Article:
Sharp, IE (2018) A Peace Play in Wartime Germany? Pacifism in Franz Werfel's The Trojan Women, Berlin 1916. Classical Receptions Journal, 10 (4). pp. 476-495. ISSN 1759-5134

https://doi.org/10.1093/crj/cly018

A Peace Play in Wartime Germany? Pacifism in Franz Werfel's *The Trojan Women*, Berlin 1916

Abstract

Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, first performed in Athens in 415BC, has been embraced by western culture as a peace play throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. During the First World War the play was performed using two different versions — in 1915 British classicist Gilbert Murray's 1905 translation from the Greek toured America and in 1916 Austrian poet Franz Werfel's 1914 adaptation was staged in Berlin. Scholars have claimed that both were anti-war productions. This article will demonstrate that in fact neither can be interpreted unambiguously as 'peace plays' and that Werfel's version in Berlin 1916 was neither presented nor understood at the time of its performance as a condemnation of the war or of Germany's role in it.

As well as shedding light on what has long been an apparently intriguing but largely unexamined anomaly in cultural censorship in wartime Berlin, this case study challenges a logocentric, literary approach to the play as text and serves to illustrate the importance of the para-textual framing, as well as the context and staging of a specific performance, in determining its reception and the meanings it creates.

Introduction

Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, first performed at the Great Dionysia at Athens in 415BC, has been interpreted in the Western world as a 'peace play' throughout the 20th and into the 21st Century.[1] In 1906, the play was performed in a production by Harley Granville-Barker at the Royal Court Theatre using British classicist Gilbert Murray's emotionally charged translation of 1905, which was intended and widely received by critics as a comment on the horrors of the Boer War (1889-1902), which Murray strongly opposed. In Germany the best-known translation of the play was by the world-leading classical scholar Professor Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, who had translated several Greek plays for the German stage and

[1]See e.g. Thompson 2006.

had acted as advisor on a number of modern productions between 1900 and 1909 (Marchand 2014: 243). His translation of *The Trojan Women* was never performed, but in 1913 the Austrian Expressionist poet, Franz Werfel, created a dynamic lyrical adaptation ('Bearbeitung') designed for performance. There is textual evidence that Werfel made extensive use of this as well as the Greek original (Meister 1965: 58). On April 22nd 1916 this version premiered at the Lessing Theatre in Berlin, directed by Victor Barnowsky to great critical and popular acclaim.

During the war, censorship in Germany was in the hands of the military, and pacifist voices were ruthlessly suppressed. Under these circumstances it is hard to see how the production of an overtly anti-war play could be possible, let alone welcome. And yet a reading of the theatre reviews across a range of publications suggests that this was indeed the case, a view which has been reinforced by later literary scholars.

This article will address this apparent paradox and ask whether it was in fact possible to stage a 'peace play' in the heart of militarist Prussia at the height of the First World War. On the basis of primary evidence, the discussion will present as accurate a picture as is possible about the background to, performance and reception of *The Trojan Women* in the Lessing Theatre in wartime Germany's capital. Using the large body of work discussing the US tours, it will explore the differences and similarities between the two versions and the three productions, and will examine the claims that both Murray's and Werfel's texts are inherently anti-war. This comparative study will serve not only to solve a long-standing but largely unexamined riddle in German wartime cultural history, but will contribute to our broader understanding of the importance of non-textual elements and the specificities of performance in interpreting the meaning and guiding the reception of a dramatic work, illustrating in other words, that 'performance is as important as text' (Hardwick 2007a: 1).

First I will consider the reception of *The Trojan Women* as a peace play in the

productions that toured still-neutral America in 1915 using Gilbert Murray's translation. Secondly I will discuss Werfel's adaptation and its production in Berlin in 1916, discussing the context for its performance and the author's attitude to the war. Using contemporaneous reviews from a range of newspapers and journals in April and May 1916 I will question whether later scholars have been justified in claiming that the play was widely understood as an attack on German militarism. Thirdly I will offer an alternative assessment of the play's reception.

1. An anti-war play? Murray's translation of *The Trojan Women*

The Trojan Women has certainly been read as an anti-war play, Barbara Goff notes that it was Gilbert Murray's translation and the Royal Court production — in direct response to the Boer war — in 1906 that 'fixed the notion of *Trojan Women* as anti-war' (Goff 2009: 79). She outlines the competing critical interpretations of Euripides' intentions — was the play a direct reference to Melos, defeated after a siege in 416, where the Athenian victors killed all the men and enslaved the women? Did he mean to call these acts into question and warn the audience of the reversal of fortune that would follow this barbaric deed? Was Euripides writing an anti-war play? (Goff, pp. 27-34). For Goff, as for several other scholars, this is far from straightforward and the Melos link appears tenuous and unconvincing (Goff 2009: 31-34; Willis 2005: 29-31; Green 1999). Yet critics still see the play as anti-war and Murray himself had no doubt that the play was 'the first great denunciation of war in European literature' (Murray 1914: 3). Murray made the link between the play and Melos in the 'Introductory Notes' to his 1905 translation (Murray 1905: 6), and this is what set the tone for the modern understanding of the play as a condemnation of war.

1.1 The American tours

In 1906, the production by Harley Granville-Barker at the Royal Court Theatre had had a mixed reception, many feeling too close to the pain of the recent war to find the performance bearable (Willis 2005: 32), so the idea of reviving the production in a country in the midst of another war did not seem feasible (Willis 2005: 38). Instead, the play formed part of the repertoire of a tour of North America undertaken in 1915 by Granville-Barker's company.[2] At the same time, the newly-formed Women's Peace Party (WPP) led by Jane Addams sponsored a tour of the play by Chicago Little Theatre company, reviving the successful production of 1912 directed by Maurice Browne using Murray's translation. The two productions were very different — the first played predominantly to stadia at Ivy League Universities, massive spectacles with thousands of spectators aimed at reviving the experience of drama festivals of the ancient world (Slater 2010; Willis 2005: 39). The WPP-sponsored production was less spectacular, playing indoors in smaller venues, although 'on the tour in fifteen weeks, thirty three thousand people viewed the performance in thirty-one cities' (Willis 2005: 62). The framing was also quite different, with on the one hand a desire to bring radical, 'modern' theatre including plays by Shaw, Ibsen and Euripides to a new audience and to recreate the experience of Greek drama; and on the other a desire to use the play as a comment on current events and to further the cause of peace. The WPP pamphlet accompanying the play states that it 'has been chosen from the world's entire dramatic literature by the Women's Peace Party, as still the most vivid, the most poignant and the most beautiful illustration of war's utter futility and unmitigated evil particularly as war affects women and children' and its performance was intended to send 'a direct message, inspiration, and appeal, here and now, to the men and women of America'.

[2] For a comprehensive discussion of this production see Foley 2012.

The explicit promotional material accompanying the play left audiences in no doubt that this was an anti-war play and that it referred to the present day: 'There are Hecubas in Belgium, Cassandras in Poland, Andromaches in Germany and countless thousands of Astyanaxes in France and Russia and England and Italy, too' (cited in Willis 2005: 59). While the WPP made absolutely clear that the aim of their production was to promote the cause of peace, to prevent America from entering the war and instead to use its power to mediate between the warring nations, Murray's intention for the Granville Barker production was less clear. In a 'Note by the Translator', he stated that while the play revealed the horrors of war and the suffering of the innocents, he was not keen to promote peace at any price:

> While I am heart and soul with the Women's Peace Party in their abomination of War … I do not wish my cooperation in this National Tour to be interpreted as meaning that I am in favour of making peace with Germany on whatever terms the German government may propose. (Gilbert Murray, 1915, cited in Perris, 2010: 427).

In 1914 Murray had published the pamphlet 'How can War ever be right?' in which he made clear that although he abhorred war on principle, some actions were too dreadful to condone and sometimes standing back from conflict was incompatible with the sense of honour that calls to 'very deep instincts in the average man' (p. 7) and which he defined as 'simply that which a free man values more than life, and dishonour as that which he avoids more than suffering or death' (p. 8).

1.2 Critical and audience response to the US tours

Responses to these productions showed that audiences were well aware of the contemporary relevance of the play 'at a moment when the eyes of the world are centred on Europe' (*Philadelphia Enquirer* 30.5.1915, cited in Slater 2010: 442). This was compared to the assumed Greek reception when 'memories of Louvain and Malines, of Ypres, — and of the Lusitania ... afforded a double meaning to the lines, which was analogous to that other double meaning which must have swept through the minds of twenty thousand citizens of Athens who first listened to this tragic drama two thousand three hundred and thirty years before.' (*Vogue*, 1 July 1915, cited in Slater 2010: 442). It is clear that despite America's neutrality, the consensus identified the suffering women with Belgium — Lillah McCarthy, who played Hecuba in the Granville-Barker production, was even said to resemble the Queen of the Belgians (Slater 2010: 442) — and the brutal Greeks with Germany. This was made even more explicit when, at the Chicago Little Theatre production of 7th April 1915, the day that the Lusitania was sunk by a German submarine, the play opened with the director Maurice Browne announcing the terrible event to the theatre, brandishing the newspaper headlines and commenting 'this play is about a deed like that' (cited in Willis 2005: 50). The linking of the barbarism of the Greeks with German barbarism through overt reference to the sinking of the Lusitania must have evoked and confirmed the US audience in their view of German atrocities committed during the invasion of Belgium and arguably shifted the axis of neutrality against the Germans and in favour of the Allies. Ironically, then, the presentation of women's plight and its association with the events that were taking place in Europe may well have made America less able to stand aside from the conflict and thus more likely to enter the war.

2. Franz Werfel's *The Trojan Women* in wartime Germany

2.1 Military censorship in Berlin

From the start of the war, military censorship applied to all branches of public expression, including the theatre. Berlin had a dedicated 'theatre police', who largely continued in their task of censoring stage productions in consultation with the army authorities. It is clear that the outbreak of the war made scrutiny much closer – for one thing theatres were required to resubmit programmes and texts that had previously been passed for censorship — and that theatre was expected to play a major role in the mobilisation of the home front for war. Some of the concerns about taste and appropriateness looked very much like just a continuation of middle class suspicion of 'low-brow' culture. There were even those who felt that the 'theatre of war' had made *any* stage production inappropriate and objected to the cheapening of wartime emotions. But in general there was a feeling that the greatness of the times and the changed mood of the public should find an appropriate response and expression on stage (Baumeister 2005: 30-33). The nature of wartime productions was subject to regional variations and shifts over time, for example circus manager Hans Stosch-Sarrasani's 1914 war spectacle *Europa in Flammen* (*Europe in Flames*) was performed in Dresden with great success, but was not passed for performance in Berlin, whereas his later show *Torpedo-los!* (*Torpedo – go!*) was performed in Berlin from June – September 1918 (Krivanec 2017: 15). While the dominant form of entertainment was the revue (Krivanec 2017: 14) and popular audiences sought to escape from the war through romantic comedy, musicals and farces, classics of Greek and German drama, and even productions of Shakespeare (Baumeister 2005: 56), continued to be performed throughout the war, often with critical success. Given the importance of the Classics as a marker for high culture in Germany, it was undoubtedly easier for a classical production than for a newer play to be passed by censors. Walter Hasenclever's adaptation of *Antigone*, which was performed at the Leipzig Stadttheater in December 1917 and won the prestigious Kleist prize that year, was written at a time when the previously pro-war dramatist was seeking release from the army. In a letter of 1919,

Hasenclever admits that the classical form was deliberately used to sneak his political ideas past the censors: 'Written in 1916 in a time when every free word was stricken by the censor, the play's task was to protest war and violence by clothing them in ancient garments' (quoted in Elwood 1972: 52).

Beyond the theatre, pacifists were vilified and persecuted by the authorities, the mood of the press ranged from virulently to strongly nationalistic and even academic discussions of peace at a theoretical level were forbidden (Quidde 1979). As in other belligerent nations, pacifists were in a minority and many of those who recorded anti-war thoughts in private diaries or unpublished essays felt utterly isolated and frustrated by the impossibility of publicly expressing critical ideas (Sharp 2013a). Under these circumstances, the idea that a theatre might have been using a dramatic production for democratic engagement with the issue of peace, let alone engaging critically with the morality of Germany's war strategy, is extremely far-fetched. In order to explain this apparent anomaly it is necessary to ask the following questions: is *the Trojan Women* an inherently anti-war play and is this evident in Werfel's text? Was Barnowsky's production anti-war? Was it perceived by press, public and military censors as subversive and dangerous to Germany's war effort?

2.2 The author Franz Werfel — 'an outspoken pacifist'?

Aged 24 in 1914, Franz Werfel was one of a group of German Expressionist poets and a member of Prague literary circles that included Franz Kafka and Max Brod. His poems had established him as a *Weltfreund,* literally a 'friend of the world', which was the title of his first collection, published in 1911*,* in other words an idealist who used powerful, lyric language to express the inner pain and ecstasy of the human soul. Characterised by heightened emotion and psychological depth, German Expressionism was an anti-

materialistic, predominantly young movement that embraced the extremes of human emotions, rejected bourgeois control and restraint, and explored marginal states such as madness, criminality and violence, including the violence unleashed in war. (Cork 1995; Ritchie 1976). In contrast to the 'edle Einfalt und stille Grösse' (noble simplicity and quiet grandeur) that was associated with the 18th Century classicism of Goethe and Schiller, these dramatists followed Nietzsche in emphasising the darker psychological depths of Greek mythology. As Suzanne Marchand noted in her Presidential address to the German Studies Association in 2014, the disturbing material in the Greek sources was exploited to the full by German dramatists such as Gerhard Hauptmann, Frank Wedekind and Walter Hasenclever and in Max Reinhardt's 1910 production of *Oedipus Rex* (2015: 242). Marchand suggests that Werfel may have been influenced by Murray's translation, 'which was widely read as a critique of English cruelties during the Boer Wars' (Marchand 2015: 247), but there is no further evidence for this claim. Prior to Werfel's, the standard German translation was by the outstanding Classical scholar Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf but there was scope for a dynamic adaptation geared at performance on the German stage.

As Werfel finished the translation in March 1914, he was obviously not directly thinking of the First World War when he wrote it but was influenced by the apocalyptic atmosphere that characterised lyric poetry during this pre-war period that appeared to anticipate and even prophesy the outbreak of war (Bridgewater 1985). However, there is no doubt that the poet was strongly opposed to militarism: his anti-war stance developed more fully during the war and was expressed in letters, diaries and an unpublished dialogue *Euripides oder Űber den Krieg*, (*Euripides or about the war*) in 1914, as well as in poems written during the conflict. In 1914 he wrote two anti-war poems: *Der Krieg* (*War*) evokes the apocalypse, but also a Christian God still moved by human love and human virtue, and *Die Wortemacher des Krieges* (*The Wordsmiths of the War*), part of which was banned from

publication for its critical vision of the war's futility, its cynical juxtaposition of the 'sublime times' with excrement and vermin and an apparent disdain for military valour. His most powerful anti-war collection, *Der Gerichtstag* (*Judgement Day*) was published in 1919. Werfel was enlisted in the Austrian army for most of the war. He served, albeit reluctantly, as a telephone operator and made several attempts to avoid active duty: according to one biographer, he tried to dodge conscription by feigning illness, and his entry into the army was delayed when he sustained an injury to his legs that was investigated as a possible case of self-mutilation (Jungk 2006: 67-71). Eventually in 1917 he achieved the safe haven of a post in the Austrian press corps as a propagandist alongside many other well-known authors (Jungk 2006: 87-88). Importantly, however, his pacifism was not expressed in public statements or activism. He did not see it as the poet's role to 'blow the trumpet for the revolution': 'The purpose of the poet doesn't seem to me at all to blow the trumpet for the revolution. He has other Bastilles to storm. He is there to make life unbearable and holy and to pursue you, O reader, right into the shadows' (Werfel cited in Jacobson, p. 342). In 1916, then, from the point of view of the Berlin audience and the censors who passed the play without comment, here was a young dramatist who had translated the play, but could not attend the premiere because he was on active service in the Austrian army, facts which did not immediately lead them to expect a pacifist critique.

2.3 Critical and press response to the play

However, the scholars who have engaged with Werfel's literary work in the latter half of the 20th and in the early 21st centuries have claimed that Werfel's adaptation was understood in 1916 as a topical anti-war play, and consequently view its production in wartime Berlin, as literary scholar J.M Ritchie puts it, as 'a theatrical event of some magnitude' (1976: 145). Avery T. Willis states that in Werfel's adaptation, '*Die Troerinnen* ... emerged as a powerful

expression of anti-war, anti-military sentiment in Germany (1916)' (Willis 2010: 15). According to Jennifer Michaels too, (1994: 32-33), 'much of the initial response … centred on the play's topicality and Werfel's' strong anti-war stance' (p. 32) and 'many at the time interpreted the play as prophecy and anti-war protest' (p. 33). Ritchie refers to the play's 'pacifist power', claiming that Werfel 'was from the outset an outspoken pacifist' and that 'for this generation of Germans the antimilitarist meaning of this adaptation seemed clear' (Ritchie 1976: 145). Both Richie (p. 145) and Marchand also claim that Werfel retreated from his pacifist position in the aftermath of war. For the latter:

> '[i]t is striking that Werfel was retreating from pacifism just as Murray's hard-hitting version of *The Trojan Women* returned to the British stage in 1919' (Marchand, 2015: 247).

In the context of military censorship and the ruthless suppression of any expression of pacifist ideas described above, it is hard to overstate the incongruity, in fact the impossibility of an anti-war play by a known and 'outspoken' pacifist being passed for performance on the Berlin stage. Had this happened, Ritchie's use of the term 'explosive' (1976: 145) to describe the event would be fully justified. In short, these claims appear hardly credible. If we examine them more closely, we can identify a shared vagueness about what precise time period the anti-war interpretation refers to. The critics whom Michaels cites in support of her claim are writing from 1922 onwards, and the only relevant citation in her bibliography from 1916 is that of distinguished critic Alfred Polgar, who restricts his review to a discussion of the quality of Werfel's verse and gives not the least indication that he finds the play pacifist in intention or effect (Polgar 1916). Willis cites sources from 1926 and 1927 respectively, neither of which give any detail of the earlier critical reception, while Ritchie cites no contemporaneous sources at all to support his claims. It is important to distinguish between the interpretations post-war, when the context was very different, and responses to the

performance in 1916 at one of the most decisive points of the war, when Germany was standing before the US ultimatum.

If we look instead at reviews in a range of newspapers from April 1916, we can see that, although some critics did object to certain aspects of the adaptation — the language was too free, too modern, too naïve, the actresses were not all ideal for their roles — not a single one raises the possibility that this was in any sense a subversive play. In my study, I looked at reviews in seventeen Berlin newspapers ranging in political affiliation from bourgeois liberal — *Berliner Börsen-Courier, Berliner Börsen-Zeitung, Berliner Tageblatt, Berliner Volkszeitung, Vossische Zeitung* — to conservative nationalist — *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, Deutsche Tageszeitung, Kreuz-Zeitung, Die Post, Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, Tägliche Rundschau, der Tag* — as well as in literary reviews such as *Die Schaubühne*, later *die Weltbühne,* aimed at the intellectual elite. As outlined above, theatre reviews are a good indication of how the play was seen by critics and may give some details about the performance in terms of staging, lighting, accompanying music and interpretation, but they need to be contextualised and read critically themselves (Hardwick 2007a). They are not a reliable way of judging audience response, even where critics invoke this. For example, the review of the Easter Sunday performance by Stefan Grossmann in the liberal *Vossische Zeitung* of 23 April 1916 makes the following claim:

> This could become a historically significant evening. One day we might find in history books: on the day that America's note was published in Berlin, the citizens had enough inner strength and freedom to listen in reverent devotion to Euripides' *The Trojan Women*.

This sounds so exactly like the expected and appropriate response of a cultured and resilient nation that it has to be viewed with suspicion: it also assumes a unitary response in an audience with no evidence in support of the claims made on their behalf.

Albert Kerr, one of the pre-eminent theatre critics of the age, reviewed the play for the nationalist broadsheet *Der Tag* on 26th April 1916. Like many other critics, he stressed the youth of the translator and even mocked some passages for their naïve rhymes and tum te tum rhythms. Even so, he recognised the significance of the theatrical event and the relevance of Euripides' drama to the historical context:

> This harrowing play by our contemporary, Euripides, (in a production of rare harrowing power in all essential points), rang out like a terrible requiem into the shaken, writhing world that is either dying or giving birth.

The play was a massive success, running for fifty performances in Berlin and afterwards touring in cities such as Düsseldorf and Vienna. In the course of the war, some twelve further productions using Werfel's text were produced in German towns and cities (Meister 1964: 262), involving 'at least sixty-five performances' (Marchand 2015: 247) none of which were apparently considered problematic by censors or critics. The play was also a critical success, with especial praise for Werfel's dynamic language and lyricism and the powerful emotionality of the production. Critics drew the central meaning of the play from its moral message of human virtue and endurance, which appeared fitting for a nation seen as struggling against overwhelming odds for its very survival. Far from being 'centred on the play's topicality' (Michaels 1995: 32), many stressed the qualities of timelessness and universality expected of classical drama. For example a review in the *Tägliche Rundschau* on 23rd April 1916 referred to the play's 'erhabene Grösse' (sublime greatness) and 'erschüttende Wirkung' (devastating effect), while *Die Post*'s review on the same day sees the play as offering the transformation of suffering and death into something great and noble, thus rendering it meaningful and of lasting value.

3. An anti-war play in wartime Berlin? An alternative assessment

3.1 Werfel's text

Instead of super-imposing post-war insights and responses onto the play, it is important to look at the text itself for clues about its purpose and reception. In the preface, Werfel makes clear that he identified with Euripides as the *enfant terrible* of Greek tragedy and with his choice to bring not the heroes or the battle, but the marginal figures of the defeated women of Troy to the centre of the action. He also made clear that he saw Euripides as foreshadowing Christianity and Hecuba as a forerunner to the sacrificial martyr and mater dolorosa of Christian iconography (Werfel 1914, Foreword). In line with his engagement with Christianity outlined in an essay of 1916, 'Die christliche Sendung' (The Christian Mission), Werfel's Hecuba is seen as 'affirming her individuality until the bitter end' (Jungk, 2006:75). This motif is expressed in Werfel's translation choices and additions of his own that evoke biblical language, notably the apocalypse of the old testament, and biblical references such as the parallels between Helen and Jezebel heightened by her finery and lexical associations — she is called both a 'whore' and a 'bitch' by the chorus and by Hecuba herself.

Language

In general, and in line with expressionist extremism, Werfel's language is more excitable than either the Greek original, Wilamowitz's sober accuracy or even Murray's overt emotionality.

Example 1: Prologue (Poseidon) in which a comparison shows that there is more blood in Werfel's than in the other two translations.

Wilamowitz:

> Die Gotteshäuser und die heiligen Haine sind wüst und blutbesudelt (Lit: The temples and the holy groves are deserted and stained with blood.)

Murray:

The groves are empty and the sanctuaries

Run red with blood

Werfel:

Nun bluten Haine, Flur und Tempelgut

Von Blut entweiht, aus wilden Wunden Blut

(Lit: Now the groves are bleeding and the temples

Are defiled by blood, blood from wild wounds).

Example 2: Hecuba's response to Polyxena's death in which Werfel's Hecuba is far more unstable and elliptical.

Wilamowitz:

Hekuba: Die ärmste. Darauf also deutete

Des Herolds Rätselwort. Wohl traf es zu.

(Lit: poor thing. So that is what the Herold's riddle meant. It must be true.)

Murray:

Hecuba: My sorrow! …Tis but what Talthybius said:

So plain a riddle and I read it not.

Werfel:

Hekuba (*in einem entsetzlichem Gelachter)*

Der Spruch des Herold: Furchtbares Erkennen!

(Lit: With terrible laughter: The herald's meaning: dreadful realisation!)

Example 3: the Chorus urges Hecuba to defeat Helen's slippery arguments. Werfel's version is far longer than the other two and has rhythmic repetition, internal rhyme and uses strong language to convey the anger and hatred of the women for Helen.

Wilamowitz:

Komme deinem Vaterland und deinen Kindern

Zu Hilfe, Königin, zerreisse diese

Trugschlüsse. Schuldig ist sie, doch geschickt

Weiss sie zu reden. Die Gefahr ist dringend.

(Lit: Come to the aid of your children and your fatherland, queen, and tear through these specious arguments. She is guilty, but skilled in her speech. The danger is urgent.)

Murray:

O queen, think of thy children and thy land,

And break her spell the sweet soft speech, the hand

And heart so fell: it maketh me afraid.

Werfel:

O zerreiss du, alte Fürstin

Diesen frechen

Huren Irrsinn!

Sieh wir schaudern

Schweren Odems

Wie sie schamlos

Worte lächelt

Eitel flicht sie

Schnöde Schlüsse

Ins Gewebe

Der Verdammnis

Sprich für Troja

Für die Deinen

Und zerreiss du

Alte Fürstin

Diesen frechen

Huren Irrsinn!

(O tear through, aged Queen

This presumptuous

Whore’s insanity!

Lo, we shudder

With heavy breath

As she smiles

Shameless words

In vanity she weaves

Disdainful claims

Into a web

Of damnation

Speak for Troy,

For your people

And tear through,

Aged Queen,

This presumptuous

Whore's insanity).

Language provides a further clue to the subliminal message of the text. As Perris points out, Murray's language is saturated with overt references to peace (2010: 428), whereas Werfel's most common references are mother, dream/madness, pain, slavery, placing the emphasis very much on the sorrowing mother and her losses.

Despite the suffering and loss it depicts, Werfel's text does not carry an unambiguously anti-war message. There is no sign that the loss of all her fifty sons has made even Hecuba into a pacifist. War, even in defeat, is equated in her speeches with redemption, glory, and eternal fame. In the Prologue the gods are presented as capricious and immune to human suffering — clearly, there is no divine justice and defeat and victory are illusory concepts. However, Barnowsky's production omitted the prologue, meaning that the audience were not confronted by the indifference of the gods and could still imagine that prayers for intercession might be heard. Moreover, unless they had bought the published text (which had sold very poorly up to that point), the audience did not have access to Werfel's Foreword and had no expectations beyond the classical source, with which they were most likely very familiar. Given the importance of the classics to German education and given the nature of the theatre audience at the Lessing Theatre, known for its preference for highbrow, modern plays by the likes of Ibsen and Shaw, we can assume a general familiarity with the story and

certainly assume a thorough grounding in the conventions of Greek tragic theatre in the critics reviewing the play (Marchand 2015).

3.2 Context and reception of Barnowsky's production

Regardless of Werfel's — and any scholarly speculation about Euripides' — intentions, the reception of the play in performance draws on the context and experience of the audience, and the audience watching this play in Berlin 1916 would have brought their own understanding with them, both of the classical source material and of the nature of their contemporary reality.

On April 22nd, the day the play opened in Berlin, Wilson's note giving Germany an ultimatum that America would enter the war if the submarine warfare against merchant and passenger ships did not cease was made public. The prospect of this powerful and rich nation joining the war on the side of the Allies represented a huge threat to German military power, and in this situation there were a number of possible dangers to German morale in this play. First, with its litany of suffering, the play could appear as a great but unresolved lament. There is a strong sense too of the suffering as meaningless: it is not set within a wider narrative, and without the depiction of battle, war is robbed of any excitement. Instead, it is presented as loss and damage triggering an endless cycle of defeat and revenge, which is exactly the analysis of the pacifist groups who opposed the war (Sharp 2013: 167). The main acts we hear of or witness are not thrilling heroic deeds, but are pitiful and barbaric: Polyxena is killed at the altar, little Astyanax is dragged from his mother's arms and thrown from the turrets, and although the action takes place off stage in line with classical theatrical conventions, his broken body is brought onto the stage on his dead father, Hector's, shield for his grandmother to mourn at heart-rending length.

Second, all this accuses and condemns the invading army and could have invoked uncomfortable reminders of German atrocities committed against the civilian populations of Belgium and occupied France. Just as Murray speculates about the Athenian audience 'were the consciences of the sacker of Melos quite easy during that prologue?' (Murray 1913: 84), it is possible to ask the same about the Berlin audience: in the light of the destruction of Belgian and French towns and cities, could the Germans fail to see themselves as the marauding Greeks and be disturbed by this insight? Germans were highly sensitive to the persistent accusations of barbarism arising from their attack on Belgium. In October 1915 nurse Edith Cavell had been executed for aiding the enemy, and the Germans' reputation for barbarism had reached mythic proportions (Pickles 2007).

Thirdly, just as Murray's play was seen in 1906 as too close to the sorrows of the recent war, in 1916 Germany Werfel's 'agonizing portrayal of the sufferings of the now childless, husbandless, and enslaved female survivors of a lost war must have been almost unbearable for the audience to watch' (Marchand 2014: 247). In particular, Andromache's sacrifice would have invoked the sacrifice of so many German mothers. Although Hecuba is of course the child's grandmother, Werfel has deliberately transposed some lines to identify her more as a mother mourning her son's loss — not Andromache but Hecuba has watched wearily through the night at the child's sickbed and it is Hecuba the mother whose devastating losses are key to the message of the play. The trope of the old forced to bury the young and the evocation of lost funeral rites for those parents bereft of children was all too topical.

3.3 Assessment of audience response to Barnowsky's production

There are some methodological challenges to ascertaining the audience response in that what we know about the performance comes overwhelmingly from reviews in newspapers and journals, which as Lorna Hardwick has pointed out, can be highly problematic (Hardwick 2007a). Most importantly, we have hardly any direct access to audience response and the majority of critics either overlook the audience entirely in their reviews or make claims for a unitary response with no convincing supporting evidence. There are, however, a few diary entries that record attendance at the play and give an indication of how some individuals responded. The artist, Käthe Kollwitz, who lost her younger son in the first months of the war and spent the rest of her life trying to give artistic expression to this loss wrote:

> With Karl at 'The Trojan Women'. Heavy, hard, some of it almost unbearable. The lament for Hector's little son. The old old Hecuba with her 50 fallen sons. Her final >> So I take my life to my breast and bear it to the end <<.[3]

Feminist, patriot and pacifist, Minna Cauer, comes closest to an understanding of the play as an indictment of the war, writing in her diary on 17 May 1916:

> Deeply shaken yesterday at the Trojan Women. I wonder whether Barnowsky put on the play to show that none of us, none of us has come a single step further, that we are still wallowing in cruelty just as we did then, even if in different forms? (Lüders, 1925).

As we have seen, there is no sense in any of the reviews across a range of publications that this was considered a dangerous play carrying a subversive message. The files of the Berlin theatre police show that the play was passed for performance without discussion.

[3] Kollwitz diary entry 30 April 1916 (Bohnke-Kollwitz, 2007).

There were no calls to prevent the performances, no note of concern in a press sensitive to any pacifist or internationalist sentiments. Instead:

> The reverberations of the evening that director Barnowsky offered us at the Lessing Theatre was full of beauty (Fritz Engel, *Berliner Tageblatt* 24.4.1916).

There are a number of possible explanations for this. First, the reverence which Classics were held in Germany led the audience to see it as expressing 'timeless and eternal values' (see Marchand 2015, especially pp. 241-244). Maybe the accusation of barbarism made German audiences even more committed to a measured response to the classics? Certainly the comment by Stephan Grossmann, the critic quoted earlier, seems to suggest a self-consciousness in the theatre-going public, almost a performative quality to their ability to demonstrate their spiritual refinement and education as well as the self-control and emotional distance required to watch Euripides at a time of national crisis. It seems likely, too, that the well-documented emotionality of the production contributed to a shared, bonding experience which was one of the aims of the theatre — and a major aspect of its justification in times of war. It is also possible that, as German playwright Bertolt Brecht has argued, the shared, cathartic experience was in itself the enemy of rational thought and critical reflection, and there is agreement that this was a particularly emotional production — the low lighting, the hypnotic dance, the rhythmic lyric language were all designed to appeal directly to the emotions rather than to the intellect. Moreover, although undeniably harrowing, the image of the mother cradling her dead son, the pietà, is an evocation of sacrifice that can as easily be mobilised to justify as to condemn war (Sharp 2011: 97-8). The death of a son in battle could be a source of pride as well as sorrow to bereaved mothers, as long as it could be slotted into a rhetoric that gave meaning and purpose to the sacrifice. The elevation of the vanquished women's suffering to heroic stature and the evocation of great heroes and the memory of

Troy itself may in some sense have served to validate the heroism of German men and the endurance of German women.

The issue of identification is also problematic: in the tour of the US, it was made quite clear that the Germans represented the Greek aggressors. Yet it is highly likely that the Germans, invaders of neutral Belgium and occupiers of France, identified instead with the victims. There is a strong victim narrative in the German press surrounding the causes of the war: Germans saw themselves as the victims of other nations' envy, of encirclement by enemies out to stifle the expansion of German culture, of the British blockade that was starving German women and children, and even as victims of the Belgian civilians, who were accused of treacherously sniping at German soldiers and gouging out captive's eyes. Wilson's ultimatum and the rejection of the German peace terms would have served to further strengthen their sense of isolation in a hostile world. It is possible, too, that even if the Germans did see themselves as the Greeks rather than the Trojans, the play could have acted as a grim warning against defeat, a reminder of the devastation of occupied territories and the fate of unprotected women — and have thus stiffened the resolve of the Germans to fight on to victory.

3.4 Werfel's moral message

Perhaps the most significant explanation of the positive critical response and the play's success is that Werfel offers a moral message that gives meaning to the suffering shown. One of the great virtues of Werfel's characters is defiance, a refusal to give in to fate. In the figure of Hecuba, he offers the most piteous figure possible: a Queen enslaved, who having already lost 50 sons and her husband, in the course of the play loses her daughters, her grandson and her city. But Werfel shows us how even she, who has lost everything, can

impose meaning on the world through force of will: ‘ich aber bin’ ‘I, however, am’ (i.e. I am still alive and can assert my individual will) she says to Andromache, and ‘gut sein ist mehr als glücklich sein’ — ‘to be good is better than to be happy’. This is an addition entirely Werfel’s own, not present in either Euripides or Wilamowitz and the end of the play is significant in conveying this message.

In both Wilamowitz’s and Murray’s versions the chorus speak the final lines, Wilamowitz:

Ach, meine zitternden zitternden Füsse,

versucht es, brecht auf,

Ihr müsst mich tragen

zu Liedestagen

zum öden Leben

der Sklaverei

Chor

Heimat leb wohl, geschieden muss sein.

Auf denn, hinweg zu den Griechenschiffen

Sie ziehen, von den Schergen getrieben, ab.

(Oh my trembling, trembling feet

Attempt it, set off

You must carry me

To days of suffering

To the desolate life

Of slavery

Chorus

Homeland farewell, there must be a parting

Come on, away to the Greek ships.

They move off, driven by the Greeks (lit. 'henchmen').

Murray:

Hecuba

Farewell! O spirit grey,

Whatso is coming,

Fail not from under me,

Weak limbs, why tremble ye?

Forth where the new long day

Dawneth to slavery!

Chorus

Farewell from parting lips,

Farewell! — Come, I and thou

Whatso may wait us now,

Forth to the long Greek ships

And the sea's foaming.

(*The trumpet sounds again, and the women go out in the darkness*).

Although presented as resilient in enduring their sorrows, these women are still helpless victims, who have no choice but to bow to the tyrants' will.

In contrast, Werfel's play gives the final words to Hecuba herself, stressing her agency and determination to endure even beyond the limits of human endurance:

HEKUBA

hat sich aufgerichtet. Sie geht einige Schritte nach vorn

und tritt auf irgendeine Erhöhung, wie auf ein Postament.

Alle Frauen fluten an ihr empor, wie an einem Riffl Sie

steht ganz in einem schwarzen Licht. — Plötzlich bricht

die Musik ab

HEKUBA has raised herself up. She takes a few steps forward and onto a raised part of the stage, as if on a podium. All the women flood up past her, as if breaking against a rock. She is standing in a dark light, suddenly the music stops.

Ihr alten zitternden Füße geht den Weg,

Wie er vor euch liegt, denn hier ist nicht mehr

Ein Recht zum Tod. Seht her, so nehme ich

Mein Leben an die Brust und trags zu Ende!!

Nun zu den Schiffen! —

Eine neue Woge von Feuer und Fanfare verschlingt das

Bild

(You old and trembling feet go the way

That lies in front of you, for here there is no more

Right to death. Look how I gather

My life to my breast and carry it to the end!

Now to the ships!

(A new wave of fire and fanfare swallows up the scene)).

This ending offers a powerful image of German endurance and the silent heroism of German women.

Conclusion

Was it possible to stage a 'peace play' in the heart of militarist Prussia at the height of the First World War at a time when in Hasenclever's words 'every free word was stricken by the censor' (Elwood 1972: 52)? It seems that it was not possible: whatever it may have been in other productions in other places, evidence shows that what was performed at the Lessing theatre to critical and popular acclaim was not in fact a 'peace play'. Barnowsky's *The Trojan Women* was not understood as such by critics or military censors, nor did it incite the audience to condemn the war. Instead, it acted as an affirmation of their suffering, a warning of the consequences of defeat, a validation of their sacrifice and a model for their continued endurance. Far from being understood as topical, the play's classical status allowed the audience to experience cathartic emotions at a distance from contemporary events. Although the highly contemporary motif of the mourning mother will have had heightened emotional effect, as suggested by Kollwitz's diary entry, the beauty and power of the language may even have helped make the war more bearable by raising the individual deaths to the level of the sublime, placing them safely into the bounds of ritualised sorrow, eternal truths, ancient, unchangeable woes. As the review in the *Berliner Börsenzeitung* on 22nd April puts it:

Uber die Zeiten her klingen Müttertöne zu uns, die der Schrei der Gegenwart sind

(Across the centuries mothers' voices reach us: they are the cry of the present day).

This article has argued that interpretations of the Berlin production of *The Trojan Women* as antimilitarist are inaccurate. We have seen that at least since Murray's translation of 1905, Euripides' *The Trojan Women* has been embraced as a peace play, and it is undoubtedly capable of carrying very powerful anti-war messages, of conveying the sorrow and the pity of war, its central emphasis on the bereaved and vanquished mothers feeding into gendered assumptions about the innocence and victimhood of women in war that still resonate today. Yet, as the case study has shown, this is not necessarily inherent in the text itself, whether Euripides', Wilamowitz's, Werfel's or Murray's. The misinterpretation of the Lessing Theatre production 'as a powerful expression of anti-war sentiment' shows the dangers of such labels, as scholars have been blinded to the incongruity of and lack of evidence for their claims. What was performed in Berlin, the heart of Prussian militarism, in 1916 was not and never could have been intended to challenge German aggression in Belgium or even to reveal the true face of war. This case study therefore does more than resolve a puzzling anomaly about a particular production. It has wider significance for our understanding of the play in its various versions and in the case of both Murray and Werfel challenges assumptions about the primacy of authorial intention and translation choices. The study also raises interesting questions about the translation and adaptation of classical plays for the modern stage, reminding us that:

> [t]heatre translation is not just a relationship between the ancient text and the creator of the modern acting script; the activators of translation and meaning also include the director, the designer, the actors, and the spectators, as well as the material and cultural contexts of theatre and its spaces (Hardwick 2007b: 358).

We have seen that even where the translator is an avowed pacifist and sees the translated play as an anti-war statement, this is not the only — or even the overriding factor — in shaping audience responses. Murray's shifting position from condemnation of British

conduct of the Boer War to qualified support for British entry into the Great War in 1914, shows us that as the context changes, so the same text can carry different authorial intentions which may or may not be reflected in the production. In their translation from text to stage, the WPP used para-textual material, stage effects and an unambiguously anti-war framing narrative to guide audience expectations and responses, while Werfel manipulated his adapted text to reflect his own religious and political beliefs. Yet despite this, we have seen that what the critics and censors saw in Barnowsky's production of Werfel's text was very far from a pacifist play, and the WPP production may have made US audiences more rather than less likely to support American entry into the war. In part this was due to staging decisions that tamed the potential in Werfel's text for Expressionist disruption and enabled the production to be understood within the category of timeless classical drama.

This disjuncture between the intentions of authors and reception by critics and audiences serves as a reminder of the importance of the play in performance, of the specificity of each production — of decisions taken by the production team, of the historical and cultural context even down to a specific day as is shown by the reactions to events such as the sinking of the Lusitania on May 7th 1915 and the American ultimatum to Germany of April 22nd 1916. Factors such as role interpretation by actors, staging, lighting, para-textual material and framing narrative — for example the decision to omit the prologue in Barnowsky's production and the introductory comments by the WPP in the Little Browne tour — play a major and decisive role in shaping a specific audience's expectations and response.

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