

## VARIA

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### ‘YOU TOO, MY CHILD?’ ON TRUST AND PERFDY IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

ABSTRACT. Schade Gerson, ‘You too, my child?’ On trust and perfidy in classical literature.

A tripartite approach is proposed in order to get hold of the complex phenomenon of trust and perfidy in classical literature. In a first part two cases of political treason are discussed: the most prominent victim of treason, Julius Caesar, who was very much surprised when he saw Brutus among his assassins, and the greatest traitor in antiquity ever, Alcibiades. Protean perfidy, however, is a gender-crossing issue, and a second part is dedicated to literary figures, in particular to women. Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra is an outstanding example of a perfidious character. Finally, a third part is concerned with words, for *πίστις* and *fides* have attracted the attention of classical scholars and structural linguists alike. At the beginning, however, Hamlet is introduced, an expert both in trust and perfidy as well as in classical literature.

Keywords: Shakespeare *Hamlet*, Julius Caesar, Alcibiades, Clytemnestra, Phaedra, Iason & Medea, *πίστις*/*fides*, Eduard Fraenkel, Émile Benveniste.

They educate their boys from five to twenty years old,  
and teach them three things only,  
riding and archery and truth-telling.

παιδεύουσι δὲ τοὺς παῖδας ἀπὸ πενταέτεος μέχρι εἰκοσαέτεος  
τρία μόννα, ἵππεύειν καὶ τοξεύειν καὶ ἀληθίζεσθαι

Herodotus on the Persians, 1. 136. 2

After his father’s death, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, wanted to find out what was so rotten in the state of Denmark. He made the messengers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern engage a group of actors whom he persuaded to perform a play in which a king was going to be murdered. Hamlet, who simulated madness in order to protect himself from his uncle’s revenge, was keen on restaging events which so troubled him. He wanted to provoke a reaction from his uncle, whom he rightly suspected of having poisoned his father. Upon the actors’ arrival,

Hamlet starts playing a role and becomes an actor. He recollects, as he puts it, “an excellent play, well digested in the scenes” (*Hamlet* ii 2, 435sq.) and asks the actors whether they remember the text of the play he has in mind. The play in question, however, turns out to be Virgil’s *Aeneid*, book II and book III. Hamlet in particular remembers that he “chiefly loved one speech, Aeneas’ tale to Dido”, which fills more than 1.500 lines. It was part of the text that Virgil himself chose to read to Augustus in 23 BC.<sup>1</sup>

Why did Hamlet, driven half-mad by the intrigues at home, particularly enjoy these books? What made him remember them – or simulating to do so? What particular event in Aeneas’ very long tale to Dido came back to him? Nobody ever knows what a literary figure and a fictitious character like Hamlet may have had in mind. Given the context of his situation, however, it is not unlikely to assume that Hamlet remembered a story related to his own being betrayed by horribly clever people. If we exclude purposeless wilfulness, one may think that Hamlet’s own miserable state might well have reminded him of a certain Sinon, who persuaded the Trojans to take the Wooden Horse inside the city’s wall. An arch-treacherous Greek, he is depicted by Virgil exactly like these sinister types Hamlet feels surrounded by.

In many an aspect, Sinon’s story reminds of a well-written and well-staged dramatic performance, and Virgil was known to his contemporaries as being much given to tragedy.<sup>2</sup> The story swiftly unfolds in three acts: Sinon suddenly appears, outside Troy, and pleads pitifully for mercy. Instead of simply killing him, the Trojans are excited and want to hear his tale. This marks the first step of Sinon’s success-story (*Aeneid* 2. 57–76). In the following, Sinon explains how he was chosen to be a sacrifice, to appease the winds and gain for the Greeks a fair journey home. He pretends to be a victim of Ulysses, who had put him to death on a faked charge. But he escaped the danger Ulysses had brought upon him, and is now a suppliant for mercy from the Trojans. The Trojans grant Sinon his life, and Priam tells him that he may regard himself henceforth to be an adoptive Trojan (77–149a). After this second step, almost more surprising than the first, the best is yet to come: Priam asks the purpose of the Horse, and Sinon explains that it is a holy thing, an offering to Minerva; if they harm it, they will ruin Troy, if they bring it safely into the city, Greece will be doomed. Sinon is believed (149b–194). This third step brings the fulfilment of his plan, and eventually complete destruction to Troy.

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The Students’ Union of the Faculty of Classical Languages at Poznań University invited me to speak at their conference on trust and perfidy, which took place in November 2012. I should like to thank the organizers for their kind invitation, the audience for the lively discussion, and my colleagues and friends for their hospitality.

<sup>1</sup>R.G. Austin, *Vergili Aeneidos liber secundus*, Oxford 1964, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup>A. König, *Die Aeneis und die griechische Tragödie, Studien zur imitatio-Technik Vergils*, Berlin 1970, pp. 234–244.

Having inquired of the actors about this plot, Hamlet improvises a long monologue. The theme of his speech, taken up and continued by one of the actors, is Priam's slaughter. While Virgil spoke of it rather shortly in the second book of his *Aeneid* (some three-hundred lines after the Sinon-episode, in 506–558), Hamlet dwells on it rather long. He enjoys a monologue describing the killing of Priam that must appear to him as an adequate punishment of a naive believer, who opened the door to a traitor and made himself his companion in evil doing. For Hamlet, too, feels surrounded by many companions in evil doing and he wishes them to be punished severely, as is the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, juggling hypocrites and slimy lackeys, who were later to be executed according to Hamlet's secret wish.

By no means whatsoever Hamlet can openly speak about this view of his. In general, rules apply which strictly regulate what can be said by whom, may it be that words denoting 'it' are considered as taboo words, or that the social ritual of the circumstances forbids 'it' being mentioned, or that speaking of 'it' is the exclusive privilege of one person only.<sup>3</sup> In particular, perfidy being always a very tricky subject and a highly explosive engine, speaking about 'it' is extremely dangerous and life-threatening. Moreover, no one can treat 'it' without being emotionally involved. Even Hamlet, who can control himself so well that he is able to simulate madness, allows himself to be carried away by the mere feeling of being betrayed, a fact which makes him liable to be unveiled as simulating madness more than really suffering from it. His character, however, impels him to hesitate. For the time being, his incapacity to act protects him, but in the end it will turn out to be the very seed of his destruction.

If Shakespeare's Hamlet were to hint at the well-known story of Sinon and the Sack of Troy, his allusion would have added a second layer to his text. It would allow the audience to perceive Hamlet as merely contemplating perfidy while Virgil was recounting them. For it is most perilous for Hamlet to speak about his suspicion of being betrayed, it would be only possible to give a clue by citing a literary text containing a similar story. Moreover, an audience who knew that Hamlet only pretended to be mad were able to observe a Hamlet keen on making a quite different impression on his uncle and on other people he suspected of betraying him. To them, by alluding to Aeneas' story to Dido, which has apparently nothing to do with his situation, Hamlet just seems to be eccentric or wilful, slightly silly or somehow mad, and in their view, Hamlet's hint at Virgil lacks a point and appears arbitrary. Shakespeare's textual interplay, however,

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<sup>3</sup>M. Foucault, *L'ordre du discours, Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*, Paris 1971, p. 11: "On sait bien qu'on n'a pas le droit de tout dire, qu'on ne peut pas parler de n'importe quoi. Tabou de l'objet, rituel de la circonstance, droit privilégié ou exclusif du sujet qui parle: on a là le jeu de trois types d'interdits qui se croisent, se renforcent ou se compensent, formant une grille complexe qui ne cesse de se modifier."

characterizes Hamlet as quite deliberately thinking of the well-known story of Sinon, well couched in Aeneas' tale to Dido.

This scene from Shakespeare's play demonstrates that trust and perfidy are opposed to each other. Of course, absence or want of trust could simply be called distrust, in the same way as disloyalty is the opposite of loyalty or, quite similarly, infidelity means the contrary of fidelity. As many a neutral way of doing things with words, however, it would have been superficial to define distrust only in a negative way, as if we were simply speaking of a deficiency of trust, an absence, something that comes about by itself, in a somewhat passive way. Hamlet shows how naive it would be to ignore that absence of trust, lack of confidence, or faith, or reliance respectively always arise a kind of doubt or suspicion. For, asking oneself what was going on that apparently escaped one's attention, as Hamlet did, one is immediately sure that there had been something going on, which one did not notice. There was someone who did something, was there not, which is obvious to other people, but hidden to Hamlet. Something was done by someone, it not only happened or came about by itself, and a word was said that one did not hear, a signal sent openly in secret. This suspicion betrays a loss of credit once given to another person, and a credit is lost either by breach of trust or breach of faith or breach of a promise. Such a betrayal of trust is a treachery, which is in turn nothing else than and synonymous with perfidy. Hamlet was very much afflicted by such a fear that 'something' is obvious to other people but hidden to him and he suffered tremendously from 'it'.

An expert both in trust and perfidy as well as in classical literature, Hamlet also remembered another victim of perfidious and treacherous friends, but this time he speaks about it openly. Before the actors started playing Hamlet asked the Lord Chamberlain Polonius whether he in his life ever performed a role. Polonius did play indeed Julius Caesar and was stabbed to death on stage. Whether he had time to say 'You too, my child?' remains untold. Later in the play, however, Polonius is to be stabbed to death by Hamlet himself – and this time, for real. Alluding decently to Sinon and speaking openly about Caesar go well together in Hamlet's mind as well as in Shakespeare's play.

That he would become so famous and considered worth of being included in a Shakespearian *mise en abyme* not even Caesar himself might have imagined. On the Ides of March in the 709<sup>th</sup> year from the founding of the city, on March 15<sup>th</sup> in 44 BC, this horribly clever and terribly ambitious man still vigorous in his mid-50s walked into the Senate House in Rome. Already when he was young, people had been warned not to approach him, the ill-girt boy as he was called then due to his snobbish way of dressing. Now it was by no means the first time in his life that he went to the Senate, but it was to be the last time, for he was not to leave the House alive again.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Aside from a monograph by G. Woolf, *Et tu, Brute?, The murder of Caesar and political*

Five years earlier, on March 28<sup>th</sup> in 49 BC, Marcus Tullius Cicero gave a brief sketch of Caesar in a letter to a friend (*Att.* 9. 18. 1): 'We were mistaken in thinking he would be easy to manage' – *illa fefellerunt facilem quod putaramus*, Cicero begins; 'I have never seen anyone less easy' – *nihil vidi minus*, he continues; and 'I am confident that he has no liking for me' – *credo igitur hunc me non amare*, he concludes (as if Caesar cared about). 'But for the rest, o gods, by what dreadful people he is surrounded' – *reliqua, o di, qui comitatus*, 'what a society assembled around him, as you call them usually, what nekyia' – *quae ut tu soles dicere, νέκυια*. Cicero was completely at a loss and chose a Greek word, the title of Odysseus' voyage into the underworld, in order to express his feelings, as if he himself were travelling in the underworld although he was in Rome, while speaking in the Senate.

Five years on, Caesar should have known that he was to die. Shortly before his death he was told that the herds of horses which he had dedicated to the river Rubicon when he crossed it not only refused to graze but also wept copiously – *equorum greges quos in traiciendo Rubiconi flumini consecrarat, comperit pertinacissime pabulo abstinere ubertimque flere*. A soothsayer even warned him to beware of danger, which would come not later than the Ides of March – *haruspex monuit, caveret periculum, quod non ultra Martias Idus proferetur*. But the confident man did not care, he who had made the Côte d'Azur a part of the Empire, he who had been the lover of Cleopatra, with whom he would have gone through Egypt in her state-barge almost to Aethiopia, had not his soldiers refused to follow him. At the moment he entered the House he mocked the soothsayer, calling him a false prophet, because the Ides of March apparently came without bringing him harm. The Ides of March had come indeed, but they had not gone yet.<sup>5</sup>

Rancid with self-regard, conceited and smug he took his seat, while the conspirators gathered about him as if to pay their respects – *assidentem conspirati specie officii circumsteterunt*, instead of which he was stabbed with three and twenty wounds. He did not utter a word, merely a groan at the first stroke – *atque ita tribus et viginti plagis confossus est uno modo ad primum ictum gemitu sine voce edito*. But some say that when Marcus Brutus rushed at him, he asked in Greek, 'You too, my child?' – *etsi tradiderunt quidam Marco Bruto irruenti dixisse καὶ σὸ τέκνον*; As if Caesar could not believe what he saw, i.e. the familiar face of his adopted son. It must have come as a revelation to Caesar, right at the moment when he passed forever to the world of the dead.<sup>6</sup>

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*assassination*, Cambridge/Mass. 2007, or an article by M. Wyke in her *Caesar, A Life in Western Culture*, Chicago–London 2008, pp. 196–238, recently Caesar's assassination as imagined by Shakespeare became the subject of a film, *Cesare deve morire* (2012), by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. The play is performed in a high-security prison, and the actors are convicted criminals; time and again they are troubled by the play's content, which reminds them of their own past.

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed description cf. Sueton, *Iulius* 81sq., on Cleopatra 52.

<sup>6</sup>Caesar doubtfully questioned Brutus in Greek (Sueton, *Iulius* 82.3), whereas a few moments

In the following, trying to get hold of such a complex phenomenon as trust and perfidy in classical literature, I propose a tripartite approach: Quite similar to Hamlet's views, at first a portrait of another Greek arch-traitor is to follow. An ensuing second group of remarks tries to give an impression of figures like Clytemnestra. Finally, a third group of notes is concerned with matters philological.

## I.

The greatest traitor ever, who played a major role in ancient history, was not a Roman, but a Greek. Even compared to the Roman portraits Tacitus painted this rotten and vile upper-class Athenian, often portrayed in literary works by prominent authors, was an outstanding figure. His career in politics was so spectacularly disgraceful as if he were eager to become an example for those 'really treacherous Greeks of whom there are so many' – *vero fallaces sunt permulti Graeci*, mentioned by Cicero in a letter to his brother Quintus (*Q. fr.* 1. 1. 16, from 59 BC, the year of Caesar's consulship).

In 399 BC, when Socrates was sentenced to death one of the charges against him was that he corrupted the young men. If anything could be used to substantiate this charge of corrupting, it was Socrates' close relationship with the most spectacularly corrupted of them all, Alcibiades. He was a glamorous figure of high birth, wealthy and well educated, an impressive speaker and a very handsome man, who never shied away from viciously indulging in sensual pleasures and criminal escapades.<sup>7</sup>

At about the start of the Peloponnesian war Alcibiades entered public adult life, and at the end of this war Alcibiades was to be murdered. Right from the beginning, Alcibiades fought for the first ten years of the war, but was still too young to sign the treaty between Athens and Sparta in 421, commonly called the peace of Nicias. Alcibiades started arguing against it out of anger that he had been neglected and overlooked as a negotiator. As Thucydides reports (5. 43), Alcibiades was piqued in his pride because the Lacedaemonians had ne-

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earlier he had exclaimed in Latin 'ista quidem vis est' (82.2). The famous 'Et tu, Brute' is from Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* (iii 1, 77). Plutarch mentions other Greek and Latin (short) phrases uttered at the moment of Caesar's assassination (*Caes.* 66.5): "At almost the same instant both cried out, the victim in Latin: 'Accursed Casca, what are you doing?' and the assailant, in Greek, to his brother: 'Brother, help!'"

<sup>7</sup>Socrates once tried to seduce him, as it is described at the end of Plato's *Alcibiades* (132–135); in his turn, Alcibiades tried to do the same when he appears drunk at the end of Plato's *Symposium* (212–222); cf. K. Dover, *Plato, Symposium*, Cambridge 1980, pp. 3–5; N. Dyer, *Plato, Alcibiades*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 5–9, and M. Johnson, H. Tarrant (eds), *Alcibiades and the Socratic Lover-Educator*, Bristol 2012.

gotiated the treaty through Nicias and Laches only. Alcibiades' opposition was due to personal ambition, and he was soon able to engineer a resumption of hostilities. In a complex manoeuvring, by privately sending messages to the one side and simultaneously persuading the other side he demonstrated what he was capable of, i.e. easily winning people's trust and readily betraying them. Both the capacity and the readiness were to remain with him throughout his life.

He then incited, and was appointed commander of, the massive expeditionary force that in 415 BC set out from Athens to conquer Sicily. He was recalled later that year, to face trial on charges of parodying the Eleusinian mysteries. On the voyage back to Athens he jumped ship, and defected to Sparta. The Athenians sentenced him to death. During this Athenian year of 416/415, Alcibiades occupies a position of unparalleled influence in the city. Yet within the space of a year he is to be found guilty of an attempt to overthrow the religious and political order of the city. He is execrated by the city's priests, and irrevocably expelled from the civic community (or so it seemed). It is this year, when Alcibiades is at his most loved but also his most feared, that is the focus of the most important ancient depictions of Alcibiades: first, his characterization by Thucydides (6. 15, just before Alcibiades delivers his speech urging the Athenians to send their ships to Sicily in 16–19); then, the bitter and violent criticism expressed in an invective or diatribe against him, transmitted amongst the works of Andokides, and, finally, Plato's *Symposium*, depicting the party to which the tragic poet Agathon invited prominent Athenians after he won a victory at the Lenaea-contest early in 416.<sup>8</sup>

From the depictions mentioned it is clear that Alcibiades had become too powerful a personality to be any longer incorporated in a civic community. Certainly, he was admired but, far more so, he was feared. The masses became hostile to him as Thucydides writes, on the ground that he was aiming at a tyranny (6. 15). This is precisely what Plutarchus had to say on Caesar who was hated so much because of his passion to be king (*Caes.* 60.1). With Alcibiades on the Spartan side, however, things started to go badly for the Athenians. On his advice, the Spartans sent help to the Sicilians, which helped to defeat the Athenian expedition. Even worse for the Athenians was another idea of Alcibiades, namely to establish a permanent garrison at Decelea, high ground within view of Athens himself, thus denying the Athenians access to the major part of Attica and forcing them to leave their town only by sea, in other words, the sheer horror.

Alcibiades' proposals helped the Spartans much to win the war. In fact, the Spartan victory would have come much sooner if Alcibiades had not defected them in turn. His multiple intrigues – and not in the least a love affair with

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<sup>8</sup>Aside from D. Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens, A Study in Literary Presentation*, Oxford 1999, cf. M. Vickers, *Sophocles and Alcibiades, Athenian Politics in Ancient Greek Literature*, Stocksfield 2008.

a Spartan queen – made the Spartans decide to kill him; but he slipped away. Alcibiades fled to the court of Tissaphernes, the local Persian governor, but then he joined the Athenian fleet, and soon became its leader. Under his leadership, the Athenian fleet was so successful that in 407 Alcibiades was able to return to Athens in glory. The charges of blasphemy were withdrawn and he took part in a solemn procession by Athenians to Eleusis, and the traitor became a priest to those he once betrayed. Eventually, he even got elected to the unprecedented office of ‘absolute leader of all’. But he separated himself from the Athenians and retreated to a castle overlooking the Hellespont. He was killed by assassins in the pay of the Persians. Whether Socrates was to blame for Alcibiades’ power-greedy opportunism is difficult to say. His relation to Alcibiades, however, was certainly more than a superficial acquaintance. What precisely could their point of contact have been?

Carefully listening to Socrates, Alcibiades could have learned how to impute beliefs and assumptions to his interlocutors. Socrates did so quite regularly, tendentiously misrepresenting other people’s views.<sup>9</sup> But there might have been something even more inspiring.

Claiming constantly that the only thing he knew was that he knew nothing, Socrates dedicated part of his life to unveiling the half-truths or semi-lies so characteristic of the human character. He was always around in order to explain his mantra to anybody, i.e. that there was something not quite right in their argument, that his interlocutor, might he be a poet or a general, has not got precisely the right ideas on poetry or war-craft respectively. Alcibiades, however, dedicated his life to constantly mixing-up things true and things untrue, the proportions of the mixture depending only on what suited him more. Contrasted to each other, both appear as if they were incarnating two directions of the same mental process. The fact that Socrates helped Alcibiades to uncover half-truths or semi-lies might have been the reason why Alcibiades was drawn to Socrates and made him certainly able to become such an influential politician. In that respect, Alcibiades learnt so much from Socrates that he could easily forge other peoples’ minds. A Mephistophelean agility enabled Alcibiades to pervert Socrates, using the acquired cleverness for establishing his own mixture of half-truths or semi-lies. Nowadays, a maker of myths as Alcibiades would be a sought-after expert in strategic communication. In his days, Alcibiades was just the master of trust and perjury, an outstanding monster, a truly hellish figure. A respected member of the Athenian ruling elite of his days, rotten to the core, puffed up with self-importance, he betrayed those who trusted him. While many a decent man is never remembered at all, Alcibiades will never ever be forgotten, although no one would like to shake hands with him.

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. the examples discussed by G. Vlastos, *Plato’s testimony concerning Zeno*, JHS 95, 1975, pp. 136–162 (in particular 146<sup>44</sup>).



## II.

Protean perfidy, however, is something of a gender-crossing issue, a fact of which Aeschylus has much to say. His man-minded Clytemnestra, as she is called in the opening lines of the *Agamemnon* (vv. 10sq. κρατεῖ / γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ), ‘having a woman’s heart, but planning like a man’,<sup>10</sup> does not only betray her husband, but also lures him to his death in the bath on the day he returned home from Troy. She was helped by Aegisthus, who became her lover after having seduced her despite a warning from the gods (a perfidious act in itself). In the *Choephoroi*, the second part of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Orestes loathes Aegisthus, calling him a woman who will soon find out whether he really has a woman’s heart or not. The context of Orestes’ phrase is his promise to liberate his home-town Argos from the tyranny of ‘a pair of women’, by which he means Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (304sq. δυοῖν γυναικοῖν ὧδ’ ὑπηκόους πέλειν / θήλεια γὰρ φρήν εἶτε μὴ τάχ’ εἴσεται).<sup>11</sup> Later in the play he is to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, but not without some discussion. What had Clytemnestra to say for her defence? And what was Orestes to say, being about to kill his mother, having revealed to her that Aegisthus was dead?

Clytemnestra’s son, who just underwent an intense emotional experience by killing his mother’s lover, opens the conversation. Freaked-out and raving against his mother, Orestes pretends an extreme coolness when addressing her, whom he wants to kill while desperately trying to control himself. In announcing the death of a lover to his mistress, Orestes sounds very prosaic and certainly at the brink of collapse when he says (*Choephoroi* 892) ‘You’re just what I’m looking for, he has got enough’ (σὲ καὶ ματεύω, τῷδε δ’ ἀρκούντως ἔχει). Ironically, he alludes to the fact that Clytemnestra will never ever betray Aegisthus, which means nothing else than that she will forever remain faithful to him, for the simple fact that she soon will join him in the grave (894sq.): ‘You love the man? In that case you can lie in the same grave – and now he’s dead, you’ll certainly never betray him!’ (φιλεῖς γὰρ ἄνδρα; τοιγὰρ ἐν ταυτῷ τάφῳ / κείσῃ· θανόντα δ’ οὐ τι μὴ προδῶς ποτε). Expressing himself like a serial killer, simultaneously depressed by his task as well as heartily enjoying it, Orestes is about to accomplish a mission on which he was sent by Apollo. Nothing will stop him. It is indeed a well chosen moment to contemplate trust and perfidy, probably the best moment ever, surely the last.

<sup>10</sup> Sophocles speaks similarly of a woman thinking like a man (ἀνδρόφρων γυνή); the context of his *fr.* 943, however, is not known to us; cf. A.F. Garvie, *Aeschylus, Choephoroi*, Oxford 1986, p. 215sq. (on v. 626).

<sup>11</sup> Orestes thus alludes to the motif of a manly woman from the trilogy’s first play, the *Agamemnon*, the text of which he cannot have heard performed. Hamlet too is not known to have witnessed a performance of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, surely not the one starring Lord Chamberlain.

Although every member of a mafia-style society knows that the day will come when a son has nothing else to do than to avenge his dead father, Clytemnestra shows signs of terror. She in turn might be just pretending too. Anyway, it is a surprisingly normal reaction for a terrifyingly abnormal woman that she is. Baring her breast, she reminds her son of his lucky childhood days while he was sucking milk at precisely this breast. Simultaneously, she is performing something and accompanying her gesture by words describing it. Her provocation is not without result. Orestes, just a few seconds earlier a sarcastic, merciless and unforgiving contract killer, is now reduced to a bewildered and embarrassed young man, a son, no longer an adult. He may have become even more pale and sombre than he already was, if possible.

Orestes turns for advice to his comrade Pylades, but having partially lost control of his intellectual capacities, Pylades seems dazed and confused. He alludes either to a pledge sworn by Apollo to protect Orestes if he carries out the revenge, or to a sworn undertaking by Orestes to do so, or to mutual oaths of fidelity between Orestes and Pylades.<sup>12</sup> Somehow encouraged, Orestes repeats more brutally what he already said: ‘Sleep with him in death, since he is the man you love, while you hate the man you should have loved!’ (906sq. τοῦτω θανοῦσα συγκάθευδ’, ἐπεὶ φιλεῖς / τὸν ἄνδρα τοῦτον, ὃν δὲ χρῆν φιλεῖν στυγεῖς). Again ironically, Orestes allows his mother to be more loyal to a man than she might have ever wanted to be; precise and to the point, no signs of any interest in small-talk, laconic Orestes treats his pernicious, callous, cruel and treacherous mother as she never imagined to be treated in her life.

The horrific situation drags on. By no means willing to give in, Clytemnestra even claims that she wanted to grow old with Orestes, a clearly farcical statement, given the fact that she had just asked a servant to give her an axe in order to kill Orestes. Asking for this axe, Clytemnestra declared that she fears to be killed by – perfidy, just as she killed others by means of – perfidy (888sq. δόλοις ὀλούμεθ’, ὥσπερ οὖν ἐκτεínaμεν. / δοίη τις ἀνδροκμήτα πέλεκυν ὡς τάχος). That is the way to find out whether ‘we are to be the winners or the losers’ she continues (890 εἰδῶμεν εἰ νικῶμεν ἢ νικώμεθα). Perfidy comes to an extreme, and talkative Clytemnestra mentions Destiny, which shares responsibility for the events. Power-crazy people often speak of divine influence when they are no longer sure to succeed. In Orestes’ view, however, it was not Destiny that forced his mother so send his son into exile in Phocis, but her wish alone. Orestes is aware of the fact that power is nothing abstract, but only the concrete ruling of one person over another. It was because Clytemnestra wanted to be undisturbed with Aegisthus that Orestes was ignominiously sold, a fact that Orestes need not

<sup>12</sup>The textual tradition of *Choephoroi* depends upon a single manuscript, and one sometimes has to rely on the scholia and on their understanding of the lines transmitted; cf. A.F. Garvie, *Choephoroi*, pp. liv-lx.

to pronounce (917): ‘Decency forbids me to reproach you with that openly’, he says (αἰσχύνομαί σοι τοῦτ’ ὀνειδίσαι σαφῶς), implying, as Clytemnestra evidently understands, that the price she received in exchange was Aegisthus.

Orestes no longer trusts his mother. He was clearly hitting the right spot, for Clytemnestra changes the course of her argument. Insulting her late husband, whom she killed, Clytemnestra now speaks openly of Agamemnon’s madness, his folly to engage in charming Chryseis and other captive women as Cassandra. While Agamemnon was enjoying himself, she had a painful life at home, kept apart from her husband (920), which of course is just another lie. Orestes defends his father with whom he finds no fault, at least he does not admit to it in front of his mother, and announces to Clytemnestra his point of view, that it is not he who will kill her, but it is she who will have killed herself. And when Clytemnestra warns him of her Furies, Orestes asks her how he is to escape his father’s Furies, if he fails to kill his mother. Again the point of loyalty is touched upon.<sup>13</sup>

Still able to control his mind, Orestes presents himself as a horribly perfidious son who is worthy of his mother. It was he himself who brought the message of his own death to her, being well aware what would happen if she did not believe him to be a simple stranger and were to recognize him. She in turn probably never expected in her life to meet a person who instead of showing the same signs of egotism, hypocrisy, greed, and envy she exhibited during her life, sticks to his principles, remains faithful to his choice, and is not guided by politics. But not much time is left for her to wonder, because her life is brought to an end soon.

Uttering her own funeral lament while still alive, Clytemnestra now understands that trying to persuade her son is as futile as talking to the dead (926): ‘It looks as though I am making a useless living dirge to a tomb’ (ἔοικα θρηνεῖν ζῶσα πρὸς τύμβον μάτην). In her last moments alive, Clytemnestra remembers a dream sent to her before the play began, in which she nourished a snake at her breasts. In her last two lines on stage (928sq.) she identifies Orestes as the snake she bore and nourished, and apparently at least in her dream she had shown signs of fear. The dream that terrified her was truly prophetic indeed (ἦ κάρτα μάντις οὐξ ὀνειράτων φόβος). Some dreams do really become true, unfortunately not necessarily those one wishes to become true.

Phaedra’s dream, however, of having an affair with her step-son Hippolytus never came true, and it was that unfulfilled desire of hers which let her commit an act of monstrous perfidy. Hippolytus, son of Athens’ legendary king Theseus,

<sup>13</sup>Now Orestes sounds like a clever lawyer, educated by sophists, Aeschylus’ contemporaries. For Orestes’ arguments are highly sophisticated indeed, as if he had been taught how to make a weaker argument overcome a stronger argument by means of clever rhetoric. Euripides is even more fond of these devices (v. *infra*).

was devoted to the hunt and to the virgin Artemis. He was not only neglecting but even ignoring Aphrodite, who responded by afflicting Hippolytus' stepmother Phaedra with a passion for him. Aphrodite wanted to teach him to obey her and to no longer leave women unnoticed. Chaste Hippolytus, however, rejected Phaedra, but she accused him to Theseus of making advances to her and killed herself. Poseidon, responding to the prayer of Theseus, sent a bull from the sea which caused the death of Hippolytus in a chariot crash.<sup>14</sup>

Phaedra's story was dramatized in lost tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides, in both of which it seems that Phaedra was portrayed as lustful and unscrupulous.<sup>15</sup> In a second version by Euripides, however, which happens to be the only surviving Greek Phaedra-tragedy, Phaedra has a strong sense of modesty which struggles with her passion. In this play it is the nurse rather than Phaedra herself who approaches Hippolytus. It is by means of a written text that the whole intrigue is carried out. When in Euripides' play Theseus finds his dead wife, a writing-tablet hangs from her hand (856sq.). At first, Theseus expects some message about his marriage or about his children in the epistle (as he calls it) which his unhappy wife has written (858sq. ἐπιστολάς / ἔγραψεν ἡ δύστηνος). Instead Theseus learns from its message that Hippolytus, as he puts it, 'has dared to put his hand by force to Theseus' marriage bed' (885sq.), in other words, that his step-son violated his wife. Not in the least suspecting that Phaedra's lines are untrue, Theseus immediately curses his son. Much later in Ovid's collection of Heroines' Epistles, the *Epistulae Heroidum*, Phaedra is to write to Hippolytus. After admonishing him to read the letter to the end, whatever it contained, Phaedra asks Hippolytus in the manner of a rhetorical question 'what shall reading a letter harm'. This line *perlege quodcumque est, quid epistula lecta nocebit* (3) refers to the reading of the earlier letter by Theseus, which in the end did very much harm Hippolytus, the addressee of Ovid's epistle.<sup>16</sup>

Indulging as often in studies of female subjectivity under pressure, Ovid clearly demonstrates that *in rebus eroticis* the greatest traitors are always men. For among these letters is not only a very moving one from Dido to Aeneas – which contains in its roughly 200 lines at least ten direct allusions to Aeneas' fraud and perfidy (cf. e.g. 13–18 & 67–69) – but also one full of reproach by

<sup>14</sup>In Phaedra's case a literary motive is clearly distinguishable, well known from other literature as, e.g., the story of Potiphar's wife (told in *Genesis* 39): Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, is taken to Egypt where he is again sold, this time to Potiphar, the captain of the Pharaoh's palace guard. At the beginning a simple slave, Joseph later becomes the head of Potiphar's household. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him, becomes furious at him for his resisting, and accuses him falsely of attempting to rape her. Joseph is cast into prison.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. W.S. Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytos*, Oxford 1964, pp. 10–15.

<sup>16</sup>In this case Ovid's choice of the epistolary format is quite appropriate, whereas in the case of Ariadne, left alone on Naxos by Theseus, one wonders where on her deserted shore she will find a postman.

Medea to Iason, which gives a glimpse of what Ovid might have written in his *Medea*. When in his days Euripides let Medea and Iason meet and exchange speeches (*Med.* 446–626), treason was already the main subject.

Iason had met Medea on a voyage undertaken to gain the Golden Fleece. Medea was made to fall in love with him and supplied him with a potion to protect him. She then charms the dragon which guarded the Fleece so that Iason could steal it. After this, Iason and Medea fled to Corinth, the setting of Euripides’ play. Now Iason abandons her. Medea deliberately kills his new bride and her own children in order to punish Iason for cheating on her.<sup>17</sup> During their conversation, what kind of niceties did they say to each other in Euripides’

Iason immediately addresses the issue of being constantly called the basest man on earth by Medea of which he could not care less (451sq. κάμοι μὲν οὐδὲν πρᾶγμα· μὴ παύσῃ ποτὲ / λέγουσ’ Ἰάσον’ ὡς κάκιστός ἐστ’ ἀνήρ). In her turn, Medea insults Iason by using the worst abuse which her tongue can speak against his unmanly conduct, i.e. his cowardice (466 γλώσση μέγιστον εἰς ἀνανδρίαν κακόν). In her view, Iason’s fault is that he treated his friends in an evil way, which contradicts the expected normal behaviour, i.e. helping friends and harming enemies.<sup>18</sup> To his transgression of a fundamental ethical principle adds his ‘shamelessness, the worst of all vices’ (471sq. ἡ μέγιστη τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις νόσων / πασῶν, ἀναίδει’); both make Iason so detestable. Taking a new marriage, he had betrayed Medea (489) and had not kept his oath to her (495). Medea regards him as completely dishonest and compares Iason to counterfeited gold (516–519).

In his reply, Iason openly insults Medea as being forced by Eros, but to tell that would expose him to ill will, again a fact of which he could not care less (529–531 ἀλλ’ ἐπίφθονος / λόγος διελθεῖν ὡς Ἔρωσ σ’ ἠνάγκασεν / τόξοις ἀφύκτοις τοῦμόν ἐκῶσαι δέμας). According to Iason’s version, it was Aphrodite who saved him and his expedition. Becoming ever more offensive, he finally accuses Medea that she has gone so far in folly that she thinks she has achieved everything, if all is well in bed (569–574). Iason’s speech, however, remains completely unconvincing, not in the least because Iason is so aggressively proud of his masculinity. Insinuating that Medea had been a victim of her sexual greed, he becomes ridiculous, and Medea rejects any help from him. Declaring that the gifts of a base man bring no benefit (618 κακοῦ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς δῶρ’ ὄνησιν οὐκ ἔχει), she puts an end to a debate, which appeared even more than the Orestes-Clytemnestra-dispute in Aeschylus as a quite realistic law-court scene.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>If Euripides did not actually invent Medea’s killing, he certainly gave it fixed form; cf. D.L. Page, *Euripides, Medea*, Oxford 1938, pp. xxx-xxxvi.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. M.W. Blundell, *Helping friends and harming enemies, A study in Sophocles and Greek ethics*, Cambridge 1989.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. also the appeal to witnesses (476), quite common in similar Euripidean scenes, at which hints D.L. Page, *Euripides, Medea*, Oxford 1938, p. 107.

Ovid is clearly fond of the Euripidean heroine whom he lets begin her letter to Iason by regretting that she fell in love with him (11sq.): ‘Why did I greatly delight in those golden locks of yours, in your comely ways, and in the false graces of your tongue?’ – *cur mihi plus aequo flauī placuere capilli / et decor et linguae gratia ficta tuae?* Speaking of fair-haired, blonde Iason and the falseness both of his good looks and his speech, Medea seems reminiscent of the counterfeited gold to which Euripides let her compare him, and Ovid’s Medea continues the speech of Euripides’ Medea. Effortlessly Ovid introduces again an intertextual interplay between two texts. If only she could have avoided Iason, she continues, how much perfidy would have perished with him (19) – *quantum perfidiae tecum, scelerate, perisset?* Medea remembers having seen Iason for the first time in her life as the exact moment when her disaster began (31sq.): *tunc ego te uidi, tunc coepi scire, quis esses; / illa fuit mentis prima ruina meae* – ‘then it was that I saw you, then began to know you; that was the first impulse to the downfall of my soul’. She addresses Iason as nothing else than a traitor because he must have known what was going on (37): *perfide, sensisti – quis enim bene celat amorem?* ‘Traitor, you saw it – for who can well hide love?’ Medea refers more than once to Iason’s fraud (91, 120) and to the fact that he betrayed her with words (92). She finally exhorts him to be faithful to his promises and to come to her aid (194): *adde fidem dictis auxiliumque refer*, which of course he will not. Calling Iason *improbus* (203), *ingratus* (206), and *infidus* (210) at the end of her speech, Medea describes *in nuce* Iason’s treacherous character: shameless, thankless, faithless.

### III.

One is tempted to ask whether there was any kind of trust at all in classical literature, and if, how had it been expressed. How exactly were things done with words?

As many another abstract noun, the Greek word for ‘trust’, which is πίστις, is absent from Homer. In the history of Greek language and literature it turns up for the first time in an antithetical gnome transmitted in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* which informs us: ‘both trust and distrust have destroyed men’ (372 πίστεις †δ’ ἄρ’ ὁμῶς καὶ ἀπιστίαι ὄλεσαν ἄνδρας). The metre is not correct, and the line is missing in some papyri and manuscripts too, which may indicate that the rather banal statement had been put in the text of the Hesiodic corpus much later, some say as late as the thirteenth century of our time.<sup>20</sup> The text, however, was known in antiquity to an author like Plutarchus, and Hesiod also uses other abstract nouns, by which he somehow differentiates his style from Homer’s in particular

<sup>20</sup>M.L. West, *Hesiod, Works & Days*, Oxford 1978, p. 249.

and from epic language in general.<sup>21</sup> Be that as it may, a 'trustworthy comrade' is well known to the Homeric language, and πίστος ἐταῖρος occurs more than half a dozen times.<sup>22</sup>

The absence, however, of an abstract noun for trust in Homer's works does by no means imply that the Homeric heroes do not trust each other.<sup>23</sup> They simply prefer not to express themselves by means of abstract substantives. Instead, they employed verbal forms like the perfect πέποιθα, which belongs to the present tense πείθομαι. Often used to convey the resultative aspect of a verb, the Greek perfect tense shows that trusting is conceived as a result of a process during which one became convinced that someone else's argument is worthy of trust.<sup>24</sup>

As πίστις and *fides*, both Greek πείθομαι and Latin *fido* derive from the same Indo-European root. Although both mean 'to trust', the Greek forms of the verb showing this meaning are restricted to medium and passive, whereas the Latin verb has active forms. But even the far younger Latin language preserves passive forms with an active meaning as in *confisus*, which means 'having trusted confidently' and not 'having been trusted confidently'. Because the group of so-called semi-deponentia is restricted to very few, the pattern itself being no longer in practice, one may safely regard *confisus*, which belongs to an active present tense *confido*, as an archaic relic.<sup>25</sup> Finally we are getting hold of an abstract noun, well used and documented – but what did *fides* mean?

In 1916 Eduard Fraenkel's article on *fides* got printed in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*,<sup>26</sup> in which Fraenkel proposed a bipolar distinction. The Latin word *fides*, Fraenkel claimed, meant either that a person or an object can be trusted, or the word denoted the process of trust itself. Distinguishing between two fundamentally different meanings of *fides*, Fraenkel thought he could distinguish

<sup>21</sup> J. Blusch, *Formen und Inhalt von Hesiods individuellem Denken*, Bonn 1970, pp. 44–64.

<sup>22</sup> The phrase is even listed in C.E. Schmidt, *Parallel-Homer oder Index aller homerischen Iterati in lexikalischer Anordnung*, Göttingen 1885, p. 183; B. Snell, *Dichtung und Gesellschaft, Studien zum Einfluß der Dichter auf das soziale Denken und Verhalten im alten Griechenland*, Hamburg 1965, p. 42sq. has a short note on it.

<sup>23</sup> The verb, however, is not used at all in the speeches of the envoys to Achilles in *Iliad* 9: cf. J. Gould, *The Idea of Society in the Iliad*, [in:] J. Gould, *Myth, Ritual, Memory, and Exchange*, Oxford 2001, p. 339sq.

<sup>24</sup> S. Schulz, *Die Wurzel ΠΕΙΘ- (ΠΙΘ-) im älteren Griechischen, Eine formal- und bedeutungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Freiburg 1952.

<sup>25</sup> It is not likely that Latin shows a newly (re-) established secondary usage, somehow influenced by Greek; briefly É. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes, I: Économie, parenté, société*, Paris 1969, p. 115 = *Indo-European language and society*, London 1973, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> Fraenkel accompanied his Latin notes by an article written in German: *Zur Geschichte des Wortes FIDES*, "Rheinisches Museum" 71, 1916, pp. 187–199, reprinted in *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie I*, Roma 1964, pp. 15–26, cf. further G. Freyburger, *FIDES, Étude sémantique et religieuse depuis les origines jusqu'à l'époque Augustéenne*, Paris 1986, pp. 84–95 (on *perfidia* and *fraus*).

between a passive and an active meaning. He began with the passive sense and entitled his first part *fides est id cui confidi potest*, i.e. a person or an object which ‘can be trusted’ (*ThLL* VI 663–686). Defining *fides* as *actio sive facultas confidendi*, which means ‘process or capacity of trusting’, in his much shorter second chapter Fraenkel discussed the active meaning (*ThLL* VI 686–691). The distinction derives from a widely used book in Fraenkel’s days, Hermann Menge’s *Lateinische Synonymik*, which was intended to be a practical manual for teachers and students alike.<sup>27</sup>

At first sight, Fraenkel’s elementary distinction seems to be confirmed by familiar Latin expressions. Speaking on the one hand about persons whom we trust, we may say *alicui fidem habere*. We use an expression confirming the active sense of showing or having trust, we simply trust him or her. On the other hand, when we want to express the passive sense of *fides*, the fact that a person can be trusted, that he or she has a positive reputation, we may say *alicuius fidem confirmare* or *infirmare*, according to our intention, whether we want to strengthen or weaken a person’s credibility. To distinguish, however, between these two things so closely connected is hardly convincing because both aspects are always combined, amalgamated or mixed. The critics rightly refer to the common as well as equivocal expression *aptus ad fidem faciendam*, pointing out that it is impossible to distinguish between an active capacity of trusting and a passive possibility of being trusted. The expression is clearly said of a ‘trustworthy’ person, but at the same time those who declare a person trustworthy speak of themselves and their own relationship to this person, whom they trust. Consequently, an active and a passive part are no longer recognizable, and distinguishing between them becomes doubtful.

Émile Benveniste was aware of this ambivalent sense of *fides*, choosing the common expression *fides est mihi apud aliquem* in order to explain his view. The expression speaks of a certain trust or confidence which should better be rendered as ‘credit’. The meaning of ‘I have credit with somebody’, however, is in itself twofold; the phrase means ‘I inspire confidence in him or her’ as well as ‘he or she has confidence in me’.<sup>28</sup> Thus establishing between the partners an inverse relationship, the Latin word *fides* apparently denotes a reciprocal process, give and take at a time, which makes a distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ appear somehow artificial.

Fraenkel invented an over-subtle distinction, artificially made in a case where no real difference exists. Accordingly, in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* no trace

<sup>27</sup> *Lateinische Synonymik, ein Hilfsbuch für Lehrer und Studierende*, Wolfenbüttel 41900, p. 113sq.

<sup>28</sup> *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes, 1: Économie, parenté, société*, Paris 1969, p. 116sq. = *Indo-European language and society*, London 1973, p. 96. Benveniste’s argument is approvingly cited by E.P. Hamp in his notes on the Albanian word *besë*, which means ‘loyalty’ or ‘trustworthiness’: *fidēs and the Latin 5<sup>th</sup> declension*, “Glotta” 74, 1997/98, pp. 54–56.



of Fraenkel's authoritative distinction is to be found. Listing a dozen or so paragraphs and indicating how *fides* is to be understood, the editors chose a pragmatic linguistic approach: A word denotes only what people want it to mean, its sense being always and exclusively defined by those who use it in a specific context. In fact, the *OLD* indicates how ambivalent Latin expressions can be, as for instance *fidem habere* illustrates. Aside from the impersonal 'to be believed' (*OLD s.v. fides* 12), *fidem habere* means on the one hand 'to be credible', i.e. worthy of belief and credibility (*OLD s.v. fides* 9), which is Fraenkel's 'passive' sense. On the other hand, the same expression *fidem habere* means also 'to place trust in, give credence to' a person (*OLD s.v. fides* 10), Fraenkel's 'active' sense.

In the same way, however, as the editors of the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* are guided by modern linguistics, Fraenkel too was indebted to ideas on linguistics prevailing in his days. Fraenkel was convinced by the idea that an original and primary sense or at least, as in the case of *fides*, two neatly connected aspects of this sense must have existed, from which meanings of words derive. In his days this was a widespread belief, and Fraenkel might well have been confirmed in his views by his uncle Ernst, later to become a professor of Indo-European linguistics, who worked on Baltic languages and published a Lithuanian etymological dictionary. Eduard, however, seemingly did not only believe in this original sense, but was also convinced that this 'early' sense or 'archaic' meaning was still relevant to texts which usually belonged to a much younger era. That the origin defined the essence was the idea behind his concept. By grouping the enormous material under two headlines only, Fraenkel thought that he could prove his idea. By doing so, however, he employed in his argument a premise which at the same time presupposes the conclusion which is at issue, a premise which eventually turns out to be equivalent to its conclusion, a circular argument, a *petitio principii*. In his article on *fides*, Fraenkel clearly was more inventing categories instead of reconstructing them. He made the facts follow his theory and not the theory following the facts.