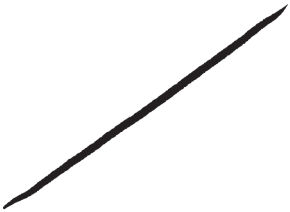


THE PHILOSOPHICAL THEATRE OF **THEODOSIS PELEGRINIS**

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Abstract: Theodosios Pelegrinis, whose most recent works are the subject of this study, is considered a restless spirit of his time, a multifarious personality unafraid to venture into a multitude of fields simultaneously. His love for philosophy and contemplation of humanity and the world represents the driving force behind his every endeavour. His study of the lives, writings, and theories of ancient and modern philosophers serves as a source of inspiration and the main material for writing articles, philosophical essays, and theatrical plays. At the same time, Pelegrinis' involvement in theatre naturally derived from his philosophical and spiritual quests, which sought the practical harmonisation of the art of drama with philosophy. The aim of this study is to demonstrate, through the presentation of four new plays by Pelegrinis, the intrinsic relationship between theatre and philosophy as interconnected and complementary domains. His works – *The Girl-King: and the Inglorious End of Descartes*¹, *Lens Maintainer: The Living Profession of Baruch/Benedict Spinoza*², *The Fatal Exit of Professor Henri Bergson*³, and *Accidental Loves: and Some Other Aspects of the Life and Work of the Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre*⁴ – will serve as the basis for a brief yet in-depth review of the philosophical theatre, its history, and its main principles, and, ultimately, through a comparative analysis, as an assessment of whether the theatrical work of Pelegrinis meets the requirements of the philosophical theatre.

Keywords: Theodosios Pelegrinis, philosophy, philosophical theatre, post-dramatic theatre, Descartes, Sartre, Bergson, Spinoza, comparative method.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL THEATRE OF THEODOSIOS PELEGRINIS⁵

The need to establish the presence of Philosophy in the Theatre, in theory, is not new, but in practice it can be characterised as an achievement of the second half of the 20th century, during which the field of Philosophy faces a fragmentation of autonomous theories and methodologies, each approaching and interpreting the Theatre differently (Pavis, 2009).

From this point in time, one can easily observe a continuous influence of the Theatre from philosophical schools of the time, an influence that extended

1 original Greek title: *Το κορίτσι – βασιλιάς: και το άδοξο τέλος του Καρτέσου.*

2 original Greek title: *Συντηρητής φακών: Το επάγγελμα βιοπορισμού του φιλόσοφου Μπαρούχ/Βενέδικτου Σπινόζα.*

3 original Greek title: *Η μοιραία έξοδος του καθηγητού Ανρί Μπερζόν.*

4 original Greek title: *Τυχαίοι έρωτες: και κάποιες άλλες πτυχές της ζωής και του έργου του υπαρξιστή Ζαν Πωλ Σάρτρ.*

5 Theodosios N. Pelegrinis, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Athens, of which he was Rector, is an author of philosophical and essay books, lexicographer, short story writer and novelist. In addition to his active involvement in the theatre as an actor and as a writer of plays staged in and outside of Greece, he has presented a series of cultural programs on Public Greek Television and on the Third Program of Hellenic Radio.

both to the level of creation and to the level of reception of theatrical works. Thus, first Marxism will contribute to the dramaturgical analysis of performances, and then the Frankfurt School will expand previous Marxist theories and criticise the ideology of theatrical texts, examining whether theatre can lead the reader-spectator to liberation from any ideological barriers and any false perceptions about the world (Pefanis, 2015, pp. 22-25). More modern, Derridian deconstruction and post-structuralism are still considered important tools for describing the practices of stage presentation, while their philosophical questions about the aesthetic and didactic function of the theatre will pave the way for the formation of the post-dramatic Theatre. Finally, Phenomenology as a field of the last two decades of the 20th century will play its own role in the aesthetic and philosophical reception of the theatrical object (Pavis, 2006, p. 43).

The influence of the theories of the philosophical Schools on the Theatre is only one evidence of the connection of the two intellectual spaces. Another indication of the connection between Philosophy and Theatre is the initiation of both components from a common topos, which is no other than the consideration and review of the world in its entirety (Pefanis, 2013, p. 432). Of course, it is interesting to clarify that there is talk of philosophical Theatre and not of theatrical Philosophy, as theatre is treated as part of the philosophy of Art and interacts aesthetically with it, mainly accepting the positions of the respective philosophical theory that suits each theatrical genre (Staikos, 1991, pp. 72-73). Another point worth mentioning is that Theatre and Philosophy have as their object of study certain common concepts such as the Body, the Other, Space, Time, a case of connection where both spiritual worlds borrow elements from each other (Pefanis, 2013, p. 442). Finally, at the thematic and ideological level, numerous theatrical texts are based on the life and work of philosophers in various ways each time, sometimes treating the Philosopher as the main dramatic figure, sometimes adopting a specific philosophical thought, and sometimes highlighting and examining given philosophical ideas and concerns.

The most basic point of intersection between Theatre and Philosophy is the common question they are asked to answer, and is related to the identification of the Subject: “who am I?”. In Philosophy, the Subject which is subjected to philosophical analysis is gradually transformed into an Object, while in the Theatre the Subject has at the same time two qualities, the one of the Subject and the one of the Object, if one takes into account that a play is produced by people (Subject) and offered again to people (Object) (Potamianou, 2011, p. 218). In fact, Descartes is considered the founder of the philosophy of the Subject with the position that “I exist when I become conscious of my existence,” whose philosophical principles will be thoroughly presented in the textual analysis of the works of Pelegrinis.

Moving now to the philosophical theatre of Pelegrinis, the starting point of his activity can be considered to be the period 1993-2000, during which he undertook, as organiser, coordinator and presenter, the presentation of a series of theatrical performances in the context of Philosophy sessions (Pelegrinis, 2021, pp. 123-125). But his real intervention in theatrical activities took place between 2006-2012 with the grand theatrical venture “Philosophy on Stage,” through which he began to perceive and handle the theatre as a tool for teaching philosophy to an open audience (Pelegrinis, 2021, p. 124). His first plays are written in traditional form and are inspired by the life and work of the first great ancient philosophers. Afterwards, both his writing and his philosophical perspective changed, with him turning towards the search for experience, trauma and memory, and his style changing from traditional narrative and biographical to fragmentary and fragmented (Pelegrinis, 2021, p. 124).

With a more mature and representative dramaturgical example of Pelegrinis, the *Makis and Lakis* trilogy, which is a model of philosophical reflection and presentation, some of the main characteristics of his works can be gathered, as guiding tools for the subsequent analysis of his aforementioned plays. Starting with the heroes, they seem to be placed without a past in the here and now of the stage action, a present full of illusions and delusions, in which the identity of the heroes is lost, and they are led to the fall and existential nakedness that entail an existential death (Pelegrinis, 2021, p. 125). In almost all his works, through the intertextual references, a continuous dialogue between the text and philosophy is achieved and issues such as the good, the moral and the beautiful are touched upon. Prevalent in all his works is the theory of aestheticism, according to which Art is not limited to teaching and transmitting moral and emotional messages to man but aims more at joy and pleasure; for this reason, at every opportunity his heroes present as a model the Epicurean katastematic pleasures, i.e. those that are not based on instinct but are controlled by the mind, as a result of which they lead people to true happiness (Pelegrinis, 2021, p. 127).

PRESENTATION OF PELEGRINIS’ THEATRICAL PLAYS – SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The Girl-King: and the Inglorious End of Descartes

This specific play is a hilarotragedy, as it has been called both by Pelegrinis himself and by many theatre critics, a characterization that has also been attributed to many of his other plays, wanting to emphasise the alternation of the text between drama and comedy and, above all, the undermining of the meaning in the face of the lightness of existence (Pefanis, 2016, p. 66). The protagonist of the play

is the French philosopher Descartes, who is in the Swedish palaces a few months before his death. He is in Sweden at the invitation of Queen Christina herself to teach her Philosophy in exchange for a place in her Court. His death is followed by the dismemberment of his lifeless body. His death was particularly enigmatic, while his dismemberment was done in such a way that the head and body were transported separately to France (Pelegrinis, 2020a, p. 65-72).

Descartes has rightly been characterised as the father of modern philosophy and is a personality who was applying criticism both by his presence and by his absence later, that is, after his death. Born at the end of the 16th century, he was active in the 17th century and was the first that dared to follow a path contrary to the scholasticism of the time, in which knowledge, to be true, had to go hand in hand with faith in God and the theories of Aristotle. According to Descartes, the truth is based exclusively on the powers of the mind, when it is freed from any previous prejudice and questions every version of the world around it until it conquers absolute knowledge (Potamianou, 2011, p. 102). He proposes a sceptical approach to knowledge and remains known in the History of Philosophy with the famous phrase “I think, therefore I exist”. Man begins to exist as soon as he realises that questioning everything is the only way to be led to knowledge. Despite his sceptical approach, he escapes from the traditional sceptics up to his time, as he does not deny everything, but by doubting them he affirms his existence (Potamianou, 2011, p. 105).

Descartes’ argument for the existence of God is based on his theory of innate ideas: according to it, the idea of perfection has been implanted in man by a perfect being, who does not want man to live in a delusion, yet leaves him alone with weapons of logic, clarity and articulacy to discover the one and only truth.⁶ In Pelegrinis’ play, during the second scene, at a point where he is conversing with the queen about God, he declares not simply the existence of God but the necessity of His existence: “Descartes: Perfect is someone who has everything: wisdom and goodness and power, as you said, but also existence. Because, if God didn’t exist, he would lack something, and he wouldn’t be perfect, thus he wouldn’t be God either. We cannot talk about God, while he does not exist. So God does not simply exist, but must exist” (Pelegrinis, 2020, p. 70).

Descartes’ main theory is that of the philosophy of the Subject, the “I of Thought,” from which emerges the Cartesian dualism of thought (skeptis) and extension (έκτασις), i.e., the matter that constitutes reality (Potamianou, 2011,

6 From the personal archives of Konstantina Ziropoulou, specifically her introduction at the presentation of the two new philosophical theatrical plays of Theodosia Pelegrinis: (1) *The Girl-King: and the Inglorious End of Descartes*, (2) *Lens Maintainer: The Living Profession of Baruch/Benedict Spinoza* (book published by Papazisis, Athens, 2022), Bookstore “IANOS”, Athens, March 17th, 2023.

p. 220). This separation leads to the formation of two distinct dimensions, one external and one internal, which can only be disengaged from each other through knowledge. From the above theory, Truth is also defined as anything that can be perceived by man in a clear and unambiguous way to his senses, tangible (Potamianou, 2011, p. 224). He distinguished beings into three categories: God, as an immaterial and pure spirit, the world of inorganic bodies, consisting of animals and plants, and humans, a being with body and soul that differs from other living organisms.

Descartes died in 1650 far from his homeland, from where he was absent throughout his philosophical activity. He arrived in Sweden in 1649, a year before his death, as a philosophy teacher for Queen Christina. It is said that the cold climate of Sweden did not suit his fragile health and leisurely lifestyle, so he died shortly afterwards, without much evidence around his death.

The *Girl-King* takes place in the psychiatric clinic “The Action,” with the main characters being Descartes, Queen Christina, the Director of the Clinic, the Queen’s maid, two courtiers and a Court servant. Of great theatrical interest is the appearance of the Director at the beginning of the play, informing the audience about the members of the theatre group, which seems to have overseen the direction and editing of the performance (Pelegrinis, 2020, p. 4). These are people who at some point in their lives had been hospitalised due to some mental disorder and with the right treatment managed to get rid of it permanently. This special composition of the theatre group is decisive for the rendering in a unique way of the experience and the trauma it left, as the performance will be the means for them to transfer to the stage their own very delicate and sensitive for human perception experiences. Furthermore, through this first speech of the Director, the great contribution of psychiatry as a science to society is touched upon, with its achievements being more numerous, more frequent and more effective.

Lens Maintainer: The Living Profession of Baruch/Benedict Spinoza

The play takes place a few days after Spinoza’s death, when his sister Rebecca arrives at Hendrik van der Spycck’s house, where the great philosopher lived during the last period of his life, and claims her brother’s manuscripts. The protagonists of the play are Rebecca, Spinoza’s sister, Mr. and Mrs. der Spycck and Louis Meyer, Spinoza’s personal physician, thanks to whom the philosopher’s manuscripts were saved (Pelegrinis, 2020, pp. 65-72). On a first reading of the text, one can detect many biographical elements of the philosopher, informed by his own sister, regarding his early life up to adolescence, and by der Spycck and Meyer, regarding the last years of his life and mainly his philosophical ideas.

His austere and quiet life as a lens maintainer begins after his excommunication by the Jewish community of Amsterdam as an atheist, because he defended an objective approach to Nature and God based on the rules of reason. Before his excommunication, already at the age of 17 he left the Jewish school and gradually renounced his obligations from the Synagogue. It is important to mention that Spinoza was persecuted by a liberal country with loose ties between state and religion, which strengthened Spinoza's need to defend the necessity for man's liberation from the religious and theological illusions that defined his life.

Despite the accusations he received, for which he lived a lifetime of persecution, Spinoza has been characterised as anything but an atheist. Influenced by Cartesian philosophy, he rejected the God of the Bible: according to Spinoza, God is identified with Nature, which is infinite (Pelegrinis, 2020, pp. 65-72). But since it is impossible for two infinite and perfect beings to exist at the same time, the following question arose: Nature or God? Again, Spinoza will respond by confirming the groundlessness of his accusations that it is not about two different existences but about one perfect existence with infinite qualities, of which man can perceive only these two (Pelegrinis, 2020, pp. 65-72). Of course, if one considers that God involves both the quality of thought and that of extension, of which man is composed, therefore he has a body, then at this very point he will perceive the complete contrast to the immaterial God of the Bible.

The entire philosophical view of Spinoza on God and man, immortality of the soul, illusions, free will and state, is a masterpiece in no way approachable in the present work.⁷ Only epigrammatically an overview of these ideas could be mentioned, as they arise through the theatrical text itself, starting with the possibly simplest one of the immortality of the soul: Spinoza does not accept this idea in his philosophy, since for him the soul cannot exist without the body (Angelaki, 2008, p. 77). Regarding the operation of Nature, he characterises it as causal, consisting of a series of causes and effects in which good and bad play absolutely no role. Nature is governed by its own rules and does not need man as a Regulator. This position also explains his theories about illusions of good and evil, as the belief that one is changing the world, the Nature for better or worse is illusion and vanity. Man's impression of free will is also an illusion: man truly begins to be free when he harmonises his desires and emotions with the rules of Nature (Dimitroulia, 2012, pp. 33-38). It is precisely these illusions and superstitions of citizens that oppressive and tyrannical states exploit to their

7 From the personal archives of Konstantina Ziropoulou, specifically her introduction at the presentation of the two new philosophical theatrical plays of Theodosia Pelegrinis: (1) *The Girl – King: and the Inglorious End of Descartes*, (2) *Lens Maintainer: The Living Profession of Baruch/ Benedict Spinoza* (book published by Papazisis, Athens, 2022), Bookstore "IANOS", Athens, March 17th, 2023.

advantage. State power through religion, which cultivates religious fear and blind faith, keeps citizens in ignorance and misery. That is why Spinoza, through all his theories, constantly preached the liberation from any religious illusion but also the consolidation of a democratic state that will serve its citizens with equality (Pelegrinis, 2020, pp. 65-72).

The Fatal Exit of Professor Henri Bergson

Henri Bergson was a French philosopher of Jewish origin whose philosophical work enjoyed enormous resonance in his contemporary philosophical and academic circles. Unlike other philosophers and intellectuals of his generation who preached their ideas with vigour in the streets in defence of human rights, he preferred a more quiet and peaceful mode of philosophical thought and inquiry. In fact, Bergson was a special personality who dealt with international issues after the end of the World War I, having as his main pursuit the peaceful coexistence of all nations, always using dialogue as his weapon. He is not known as a dynamic figure who would vigorously engage in demonstrations and marches, even in defence of his Jewish origin, although his time, due to dangerously rising anti-Semitism, required it. The only time when, in comparison with his own temperament, he overcame his peaceful comments was when he decided to declare his origin at the Paris police station, an exit indeed fatal, as it caused his death from pneumonia. Even this act of protest was done by Bergson silently, calmly, and peacefully (Pelegrinis, 2022b, p. 4).

Bergson's basic theory was that of vital impetus, an uncontrollable dark force from which three different kinds of life were created: plants, insects and vertebrates. The consequence of this first evolutionary line was the creation of man. The vital impulse in man is expressed either as instinct or as intellect. For Bergson, instinct was the necessary means to understand the flow of the world as the main part of real knowledge (Pelegrinis, 2022b, pp. 39-42). Another philosophical theory, very useful for the world of theatre, was that of the comic and laughter: he claimed that comic arises from the sudden perception of the clash between rigid and flexible, while laughter from the surprise due to the reversal of a fixed behaviour of a person and his reaction (Pavis, 2006, pp. 112-121).

Accidental Loves: and Some Other Aspects of the Life and Work of the Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre

Accidental Loves was born one night in March in a house in Kolonaki where, after Jean-Paul Sartre's speech at the Philosophical School of Athens, a meeting of some friends had been arranged. At this meeting, Sartre himself may not have been able to attend, however his philosophical ideas kept the rest of the group in

pleasant company throughout the evening. Pelegrinis himself, as a member of this company, instead of narrating the entire evening, decided to reconstruct it with himself playing the role of the unseen observer (Pelegrinis, 2022c, p. 9).

Sartre was the most important and popular existentialist of the 20th century, the founder of the notion that existence precedes essence, setting as a priority the understanding of existence for the conquest of absolute and objective knowledge and truth. For Sartre, a Subject follows the following evolutionary path (Pelegrinis, 2022c, p. 48):

Birth – Existence – Entity – Death – Essence

From the above line, two categories of beings emerge: the beings-in-themselves, the things, and the beings-for-themselves, the consciousness, i.e., human existences. These are imperfect creatures, in a continuous evolution, alone and autonomous in the process of their formation and completion. Man, throughout his existence, is not a being-in-itself as he is constantly changing. A being-in-itself, therefore an essence, he will end up being after his death. However, if he is trapped while he is alive in the limiting axis of moral principles, he ceases to evolve, becomes immobilised, becomes a being-in-itself and finally dies before death even occurs. That is why one's behaviour should not be determined by moral principles.

Among the four, Sartre is perhaps the only one who questioned both the necessity of moral principles and the existence of God, a dispute which arose from the contradictory definition of God as both a being-in-itself and a being-for-itself: for Sartre, the contradictory was equivalent to the logically impossible, concluding that such a thing cannot exist (Pelegrinis, 2022c, pp. 48-55). As a personality, Jean-Paul Sartre changes after World War II and from a passive citizen he becomes, in contrast to Bergson, an active and vigorous politicised person.

EVALUATION OF PELEGRINIS' PHILOSOPHICAL PLAYS

The theatre of Pelegrinis, based on the above theatrical examples of his work, could be characterised as philosophical and not philosophised, as the author highlights through the theatrical action directly the life and work of the philosophers during the most critical moments of their lives (Petraou, 2015, pp. 389-394).

More specifically, the reference to Descartes begins with his inglorious end in a foreign place, both in terms of his origin and habits, in a place where he suffered unjustly while until then he had lived a calm and peaceful life. His end is inglorious precisely because, while he had never come into conflict and confrontation with the Church and religion, he nevertheless could not find the posthumous peace he deserved.

Spinoza, through the “lenses,” tried to capture the existential anguish of man, his relationship with society and religion, focusing on the toxic emotions that these give rise to, hatred, despair, anger, unhappiness, with an eternal goal of his life to understand in order to finally be free.

Bergson, a passive philosopher of his time, an “office philosopher,” decided to change this title given to him by History and make his own revolution: a revolution silent, noiseless, but not weak.

Finally, the visit of existentialist Sartre to Greece was the occasion, through a relaxed meeting at a friend’s house, to reveal his true love for Simone de Beauvoir against all the other random loves of the great philosopher’s life. If one studies Sartre, one will realise in his work the course of philosophical ideas in their most dramatised version, a characteristic that can also be found in Pelegrinis, a philosopher-dramatist, who tends to give Philosophy, as he has studied and understood it, a dramatic form (Pefanis, 2016, p. 54).

Epilogue – Conclusions

Is Pelegrinis finally a devotee of Philosophy who participates in its theatrical, dialogical and conflictual dimension, beyond the simple reading of philosophical ideas, or is he a theatrical philosopher enchanted by the art of disguise (Pefanis, 2016, p. 56)? The answer is not one of the two but both, as theatre and philosophy are two intersecting and complementary fields: even their roots are part of the same social and historical context, the conception of the democratic state (Pefanis, 2016, pp. 21-23). It is no coincidence that the peak of ancient philosophical thought coincides with the birth of tragedy, the beginning of the Theatre. Despite any controversy between the two spaces throughout the history of Philosophy and Theatre, no philosopher, not even Plato himself, was an enemy of the Theatre. Philosophy may not belong to the theatrolological triangle “Theory – History – Theatre Criticism,” though it is able to influence all its levels. The reason that Philosophy is not enclosed in this triangle is because its powers go beyond the Theatre space and penetrate into other cognitive and scientific areas (Pefanis, 2016, p. 29). When the concepts that are produced through philosophy and contribute to a better understanding of the world do not simply refer to persons and meanings, they themselves become persons with distinct meanings and emotions, causing a new experience of the world on stage and allowing its use (Petrahou, 2015, p. 387) Philosophy illuminates Theatre, Theatre illuminates Philosophy.

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