



# Viewing Ancient Greek Tragedies in Light of Transformative Pollution: *Antigone, Oedipus Tyrannus, Hippolytus*

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the Ancient Greek social structure practices, tracing the historical, social, and mythical traces of the idea of pollution, and explains how these ideas and practices took place in the three fifth century BC Athenian tragedies *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and *Hippolytus*. The pollution motifs in the tragedies of three different periods by two different authors show differences in principle in the context of the transformativeness of pollution. While the Ancient Greek concept of pollution was also deconstructed in light of these differences, the definitions of pollution by Mary Douglas, René Girard, Robert Parker, and Andrej and Ivana Petrovic were read comparatively. To clarify the position of the concept in tragedies, the concepts of ritual pollution and social pollution are also disclosed. In conclusion of the study, it is suggested that the transformativeness of the concept of pollution in tragedies also can be a revolutionary movement.

**Keywords:** Ancient Greek tragedy, transformative revolutionary pollution, *miasma*, Mary Douglas, René Girard.



## Introduction

The historical and mythical trace of the idea of pollution in ancient Greek texts can be traced back to Homer's *Iliad*. In the very initial lines of the *Iliad*, the poet writes about the unity of the war and the epidemic that destroyed the Achaeans.<sup>1</sup> The Greek equivalent of the word translated as an epidemic here is *loimós* (λοιμός<sup>2</sup>) which means a plague. In addition, *miasma* (μίασμα) is a concept that is frequently used by tragedy writers, which corresponds to epidemic disease and religious pollution at the same time. The suffix “*mia-*” at the beginning of the word comes from the verb “*miainō*” and this verb has the meaning of pollution and deterioration in the form of things. *Miasma*, on the other hand, usually denotes a dangerous situation, the pollution it creates violates the sacred space and communication with the sacred. The concept of *miasma* has been frequently used by the tragedian writers, but not in the texts of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, which also gives information about the stylistic position of the concept.<sup>3</sup> While *loimos* is in the field of pathology as a definition of disease, *miasma* not only points to physical contamination by air, but also to socio-metaphysical contamination epistemologically, and it also exists in the field of literature.

The plot of the tragedies *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* begins in a polluted geography. In both tragedies, regardless of the acts of the tragedy, the space of the play has already begun to be polluted. In the text of *Antigone*, fratricide took place, perhaps one of the most suitable actions for pollution (war) was more recently experienced, and the lifeless body of one of the people who died in the war was not buried due to the first decree of the new king. The lifeless body spreads odor to the city above the ground. A second polluting factor is *Antigone's* opposition to *polis*<sup>4</sup> laws as a transformative act.

In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *miasma* again collapsed in the city and again, one of the most obvious polluting acts, the act of killing, took place. Furthermore, this act of killing was carried out at a time not included in the plot of the tragedy, but years before the beginning of the plot, and this action is also both patricide and regicide. At the beginning of the tragedy, it is seen that the choir begins to search for the cause of the *miasma* that spread to the city. While one of the pollutants that do not have a place in the plot for the city is the regicide, the second pollutant

1 Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Fitzgerald, R. (New York: Anchor Press, 1974), 5-6.

2 Homer, “*Iliad*”, Perseus Digital Library, access 3 July 2022, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-grc1:1.33-1.67>

3 Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (New York: Oxford University, 1996), 13.

4 G.E.M. de Ste. Croix states that it is not possible to give a general definition of the *polis* that would apply to all aspects and to all periods. In light of that, the concept of *polis* will be discussed as “city-state” in this article. For more information: GEM de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquest* (New York: Cornell University Press: 1981), 9-19.

is the fact that this regicide was unknowingly carried out by the current tyrant<sup>5</sup> of the plot, and this tyrant himself is overconfident that he can save the city from the *miasma*.

In *Hippolytus*, unlike in the other two tragedies, pollution appears in the plot of the tragedy. While Hippolytus becomes a sacred and privileged servant to one goddess, he despises another goddess for this reason. In this tragedy, where the sacred is clearly stated as the impure, the transformative impure factor comes with Phaedra's suicide as an opposition that *dispossesses life itself*.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this article, the concept of pollution which cannot be separated from the sacristry and also includes the dilemma of outcaste and transformative has been opened, and the treatment of pollution as a mere exclusive practice has been criticized. All things considered, the tragedies of *Antigone* and *Hippolytus* have been analyzed due to their transformative potential which coincides with pollution intensively, and in the part of the tragedy of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the base point took place as the myth of *pharmakos*<sup>7</sup> as the exclusive potential.

## The Concept of Pollution in Ancient Greece

Ivana and Andrej Petrovic, in their study *Inner Purity and Pollution in Early Greek Religion* (2016) divide the concept of pollution into three as *physical pollution*, *minor metaphysical pollution*, and *major metaphysical pollution* and state that the concept of "*miasma*" is used for physical pollution and minor metaphysical pollution while the concept of "*agos*" is used for major metaphysical pollution. According to the definitions here, physical pollution is expressed by *miasma* and the conditions that cause such pollution are usually somatic; examples of these somatic situations are corporal waste, wounds, corpses, and sexual intercourse. Physical impurity is outside the ritual realm (profane) and is strictly contagious, and its contagiousness is strictly temporary. Its pollution is transmitted by contact, and its temporariness is provided by the physical or symbolic elimination of the polluting factors.

They defined minor metaphysical pollution as acts that constitute a *violation of official ritual boundaries*.<sup>8</sup> Minor metaphysical pollution is explained in the accompaniment of religious-sacred rituals and its contagiousness is not accurate. While explaining the fact that its contagiousness is not accurate, they propound the knowledge that in sacred rituals, the

5 Experiencing democracy, the people of Athens in the 5th century BC. read the tyrant as the personal dictatorship of someone who came to rule among the people and had a certain amount of capital or private property and status. For more information: Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, 278-282.

6 Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice* (Cornwall: Yale University Press, 2018), 9.

7 Scapegoat/*Pharmakos* rituals are the expulsion of a person from the community in the name of ensuring social purification. Terry Eagleton, on the other hand, characterizes *pharmakos* as an animal without distinguishing features and adds that killing it will reallocate hierarchy and order since it is the primary indicator of moral act and social disorder. Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, 54.

8 Ivana Petrovic and Andrej Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Early Greek Religion: Volume I: Early Greek Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30.

ritual place should be clean, but there is no definite cleaning rule for people themselves in the same rituals.

Major metaphysical pollution, which is the last of the pollution types classified by Ivana and Andrej Petrovic, is signified with the concept of “*agos*”, unlike the other two types of pollution they classified. *Agos* refers to the attention of the divine, which can be both positive and negative, but its most common usage is the weight of the divine burden placed on an individual as a result of a violation, that is “divine anger”. The perpetrator of a major violation becomes *enages* in the state of *agos*. When discussing the etymology of the concept of *enages*, Robert Parker juxtaposes it with the concept of “*hagnos*”<sup>9</sup> and describes *enages* as “subjection to a dangerous sanctification”.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, Ivana and Andrej Petrovic note that research into the contagiousness of subjection to such dangerous sanctification has been inconsistent. The common view is that the affected individual does not spread pollution to others or the environment, but the divine punishment that a person will receive due to this pollution scares society because of the idea that this punishment will also affect society.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the social class of the individual who is the direct perpetrator of this punishment is very important. As Ivana and Andrej Petrovic stated, while divine punishment takes its place indiscriminately in Ancient Greek literary descriptions, if the perpetrator of the punishment is a king, a military leader, *etc.*, the audience affected by that punishment expands. As Terry Eagleton points out in his book *Tragedy*, upper-class people splash more when they fall.<sup>12</sup>

The causes of major metaphysical pollution are explained as ritual or direct defiance of sacred laws and authorities, breaking sacred boundaries. In fact, in major metaphysical pollution, the sacred and the unsacred are considered together, and there is a violation of not only sacred laws, but also social norms. Major metaphysical pollution is not always contagious, but always causes widespread religious and social tension in society. According to the authors, the purification of the person and society from this pollution is only possible with divinity.<sup>13</sup>

The main difference between minor and major metaphysical pollution; a major violation, like a minor violation, is not just a ritual “mistake”, it is also an opposition to the ritual or the sacred. Ivana and Andrej Petrovic state that the most common type of *agos* is associated with breaking the oath and additionally state that:

“...an oath can be broken in any context, but the act is essentially a transgression against the ritual of oath-swearing. The failure to bury a corpse also provokes *agos*, because it represents the denial of a divinely sanctioned ritual.”<sup>14</sup>

9 Sacred, pure.

10 Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, 8-11.

11 Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Early Greek Religion*, 30-32.

12 Terry Eagleton, *Tragedy* (Cornwall: Yale University Press, 2020), 7.

13 Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Early Greek Religion*, 28-32.

14 *Ibid.*, 32.

Jean Pierre Vernant states that there is no form of pollution other than being (physically) unclean in Homer and that the stain that pollutes the body in the world of Homer, he wrote, makes people sad, and ugly, and touches their social and intellectual personality. Pollution prevents people from relating to the gods, subsequently, “before taking part in any religious ritual, a man must wash himself.”<sup>15</sup> While the word is used in this sense in Homer, the use of ritual, social and metaphysical pollution is more common in post-Homeric antiquity writers. The position of the concept of pollution used by the authors can easily be stated as death, murder, birth, incest, or consumption of some animals as food. While the cases where these actions cause social pollution in the texts are quite common, there are also cases where the same actions do not cause any pollution. For instance, it is known that the understanding of the punishment of homicide in Athenian democracy changed between the 7th and 4th centuries BC. As Ivana and Andrej Petrovic stated, the understanding that “every homicide may not be a polluting *miasma* for the whole community”, was gradually abandoned in the 7th century BC, and became visible in the 4th century BC. In that process, homicides were evaluated in line with the purpose of the act of killing and were divided into two as *intent* and *just*. While intentional or unjust killing caused pollution, unintentional or justified killing did not require a direct punishment procedure.<sup>16</sup>

Anthropologist Mary Douglas, on the other hand, states that two things lie in the basis of the thought about pollution in her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* which is “care for hygiene and respect for tradition”.<sup>17</sup> However, Douglas then straightly states that in a society where purification rituals are performed before entering the altar, we cannot easily distinguish between what is sacred and what is impure, and adds the following quote from Mircea Eliade:

“The ambivalence of the sacred is not only in the psychological order (in that it attracts or repels), but also in the order of values; the sacred is at once “sacred” and “defiled.”<sup>18</sup>

In the theory of pollution, the type of pollution is very important, in addition, the effect of this pollution will change according to the framework in which the type of pollution is located. Therefore, the definition of pollution is to change according to the action and the ritual effect it corresponds to and the social space it is in. What pollution means varies even among different *poleis*<sup>19</sup> in the same region and different *poleis* speaking the same language. For instance, in a *polis*, only the woman who gave birth is polluted for a certain period, while in another *polis*,

15 Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 122.

16 Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Early Greek Religion*, 14.

17 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger, An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1984), 8.

18 *Ibid.*, 30.

19 *Poleis*: Plural of *polis*.

both the woman and those who help her during childbirth, those in the *oikos*<sup>20</sup>, and those who enter the *oikos* within three days after giving birth are also considered polluted. After the third day, the pollution is removed with the purification ritual. A similar practice is also found in funeral houses. People in the deceased person's *oikos* and those who subsequently entered the household are also considered "temporarily" contaminated. And if a murder takes place in public, the pollution may affect the entire *polis*, not just the deceased's *oikos*.<sup>21</sup>

Mary Douglas explains pollution as a violation of a border and a situation that poses a danger due to this violation, as well as she states that pollution also indicates the order. Douglas embodied order and pollution in dialectical integrity and states that there will be no pollution where there is no order. A polluting person is always wrong, *ze*<sup>22</sup> has crossed a border that should not be crossed, and this displacement may endanger someone else(s):

*"...all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spit, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat. The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins. There is no reason to assume any primacy for the individual's attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than for his cultural and social experience. This is the clue which explains the unevenness with which different aspects of the body are treated in the rituals of the world. In some, menstrual pollution is feared as a lethal danger; in others not at all."*<sup>23</sup>

While Douglas writes that pollution cannot be thought of independently without order, she also draws a contrast between pollution and order. According to this contradiction, pollution violates the order and poses a danger to the continuity of the order in its unviolated state. There is no denying the existence of the transformative potential of pollution here. So, if an order is mentioned, pollution also should be mentioned even if that order has not been violated yet because the order has the potential to be collapsed. On the other hand, in the relationship between pollution and sanctity, if sanctity is not equated with purity, the definition of pollution will become easier. Andreas Bendlin, in his article *Purity and Pollution*, gave a very simple explanation of this subject.

*"And contrary to what is usually claimed, the opposite of pollution is not purity: with regard to both purity and pollution, the opposite is normality."*<sup>24</sup>

20 *Oikos*: House, household, fields cultivated by the household.

21 Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, 35-40.

22 Unsexist pronoun used by Oxford University. "Oxford University students 'told to use gender neutral pronoun *ze*'", (Independent, 12.12.2016, Access 12.12.2016). <https://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/oxford-university-students-gender-neutral-pronouns-peter-tatchell-student-union-ze-xe-a7470196.html>

23 Douglas, *Purity and Danger, An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 122.

24 Andreas Bendlin, *Purity and Pollution*, in *A Companion to Greek Religion*, Ed. Daniel Ogden, (New Jersey: Blackwell, 2007), 178.

For the Greeks, the gods were sacred not because they were pure, but because they were powerful and immortal.<sup>25</sup> While sanctity is an absolute metaphysical concept, purity can also be met with concrete symbols. It is known that it would be much more appropriate for the Greeks to provide a purification ritual at the entrance to the sacred places. Robert Parker states that theaters, public buildings, agora, sacred places, and the city are purified before festivals. Parker says that purification purifies sacred places from the profane in this way, and according to Parker, this purification leads individuals to become a community provided that purification removes the dirt created in the past and prepares the space for the future.<sup>26</sup> If it is considered the violation of the state of *statis*<sup>27</sup> as pollution in this analysis by Parker, the removal of that pollution also creates a new *statis*. In the continuation, Parker refers to the polluted area as stained and signifies that a new beginning will come into play with the removal of the stain. In addition, if it is considered the *polis* as the “regulation of togetherness”, then the *polis* also contains the *dynamis*<sup>28</sup> of pollution. Therefore, the implementation of rituals and laws is essential for the maintenance of order. When it is stated that the concept of justice and the concept of *polis* are intertwined in ancient Greece, it can be put on solid ground that the people in the region also experience the impact of a homicide committed by a single person.

## Ritual Pollution

René Girard, in his study *Violence and the Sacred*, proceeds through the “cause” of pollution in his definition of ritual pollution by exemplification. According to Girard, the main factor that creates ritual pollution is violence, and this form of pollution is contagious. Approaching the people or situation that causes pollution carries the risk of contamination, and furthermore, it is necessary to get away from the situation/person causing pollution as much as possible in order not to get polluted because the contamination of violence/pollution is a terrible danger. Examples of other forms of contamination by Girard are:

*“when a man has hanged himself, his body becomes impure. So too does the rope from which he dangles, the tree to which the rope is attached, and the field where the tree stands. The taint of impurity diminishes, however, as one draws away from the body. It is as if the scene of a violent act, and the objects with which the violence has been committed, send out emanations that penetrate everything in the immediate area, growing gradually weaker through time and space.”*<sup>29</sup>

Girard analyzed the concept through sampling and explained what causes pollution, how pollution is transmitted, and how pollution is avoided. In another example, it proceeds through the carnage in a city;

25 Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, 20.

26 Ibid., 21-23.

27 The initial and the ending state of the plot.

28 Potential. The concept of being and not being equidistant. For more information: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer; Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Roazen, D. H. (Stanford: Meridian, 1998), 28-29.

29 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Gregory, P. (Baltimore&London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 1989.

*“A massacre takes place in a city. This city sends ambassadors to another city. The ambassadors are polluted; people avoid touching them, calling them, or even being in the same place as they can. When the ambassadors are gone, the purification rituals, the sprinkled waters, and the sacrifices are endless...”*<sup>30</sup>

René Girard’s definition of pollution gets a little blurry later in his work. Girard, who states that staying away, taking a distance from the place that creates pollution, is a solution for avoiding pollution, and then states that this may not be a solution either. Even the most perfect precautions can remain unresolved in the face of some forms of pollution. Some types of pollution can spread from even the smallest contact to the entire society. How to prevent pollution that has spread to the whole society? It is at this point that Girard opens the concepts of exile and sacrifice. According to Girard, blood, which is dirty by nature, becomes pure if it is shed in a sacrificial ritual. In this case, the blood of the victim is pure, and the solution proceeds as blood to blood.

The ritual sacrificial blood breaks the cycle of vengeance. If individual blood is shed instead of social and religious sacrifice, contamination continues, and the risk of revenge increases. The chain of murders (the cycle of revenge) jeopardizes the principle of “existing socially”.<sup>31</sup> Girard explains that the ritual function of the sacrifice is “*to cleanse violence, that is, to take its pressure by deceiving it, directing it towards sacrifices who are in no danger of being avenged*”.<sup>32</sup> Terry Eagleton, on the other hand, describes the concept of sacrifice as a *polythetic*<sup>33</sup> concept in his book *Radical Sacrifice* and states that the concept encompasses a series of activities that are unrelated to each other.<sup>34</sup> Examples of the various sacrificial activities described by Eagleton include being exiled as a scapegoat or being declared a martyr.

### Social Pollution

Mary Douglas divides the concept of social pollution into four.

- a. The danger pressing on external boundaries,*
- b. The danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system,*
- c. The danger in the margins of the lines,*
- d. The danger from internal contradiction, when some of the basic postulates are denied by other basic postulates so that at certain points the system seems to be at war with itself.”*<sup>35</sup>

To explain the danger that presses on the external borders, Douglas primarily describes the Syrians’ high fear of dirt. Syrians keep the entrances and exits of their systems and bodies

30 Ibid., 45-46.

31 Ibid., 23-30.

32 Ibid., 56.

33 Very diverse.

34 Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, 4.

35 Douglas, *Purity and Danger, An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 123-124.



under high control. According to them, nothing that comes out of their bodies/systems can return, if it returns, it pollutes. The most dangerous pollution is the pollution caused by the re-entry of something that comes out of the body. Based on this, actions aimed at exiting the system by putting pressure on the system itself are polluting, these actions should be reduced or, more appropriately, cleaned so that the system does not experience collapse with the danger of pressure subsequently that the *status quo* does not face what is different from itself. Thus, while Syrians' fear of high dirt may to some extent correspond to the social, on the other hand, it does not fully correspond to the social life of the Athenians. Because comparing feces with a social objection will lead to ambiguous results. Using the concept of "*isegoria*"<sup>36</sup> as one of the basic principles of democracy, it seems unlikely that the Athenians –even if it is a *democracy based on the exploitation of slave labour*<sup>37</sup>- would accuse someone who uses the right of expression of pollution. What's more, if the example of the Syrians is used for every situation, every revolt will be read as a danger that must be quelled and averted.

Douglas established the "danger arising from the internal lines" through the juxtaposition of the concepts of morality and pollution. Behaviors that are not in conformity with the code of ethics may not contain any inappropriateness under the law of pollution. On the other hand, other behaviors that are not punishable by moral codes may be considered polluting by pollution laws. Douglas states that a moral code is "general" in nature, and therefore how to apply this moral law varies. A person may follow the rules of pollution while performing the morally required behavior. Contrary to what Douglas said, pollution rules are also general and therefore variable, since the reverse is also possible. Douglas explains this situation with an example from the social life of the Nuer society.

*"The integrity of the social structure is very much at issue when breaches of the adultery and incest rules are made, for the local structure consists entirely of categories of persons defined by incest regulations, marriage payments and marital status."*<sup>38</sup>

Robert Parker, in his book *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, states that Mary Douglas describes pollution as "betwixt" and "between". According to her, pollution categorizes and violates the reality of a particular society, and this situation is considered impure by society.

36 The Athenian political order, as defined by Cleistenes, was *isonomia*, that is, equality before the law. *Isegoria*, on the other hand, corresponds to the right to equal expression before the law. For more information: Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages* (London: Verso, 2008), 36.

37 "We must never forget, of course, that Greek democracy must always have depended to a considerable extent on the exploitation of slave labour, which, in the conditions obtaining in the ancient world, was if anything even more essential for the maintenance of a democracy than of any more restricted form of constitution." Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, 284.

38 Douglas, *Purity and Danger, An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 132.

*“The pig is, therefore, an abomination, because ‘though he divides the hoof, yet he cheweth not to cud.’”<sup>39</sup>*

They are between categories, in this sense, they cannot be subject to a certain classification. However, as Parker stated, it is not yet a matter of consensus whether all pollutions are category violation in pollution theory.

Douglas did not separately address *“the danger in the margins of the lines”*, which is the third of the social pollution categories. This item is perhaps the most convincing article of her categorization. Directly, the relationship of the Ancient Athenian society with the concept of *“sôphrosynê”* can also be read from the presence of pollution at the ends/extremes. Oğuz Arıcı states in his work *“Antik Yunan Tragedyasında Ölçülülük (Sôphrosûnê) ve Uyum (Harmonia)”* (The Idea of Temperance (*Sôphrosûnê*) and Harmony (*Harmonia*) in Ancient Greek Tragedy) that the word does not have a single equivalent in most languages. Although *sôphrosynê* also corresponds to meanings and situations such as “common sense”, and “moderate”, the closest equivalent of the concept in today’s world seems to be temperance.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, the state of being socially and ritually intemperance also refers to the state of being polluted.

The last item of Douglas’ categorization, the *“system at war itself”*, is quite interesting and includes other categories as well. If an external danger comes to the system, this may cause a solidarity network inside, and if there is danger inside, measures can be taken to eliminate this danger. But not only internally or externally, but the system can also bring itself into crisis. The system, which contradicts itself due to its ontology, is also doomed to create a crisis. The fact that the system, which contradicts itself due to its existence, generates a crisis is also included in its ontology. An example of this would be the collapse of Athenian democracy. Croix described three important aspects of that process as follows:

*“...the growth of royal, magisterial, conciliar or other control over the citizen assemblies; the attachment to magistracies of liturgies (the performance of expensive civic duties): and the gradual destruction of those popular law courts, consisting of panels of dicasts (dikasteria, in which the dicasts were both judges and jury), which had been such an essential feature of Greek democracy, especially in Classical Athens.”<sup>41</sup>*

Just as Athenian democracy has been destroyed by its elements, the social structure has the potential for pollution precisely because of its sociability. However, the potential of this pollution varies according to how the pollution is exposed. Although Mary Douglas specifically analyzed the Syrians in revealing the link between social behavior and pollution, this conceptualization also finds its counterpart in Ancient Greek social structure. Especially

39 Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, 61-62.

40 Oğuz Arıcı, *“Antik Yunan Tragedyasında Ölçülülük (Sôphrosûnê) ve Uyum (Harmonia)”*, (Master’s Thesis, İstanbul University, 2005), 16-17. All translations to English are mine unless stated otherwise.

41 Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, 300-3001.

in the 5th century BC Athenian tragedies, extensive research can also be conducted on social pollution.

## Construction of Pollution in Tragedies' Language

In addition to social, political, and religious rituals, pollution in tragedies enters the field of literature with its construction in language. The absence of the word *miasma* in political and medical writings, but in tragedies is important in this sense in terms of the stylization of the concept and its relation with literature. According to Giorgio Agamben's definition of the structure of language in the work of "*Remnants of Auschwitz, the Witness and the Archive*", the first movement in the language corresponds to the concept of anomie, while the second movement corresponds to the grammatical rule.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, if the language of tragedy is considered a fictional/poetic language with the result of its form, this language structure also carries its literary objective obligations. As a literary form, tragedies are written in motion, and this motion has a different quality from non-literary genres. For instance, according to Terry Eagleton in his book *How To Read A Poem?*, non-literary language aims to construct meaning, whereas literary language aims to reproduce meaning.<sup>43</sup> Considering that there is a reproduction of meanings constructed with language in the tragedy, it can be said that the concept of pollution is also reproduced. Likewise, according to Eagleton, "meaning" is not a randomly decided construct, but a social practice with rules.<sup>44</sup> In the same work, Eagleton likens poetry to the constant violation of one system by another. Accordingly, while one of the systems presents the norm, the other presents the transgression of the norm.<sup>45</sup> In this case, a connection can be established between the dialectical relationship that the concept of pollution contains and the literary language. The literary text reproduces the meaning of pollution with its own dialectic, as a structure that is built as a result of constant conflict and reproduces meanings. As a result, the idea of pollution, which is reconstructed in the language structure of the tragedy, can also create a premonition about the transformative power of the concept.

## Pollution in Tragedies: *Antigone*

The opposition of *polis* and *oikos* can be read in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*. While Creon is the representative of the law of the *polis*; Antigone maintains the law of the *oikos*. Creon's law is the law of the citizens, enforced by the citizens, its primary interlocutor is the citizen and the law of the *nomos*<sup>46</sup>; Antigone's law is the law of *physis*, that is, nature.

42 Giorgio Agamben, "*Remnants of Auschwitz, the Witness and the Archive*", trans. Roazen, D. H. (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 159.

43 Terry Eagleton, *How to Read A Poem?* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 110.

44 *Ibid.*, 163.

45 *Ibid.*, 91.

46 One of the changes made in the language of state law with Cleistenes was the use of *nomos* instead of the more traditional *thesmos*. *Thesmos* refers to the much more religious traditional law, while *nomos* refers to a common agreement. For more information: Wood, *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages*, 36.

Although the *polis-oikos* contradiction of the antagonists is concrete, Antigone's will is cloudy. Antigone wants to bury the body of one of her brothers Polyneikes, but according to the laws of the gods, the burial process requires ritual and communion. As a result, Antigone, on the one hand, defies the laws of the gods by trying to bury Polyneikes' lifeless body alone, on the other hand, she tries to continue the tradition since the standing of the lifeless body on the earth is not in accordance with ritual and social laws.<sup>47</sup>

Fabian Meinel, in his work *Pollution and Crisis in Early Greek Tragedy*, states that the main pollution in the tragedy takes place due to fratricide. However, beyond that, Creon has a very persistent desire for "order" and "stability". Decategorization violation is not acceptable for Creon. In addition, according to him, everyone should know their position and act according to it. In the first epeisodion, the sentry asks, "Is your heart or your ears in trouble?" and the response he receives from Creon is as follows: "Is it up to you to put my troubles in order?"<sup>48</sup>. In the following lines of the play, he makes assignments about "being a woman" and "being a man" and clearly states that these two categories should not be intertwined. Meinel states that Creon, who was a tyrant at the beginning of the tragedy, later turned into a tragic character because Creon crossed those boundaries, which were very important to him, and the tragedy of Antigone became the tragedy of Creon.<sup>49</sup> Having said that, as Serdar Tekin examines in his work titled "Adalet, Pratik Akıl, Eylem: Antigone" (*Justice, Practical Reason, Action: Antigone*), Antigone and Creon know their wills quite clearly in the first chains of the plot of the tragedy. On the other hand, the sentry does not know what he wants to do or his will and tries to think and decide. Subsequently, the sentry is a dramatic character, he negotiates. Antigone is a tragic character; she does not hesitate in what she knows is right. Creon, on the other hand, transforms from a tragic character to a dramatic character, because he is quite confident at first, and then negotiates towards the end of the plot.<sup>50</sup>

What pollutes the city, in a way, are the boundaries that Creon wants to keep tight in the city. As classified by Mary Douglas, the effect that leads to social pollution in the Tragedy of *Antigone* can be read as the contradiction of the internal parallels of the system, the danger at the extremes, and the contradiction of the rules of the system with other rules. Creon's first decree as king was that the body of the enemy should not be buried. But in parallel, this contradicts the laws of the *oikos* because although the lifeless body of a person may not be buried in hostile territory, it must necessarily be buried somewhere else outside the border of that region, and this burial process must be accompanied by the appropriate funeral ritual according to the laws of the *oikos*.

47 For more information: Serdar Tekin, *Adalet, Pratik Akıl, Eylem: Antigone*, in *Siyasalın Peşinde Dünyaya Tragedyalarla Bakmak*, Ed. Devrim Sezer, Nazile Kalaycı (İstanbul: Metis, 2017), 79-118.

48 Sophokles, *Antigone*, trans. Çokona, A. (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları), 13.

49 Fabian Meinel, *Pollution and Crisis in Early Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 86.

50 Tekin, *Adalet, Pratik Akıl, Eylem: Antigone*, 79-118.

What Creon has done is usurp Polynikes' body, not allowing him to be buried in any way or anywhere, and this is his *hamartia*<sup>51</sup>. He never doubted the propriety of the decision he had made. The most obvious of the factors provoking the major metaphysical pollution and *agos* is Creon's opposition to the burial ritual.

On the other hand, the Labdakos family has a transmitted curse. Oedipus, Antigone's father and also her brother, killed her biological father and married the person who was her biological mother, had an incestuous union with that person, and had children. Antigone was born as a result of such a union, and therefore she already seems polluted in that way. Although he buries Polyneikes, Polyneikes comes back to earth as if the gods were somehow displeased because of the burial process held by Antigone. However, in this regard, Meinel states that Antigone was right for the people, as mentioned several times in the play. The deceased relative must be buried. Moreover, Polyneikes is a relative not only of Antigone, but also of Creon. Tekin, on the other hand, states that Creon's sanction is not a very unfamiliar sanction for the public view. The part that seems unfamiliar to the public is not that Polyneikes were not buried in Thebai land, but that Polyneikes could not be buried at all. Because the lifeless body decays, smells secrete secretions, and leaves feces; it calls carrion-eating animals to its side. It jeopardizes the purity of the *polis*. As stated in the first chapter, when the king who is responsible for the city becomes the reason for the dead body becoming a polluted element, the area of influence of the situation expands. The smell spreads from the lifeless body to the whole city; it does not rain, and crops do not grow.

The reason why Creon did not allow Polyneikes to be buried under any circumstances can be found in how the ancient Greeks evaluated the burial ritual. Giorgio Agamben attributes the respect shown to the deceased and the desire for one's body to be buried because the inhabitants of the city do not want the soul leaving the body to remain in the living world. Thanks to the funeral ritual, this uncanny creature, the soul, is symbolically transformed into a mighty ancestor.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Creon also does not want Polyneikes to turn into a mighty ancestor.

In addition to his great desire for boundaries, Creon violates another boundary. While not allowing a lifeless body to be buried, he buries a living being alive and locks Antigone in a dark cave. Antigone forcibly entered the cave, which she described as a tomb, alive, and even the gods do not have such authority. Creon transgresses the boundaries that even the gods do not have authority over, he behaves intemperate. According to Mary Douglas's classification, this intemperance leads the *polis* to social pollution. In Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, the social pollution that plunges the city into chaos is Creon's intemperate desire for purity and order. On the other hand, the revolutionary pollution is Antigone's opposition to the law as a woman.

51 "Most commonly used, it means "fault, lack" (especially lack of virtue)." Arıcı, "Antik Yunan Tragedyasında Ölçülülük (*Sôphrosünê*) ve Uyum (*Harmonía*)", 28.

52 Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz, the Witness and the Archive*, 79.

## Pollution in Tragedies: *Oedipus Tyrannus*

*Oedipus Tyrannus* is one of Sophocles' tragedies in which he contrasts the laws of the *oikos* and the *polis*, although not as obvious as in *Antigone*, and has a direct place in pollution theory. However, contrary to the general belief in these studies, Oedipus is not the only cause of the disease spreading to the city. *Oedipus Tyrannus* "... in a sense, the discovery of the cause of the epidemic disease and based on the causal relationship found, tells the ruler to undertake a political solution, not a medical one."<sup>53</sup>

The urbanites of Thebes know that their previous king, Laios, was killed, and it must be predicted that this murder would lead the city to disease. There are forms of death in the ancient Greek social and political structure that can be considered completely pure, but the murder of the old king Laios is not one of the "pure", "justified" or "unintentional" acts of killing since it still spreads pollution to the city. Notwithstanding, the choir -as a representative of the people- say that they do not know the reason for the *miasma* that ravaged the city, and instead of revolting, they asked for help from Oedipus, who had saved the people and the city from the Sphinx before, who assumed the power of their city as a tyrant because of this salvation. Besides, the reason why Oedipus initially sought the remedy in Apollo was that Apollo was also the god of plague, that is, Apollo was responsible for the situation the city fell into.<sup>54</sup>

The tragedy begins by explaining the disaster into which the city fell from the first chains of the plot. The priest of Zeus states that disease is rampant everywhere, crops are not growing, children are stillborn, and the plague is spreading everywhere, and asks Oedipus for help.<sup>55</sup> The person who the people (the chorus) asked for help is a tyrant who saved them from a monster and seized the power of the city not because of his paternal lineage, but because of his help to the city. But even from this point on, the decategorization manifests itself, because, as everyone will find out at the end of the tragedy, Oedipus is also the king<sup>56</sup> because of his paternal lineage.

Firstly, Oedipus states that he sent Iocaste's brother, Creon, to the Temple of Delphi so that he could diagnose this disaster that had befallen the city as if to satisfy those who came to him asking for help. Oedipus, almost as Hippocrates used in his *Epidemic*, mentions "diagnosing the disease" and finding a remedy to save the city. Later, it is learned that the *katharmos*<sup>57</sup> of this *miasma* is the sending exile or execution of the murderer of the previous king Laios. The reason for the *miasma* is that the murderer of Laios is still in the city.

53 Ferda Keskin, "Salgın Hastalık ve İktidar", *Covid-19 Pandemisi Altıncı Ay Değerlendirme Raporu* (Türk Tabipleri Birliği, 2020), 655-661.

54 René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Freccero, Y. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 46.

55 Sophocles, *Kral Oidipus*, trans. Tuncel, B. (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2021), 2.

56 The difference between a king and a tyrant is very important. A person's ability to become a king is due to his paternal lineage, while his ability to become a tyrant is usually due to his capital. Oedipus, on the other hand, learns that he is actually a king in the city where he rules as a tyrant.

57 Cleaning, purification. *Katharos*: Clean, pure. It is the word origin of *catharsis*.

The conversation in which the tragic fault (*hamartia*) of the play is committed takes place among Oedipus, Creon, and Teiresias, as René Girard states in the “Oedipus and Substitution” chapter of his work *Violence and the Sacred*, all three characters of tragedy act without temperance and overflow themselves. Oedipus is not Theban, but claims to be, Creon is not a king, but speaks as a king, and Teiresias ignores the class distinction.<sup>58</sup> The internal lines of the system have been crossed. The proposition “*Gnothi Seauton*” (Know Yourself) engraved on the Temple of Apollo in Delphi has been violated. On the other hand, for Oedipus, the “self” is a problem in itself. Oedipus, who was looking for the murderer of Laios, stated that when he found the murderer, he would judge this murderer as if the perpetrator of the murder was his father.<sup>59</sup> According to the classification of Andrej and Ivana Petrovic, major metaphysical pollution has been held. The people of Thebes did not sanction the murderer of their king. Oedipus cannot escape his fate, and the patricide and regicide take place at the same time. He marries his mother, making intemperate promises that he will save the city, and pollution had spread far, fast and wide.

### **Pollution in Tragedies: *Hippolytus***

Euripides’ tragedy *Hippolytus*, which he wrote for the second time and staged for the first time in 428 BC, was written as if it expressed the state of divine agency. It is not very concrete who is responsible for the actions in the tragedy. According to Aphrodite’s *soliloquy*<sup>60</sup> at the beginning of the tragedy, the Goddess of Love Aphrodite punished Hippolytus for Hippolytus’ intemperate behavior by making his stepmother Phaedra fall in love with him. In the first version of the tragedy, Phaedra declares her love to Hippolytus, but in the second version, where the tragedy receives a reward, Phaedra considers declaring her love as an act without virtue.<sup>61</sup> Phaedra’s old nanny reveals her secrets to Hippolytus, Phaedra writes a letter and commits suicide to save her life and the future of her children. The reader does not know what is written in the letter, but begins to learn from the mouth of Hippolytus’ father, King Theseus, Phaedra accused Hippolytus of raping her.

Theseus calls Phaedra the goddess of his palace and says that Hippolytus defiled his bed. Then, he uses one of his three wishes from Poseidon to destroy his son, as he does not trust God so much that he assures himself if this wish does not come true and exiles Hippolytus. During this exile, the god Poseidon created waves that would seriously injure Hippolytus and later cause his death. When Hippolytus is brought to his father injured, Artemis, the Goddess of Hunt, comes to them and tells Theseus the truth, but it is too late for everything. The act that brings everything to its full reality has come to light as a result of divine intervention.<sup>62</sup>

58 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 68-88.

59 Sophokles, *Kral Oidipus*, 10.

60 The situation in which a character talks with themselves alone on stage in dramatic texts. For more information: Oğuz Arıcı, *Kurmacanın İnşası: Oyun Yazarlığına Giriş* (İstanbul: Habitus Kitap, 2020), 211-213.

61 Joachim Latacz, *Antik Yunan Tragedyaları*, trans. Onay, Y. (İstanbul: Mitos-Boyut Tiyatro Yayınları, 2006), 286-290.

62 Euripides, *Hippolytos*, trans. Onay, Y. (İstanbul: Mitos-Boyut Tiyatro Yayınları, 2015).

What leads Hippolytus to disaster is that, like Creon's excessive passion for order and stability in *Antigone*, Hippolytus clings to *hagnos* intemperately, physically, and morally. However, the approach of his definition of purity to the culture, linguistics, and behavior is also not concrete. Hippolytus, who thinks of sexual union as a polluting act, can talk intemperately about another goddess while refusing sexual union for one goddess. Talking intemperately about a goddess is not a polluting factor for him, while choosing eternal virginity for another goddess is a pure stance. This situation is not a situation that the people of Ancient Greece will not be familiar with to a certain point. For the Athenian peoples of the fourth and fifth centuries, *aphrodisia*<sup>63</sup>, although not very polluting, is certainly seen as a polluting act. To enter a sacred area after sexual intercourse, partners must have washed. Sexual intercourse and the act of killing were also strictly forbidden to take place in the sanctuary. This prohibition is also directly committed in one of Euripides' tragedies, *Andromache*.<sup>64</sup> *Hippolytus*, on the other hand, identifies the main antagonist of the desire for absolute purity as the polluting Aphrodite. Despite this, the refusal of sexual union for absolute purity is not a socially widespread situation. Therefore, Hippolytus' relationship with Artemis is much deeper than the other people who serve Artemis. Because every citizen who donates a sacrifice to Artemis does not get that close to Artemis by choosing eternal virginity.<sup>65</sup>

The act of "thinking" has a wide place in *Hippolytus*. The concept of *phronein*<sup>66</sup> provides information on why Aphrodite punished Hippolytus in the soliloquy of the goddess. Aphrodite states that she will destroy those who oppose her by establishing the *mega phronein*<sup>67</sup> structure. "I bring down all those who have haughty thoughts towards me..."<sup>68</sup>

Throughout the play, the act of "thinking" is of great importance in terms of being temperate or not towards the gods. Additionally, Phaedra states that her thoughts are under the influence of *miasma*.<sup>69</sup>

Euripides, as in numerous of his tragedies, put the concept of temperance in the center of *Hippolytus*. In particular, the concept of *sôphrosunê* helps to read the *hybris*<sup>70</sup> of Hippolytus. Hippolytus maintains a *modus vivendi* (lifestyle) aiming to be absolute pureness in mind and body. He almost thinks that no one knows better than him how to worship goddesses and gods. He claims that there is no one more temperate than him. But when he claims these things, he insults another goddess while he thinks that he is temperate toward one goddess.

63 "The acts of Aphrodite, namely sex". Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Early Greek Religion: Volume I: Early Greek Religion*, 188.

64 In the tragedy, Andromache took refuge in the Altar of the Goddess Thetis to avoid being killed.

65 Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Early Greek Religion*, 187-190.

66 Thinking.

67 Thinking big.

68 Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Early Greek Religion*, 186.

69 *Ibid.*, 187.

70 The opposite of *sôphrosunê*, excess, incompleteness, insolence, *violating the limit*, arrogance. For more information: Arıcı, "Antik Yunan Tragedyasında Ölçülülük (*Sôphrosunê*) ve Uyum (*Harmonia*)", 26-36.



*“In the course of the play, Phaedra’s miasma of the mind is transformed into agos, a curse that Theseus inflicts on his son. The miasma started as Aphrodite’s intervention, and its final realization will be an intervention of another god, Poseidon; however, it is the human manipulation of rituals that facilitates the transformation of Phaedra’s erotic miasma into Theseus’ curse-driven agos. Two ritual agents, the Nurse, and Theseus, who are both represented as reckless abusers of rituals, contribute to the execution of Aphrodite’s plan.”<sup>71</sup>*

One of the characters in the tragedy that is certainly stated to carry a *miasma* is Phaedra, and the other is Theseus. Theseus killed his cousins who disputed his right to the throne, and for this reason, he and Phaedra came to the place where the tragedy took place, Troizen, as exiles to purification for a year. As a result, it is not only Aphrodite who poses a threat to Hippolytus’ purity; it is her stepmother Phaedra, her father Theseus, and also his own arrogance. Andrej and Ivana Petrovic, in particular, elucidate the source of the *divine agos* that happened to Hippolytus as his father Theseus, who cursed him. The reception of the source of the *divine agos* as just Theseus appears as a result of reading pollution as a stain. Conversely, even if it will be like this, then the fact that Hippolytus is making fun of someone in public who told him to be restrained at the beginning of the tragedy also carries the risk of pollution for social life. In addition, if it is considered pollution as a rebellion, the factor that makes Phaedra polluted is not that she fell in love with Hippolytus, but that she committed suicide as a rebellion against the impossibility of unrequited and incestuous love.

The juxtaposed positions of Oedipus and Hippolytus in the myth of pollution are their relationships with women who are forbidden to them. Oedipus unknowingly had sexual relations with his mother Iokaste, while Hippolytus learned and rejected the emotional and sexual desires of his stepmother. Also, the fact that Creon was also juxtaposed with them in this network of pollution is that he was the perpetrator of the path to Eurydike’s death.

## **Transformative Pollution and Its Position in Tragedies**

The Greek word for transformation is “*metamorphosis*”, and the prefix “*meta*” means “change” and “*morphe*” means “form”. The concept, which refers to the change in the form of things, has a very wide area of use, however, it usually finds its counterpart in the field of literature in Ovid’s work titled *Metamorphosis*. Ovid wrote otherwise of already existing and known myths, in a way, he emphasized the importance of how myths are told rather than what they are. The concepts of *miasma* and transformation also seem to be consistent in terms of unity here. The formality of the concept of transformation can be physical and external changes, as well as internal, psychological, and social changes or transfers.<sup>72</sup> Pollution also refers to a stain or change in the form of things, which also coincides with the concept of transformation.

71 Ibid., 202.

72 For more information: Richard Buxton, *Forms of Astonishments, Greek Myths of Metamorphosis*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

In this sense, it is obvious that pollution contains a transforming structure. Eagleton also stated that tragic art signifies a transformation from pagan rituals to the political, from myths to truth, from destiny to freedom, from nature to history, and to peoples freed from tyranny.<sup>73</sup>

It was mentioned above that liquid essences from the body are pollutants. Based on this, when the blood is also taken as a liquid essence flowing from the body, the blood is polluting as well, and the rituals of animal or human sacrifice cannot be deciphered by ignoring this pollution. This blood shed for the divine and social is a transition and contains a transformative potential in itself. In the act of sacrifice, as Eagleton pointed out, energy is released, and this energy indicates a transition. When considered as a political and social action of sacrificing and with it the act of pollution in sacrificing, this act contains a movement about power. It is necessary to be strong and confident in the sacrifice, or this ritual is attended to have a certain power. But the connection of these acts with the power is permanent.<sup>74</sup>

Today, this ritual, which can also correspond to a massacre, has taken on a moral, religious ritual aspect as a result of its own evolutionary process. In addition, it is also known that Empedocles, Theophrastus, and Pythagoras were absolutely against the sacrificial ritual.<sup>75</sup>

When the concept of sacrifice is handled insightfully with the concepts of sanctity and pollution, the forms of behavior that cause social and symbolic pollution become a quest for justice with their opposition to the *status quo* and suggest a new order description, although not directly. The questions Antigone asks while defying the *polis* laws will later become ambiguous questions for Creon. As such, Antigone's opposition to authority has become destructive, and this destructiveness dialectically has the potential for a new creation. Therefore, when it is mentioned that the destruction of the hero or the order, actually it also surfaces that the new creation created by this destruction. Nevertheless, the character's destruction refers to the ideas of "being" and "becoming". Herein lies the transformative potential that is also manifested in Antigone's attempt to protect the laws of the gods against the laws of the *polis*, and especially the rules of Creon. Antigone, "out of her mind" according to Ismene and many others, acted inconsiderately, prudently, and intemperately according to social laws. Those excesses, which were outside the social laws, were not enough to dissuade Antigone from her case. Likewise, Antigone herself describes her act as "*madness*"<sup>76</sup>. She chose not to give in to the inconsistencies in the established and functioning order and even invited her sister to her resistance. This rebellion, which can be considered pollution according to *polis* laws, transforms both the people of Thebes and Creon into questioning the social structure they live in. Thereby, it can be an accurate instance of transformative pollution.

73 Eagleton, *Tragedy*, 85.

74 Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, 7.

75 *Ibid.*, 41.

76 Sophokles, *Antigone*, 5.

Throughout the play of *Antigone*, when Sophocles' constant use of the concepts of thoughtlessness, prudence, and intemperance in the use of language by the characters is evaluated in the context of transformative pollution, the line of action in the play becomes more evident in the context of pollution theory. First, Antigone is considered as an intemperate rebellious, then the intemperance finds itself in the character of Creon. At the beginning of the tragedy, Antigone states that those who oppose Creon's law will be stoned in the agora by the people of Thebes.<sup>77</sup> However, in the *stichomythia*<sup>78</sup> part of Haimon and Creon, Haimon conveys to Creon that the same people said unanimously that Antigone had no fault. Public opinion was transformed by Antigone's "polluted" act.

According to Walter Benjamin, the tragedy itself corresponds to a sacrificial ritual.<sup>79</sup> While tragedies are made to communicate with the gods and greet the existence of the gods, on the other hand, they are structures that aim to destroy the order of the gods themselves, or at least question the order and take action to destroy it, with the imagination of a new revolutionary order. According to Benjamin, precisely because of these structures, tragedies contain the practices of the sacrificial ritual. When the structures of these practices are dismantled, pollution, which is one of the building blocks of the sacrifice, is the catalyst for revolutionary action. Dionysus himself, the god of tragedy, "*signifies pure joissance, the unclean delights of the death drive, the bliss born of ecstatic, primordial pain.*"<sup>80</sup> In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, when Oedipus is considered as the sacrifice of fate, the sacrifice state becomes the result of a transformation, while it is the cause of another situation. However, as the pollution in Oedipus's own actions can be sought in his actions and his words, Oedipus's "stubbornness" in the sense of transformative pollution comes to the fore. While making decisions and putting them into practice imprudently, he also does not believe what Teiresias says and blames others for. He first turns his accusations, which seem to be his final decisions, to Teiresias and then to Creon. These decisions taken without measure can lead society to the *agos* according to political, social, and sacred laws. Because the polluting factor was carried out by a tyrant, in this case, it would not only be physical pollution, but also an action that would turn into a rebellion against destiny. In this case, the disease that ravages the city transitions from *miasma* to the *agos*.

Another key thing to remember, Oedipus' use of language indicates another transformation. The language used by Oedipus is very confident language. With his self-confidence, Oedipus' eyes were blind and his ears were deaf. He cannot recognize himself. In his conversation with Teiresias in the tragedy, he suddenly becomes quite sure that Teiresias is the culprit, and after a

77 Ibid., 2.

78 *Stichomythia* is a technique that raises the tempo in dialogue. Each figure in the dialogue makes an equal move with each move, and a transformation takes place from the beginning to the end of the episode. For more information: Oğuz Arıcı, *Kurmacanın İnşası: Oyun Yazarlığına Giriş*, 215 – 218.

79 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. Osborne, J. (London: Verso Press, 1998).

80 Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, 36.

very short conversation, he is sure that the culprit is Creon. Knowing that when he accepts the truth of Teiresias's prophecy, he will be the one who will be exiled from the city as a *pharmakos* and heal the city, Oedipus asks the Head of Choir: "Do you know what you want from me by saying that?"<sup>81</sup> As a response to the self-confidence in language, the *agos* state transformed Oedipus both physically and metaphysically at the end of the tragedy.

When looking at *Hippolytus*, the suicide of Phaedra, a character who expresses that her "mind is polluted" in tragedy and "rebels" against the imperatives of the family structure, can be read as a classic female character ending since the appropriate form of death for women characters in Ancient Greek tragedies is usually suicide in the boundaries of *oikos*.<sup>82</sup> However, as in one of Eagleton's descriptions of the theory of tragedy, the fact that the characters humiliate themselves in tragedies and do this by suicide also corresponds to transcending themselves by showing the will to liquidate themselves.<sup>83</sup> In addition, in the discourses of the choir and especially the nurse in tragedy, it is understood that Phaedra was someone who behaved differently until three days ago. Three days ago, Phaedra had emotion and fell in love. This aphrodisiac effect is strong enough to make Phaedra sick, and Phaedra is quite helpless against this aphrodisiac effect. Apart from the fact that the person to whom this love is directed is her stepson, Phaedra's love is also quite intemperate. Her feelings do not fit his body, they harm her body, and prevent her from walking. In a way, it is seen in Phaedra the pathological condition that Jung calls *diminution of personality*.<sup>84</sup> With this love, Phaedra loses the features of her old character with a painful disease process and reaches brand new wishes. Phaedra initially transforms herself because of her incestuous and therefore polluted love. Euripides' construction of this transformation in the language is in Phaedra's words directed towards the person she fell in love with. While the first sentences of Phaedra in the tragedy give information about her illness, she immediately establishes the following rhymes directed to Artemis, the Goddess of the Hunt, and therefore to Hippolytus:

*"Aah! I am longing to draw from the clear streams  
of dew a pure drink of water,  
and lay myself down in the meadow's deep tresses,  
beneath the green poplar-"*<sup>85</sup>

With these words of Phaedra and the underlined concept of "madness" in the reaction of her nurse, who can be counted as her *shadow*,<sup>86</sup> it is realized that Phaedra said things she had

81 Sophokles, *Kral Oidipus*, 25.

82 Banu Kılan Paksoy, *Tragedya ve Siyaset: Eski Yunan'da Tragedyanın Siyasal Rolü*, (İstanbul: Mitos-Boyut Tiyatro Yayınları, 2011), 158-162.

83 Ibid., 52-53.

84 The situation, which Jung described as a *diminution of personality*, manifests itself as malaise, melancholy, and the person has no mood to start the day. It can also be considered as a *diminution of character* here. Carl Gustav Jung, *Four Archetypes*, trans. Hull, R. F. C. (London: Routledge, 2004), 61.

85 Euripides, *Alcestis, Medea, Hippolytus*, trans. Svarlien, D. A. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), 133-134.

86 Servant, nurse. According to Jung, if people captured by their shadow, they lose their light and fall their own trap. Jung, *Four Archetypes*, 66.

not done before, things she did not say. As a polluted act, Phaedra's love transformed Phaedra from a noble and temperate person into a mad and transcendent lover. The social codes, which are the reasons why this love made Phaedra's mind and body sick and let her existence *miasma*, will be open to question later by Phaedra's action against these codes. At the end of the play, it is seen in Artemis' explanation that it is the goddesses and gods that cause the events, but it is the responsibility of the people to react or say what to these events. In the end, Aphrodite was the reason why Phaedra fell in love with Hippolytus, however, according to Artemis, Phaedra perpetuated this madness virtuously. Artemis reads her act of suicide and the slanderous letter she wrote as a virtue. But on the other hand, Phaedra rebelled against the goddess who put her in this mad love situation and the social laws that determined that this love was mad, and she chose to end her life. As a rebellion that ends her own life, Phaedra's suicide and slander bring other polluted events one after the other. This contagion continues, and the *miasma* that is integrated into Phaedra's body and mind spreads and transforms Theseus. Because of this *miasma*, Artemis says that Phaedra's love will never be forgotten.<sup>87</sup>

In the relationship between tragedy and *catharsis*<sup>88</sup>, purification itself can only be reached through *pathos*<sup>89</sup>. The presence of the pathological is also needed in the path of reaching catharsis by solving the factors that spread pollution in tragedy.<sup>90</sup> The situation in which the disease is terminated and the pollution is removed must be due to another pollutant effect. The quality of this dirt brings the tragedy to its new *statis* as an effect that overthrows the pollution of the *statis* at the beginning of the tragedy. Therefore, the pollution at the beginning of the plot is transformed by another polluting potential. One of Eagleton's definitions of tragedies seems to overlap with the concept of pollution in this sense. Accordingly, the concept of pollution preserves a sense of order if it is considered formally, but if it is viewed as content, it will be understood that there is an order under the risk of disruption.<sup>91</sup> From this point of view, when it is considered the tragedies as the desire for cleansing and order, the tragedies themselves make their cyclicity more visible in this sense. Contagious pollution that continues in the insoluble webs of fate and the conflict of desire that wants to clean this pollution constantly is at the center of the tragedies. However, since the concept of order contains pollution ontologically, the desire for this cleansing is unattainable.

87 Euripides, *Hippolütos*, 70.

88 Social purification with the feeling of fear and pity in the audience due to the structure established in the tragedy plot.

89 "Pathos is an ambiguous term that can mean anything experienced, hence bad experience: misfortune, suffering; or it can denote a reaction to experiences, hence emotion." Dana LaCourse Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 50.

90 Kerem Karaboğa, *Tragedya ile Sınırları Aşmak* (İstanbul: E Yayınları, 2008), 69.

91 Eagleton, *Tragedy*, 173.

## Conclusion

In pollution theory, it is generally seen that pollution is constructed in language as a concept that creates danger, crosses individual, social and political boundaries, and should be eliminated. There are also many social life practices where the equivalent of the concept in social life is in the form of a “stain”. The concept of pollution and the concept of plague in connection with it, especially its some of the uses in the Ancient Greek world by Hippocratic authors, also have a great influence in this case. But with the stylization of the concept and its involvement in tragedies, another transformational potential has emerged. Pollution, which violates the state of *statis*, or is “different from the *status quo*” indicates a new order. Therefore, the transformativeness of pollution can be not only a call for the restoration of the old order in tragedies, but also a revolutionary movement that proposes the destruction of that old order and the construction of a new one, as in the tragedies of *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and *Hippolytus*.

Since the qualities of the pollution in the tragedies are different, the power and results of their transformative potential have also been different. While the act of pollution in *Antigone* can be counted as revolutionary pollution because the results of the action point to a social questioning, the quality of transformativeness is different in the plays of *Hippolytus* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Although Phaedra’s suicide and slander against the gods, her own life, and social codes in *Hippolytus* were transformative, this transformativeness could not construct a revolutionary result. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus’ arrogance and self-confidence drive society from *miasma* to *agos*, and Oedipus’s transformation, triggers the public to question the concept of confidence. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that the concept of pollution in tragedies juxtaposes with the idea of transformativeness, and transformative pollution can be a revolutionary act.

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