GREEK TRAGEDY FOR THE NEW MILLENIUM: PUBLIC TESTIMONY AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN YAEOL 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 do 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 YAEOL 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.

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)

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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᾿ εὐπειθῆς ἐμοὶ
γλώσσης ματαίας μὴ ἱκβάλῃς ἔπη χθονὶ…
ὡς σεμνότιμος καὶ ἐνυοικήτωρ ἐμοῖ:

Be readily persuaded by me: do not loose off against this land the words of a foolish tongue…