all – will not be forgotten; and Christopher Kelly, for his unflagging support and friendship.

Cambridge University Press' Michael Sharp, Gillian Dadd and Jodie Hodgson have been a pleasure to work with and I thank all three for masterfully guiding me through the process of turning a PhD manuscript into a book. My copy-editor Nigel Hope deserves a similar eulogy: his expert proficiency has continually amazed me and saved me from a number of minor and major embarrassments. I should like to take the opportunity also to thank the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for their contribution to my stay at Harvard; and the Fondation Hardt in Vandœuvres/Geneva for a research scholarship: the weeks there were unforgettable and I would like to thank Monica and Heidi for their hospitality and Alcione, Anna, Antonio, Bob, Christiane, Marella, Marilena, Margherita and Wytse for their company.

My final nod is to friends and family. Nicolas Wiater has been an important source of wisdom; Anja, Codruța, Simon and Torsten important sources of (in)sanity. Nick Dodd has not only been a best pal, but also a diligent reader of the entire typescript. My family deserves the concluding note. Their love and support are beyond words. With the greatest humility, therefore: thank you.

Note on the text and translations

In the case of citations from tragedy, the Greek text usually follows the editions in the Oxford Classical Texts series. Translations of tragic passages are mostly my own, often following existing translations and in particular the Loeb translations of Alan Sommerstein (Aeschylus), Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Sophocles) and David Kovacs (Euripides). Other translations I have consulted include the *Oresteia* translations of Christopher Collard (Oxford, 2002) and Alan Shapiro and Peter Burian (New York and Oxford, 2003) as well as the translations offered in the Aris & Phillips Classical Texts series (especially in the case of Euripides).

Abbreviations

For ancient authors and their works the abbreviations in H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. S. Jones, *Greek–English Lexicon with a revised supplement*, 9th edn (Oxford, 1996) have been followed. In a number of cases, however, the abbreviations adopted here diverge. Thus, for Demosthenes I use Dem. (rather than D.); for Euripides Eur. (rather than E.); and for Thucydides Thuc. (rather than Th.). For the plays of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* I have adopted *Ag.* (for *Agamemnon*), *Choe.* (for *Choephoroi*) and *Eum.* (for *Eumenides*).

Abbreviations of periodicals are those recommended in *L'Année philologique*.

Otherwise the following may be noted:

<i>FGrHist</i>	F. Jacoby, <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> (Berlin, 1923–58)
Kahn	C. H. Kahn, <i>The art and thought of Heraclitus. An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary</i> (Cambridge, 1979)
<i>LSCG</i>	F. Sokolowski, <i>Lois sacrées des cités grecques</i> (Paris 1969)
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. S. Jones, <i>Greek–English Lexicon with a revised supplement</i> , 9th edn (Oxford, 1996)
<i>LSS</i>	F. Sokolowski, <i>Lois sacrées des cités grecques. Supplement</i> (Paris, 1962)
ML	R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis, <i>A selection of Greek historical inscriptions to the end of the fifth century BC</i> (Oxford, 1969)
MW	R. Merkelbach, M. L. West, <i>Hesiodi Theogonia; Opera et Dies; Scutum</i> , 3rd edn (Oxford, 1990)
<i>PMG</i>	D. L. Page, <i>Poetae melici Graeci</i> (Oxford, 1962)
RO	P. J. Rhodes and R. Osborne, <i>Greek historical inscriptions 404–323 BC</i> (Oxford, 2003)

List of abbreviations

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<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum graecum</i> (1923–)
Smyth	H. W. Smyth, <i>Greek grammar</i> , rev. by G. M. Messing, Cambridge, MA. (1980)
SM	B. Snell and H. Maehler, <i>Pindarus. Carmina cum fragmentis</i> , 2 vols., 8th edn (Leipzig, 1987–9)
<i>TrGF</i>	B. Snell, R. Kannicht and S. Radt, <i>Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta</i> (Göttingen, 1971–)
West	M. L. West, <i>Delectus ex iambis et elegis Graecis</i> (Oxford, 1980)
Σ	Scholion