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Twenty-first century drama adaptations of medea by male authors from minor European literatures: Tom Lanoye and Dimitris Dimitriadis

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6.7.5. Excursus: Twenty-first Century Drama Adaptations of Medea by Male Authors from Minor European Literatures (Tom Lanoye and Dimitris Dimitriadis)

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This final section, by way of an *excursus*, zooms in on two twenty-first-century adaptations of the Medea myth written in two minor European languages, Flemish and Greek: Belgian author Tom Lanoye's *Mamma Medea* (2001) and Greek author Dimitris Dimitriadis' *Πολιτισμός: Μια κοσμική τραγωδία* (*Civilization: A Cosmic Tragedy*) (2003/2013). The adaptations by these contemporary male writers not only offer comparative material for the adaptations by women writers discussed above, but have been selected for their innovative treatment of the Medea myth, which they link to twenty-first-century sociopolitical challenges, and the distinctive way in which they reflect on *barbarism*. *Mamma Medea* inserts the *barbarian* in an imperialist context—alluding to US neo-imperialist ventures after 9/11—while also linking it to (poetic) language. *Civilization* erases and invalidates the barbarian other, depriving Medea of agency and turning her from a threatening other into a powerless scapegoat. The drama thereby stages a new world order in which civilization's all-encompassing framework has absorbed and obliterated otherness and difference—a framework that chimes with the post-Cold War universalization of neoliberal capitalism.

Lanoye's *Mamma Medea* (2001) adapts Euripides' play but also draws on two other intertexts: the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius, a Hellenistic epic poem from the third century BC that recounts the journey of Jason and the Argonauts to Colchis with the purpose of retrieving the Golden Fleece, and Edward Albee's well-known play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) about the demise of a marriage. What belongs to the prehistory of Euripides' play—Jason's voyage, his first encounter with Medea, the beginning of their relationship and their journey back to Greece—becomes part of the primary story in *Mamma Medea*: the first half of the play is set in Colchis. Some of the events that take place in Colchis or during Medea's and Jason's journey back to Greece are recounted through retroversions in Euripides' play (and were well-known to the Athenian audience at the time the play was written) but move to the foreground in Lanoye's play. This choice has substantial implications for the way the Greek / barbarian opposition is played out in Lanoye's *Mamma Medea*.

The words "barbarian" ("barbaar"), "barbarism" ("barbarij"), and "civilization" ("beschaving") come up five times in *Mamma Medea*, but the semantics of barbarism and the barbarism/civilization opposition are evoked throughout the drama: intradiegetically, in the way Medea and her people are cast through the eyes of Jason and his comrades, as well as in the language that Greeks and the 'barbarian' Colchians speak in the drama. Medea and the Colchians speak in verse and in Flemish (the version of the Dutch language spoken in the region of Flanders in Belgium), while

Jason and the Greeks—posing as representatives of civilization—speak in prose and in mainstream Dutch. The drama mobilizes the barbarian/civilized opposition to distinguish Medea and her people from the Greeks, but problematizes it by questioning its legitimacy. In so doing, it reiterates Euripides' questioning of the opposition but takes his critique further. It de-centers the (normative) ground on which this hierarchical opposition stands and uses the linguistic register to subversively mark Medea's difference as a 'barbarian' foreigner and a woman: her 'barbarian' speech is linked with poetry (through the use of verse for Medea's speech) and with the 'peripheral' Flemish (spoken in Belgium, where Lanoye is from) as opposed to the use of mainstream Dutch (as spoken in Holland) by the Greeks.

The way *Mamma Medea* casts Jason and Medea evokes the common features attributed to Greeks and barbarians in Greek classical antiquity. For example, when they argue, Jason is annoyed with Medea's inability to restrain herself. He finds her too emotional and impulsive, unable to hide her feelings. Her own arguments—e.g., that Jason broke his marriage vows; that she is banished from her own country for helping him and now has nowhere else to go; that although he owes her everything, he now abandons her for a younger woman, power, and money—are dismissed by Jason as irrational. By contrast, Jason appears more composed, restrained, and cool. The portrayal of Jason and the Greeks in *Mamma Medea* reproduces the distinction between the Greek self as rational versus the barbarian other as irrational, explosive, and uncontrollable: features that mark the construction of barbarians (and women) in Greek tragedy (Hall 1989). The play, however, delegitimizes this construction by showing how the perception of the barbarian other as irrational serves the interests of the Greek self. Jason, whose detached and callous speech does not make him sympathetic to viewers, refuses to take Medea's arguments seriously because in his eyes they are not the product of Greek ratio but the incomprehensible mumblings of an inferior being. This allows him to blame her for everything while refusing to take responsibility (2012, 36). Evoking the same argument as in Euripides' *Medea*, Jason mobilizes Medea's barbarian status to claim that his purported debt to her has been repaid by the mere fact that Medea had the privilege of partaking in (the Greek) civilization:

Jij hebt helemaal niets verloren. Mij helpen heeft jou iets opgeleverd. Jij leeft nu hier, in de beschaving, niet langer in de *barbarij*. Je hebt kennis mogen maken met cultuur en echte wetten, in plaats van louter botheid en het recht van de sterkste. De mensen kennen je tenminste. Ze hebben jou hulde gebracht, ze waren dol op je, ze probeerden jou wat ontwikkeling bij te brengen. (2012, 35)

You haven't lost anything. The fact that you helped me benefitted you. You now live here, in civilization, no longer in *barbarity*. You have been introduced to culture and real laws instead of mere vulgarity and the law of the strongest. At least people know you now. They've paid you tribute, they loved you, they tried to bring you some development.¹

1 All translations from the Dutch into English are mine, M. B.

However, just as in Euripides' play, Jason's vision is not left unchallenged in *Mamma Medea*. Viewers or readers receive both perspectives and are invited to draw their own conclusions.

A striking new element in Lanoye's adaptation is that both Jason's and Medea's visions are tested not only on Greek but also on barbarian ground. The main locations of the play are Colchis—"het verre en barbaarse Kolchis" ("the far and barbarian Colchis") as we read in the stage instructions—and Corinth.² Euripides' use of Corinth as the drama's sole location makes Greece the normative ground that determines the dominant perspective: Greece defines the "we" of civilization in the drama with Medea as a clear outsider. Colchis, where Medea comes from, remains a foreign barbarian land we never get to see. By contrast, in *Mamma Medea* both locations become the drama's stage, creating two different grounds from which we are invited to reflect on the relation between self and other, civilized and barbarian. This double perspective is also reflected in the drama's two parts: "Deel 1: Thuis / In den vreemde" ("Part 1: Home / in a foreign land") and "Deel II: In den vreemde / Thuis" (Part II: In a foreign land / Home"). What is "home" for Medea is a "foreign land" for Jason, and vice versa. This way, the projection of Greek as the privileged perspective in Euripides is weakened in Lanoye's adaptation. By shifting locations, we get closer to the 'barbarians' of Colchis by virtually visiting their land. 'Barbarians' (as a name for non-Greeks) becomes a less generic appellation: they materialize as actual people.

As a result, the terms *barbarian* and *civilized* lose the self-evidence with which they are attached to specific groups and become relativized. In the play's first part, Colchis is the ground from which we experience the drama's world and the characters' perspectives. For the Colchian king and his people, Jason and the Argonauts are intruders, foreigners, who have arrived seeking to steal something that belongs to Colchians. For Jason and his comrades, of course, king Aietes and his people are barbarians with strange customs and are neither to be respected nor trusted: "Wat is het woord waard van een barbaar?" ("What's a barbarian's word worth?") says Idas, one of Jason's comrades, referring to king Aietes; "Wij zijn Grieken. De beschaving" ("We are Greeks. The civilization"), Jason replies (2012, 8).

Yet Jason, in his attempt to convince Aietes to give him the Golden Fleece, evokes other barbarians too: he uses the term to refer to a vague threat at the border of Colchis. Jason offers to help Aietes deal with his 'barbarian problem' at the border, as the Greeks apparently know how to fight barbarians: "Ik hoorde dat u last heeft van barbaren, aan uw grenzen. Als u hen de les wilt lezen, steken wij wel een handje toe" ("I heard that you have trouble with barbarians at your borders. If you want to teach them a lesson, we can lend you a hand") (2012, 6). Jason's offer relativizes the *barbarian*: just as every society, the Colchians—barbarians in Greek eyes—have their own barbarians through which they define themselves as superior. But even though Jason and his comrades are on foreign ground in Colchis and do not have the upper hand, they still carry an air of superiority and arrogance. Viewing the people of Colchis through a Hellenocentric lens, Jason's comrades mock the luxurious, extravagant

2 There are two secondary locations too: two small islands on the Argonauts' way back to Greece, one in-between Colchis and Greece, and Circe's island.

clothes and the strange language of the ‘barbarian’ Colchians. They behave like imperialists who seek to impose their norms and bring civilization to a barbarian folk.

By making Medea and Jason’s background story part of the drama, Lanoye’s play ‘displaces’ Jason and the Greeks, inviting the viewer to see the invading Greeks through the eyes of their ‘barbarians.’ This gesture further underscores the imperialist character of Jason’s expedition: because Jason and the Argonauts have decided that the people of Colchis are barbarians, and thus unworthy of respect, appropriating this country’s riches and cultural artefacts (the Golden Fleece) becomes a legitimate act. Lanoye’s play, written in 2001, issued a critique of contemporary attempts to impose Western norms and values upon nonliberal ‘barbarian others’ in the name of (Western) civilization. In particular, the play evokes the rhetoric of the George W. Bush administration after the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the subsequent military intervention in Afghanistan, during which the rhetoric of civilization versus barbarism lent support to imperialist agendas.

As *Mamma Medea* problematizes and deconstructs the civilized-barbarian opposition, it projects Medea’s cultural and gender difference in non-hierarchical terms. Medea feels like a foreigner in Corinth but refuses to view her difference from Jason and the Greeks as a token of inferiority, and that is a problem for Jason. She does not succumb to Jason’s attempts to appropriate her difference, tame her, subject her to his will. The difference between man and woman is decisive for the way their relation plays out in the drama. Gender works alongside cultural difference in *Mamma Medea*, not only to cast Medea as doubly other and marginalized, but also to *exalt* her difference. In the end, Medea’s last appearance in her royal, extravagant ‘barbarian’ garments—the clothes she wore in Colchis—performs her refusal to erase herself as culturally other *and* as woman. Her accompanying statement—“Ik wil alleen maar dat gij me graag ziet!” (“I just want you to see me”) (2012, 49)—is a cry for Jason to acknowledge her difference in equal terms.

Language is also a crucial marker for the Greek/barbarian distinction in *Mamma Medea*: Flemish and poetic verse for Medea and the people of Colchis, mainstream Dutch and prose for Jason and the Greeks. The difference in dialect and style of expression between Greeks and barbarians evokes the linguistic basis of the barbarian as the speaker of a foreign language, or one who speaks Greek differently (with a lisp, stutter, faulty accent; Long 1986, 130–31; Hartog 2001, 80). Medea’s poetic, embellished speech, which carries a more dramatic tone than Jason’s distant and rational language, makes her virtually incomprehensible to Jason and the Greeks, or rather gives them an excuse to dismiss her speech as irrational. But the use of poetic language as ‘barbarian speech’ in the drama also works to exalt barbarism as an aesthetic force that defamiliarizes and challenges Jason’s flat, everyday language, and thereby also the dominant (Greek, civilized) discourse that he represents.

In Lanoye’s adaptation, Medea and Jason each murder one child in the end. They thereby both carry the responsibility for the heinous act that seals the drama. The barbarity of that act, which is solely credited to Medea in Euripides’ tragedy and built her reputation as one of the most monstrous characters in literary history, becomes here the shared burden of a Greek man and a barbarian woman: a married couple sharing the guilt for the terrible consequences of the demise of their marriage.

Another radical revision of Medea's myth, in which the civilization-barbarism diptych is challenged from an unexpected perspective, comes from Greek playwright Dimitris Dimitriadis' play *Πολιτισμός: Μια κοσμική τραγωδία / Civilization: A Cosmic Tragedy*.³ The play was first published in 2013, which was also the year it premiered on the stage in Greece, in a production by the theatre group *bijoux de kant* with the Greek actress Kariofillia Karambeti in the role of Medea. As we read in the introduction to this edition, however, the play had been written ten years before (in 2003) and remained unpublished until 2013 (Kondylaki in Dimitriadis 2013, 9).

The momentum of its publication and its premiere on the stage are not without significance. In 2013 we find Greece in the midst of its sovereign debt crisis that started in 2009: a long period of recession and harsh austerity measures that led to the impoverishment of a big part of the population. The crisis did not only have financial and social consequences, but it also precipitated the unsettling of what Cornelius Castoriadis called the "instituted imaginary" of (Greek) society: long-standing national narratives and myths that dictate a society's mode "of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence" (2005, 155, 145; see also Boletsi 2018, 9). This unsettling was also registered in art forms that tried to give expression to what critics identified as a "crisis of meaning."⁴ This crisis of meaning involved a reconsideration of Greek people's relation to their past. Cultural theorist Dimitris Papanikolaou coined the term "archive trouble" (2011) to talk about this "iconoclastic return to the past" by artists, filmmakers, and performers in the years of the Greek crisis, which involved reframing and reassessing the fixed meanings of past narratives from a precarious present (Papanikolaou 2011; 2017, 45). Revisiting ancient myths was part of such artistic attempts to articulate the estranging experience of the present (Boletsi and Celik-Rappas 2020, xiii). Theatre was one of the main cultural arenas in which this revisiting of myths took place.

Dimitriadis' adaptation of Medea, though first written before the crisis-years, can be seen in the context of such attempts to revisit past narratives. Medea's story was, of course, already iconoclastic to begin with, as Euripides' *Medea* already questioned narratives of Greekness and barbarism in ancient Greece. And so, Dimitra Kondylaki asks in her introduction to the play: "How can one understand the reversal of a play in which the 'barbarian' is exalted as nobler than the 'civilized,' the body emerges as more powerful than the intellect and reason, and the foreigner metes out justice to a Greek who has violated what is just?"⁵

In Dimitriadis' play, Medea's dire situation and plans are laid out in full from the start. We immediately hear from the nurse about Jason's betrayal and Medea's plans to kill king Creon, his daughter Glauce, and her own children in order to

3 The play has not been translated into English. All translated quotes from the Greek are mine, M. B.

4 See, for example, Marios Psaras' introduction "The Meaning of the Crisis Or the Crisis of Meaning" in his book *The Queer Greek Weird Wave* (2016).

5 Translation mine, M. B. In Greek: "Πώς να αντιληφθεί λοιπόν κάποιος την αντιστροφή ενός έργου όπου ήδη το 'βάρβαρο' εξαιρείται ως ευγενέστερο του 'πολιτισμένου,' το σώμα αναδεικνύεται καταλυτικότερο από τη νόηση και τον ορθό λόγο, ο ξένος γίνεται απονεμητής ενός Δικαίου που ο Έλληνας με τις πράξεις του καταπατά;" (Kondylaki in Dimitriadis 2013, 10).

punish Jason. The overturning of Euripides' narrative starts when Aegeus, king of Athens, enters the stage early on in the play to tell Medea that he does not wish to bear children anymore. When Medea asks him what Apollo's oracle in Delphi told him about the matter, he replies that there is no god anymore. Only ruins and ashes remain where Apollo's sanctuary stood; the oracle has killed herself and all other temples in Greece have met the same fate. Aegeus' description reveals a post-apocalyptic landscape of total ruination caused by "an unknown force" ("μία άγνωστη δύναμη") (Dimitriadis 2013, 26), which marks the inauguration of a world without gods. Medea is initially reluctant to believe him and declares: "ποτέ δεν θα φύγουν οι θεοί" ("gods will never leave") (32). She is determined to go through with her revenge scheme with an unshaken belief in her magical powers, which she owes to her divine descent. In her confrontation with Jason, she defiantly reminds him that he is talking "to a goddess / Helios' daughter" (sic) ("μιάς σε μια θεά / στην κόρη του Ήλιου") (37). Her confidence in her powers, however, soon gives way to the shock of realizing the depletion of these powers. Medea's scheme to poison Glauce and Creon with her gifts fails, as her magical powers abandon her. As she is deprived of her powers, nobody fears her vengeance anymore. Creon, who had initially banished her, tells her that she is welcome to stay in his city, as she is now completely harmless: a common, powerless woman whom nobody fears (56–57). Medea longs to reclaim her lost identity as a monstrous, barbarian other—to become a "monster" again, to become the "Medea" she used to be (63)—but there is no god to listen to her plea.

Yet, as Medea's threat is removed, opening the way for Jason to enjoy his new life with his young bride-to-be, a new twist is introduced: Creon murders his own daughter Glauce, driven by his uncontrollable lust for his daughter, whom he wants to possess and refuses to share with anyone else. Glauce's murder, with which Medea is credited in Euripides' play, is here ironically transferred to the leader of a civilized society—a society that purportedly lives by the rule of law. This plot twist reenacts the theme of barbarism as inherent to civilization, famously captured by Walter Benjamin in "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" ("Theses on the Philosophy of History").⁶ The barbarism of Western civilization, concealed by the façade of progress, takes center stage in Dimitriadis' work (Tornariti 2018, 175).

Medea's grand exit on Helios' chariot in Euripides' play gives way in Dimitriadis' play to the departure of Jason and their sons on a chariot, leaving Medea behind in Corinth without an explanation. But although she becomes disempowered and irrelevant, unable to wreak havoc on civilization anymore, she still performs an important function for civilization: that of the scapegoat. The people of Corinth, perplexed and dumbstruck by the departure of the gods and the king's murder of his daughter, end up blaming Medea for their plight. Demanding the punishment of this "monster," this "female dragon," this "demon" (95–96), they send someone to kill her, who easily executes this task: Medea stands no chance against her executioner without her powers. Reduced to bare life, Medea serves the function of the barbarian as a demonized other and sacrificial victim. Her tragic end affirms the familiar mechanism

6 On Walter Benjamin, see also above, chapter 5.3.3.

according to which civilization locates its crises in external others rather than facing its internal contradictions.

Throughout the play, Medea's position as the other in Greek society is multiply emphasized. Various terms are mobilized to mark her otherness, by Jason, Medea herself, the chorus, and other characters, yet the term "barbarian" is not among them: "foreigner" ("ξένη," 34); an "untamed beast" Jason "snatched" from "Asian caves" ("[...]ανήμερο θηρίο / που άρπαξα / μέσα από τις ασιατικές σπηλιές"; 40); "crude" and a "woman" ("άξεστη," "γυναίκα"; 41); a "fool," "backwards," and "uncivilized" ("ανόητη, "καθυστερημένη, "απολίτιστοι"; 53);⁷ a monster ("τέρας"; 63, 95, 98); a "female dragon" ("δράκαινα," "θηλυκός δράκος"; 95, 98); a "demon" ("δαίμονα"; 96) etc. In fact, the word "barbarian" is used only once as an adverb by Medea herself, to refer to the way she has been treated by Jason and the Greeks: "με ταπεινώσαν ανελέητα / με πρόσβαλαν βάρβαρα" ("they humiliated me mercilessly / they offended me barbarously") (87). The absence of the term "barbarian" as a signifier for Medea and its sole use for qualifying the behaviour of Jason and the Greeks is not a coincidence. This choice may in fact offer a better understanding of the play's title, *Civilization*. Through its title, the play suggests that the dialectic of civilization and barbarism is at its center, yet it refrains from using the word *barbarian* for civilization's other. In Dimitriadis' adaptation, civilization's opposite is only denoted by the word "uncivilized" ("απολίτιστος"), used several times. For example, in Jason's address to Medea when she confronts him with his betrayal, Jason iterates the same argument that Euripides' Jason had articulated some 2450 years ago, pointing out the gift of civilization that he gave Medea and the purported difference between Greeks and barbarians. However, instead of "barbarian," Dimitriadis' Jason uses the term "uncivilized":

το κυριότερο
 ήρθες στην Ελλάδα
 σε προηγμένες πόλεις
 σε έναν άλλο κόσμο
 κατάλαβες
 τι σημαίνει δικαιοσύνη
 ισονομία
 είδες πώς είναι
 να ζείς με σεβασμό στους νόμους
 και όχι
 όπως είχες μάθει
 να φοβάσαι το δίκαιο του ισχυρού
 χωρίς αξιοπρέπεια
 σε αυτό διαφέρετε εσείς οι απολίτιστοι
 από εμάς τούς Έλληνες (Dimitriadis 2013, 39–40)

7 These three terms are used by Medea to refer to herself in an address to Jason, when she starts realizing that her magical powers have abandoned her and that she cannot inflict harm on her enemies. The Greek word for "uncivilized" is here in the plural (*απολίτιστοι*) as Medea uses it to refer collectively to her people ("εμείς οι απολίτιστοι" / "we the uncivilized") (53).

most importantly
 you came to Greece
 to developed cities
 to another world
 you understood
 what justice means
 equality before the law
 you saw how it is
 to live with respect for the law
 and not
 like you had been taught
 to fear the law of the powerful
 without dignity
 this is where you, the uncivilized
 differ from us Greeks. (My translation, M. B.)

The replacement of the term “barbarian” with “uncivilized” here and throughout the play is purposeful. This replacement eradicates the barbarian’s potential agency, as the barbarian is shown to fully belong—conceptually, linguistically, materially—to civilization and to have been appropriated by it. Using the word *barbarian* for Medea—an autonomous word, linguistically independent from the word “civilization” and much older than the latter for that matter—could have suggested that her otherness carries agency and the potential to unsettle the construct of civilization.

That is not the case in Dimitriadis’ *Civilization*. The title suggests that there is only civilization without an outside: a civilization that is being depleted of all vital forces, internal or external—gods, barbarians—and is collapsing under the weight of its own barbarity, without the hope of salvation. With the gods abandoning the Greek landscape, and with the barbarians (Medea) stripped of all powers, no transcendental force, *deus ex machina* or external barbarian can intervene to offer “a kind of solution”—to borrow the words of C. P. Cavafy’s poem “Waiting for the Barbarians,” discussed in volume 1 of our study.⁸

The departure of the gods in this drama is reminiscent of the motif of the exile of the gods in the modern world, famously captured by Heinrich Heine’s seminal 1853 fictional essay “Die Götter im Exil” (“Gods in Exile”). Nevertheless, this contemporary play leaves no room for a religious ecology, neither in the form of the Greek pantheon nor Christianity. The motif of a dying society defeated by internal forces, which alludes to Cavafy’s “Waiting for the barbarians,” can also be traced elsewhere in Dimitriadis’ work, and most notably in his best-known work, the novella (or fictional essay) *Πεθαίνω σαν χώρα* (*I die as a country*) (1979), which received renewed attention in Greece in the context of the financial crisis as an allegory for the crisis-stricken country.⁹

8 See Boletsi’s chapter 4 in vol. 1, p. 285–334.

9 For a nuanced, critical discussion of this reappraisal of Dimitriadis’ *I die as a country* in the context of the Greek crisis but also in a historical perspective, see Papanikolaou 2016. For a

The invalidation of external forces that could either threaten or ‘save’ civilization in Dimitriadis’ play leaves us with a barren civilization that strangles its own futurity—just as Aegeus denounces his desire for bearing children and Creon murders his own daughter. Dimitriadis’ *Civilization* reintroduces the aforementioned nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary motifs into a twenty-first-century landscape. This landscape is marked by the universalization of neoliberal capitalism, which became fully established after the collapse of Eastern-bloc communism in 1989. This global capitalist order can be seen as an omnipresent Civilization or, to use Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s term, an *Empire* without an outside (2000). The condition this order initiated was famously described by Mark Fisher as “capitalist realism”: an anti-utopian diagnosis of the present typified by “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it” (Fisher 2009, 2). According to Franco Berardi and several other thinkers, this order entails the “slow cancellation of the future” (Berardi 2011, 18). Dimitriadis’ *Civilization* can be read as a ‘local’ allegory that addresses the grim present of Greece’s debt crisis during which the play was published and staged. But we may also read it as a recontextualization of Medea within this new global order in which there is no room for a barbarian outside. With no external barbarian forces to threaten, enchant or unsettle civilization, the body of the other, Medea’s body, betrayed, suffering, and in love, poses as the only remaining force, until that force, too, is silenced through death. In the play’s civilization, its others—society’s barbarians—become even more invisible, silenced, and disempowered. The absorption of otherness is accompanied by the collapsing of the future into an eternal present without the hope of the new. Aegeus’ declaration that he does not wish to bear children and Creon’s murder of his daughter are unmistakable signs of the future’s disappearance.

This is perhaps why the word *barbarian* has been replaced in this play by a term that merely denotes *lack* of civilization (α – πολιτιστος / *a* – *politistos*). In its history, the *barbarian* has denoted not only the other’s inferiority and marginalization, but also its role in the civilized imaginary as a potential agent of history, be it in the form of a threat or (in decadent accounts) a force of salvation and renewal.¹⁰ Here, the barbarian is rendered incapable of making any independent ‘noise’—the other’s ‘bar bar bar.’¹¹ There is no outside agent threatening civilization with its incalculable force or its promise of a new start. There is no future or escape in Dimitriadis’ *Civilization*. The ‘escape’ of Jason and his sons on a chariot is violently interrupted by a monstrous creature that kills them all. It is thus fitting that the play’s final words are spoken by the dead: Medea’s sons, also deprived of a future, return as ghosts to express their regret for abandoning their mother without a word and to strip civilization’s end

discussion of Dimitriadis’ *I die as a country* in relation to Cavafy’s poem and to the concept of the barbarian, see Tornariti 2018, 173–80.

10 See Winkler’s Introduction in vol. I of the present study, p. 21, 33, 37–38.

11 For an exploration of the way barbarism can function as a force that unsettles and subverts the discourse of civilization, see Boletsi 2013.

and their own death of any meaning: “[...] τώρα τέλειωσαν όλα / κι εμείς δεν έχουμε τίποτε άλλο να σάς πούμε” (“[...] now everything has ended / and we have nothing else to tell you”) (2013, 102).