

Towards understanding classical drama texts [Haasen]

Haasen, Richard (2023). Theatre performance: an engaging step towards understanding classical drama texts – Notes from three consecutive Erasmus+-projects. *Ars docendi*, 14, marzo 2023.

Richard Haasen, Griechischlehrer am Barlaeusgymnasium in Amsterdam, hat mit z. T. wechselnden Partnerschulen aus München, Bozen, Graz, Thessaloniki, Kronstadt in drei Erasmusplusprojekten, die alle den klassischen Sprachen und dem Klassischen Gymnasium gewidmet waren, die großen Projektthemen (Migration, Demokratie und ihre Gefährungen, (V)erkannte Vielfalt: Minderheiten in Europa) mit jeweils einer Theaterinitiative in großartiger Weise unterstützt.

Richard Haasen, insegnante di greco presso il Barlaeusgymnasium di Amsterdam, ha sostenuto ciascuno dei grandi temi di tre progetti Erasmusplus (migrazione, democrazia e le sue minacce, minoranze in Europa) con un'iniziativa teatrale (insieme a scuole partner provenienti da Monaco, Bolzano, Graz, Salonicco, Braşov). Tutti i progetti erano dedicati alle lingue classiche e al Ginnasio Classico.

1. Drama versus translation.

Learning grammar and morphology can, such is common knowledge in the Dutch classical languages community, hardly be a goal in itself. It is generally considered a means and not an end. For classical languages the practical component, covered by the end terms, and as such the goal of much of our teaching efforts, is twofold, constituted by the interpretation of ancient texts (which prior to the exam have been read together in the class room) and the translation of an unseen Greek or Latin text (in The Netherlands as a rule by the same author). Although versability in translation skills is a prerequisite for obtaining positive results in the final exam years (for 17 to 19 year olds), this very competence seems to be increasingly out of reach for the majority of pupils. In recent decades of steadily diminishing eagerness to read and dwindling levels of literary literacy among youngsters, and therefore among gymnasium pupils as well, the activity of independently translating an ancient text, other than a joint class room endeavour, has become a frustrating exercise for most of them. I do not suggest to have an answer to revive these skills at all, alas. I honestly think this lack of translating (and therefore interpreting) skills is the biggest threat to the viability and survival of classical languages as a subject at highschool level, but I do advocate the use of drama and performance, as a practical component, at least in the interpreting of ancient theatre texts.

2. Drama in the school curriculum.

The combination of language classes of any kind and different kinds of performative activities has been standard school practice ever since the establishment of eloquentia and other forms of rhetoric within the school curricula. In earlier times the reading and study of plays in Latin and even in ancient Greek helped enhance the proficiency of pupils, especially at the beginning of their Latin School career, although 'Latin school drama was preferred for the senior boys and a more educated audience.'

Humanists, such as Erasmus, Comenius and Macropedius, were fervent advocates of the reading of classical theatre texts, either by studying the ancient comic plays by Aristophanes and Terentius/Plautus ('suitably trimmed') (John O'Toole, note 1), or writing plays themselves in Neolatin especially for school performance by their pupils. I have started my professional teaching career at the The Hague Montessori Lyceum, where Lode Salden ran a school theatre group, directing every year a play in classical Greek: a tragedy by Euripides or Sophocles for instance, or a compilation of direct speeches, taken from the Iliad, e.g. the confrontation between Agamemnon and Achilles in Book 1.

The issue with incorporating theatre performance in our school curriculum is that theatre just as the art of teaching itself requires a peak performance. This is of great disadvantage to us, professional teachers, and quite detrimental to our energy household. At the same time, incorporating drama is of the utmost advantage, as it tends to be an extremely engaging learning activity for pupils. For me personally, that has been the main drive to try and incorporate certain aspects of theatre in my teaching, and I have done so at set points in my career. Theatre performance does evidently not only require commitment from us, teachers. It demands commitment and peak performances of our pupils as well, as it is quite impossible for a pupil to *duck school* or otherwise disengage with the subject matter at hand within a theatre context. Such solitary and egocentric behavior would involve letting down your peers, and, also and especially in a context of theatre performance, letting down your peers is the biggest taboo in the life and times of any teenager.

3. Personal involvement in drama.

'Reading a classic must also surprise us, when we compare it to the image we previously had of it. That is why we can never recommend enough a first-hand reading of the text itself, avoiding as far as possible secondary bibliography, commentaries, and other interpretations. Schools and universities should hammer home the idea that no book which discusses another book can ever say more than the original book under discussion; yet they do actually do everything to make students believe the opposite.' (Italo Calvino, note 2)

Actually, I have little experience in staging a classical play in its original language, but entertain plans to do so with a Neolatin text of Macrobius, called Hecastus, based on the Dutch medieval play Elckerlijc, published in 1496, supposedly the basis of the famous English Everyman. As a classicist I did collaborate on a production which put Lucretian hexameters to music, in an inaugural lecture.

My main expertise with school drama is co-staging performances in Dutch, together with my colleague and director Hein van Eekert at the Municipal Gymnasium in Hilversum (2001-2010). These were plays featuring classics in the Calvino sense: Dutch translations of English, German, French or Norwegian texts (by such authors as Shakespeare, Goethe, Drost, Strauss, Molière and Ibsen). My first experience with co-staging a school performance of an ancient classical theatre text was at the Corderius Lyceum in Amersfoort: Seneca's Medea in collaboration with director Howard van Dodemondt (2001), in a Dutch translation by my then colleague Jan Bloemendal, followed in Hilversum by the same author's farce Apocolocyntosis Divi Claudii (2005), in my own translation, as a personal insert in John Mortimer's adaptation of Robert Graves' I Claudius. After that Van Eekert and I did a compilation of a satyrplay and melodrama by Euripides (e.g. Cyclops, Alcestis) and two women plays by Aristophanes (Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae), called Euripides! Euripides! (2009). Trained as a dramaturg at the University of Amsterdam (1986-1989), while studying classical languages of and on from 1979 to my Master degree in 1999, I had always preferred collaborating with directors.

4. Drama as part of the Erasmus+ exchange projects in Amsterdam.

When approached by an ambitious team of Classical languages teachers from Munich and Bolzano to join in an Erasmus+ project concerning migratory patterns in antiquity and modern Europe, I instinctively proposed to integrate a theatre workshop/performance in the Amsterdam leg of the project. I had become a teacher of Latin and Greek at the Barlaeus Gymnasium in Amsterdam, near the Leidseplein. This school has historically developed from the Latin School and in the late nineteenth century moved close to one of the main squares in the city centre. As such, it is located in close vicinity to one of city's theatre districts. At a walking distance the stages of the main City Theatre (International Theatre Amsterdam), of Paradiso (pop culture), of De Balie (politics & culture), of DeLaMar (commercial theatre and musical productions), of the Melkweg (pop culture, cinema, theatre) and Bellevue (theatre) are situated.

Foreign pupils participating in an exchange must subconsciously feel this theatrical ambiance, even if they might not be able to describe it right away. As our school is located in the city centre it is a relatively small school (slightly more than 800 pupils, ranging from the ages of 12 to 18/19 years) within a very limited space. On top of the nineteenth century building in the 90s a sports facility has been built, which was instrumental for the theatre workshops of the Erasmus+ exchange program. A typical long weekend in Amsterdam offered the following: arrival on a Friday afternoon (introductory workshop to the school, communal dinner at the school). During the weekend we were allowed to use these sports facilities for rehearsals, with visits to neighbouring musea (such as the Rijksmuseum and Van Gogh museum) in between. In reality we had little more than four day parts rehearsal time at the school, some ten hours in total. On the following Monday we would move to the Bellevue theatre closeby and mount a production there the same night. Monday is the regular day off for theatre professionals, so with a bit of luck I could secure professional performance space for the project. At the theatre we would have a maximum of five rehearsal hours, including the general rehearsal. This required much patience and a very strong motivation from the participating exchange pupils to stay focused during technical rehearsal time and the general dress rehearsal. On Tuesday the exchange would finish with a full day of excursions in Amsterdam, related to the specific theme of the exchange program; Wednesday being departure time for the individual participating schools.

In the description above I have stressed the nature of what we as a participating school had to offer: it was a combination of a succinct theatre workshop resulting in a performance and a taste of the city's rich culture. Although I have often been extremely moved by the results shown by the exchange pupils on a professional stage those Monday nights, the quality of the performance could most certainly have been improved by a longer rehearsal time. It was a mere indication of what could be achieved in a short time by a driven production team and with the guidance of professional light and sound technicians (theatre performance always being an organic team effort) supporting teenagers who were willing to put all their youthful energy in a communal theatre project for a couple of days. And as such it required a certain amount of empathy and phantasy on the part of the audiences willing to attend these productions. Which was clear from the beginning also, these Erasmus+-productions needed a live audience, in order to succeed.

5. Drama and personal growth in bullet points.

For my reflection on the Erasmus+-experience, which constitutes the rest of this essay, I have found inspiration within the theoretical framework provided by Australian practitioner John O'Toole, some of whose well put bullet points I hereby happily quote.

- 1. Drama is a valuable art form in its own right – the training of theatre and performing skills has value per se;
- 2. Drama is a pedagogy that creates engagement and motivation and can help to teach other subjects;
- 3. As a spoken and dialogic art form, drama has a special place in language teaching.
- 4. Dramatic play is the basis of creative self-expression and can also stimulate ‘creativity’ .
- 5. Drama teaches social skills.
- 6. Drama teaches empathy.
- 7. Drama plays a role in cultural and intercultural understanding, through its trick of getting the actors to step into other people’s shoes.
- 8. Towards the end of the century also came the dawning recognition that drama can be an agent of social action, even of social change.
- 9. Drama can certainly be used to help young people understand their own agency and the choices before them. (Note 3)

6. Aeschylus’ Suppliants as part of *Omnes cives mundi sumus: Bollwerk Europa oder...?*

The first theme project (2017-2018) we have embarked upon as Erasmus+ cooperative team had a motto of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, taken from one of the maxims of his Apophthegmata ‘Cives mundi sumus omnes’, we are all citizens of the world. This adage aptly highlighted the issue at hand, that there appeared to be a growing gap between first rate and second rate citizens within the European Union, in the wake of the refugee crisis of 2015. As the project evolved I proposed to stage *Suppliants/Hiketides*, the tragedy of Aeschylus as part of this project. While researching this text, I particularly was indebted and inspired by a monograph about this refugee play: *Aeschylus’s Suppliant Women: The Tragedy of Immigration* (by Geoffrey Blackwell note 4).

Because of earlier experiences, having staged other tragedies of Aeschylus, I was confident to propose staging *Suppliants*. In 2000 I collaborated on a student production of *Agamemnon* at the University of Amsterdam. Subsequently, in 2013 I staged a production of *Prometheus Bound* (in an adaptation of translations by Heiner Müller, Robert Lowell and André Gide) with Barlaeus grade 4 pupils, at the open air theatre of Palazzolo Acreide (International Festival of Classical Young Peoples’ Theatre, in connection to the INDA - Syracuse, Sicily) and in 2014 entered pupils in an junior *Oresteia* competition of the North Netherlands Theatre (NNT) with an adaptation of *Libation bearers Choephoroi* co-written again by pupils Barlaeus grade 4 of my cluster Ancient Greek, resulting in a performance at the Stadsschouwburg (City Theatre), Amsterdam. I could bring this experience into the Erasmus+-project and luckily the founding members and co-organizers Maria Krichbaumer of Munich and Martina Adami of Bolzano picked up on the idea and so our first theatre workshop could take shape. In November 2017 we mounted an international production of Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* (using an English translation by Janet Lembke and a Dutch translation by Gerrit Komrij). It also was an adaptation, because in what I referred to as “knee plays” (a term borrowed from Robert Wilson) the results of a creative writing work shop in Bolzano were incorporated. This Bolzano workshop given in collaboration with Philipp Jescheck especially ticked all the boxes of O’Toole’s bullet points. It was of great value that Gambian minor asylum seekers entered these workshops, so I can honestly claim that this activity encompassed bullet points 5 to 9. The exchange pupils felt empathy with their less fortunate African peers, started writing situations in which they projected themselves as refugees. On the other hand, the Gambian minors were surprised that some 2500 years ago people already crossed the Mediterranean in the hope of a better life, such as the choir of Danaids did in the play. (note 5 for an example of this creative writing).

Off course, performing Aeschylus with pupils poses severe problems. This brilliant tragedian combines highly poetic language with choir parts that determin much of the length of a performance. The plot

of Suppliants/Supplices ('a play long considered our earliest extant tragedy because of the dominant role of the chorus in the play') is also challenging. The choir, consisting of women, i.e. fifty daughters of Danaus, are threatened with abduction by their nephews, sons of Aegyptus, the uncle of these Danaids. This is the reason why they become refugees, flee from Egypt and seek asylum in the city-state of Argos, where their ancient roots lie through their common ancestor, Argive Io.

Naturally, I was very lucky to be able to secure the assistance of choreographer Alexandra Veldhuijzen, in collaboration with Nicky Weststeijn, whom I had worked with as pupils on the Prometheus Bound and Libation Bearers projects. They could enhance the drama by choreographing a startling opening sequence and the choir parts. Apart from inserting results of the creative writing class in Bolzano, I had another idea to tackle some of the challenges posed by this tragedy, but first add one more: 'The chorusses in Aeschylus' *Supplices* sing their songs in Greek but an impression is given that they are using their own non-Greek languages.' (Peter Walcot - note 6) Working at the Gymnasium Hilversum, I had been impressed with the results of the Pan European Exchange Programme [PEEP], where pupils from Greece, Hungary and The Netherlands would play sections of the same play in their mother language, with mesmerizing results. Inspired by this good practice, the three consecutive Erasmus+-projects have been conceived in such a way that the pupils could speak and act, at least part of the text, in their mother tongue. In *Hiketides* this concept was adhered to, with the exception of the Dutch actors, performing the extremely evocative and poetic English of Janet Lembke's translation. The choir pieces were thus spoken in German by the Austrians, Germans and South Tyroleans (although Italian often was their mother tongue, I changed this in later productions) and Greek, evoking a sensation of otherness in an English language environment. The first project was co-produced by Janne de Vries of the German section, and thus German language oriented; which turned out not to be very inclusive for the anglophone Greek and Dutch participants.

Because of the extremely short production time, our performance had to be heavily preproduced. This resulted in a production which had strong features of a theatre of images. The time framework of the choral pieces was provided with a background Image and sound track on video, created by Caio Vinicius, a 16 year old pupil from the New International School Esprit - DENISE, then situated in close vicinity to our gymnasium. As part of the first Erasmus+-project, I had also collaborated with teachers and four pupils from DENISE on this refugee project. Integral part of this image and sound track made by Caio was the projection of subtitles for the choir pieces in both Dutch and English, so the audience could follow these choir parts. Both the choreography and the rich imagery of the video background provided a visual balance to the static wordiness of Aeschylus. I had rehearsed the different episodes with Amsterdam pupils beforehand, the text of Danaus, father of the Danaids, the protagonist role, had for instance been distributed over three Barlaeus boys. How did ancient Greek democracy deal with immigration? The mix of Barlaeus and Denise pupils did extra complicate the production process, although the three DENISE girls playing the role of father Aigyptos in Engels and Spanish were certainly enriching and the result of Caio's editing of video material (e.g. helicopter images of the fleeing Rohingya), cut to his own soundtrack, enchanting enough to have exchange pupils read part of their choir texts from their cell phones. (On visual material, note 7)

During the exchange weekend we could thus mainly focus on elucidating the meaning of the choir parts for and choreographing them with the nineteen visiting pupils, but Alexandra Veldhuijzen had also prepared some set choreography pieces for Amsterdam pupils beforehand (one of the dancers brought her bird of prey on stage for the Zeus choir texts). I sketch this in detail just to give a hint of the visual aspects of the production process, adding to the explicit and implicit understanding of the tragedy as a whole. More than any class room activity could have achieved (O'Toole's bullet points 1 to 3).

7. Euripides' *Suppliants* as part of *Democracy and its endangerments*.

Erasmus plus and minus: between both productions of *Suppliants* was time for reflexion. It remains a lifelong effort of mine to try and *update* classical education, although antiquity in essence is always new. Invariably I am looking for contemporary parallels which help more fully understand classical subjects by experiencing the here and now. My Erasmus+- engagement may be regarded in this way. Exchange projects have an intrinsic value, of course, but their impact depends on the quality of their theme, and the intensity of the collaboration between pupils and teachers generated by the scope of such a unifying theme. On this level I count my blessing with the Erasmus+ projects I participated in. Internationalization was spearhead policy of Alwin Hietbrink, former principal of our gymnasium. In this policy the Erasmus+-projects did fit well. To succeed the exchange programmes needed more than the well thought out thematic plans by the founding members of Munich and Bolzano. Close cooperation was also needed internally with then vice principal Sabien Onvlee, head caretaker Dirk van der Meiden, co-producer Janne de Vries responsible for a parallel teacher programme, assistant director Gabriel Molinar and financial administrator Titia Jodha. Without their support there would have been no theatre performances in Bellevue. For the second project, my history colleague Joep Beijst took over production from Janne de Vries, and thus the project got more of a historical angle.

In 2016 the sign of the times in Germany and Europe was determined by mass migration. For a Barlaeus parent course I had that year been gathering material on asylum procedure in antiquity and its effect on tragedy. So my colleague Marco Poelwijk and I did read certain episodes of Euripides' *Suppliants* with our ancient Greek clusters and attend a production of it in Almere. In 2016 the choice for the second tragedy was thus born. For me personally it was clear from the beginning that there were basic similarities between the plot of Euripides' *Suppliants* (about a humanitarian mission of Athens intervening in a conflict between Thebes and Argos about the salvage of heroic war casualties) and the recovery of the bodily remains of 196 deceased Dutch civilians and staff members after a catastrophic plain crash. In the week after the shooting down of the MH17 (Malaysia Airlines flight 17) on July 17th 2014 with a Russian Buk missile by separatists above Donetsk (Ukraine). A similar international invention was needed to have the bodies released by the parties at war. The meticulously directed media event of their funeral gave this national trauma framing and imagery. Humanitarian motives within the international mediocracy played a crucial role. In December 2019 Euripides, *Suppliants / Hiketides*, was performed in Bellevue, Amsterdam, the English text and subtitles taken from *Suppliant Women* (translated by Rosanna Warren & Stephen Scully, OUP, 1995) and the Dutch from *Smekelingen* the translation by Herman Altena (2013).

Production management wise, I was able to amend some flaws from the first project to the next. First of all I cancelled the presence of an audience at the general rehearsal. At the first *Suppliants* the vocalized attendance of Barlaeus pupils at the general rehearsal had caused anxiety and insecurity amongst the exchange pupils. And indeed, the material was still being technically processed and not ready to be seen yet. Nevertheless the afternoon consternation had led to a successful evening performance. For the follow up project, I intended to prepare the exchange pupils better for the task ahead in Amsterdam. In this second project the same gymnasia from München, Bolzano and Rein (near Graz) participated, now complemented by other two different gymnasia from Greece, hailing from Thessaloniki and Heraklio, instead of Gazi, Crete. Thus the Greek partaking grew, and I was able to direct two choir parts in (ancient and new) Greek. Internally I had found support with the history department in colleagues Joep Beijst en Merel Meijer. Joep was instrumental in embedding the theatre aspect broader into the Barlaeus curriculum, and has sought collaboration with visual arts teacher Vanessa Hudig. She coached three students from the HKU (University of the Arts Utrecht) in an internship. They were to help prepare a try out of the second part, the actual mourning and funeral part of Euripides' *Suppliants*, most in line with the MH17 aftermath, in our school auditorium.

Within the *Democracy and its endangerments* theme, we tried to link the development of democracies in ancient Greece to more recent (anti-)democratic developments. In this sense, the second project had a less purely humanistic and a more political theme. Russia and the separatist of the Donbas called Dutch accusations of involvement fake news. With three Barlaeus colleagues I had been editing a website on Pericles (<https://rondompericles.nl/>) and its initiator Willem van Maanen came to Munich to give a workshop on Pericles' funeral oration, an ancient eulogy of democracy, as part of making the kick-off event, based on ancient text interpretation, more interactive. The different phases of the project were thus better coordinated, all due to good practice. This learning process also resulted in me working with the exchange pupils, being selected for the performance in Amsterdam, during my visits to the different exchange schools beforehand, on interpretation of the chosen choir parts, but also on acting technique, with Amsterdam being the final stage of the project. Similar to the creative writing workshop during the first project, the thought process of pupils about the use of (anti-) democratic symbolism and rhetoric took place in Bolzano, having its effect on the visual language and imagery of the performance. Good practice is time consuming, but the exchange pupils were better prepared, the directing concepts clearer to them, and the overall performances better by a Barlaeus try out, although at the actual theatre performance some of the Barlaeus pupils seemed to be slacking.

For me the wonder of the second *Suppliants* was the learning process of artistic collaboration with two exchange colleagues. Especially the input of Maria Choulaki, a teacher from Iraklio, was important for the production design, being a gifted professional photographer. Her talent became apparent while impromptu photographing the Thessaloniki choir girls before beautiful grave steles in the Archeological Museum of Thessaloniki. Insightful collaboration also took place with Ivan Bortolotti, an English teacher and professional actor/director from Bolzano. So by taking the two year period of the project as preparation time for the theatre performance, I found myself learning and discovering new pathways in the company of such talented colleagues who were generously supporting the production demands. Another miracle was the possibility to visit an open air performance "Theatro thasous" (Theatre in the woods), of Euripides' *Suppliants*, directed by the incumbent artistic director of the National Theatre of Greece, Stathis Livathinos, in cooperation with the Theater Organization of Cyprus. At the invitation of Fotini Karagiauri and Georgos Giannoudis from the Thessaloniki gymnasium I attended this performance end of August 2019 together with their exchange pupils.

In retrospect it was a small miracle that the theatre performance could take place on this scale. Only two months later, first Northern Italy and then all of Europe was in lockdown because of COVID-19. Again with the support of choreographer Alexandra Veldhuijzen, we had a huge choir of suppliants. In this production, dressed in black mourning costumes, provided by Cretan professional Alexandrina Georgieva and the protagonists in costumes designed in the art class and made by Dutch exchange pupil's grandmother Anna Grevers, following the effective cloth drapings by pupils of the first production. I refer to all of O'Toole's bullet points for this production (Note 8 for names of pupils participating in the choir as an indication of international collaboration).

- 8. A compilation of scenes by Aristophanes, PEACE: Aristophanes' Minor(itie)s, as part of (V)erkannte Minderheiten in Europa - (Un)recognized diversity: Minorities in Europe.**

'Absurd' originally means 'out of harmony', in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition: 'out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical'. In common usage, 'absurd' may simply mean 'ridiculous.'

'In the dramatic literature of antiquity that has come down to us, only the theatre of Aristophanes contains the same freedom of imagination and the mixture of fantasy and broad comedy.' (Martin Esslin note 9)

The second project having been successfully finished, the third project tragically started in the midst of the COVID lockdown. That school year, 2020-2021, I was lucky enough to teach Ancient Greek to the only cluster of twelve Barlaeus grade 4 pupils having chosen both Latin and Greek. The Erasmus+ exchange program was targeted specifically at them, in the hope of further motivating them to choose and keep both classical languages. Arguing that working on a Greek tragedy in a lockdown situation would be too dark and gloomy for most pupils, I started reading excerpts from three Aristophanes' comedies in Greek and in total five of his plays in the Dutch translation by Hein van Doolen with these pupils. We read parts of *Peace*, *Birds* and of *Lysistrata* in the original language and *Acharnians* and *Women Parliament* in translation. In June 2021 I gave a workshop *Old Comedy* to grade 3 pupils, keeping up the spirit. Unfortunately COVID came and went, and a convened meeting for the end of 2021 in Amsterdam had to be cancelled. Because of the uncertainty and insecurity of the COVID situation, I was hesitant to involve direct colleagues in exchange plans that had to be cancelled at the last minute. As a result in this leg I felt more thrown back at my own resources than before.

On the other hand, in the very COVID context the other participating exchange schools reached out, and colleagues at other schools took it upon themselves to prepare their pupils for the performances. Colleague Ludwig Kres from Munich directed pupils in his own adaptation, with parts of the original added by me, Ivan Bortolotti from Bolzano prepared his pupils for playing *Women Parliament* (*Ecclesiazusae*), and in Amsterdam directed the mix of his own pupils with Rumanian girls from Brasov in mirror scenes from *Lysistrata*. The only school I had been able to visit during this project and help prepare for the Amsterdam performance of fragments of *Acharnians* was the Thessaloniki gymnasium, assisted by Fotini Kagiauri. Otherwise we had interesting general zoom on the theme of minorities in the different countries and specific theatre zoom sessions with Munich and Brasov.

Even under these extreme circumstances the direction concept stood firmly, and the revelation of the pupils experiencing how the different Aristophanes fragments came together was comparable to that of acting out an entire tragedy. My own pupils started the performance and finished it off in an ensemble set piece, co-directed by my ex-pupil assistant and professional actor Justin van der Veen and Ivan Bortolotti. Pupils were managing the subtitles in Dutch and English for the third time, Dutch exchange pupils were playing string music to the Hoopoo song of Alphonse Diepenbrock, written for a performance of *Birds*. Like a thread ran the recurring theme of the inventiveness of humans to secure some form of peace for a while in times of war through the performance: opening with the flight on a dung beetle to the Olympus in *Peace* to hold Zeus accountable for the war, seeking refuge in an idyllic colony in the clouds without money, lawyers or politicians in *Birds*, or women disguised as

men voting for the transfer of power to women in a men only parliament (Women Parliament), and the famous sex strike for peace (a ruse of Lysistrata), resulting in a private peace struck with Sparta for the Athenian deme of the Acharnians. Reading the text fragments in ancient Greek with my cluster in 2020, in the lessons I focused on the historical circumstances of the Peloponnesian wars. Little did I now how ominous and to the point this choice of fragments would turn out to be in the rehearsal weekend leading to the theatre performance, a few months after a devastating war had broken out on the eastern frontiers of the European union. So we should listen to Aristophanes' voice with another ear, and hear his warnings against demagogues and war mongers. (Robert Bartlett note 10)

Note 1

O'Toole, John & Madonna Stinson, Tina Moore (2009:22-23) *Drama and Curriculum: A Giant at the Door*, Springer, Berlin/Heidelberg. See John O'Toole's first chapter *Strange Bedfellows: Drama and Education* (pp. 11-28)

Note 2

Calvino, Italo, (2009/1999) *Why read the classics?* Translated by Martin McLaughlin Penguin London (2009:5)

Note 3

McAvoy, Mary & Peter O'Connor (2022), *The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education*, Routledge, New York. I quote these bullet points from the chapter 6 by John O'Toole: *Whose enlightened pedagogy? A historical mini-tour of the educating process of drama.*

Note 4

Bakewell, Geoffrey W. (2013), *Aeschylus's Suppliant Women: The Tragedy of Immigration*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison

Note 5

Das Interview by Kathrin Hubmann (Pelagos is a politician who is against refugees)

I: Welcome Pelagos. I want to ask you some questions about refugees and migration. P: Hello. I will answer your questions. I: Ok. Let us begin. But before we start I have to tell you that I'm not going to ask questions about your point of view, but I want to show you how it feels to come here as a refugee. Try to imagine you are a refugee, you have just arrived here and you don't know our language. You came from Syria. I'm an Office man and I ask you some Questions. Where do you come from? P: From Syria. I: Really? Proof it. P: How should I proof it? I: You have to know this yourself. P: But I can't proof it. I: Then I won't believe you. See, that's how many refugees feel.

Note 6

Walcot, Peter (1976), *Greek drama in its theatrical and social context*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1976:37 + 69)

Note 7

Readers can get a good impression of Caio's artistry on <http://www.klassischegymnasien.eu/2015/01/13/the-high-school-for-classics-in-europe/>

Photo editing by then mediathecaris Roeland Smeets with his photoshopping crew can be found on the Barlaeus website: Barlaeus Gymnasium > Algemeen > Toneel, Asielzoeksters.

Note 8

Daphne Tzatzis, Rodanthi Panikidou, Chrysoula Mouratidou, Marianthi Theodoraki, Konstantina Kountou, Sakkadaki Antonia, Marilena Kargiantoulaki, Chrisanthi Kalogiannaki, Maria Kokkinaki, Triantafyllia Chasouraki, Marina Spiliotaki, Juliette Voorhoeve, Nele Brom, Rana-lina Abdelrahman, Emily Schmalbach, Magdalena Böhmer, Ines Merlin, Sarah Eisenberge, Sara Niedermair, Samira Santa, Cindy Pederiva, Sofie Rammlmair, Julia Mazur

Note 9

Esslin, Martin (1983/1961) *The Theatre of the Absurd* Penguin Middlesex New York (1983:23) (1983:331)

Note 10

Bartlett, Robert C. (2020) *What Aristophanes Can Teach Us about the Perils of Populism and the Fate of Democracy*, [New Translations of the *Acharnians* and the *Knights*], University of California Press, Oakland