



CONCEPT STUDIES

# **Contemporary Perspectives on Greek Theatre**

Edited by Andreas Markantonatos,  
Mihaela Betiu and Despina Kosmopoulou

UNATC PRESS

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2025

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Mihaela Bețiu and Despina Kosmopoulou**

The volume is a collaboration between the *Programme of Postgraduate Studies "Performing Arts" (PEA)* of the Hellenic Open University, the *Centre for Ancient Rhetoric and Drama (CARD)* of the University of the Peloponnese, and the *CONCEPT* academic journal, edited by I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest (UNATC).

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## INTRODUCTION

With great enthusiasm, I extend my warmest greetings to this remarkable collaboration between the MA Programme in Performing Arts at the Hellenic Open University, the Centre for Ancient Rhetoric and Drama at the University of the Peloponnese (Department of Philology), and the *CONCEPT* academic journal, published by the I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest. This large-scale partnership, dedicated to the study of ancient theatre and its reception over the centuries, seeks to make a meaningful and creative contribution to the broader intellectual endeavour of deepening our understanding of these theatrical masterpieces, which so powerfully embody the spirit of ancient Greek culture. At first glance, the theme of this collaboration—the intricate and evolving relationship between antiquity and modernity—may appear self-evident. However, recent developments in literary studies have significantly complicated these interactions, inspiring scholars to pursue more intricate interpretations while, at times, striving for greater clarity.

It is an undeniable fact that, in every era, human beings experience an intense and inherent need to formulate a comprehensive theory that explains, as persuasively as possible, the origins of their world and, more profoundly, the purpose of their existence within a cosmic order that often appears both unfathomable and irrational. Our own turbulent age—justly described as the Fourth Industrial Revolution—is no exception to this rule. In the humanities, there has been a concerted effort to create an innovative and interdisciplinary synthesis, integrating a wide range of scientific disciplines. This intellectual amalgamation extends from anthropology, psychology, and sociology to philology, philosophy, and theology, and even encompasses fields traditionally classified as the natural sciences, such as informatics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics, and biotechnology.

One of the most striking outcomes of this systematic interdisciplinary fusion over recent decades is the emergence of a novel and compelling form of global history, which aspires, as far as possible, to provide panoramic interpretations of human development and to offer comprehensive, yet nuanced, perspectives on political and social transformations across time.

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Another particularly fruitful result of this intellectual cross-pollination is the evolution of a refined and enriched form of historiography—one that intertwines philology, philosophy, and anthropology to construct its own distinctive vision of ‘anthropogenesis’. This approach seeks not to impose rigid causal explanations but rather to illuminate the cultural evolution of humanity through a dynamic and interpretative framework. More specifically, in the field of literary criticism, this perspective enables scholars to engage with creative works from an entirely fresh vantage point, beginning with foundational insights and advancing towards post-humanist methodologies and objectives.

The study of Attic drama, in particular, stands to benefit immensely from this unprecedented interpretative approach to the literary tradition. This perspective acknowledges, with striking realism, the boundlessly imaginative character of contemporary culture while simultaneously cautioning against an excessive preoccupation with individuality—an inclination that can, on the one hand, lead to the illusion of absolute reality and, on the other, confine human experience within the limits of introspection. Ideally, human individuality should serve as a crucial factor in fostering self-awareness, enabling *homo sapiens* to navigate the many choices that shape the course of history. Engagement with the past should not be confined to a form of obsessive self-reflection; rather, it should inspire a revelatory awareness of the multiple alternative paths that lie before us—paths we must choose among when confronted with challenging circumstances, unforeseen adversities, and the unpredictability of fate.

Ancient Greek theatre is particularly distinguished by its remarkable dramaturgical tendency to depict mortal struggles and harrowing dilemmas as reflections of cosmic conflicts—battles waged between eternal and omnipotent deities across the celestial heights of Olympus and the shadowy depths of Hades. The Dionysian orchestra, where mortal figures strive to attain a fleeting moment of existential autonomy, is continuously shaken by the devastating blows of divine clashes, as the gods contend for dominion over cosmic sovereignty and jurisdiction.

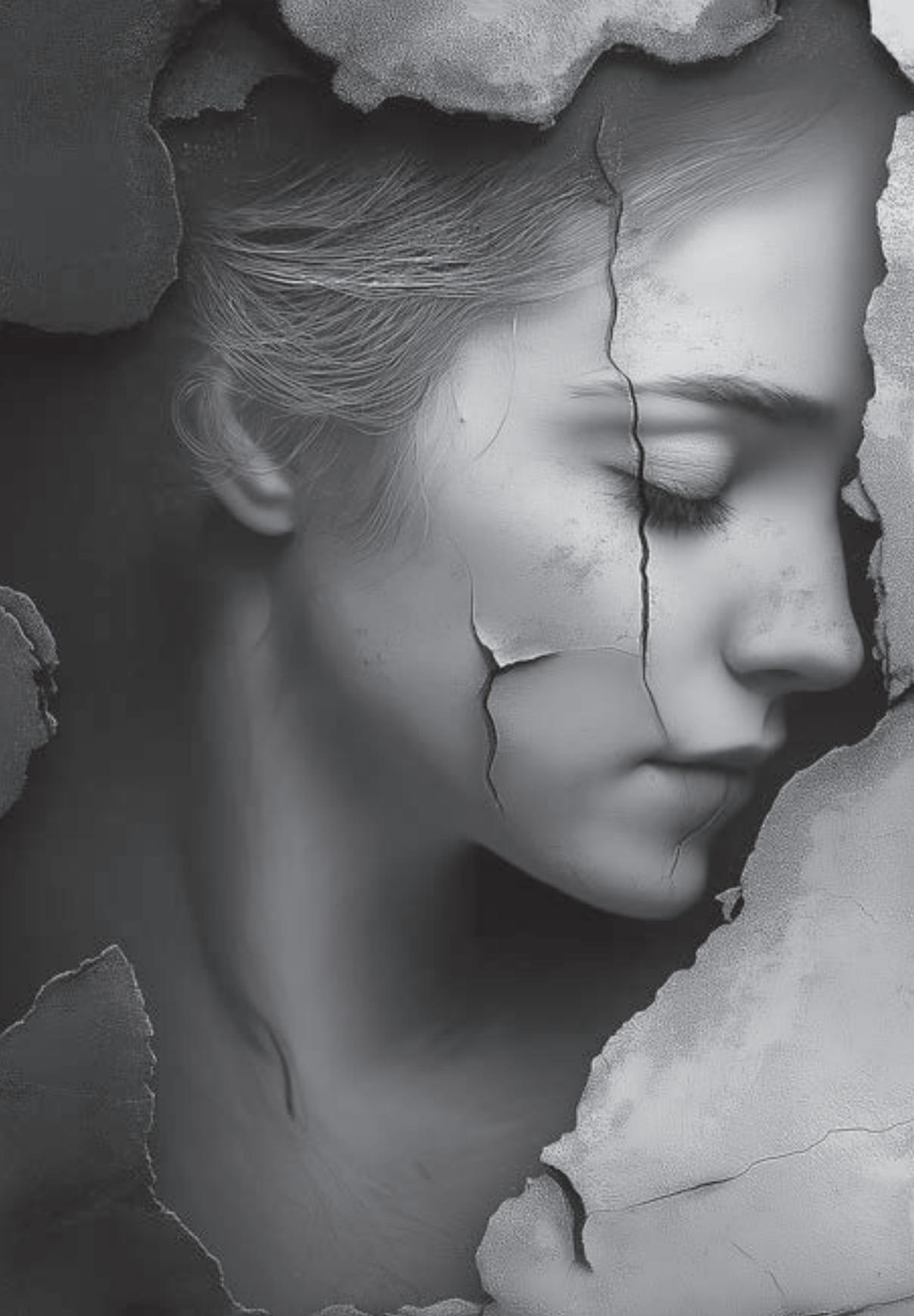
This perpetual struggle for the allocation and, at times, reallocation of Olympian and Tartarean power always precedes human action, decisively shaping events on the dramatic stage, behind the scenes, and beyond. The divine decrees and unalterable edicts that govern the cosmos intertwine with profound moral dilemmas and the inescapable tensions between conflicting human and divine objectives. Mortal protagonists in Athenian drama perceive the cosmic upheavals precipitated by existential impasses and ontological

uncertainties but remain unable to grasp, in time, the full extent of the repercussions arising from these invisible yet all-encompassing divine conflicts. And yet, the outcomes of these inconceivable struggles leave an indelible mark on human lives, shaping their destinies in ways they can scarcely comprehend.

In Attic drama, the only conceivable escape from the inherent violence of the universe lies in the formation of enduring alliances among mortals—alliances that serve to establish a form of heroic identity. This concept aligns closely with contemporary post-humanist theories, which emphasise the necessity of resisting destructive forces, both within the vast landscape of unchecked globalisation and in the more intimate sphere of daily social interactions. At the heart of such reflections is the concept of intersubjectivity—the uniquely human capacity to forge profound social bonds with others, a capacity unparalleled in the animal kingdom. Indeed, according to recent scholarly perspectives, human beings possess an extraordinary ability to imagine and believe in the same concepts simultaneously, or, to put it simply, to dream the same dream together. This innate faculty for collective imagination—manifested through narrative, myth-making, and dramatic invention—has enabled human societies to articulate fundamental questions concerning political, social, economic, religious, and ethical matters. More crucially, it has granted humankind, despite its physical frailty relative to other species, a decisive advantage on Earth, paving the way for astonishing cultural and technological advancements.

In conclusion, these contemporary approaches to Greek theatre, characterised by their synthetic depth and bold intellectual aspirations, allow us to break free from the myopic perception that our lives remain untouched by the realities that surround us—an illusion that is often at odds with the unmistakable signs of change. It is within this framework that the urgent necessity emerges for us to experience our existence as an honest endeavour to mitigate violence, above all by alleviating the suffering that human beings, all too often, inflict upon one another.

ANDREAS MARKANTONATOS





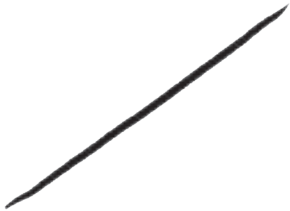
ISSUES OF RECEPTION  
IN GREEK THEATRE

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# THE RECEPTION OF ATTIC DRAMA IN MODERN TIMES: AN OUTLINE

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**Abstract:** This article suggests that the history of the performative revival of Attic theatre in post-revolutionary Greece of the 19th century, with numerous native variations and transformations—which justifiably paves the way for particularly audacious attempts at reconstitution and, on fortunate occasions, successful restaging of ancient performances during the immediately following tumultuous century—serves, on the one hand, as an enlightening reflection of the turbulent historical development of post-revolutionary Greece and, on the other hand, as a resonant sounding board for various theoretical configurations concerning the comprehensive study of Athenian theatre in the wider world. It is well-known that the global community has embraced with genuine enthusiasm the rich theatrical legacy of the ancient Greeks. As a happy consequence, on a universal scale, productions of Attic plays have proliferated to such an extent that more ancient Greek dramas have been staged in recent decades than during these past few centuries.

**Keywords:** Attic drama, reception, adaptation, performance and literary reception.

### ***Introduction***

The concept of the reception of Attic drama in the modern era has long been defined with satisfactory adequacy, and in the last two decades, it has become familiar among scholars of Athenian theatre, primarily of the classical period, and not only.<sup>1</sup> However, it is particularly striking that the final semantic illustration of the above term is still pending, mainly because the astonishing complexity and multiplicity of associated meanings and significances greatly hinder the full interpretive access to the core of the reception theory itself and its implications for literary and, more broadly, artistic issues.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in this article, readers should always bear in mind that theoretical thought about the literary and stage reception of ancient Greek theatre, despite its apparent solidity, cannot be put in competition with the insatiable curiosity of the contemporary artist, who continuously strives to innovate and, most importantly, discover many and various unprecedented methods for reimagining the past.

It is worth noting from the outset that the ways in which the works of Attic drama are received by newer and contemporary authors, artists, and scholars—whether they happen to be, among others, writers and directors, poets and actors,

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1 It must be noted from the outset that the bibliography on the topic at hand is extensive, and therefore the references in this article have been deliberately kept to a minimum, with the aim of not overburdening the reader with an abundance of information. Moreover, references to adequately informed bibliographic sources serve as a starting point for further exploration of the related complex issues.

2 See primarily the fundamental theoretical contribution of Hardwick 2003. Regarding the reception of the Greco-Roman tradition, see, for example, the emblematic work of Hight 1949; and also, the collective volumes: Hardwick-Stray 2008 and Grafton-Most-Settis 2010 with a plethora of enlightening chapters on a wide range of related reception topics.

philologists and theatre scholars, philosophers and psychoanalysts, translators and composers, people of cinema and television, or even painters and sculptors—are potentially countless. This has been emphatically proven by the numerous forms and diverse ways through which all these masterpieces of Athenian theatre are re-presented, whether partially or wholly, individually or combined, authentically recreated or radically transformed, to the audience of our own time.

Even more significant, given the lesser or greater resonance of the truly daring experiments, which can arise at any moment from the continuous and vibrant readjustment and sometimes catalytic deconstruction of the ancient theatrical tradition within the framework of literary and more generally artistic creation, the systematic study of the celebrated *Nachleben* of Attic drama, especially in the modern and contemporary era, undoubtedly broadens the interpretive horizons of both established experts and younger researchers. The thorough analysis of iconoclastic and pioneering revivals of Athenian tragedy and comedy, as well as the examination of reputable and in many cases widely recognized approaches to the ancient dramatic corpus, undoubtedly facilitates the revelation of all those invisible ‘threads’ that creatively connect the Attic theatrical works with intersecting currents of formative ideas and influential theories of our time. The elucidation of aspects and manifestations of our times’ receptive ability ultimately allows the open-minded critic to easily discern, under the transparent membrane of each reimagined ancient text, contemporary artistic movements and modern aesthetic currents. In essence, these new ways in which the present receives the past are luminous beams that shoot from unsuspected angles and shed revealing light on the complex issues of our own lives—in other words, they act as a screen that ‘filters’ the works and days of our world with sometimes unexpectedly adept methods.<sup>3</sup>

### *Greece and beyond*

The history of the performative revival of Attic theatre in post-revolutionary Greece of the 19th century, with numerous native variations and transformations – which justifiably paves the way for particularly audacious attempts at reconstitution and, on fortunate occasions, successful restaging of ancient performances during the immediately following tempestuous century—serves, on the one hand, as an enlightening reflection of the turbulent historical development

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, van Steen 2016 and more generally van Zyl Smith 2016 with numerous well-informed contributions to a more detailed study of the revival of ancient Greek theatre. Additionally, see Bacopoulou-Halls 1987; Kyriakos 2015 with several interesting research papers on the contemporary reception of Attic drama; Mavroleon 2016 and 2019. Regarding the history of the reception of ancient theatre from the Hellenistic period to our times, see, for example, Garland 2004; and the relevant chapters in: Bushnell 2005; Gregory 2005; Easterling 1997; Markantonatos 2012 and 2020; Markantonatos-Tsagalīs 2008; Markantonatos-Pappas 2011; Markantonatos-Diamantakou 2022; Markantonatos-Georgopoulou-Kosmopoulou 2023 and McDonald-Walton 2007.

of liberated Greece and, on the other hand, as a resonant sounding board for various theoretical reconfigurations concerning the comprehensive study of Athenian theatre in the wider world. The central premise of that period was undoubtedly the urgent crystallization and promotion of a new national identity, one that, among other things, should be rooted in the profound awareness of the unparalleled ancient glory as the starting point for every neo-Hellenic endeavor towards Europeanization and subsequent modernization of its emerging spirit. This inseparable connection of a neophyte national self-conception—one that could be vividly imprinted on the collective unconscious—with an invaluable ancestral legacy is reflected as a substantial social category and essentially as a coveted cultural asset, among much else, in the various critical methodologies aimed at the interpretative and performative approach to Attic drama.

As the unrestrained romanticism of the early 19th century gradually morphed into a dignified neoclassicism, which eagerly endorsed the lofty ideals of what we might call ethnocentric patriotism in the first decades of the 20th century in Greece, the arrival of modernism as the dominant force in Europe prepared the discerning theatre enthusiasts for decidedly more realistic attempts at the performative revival of Attic drama. The pioneering directorial efforts of the American wife of the renowned poet Angelos Sikelianos, Eva Palmer, and, most notably, her exhaustively studied choreographic reconstructions of the movements of the choral group on the *orchestra* – which added a distinctive touch of modernity to the famous Delphic Festivals of 1927 and 1930 – undoubtedly constitute a profoundly important milestone in the history of the revival of ancient Greek theatre in our country.<sup>4</sup>

The decade of the 1950s could be described, without exaggeration, as a *decennium mirabilis* for the further progress of the total revival of ancient drama in modern Greece. After Dimitris Rontiris, a gifted student of the distinguished German director Max Reinhardt and a conscientious heir to the directorial tradition of Thomas Oikonomou and Fotis Politis, successfully attempted to present Sophocles' *Electra* in the open-air theatres of the Herodes Atticus Odeon in 1936, as part of the “Ancient Drama Week,” and in Epidaurus in 1938, he inaugurated and simultaneously solidified, as the artistic director of the National Theatre, the significantly artistically enriched annual Epidaurus Festival during the crucial years of 1954 and 1955. Furthermore, following an idea from Georgios Rallis,

4 See the following in-depth contributions: Andreiadis 2005; Arvaniti 2020; Constantinidis 2001; Georgopoulou 2008 and 2009; Georgousopoulos 1982; Glytzouris 2011; Grammatas 2006; Ioannidou 2016; Kosmopoulou 2018; Mavromoustakos 2005; Sideris 1972. Also, see the following academic works with a robust theoretical background and distinct socio-political focus: Diamantakou 2021; Patsalidis 1997; Pefanis 2007; Puchner 2015; Tsatsoulis 2017; van Steen 2000, 2011, and 2015.

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Minister of the Presidency in the government of Alexandros Papagos, with the long-term goal of further enhancing both culture and tourism, the Athens Festival was established during the same period (August 1955). Within this framework, four years later (1959), the highly debated Aristophanic play *Birds* was performed with ingenious directorial guidance by Karolos Koun and a masterful musical score by Manos Hatzidakis. It was indeed a particularly innovative theatrical production for its time, but it provoked unacceptable satirical comments from many spectators, who seemed scandalized, apparently due to the use of overt Christian symbols during a paganistic sacrifice scene on stage. It is worth noting that the enlightened director introduced innovative ideas once again later in 1965 when he presented Aeschylus' *Persians* to highlight the perilous fascination and uncontrollable frenzy of the human soul in the face of what exceeds all possibility, especially any sinister design. It is also known that in 1958, the talented actor and director Alexis Minotis first presented *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles at the Epidaurus Theatre in a fairly faithful Modern Greek rendition by the distinguished writer and educator Ioannis Gryparis. Furthermore, the masterful performance of the eponymous role by Alexis Minotis himself in successive stagings of the aforementioned tragedy was rightfully recognized as the highlight of his over six-decade-long theatrical career and a milestone in the history of the evolution of acting in Greece.<sup>5</sup>

It is evident that during the post-dictatorship period (1974-today), the dominant interpretive framework, which had largely aimed to bridge the revival of ancient performance with the foundational conditions of a more substantial national resurgence, significantly declined and gradually gave way to purely postmodernist and noticeably international directorial endeavors. Once again, the performative revival of Attic drama, primarily in its tragic and comedic facets, allows audiences and critics to more clearly discern the dominant *zeitgeist* in Greece. Simultaneously, in its most inspired manifestations, it constructs solid bridges of communication between the domestic intellectual life and globally established theoretical considerations in the field of interpretive approaches to ancient Greek dramas.

One could argue that this complex synthesis, associated particularly with modern reinterpretations of iconic tragic and comedic works in Greece over the past half-century, on the one hand, reflects corresponding theatrical developments on a universal level. On the other hand, in several instances, it prefigures the introduction of pioneering aesthetic ideas and perspectives into the rapidly evolving domestic artistic milieu. Talented directors, such as, for instance,

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5 See, for example, Georgousopoulos-Gogos 2003; Hunratty-Ioannidou 2011.

Alexis Solomos, Takis Mouzenidis, Spyros Evangelatos, Andreas Voutsinas, Minos Volanakis, Yannis Houvardas, and Theodoros Terzopoulos, but also younger fellow artists, like Michael Marmarinos, Katerina Evangelatou, Yannis Moschos, and Dimitris Karantzas, have managed through their various theatrical accomplishments to successfully present —despite the lively disputes over their bold and sometimes iconoclastic choices— the Attic tragic and comic plays to a demanding Greek and international audience. It is imperative to emphasize that these inspired theatre directors, as independent and often self-fashioned intellectual personalities, with a notable presence in Greek public life, managed to engage in fruitful dialogue with foreign reformist artists and interpreters of Athenian drama.<sup>6</sup> This was part of a renewal and potentially revolutionary effort to redefine, sometimes even from the ground up, the intellectual domain of ancient texts. They undertook this challenging endeavor by adopting various approaches—in fact, they introduced innovations at times with ritualistic rigor, at times with radical impetus, particularly aimed against all forms of patriarchal symbolism, whether gender-related or nationalistic, and at other times with resourceful deconstructive spontaneity.

In conclusion, the performative reception of Attic drama in Greece over the last approximately two centuries has been involved in a complex journey. Its primary starting point was the crucial challenge of acquiring national identity by means of gradually forming inseparable unity between the illustrious classical antiquity and the trouble-worn modern Greek state. It later evolved into an influential step of democratic sensitivity and social inquiry, all the while not relinquishing ancestral rights that have allowed, from ancient times to the present day, fruitful cross-cultural dialogue with the great intellectual and aesthetic *desiderata* of each era. Recent theatrical productions often pleasantly surprise Greeks and foreigners alike with the originality of directorial solutions and acting techniques they methodically and skillfully put into good use in the context of globally acclaimed theatre festivals. Moreover, the contemporary domestic performative initiative greatly facilitates the gradual assimilation of ancient Greek tradition by the generally skeptical and occasionally reactionary modern Greek society. This is true even when such innovative stage attempts end up fruitless and devoid of a coherent meaning, sometimes becoming an inseparable part of an impenetrable and unpleasant subculture.

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6 See also, for instance, Cole 2019; Rodosthenous 2023.

***Attic Drama and the World***

Given the brief scope of this article, the description of the performative revival of Attic drama in Greece and worldwide had to be as concise as possible, with particular emphasis on local matters always in relation to the broader theatrical panorama. It is well-known that the global community has embraced with genuine enthusiasm the rich theatrical legacy of the ancient Greeks. As a fortunate consequence, on a universal scale, productions of Attic plays have proliferated to such an extent that more ancient Greek dramas have been staged in recent decades than during these past few centuries! However, it would be unjust for the Attic dramatic genre itself if this article focused solely on the multifarious ways in which the ancient theatrical tradition has been embraced by Greeks and foreign professionals of the stage. The resonance of this tradition is so profound throughout the centuries that it would not be an exaggeration to claim that its myriad themes and lofty ideas have permeated world literature and significantly shaped contemporary playwriting. The profound impact of Attic drama on modern theatrical practice is only a small part of its strong aesthetic and ideological influence on global intellectual matters, which has been steadily growing in recent decades, especially following a period of relative skepticism, particularly after the two World Wars. Wherever one looks in the realm of art and, in general, artistic creation, whether in opera and musical theatre, in cinema and television, in music and painting, or in so many other fields of the fine arts, one could easily observe that the central themes and foundational principles of ancient Greek theatre continue to be a common denominator in countless forms of aesthetic creativity within the framework of Western civilization.

In order to highlight the depth and extent of the influence that Attic theatrical tradition has exerted on a wide range of artistic forms in the modern world, we choose to present here the as detailed as possible account of a single emblematic case of multi-layered and lively literary and performative reception: a well-known tragedy by Sophocles has been transformed in a truly innovative way into an African-American gospel performance, with recognizable fundamentals, largely drawn from modern musicals and traditional oratorios. We refer to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, which was thoroughly reimagined and initially presented before a distinctive African-American audience in North America under the atypical title *Gospel at Colonus*. Subsequently, it garnered undivided admiration on both sides of the Atlantic. This fact demonstrates the impressive penetration of Attic theatre into all fields of art and all social strata, regardless of racial origin and religious belief. Indeed, this enthusiastic reception led to the remarkable text

of this tragedy being transformed into a completely different literary genre with an unprecedented aesthetic and ideological purpose. This transformation was achieved through the radical re-adaptation of selected scenes, the reconstruction and enrichment of the original plot, as well as the reshaping of its integral musical and choreographic component.<sup>7</sup>

It is worth noting that in the latter half of the previous century, several highly successful operatic adaptations of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* can be found. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Second World War, there is a notable resurgence of artistic interest in the mythological cycle of the Labdacids, especially the ambivalent figure of Oedipus, who unwittingly committed patricide and incest. Beyond the lyrical drama by Nobel laureate poet and essayist T.S. Eliot, "The Elder Statesman" (1958), where Christian eschatological ideas provide the framework for a somewhat trivial story of conscious guilt and psycho-soteriological deliverance, there is the musical-theatrical re-adaptation of Sophocles' drama into the Christian-centered work of Roy Travis, duly titled "The Passion of Oedipus" (1965). Furthermore, the meticulously crafted operatic experiment by Theodor Antoniou, "Oedipus at Colonus" (1998), deserves special attention. More significantly, on November 8, 1983, in the context of the renowned Music Academy of Brooklyn's Next Wave Festival, the Christian allegory *Gospel at Colonus* was presented, initially intended as a companion piece to the work of Lee Breuer and Bob Telson, titled "Sister Suzie Cinema." However, it later evolved into a large-scale musical theatre production of superior scope. This transformation further underlines the remarkable versatility and adaptability of Attic theatre, which continues to inspire and resonate with diverse artistic and cultural contexts, transcending boundaries of time, place, and tradition. Lee Breuer, a pioneering director, and Bob Telson, a talented composer, also skillfully attempted to transform the English rendition of *Oedipus at Colonus*, which had been meticulously crafted by the poet, literary critic, and translator Robert Fitzgerald, into an African-American Pentecostal service—rich in religious devotion and profound mysticism. To the pleasant surprise of all those involved in the production of this highly demanding performance, the reviews were truly laudatory. The receptive audience in both Europe and North America welcomed the new play with spiritual fervor and wholehearted admiration. Furthermore, the distribution companies for the recorded and filmed version of the production eagerly took on the global promotion of this extraordinarily innovative approach to Attic drama.

<sup>7</sup> See primarily Markantonatos 2007, 231-255 with an exhaustive bibliography on the contemporary reception of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. Also, see the recent relevant survey by Scharffenberger 2017.

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This ancient Greek-themed musical certainly deviates from the established parameters of Sophocles' tragedy, especially in terms of the repetitive principal motif — that is, the ineluctable linking of the moving revelation of hopeful mysticism with a deeply pessimistic interpretation of worldly matters. However, the optimistic spirituality prevalent in all the hymnal scenes, along with the evident interdenominational acceptance of redemptive forgiveness within the context of Christian eschatology, appears to provide a robust dramaturgical foundation. Simultaneously, it penetrates beneath the surface of mundane human affairs. Given the broader Christian purgatorial intent of similar religious ceremonies, primarily aimed at strengthening theological, social, and cultural relationships and bonds, it could be argued that these remarkable analogies between the Athenian drama and the Pentecostal liturgy reflect a distinctly mortal perception of the world. In this context, it should be emphasized that in such a complex reception process, narration is an integral part of the musical theatre ensemble. The narrative function is indeed an essential element of traditional African-American church preaching. In *Gospel at Colonus*, an African-American Pentecostal priest and his congregation recount the myth of Oedipus, placing particular emphasis on the hopeful prospect of sin forgiveness after a long period of unbearable suffering. To illustrate the astonishingly auspicious outcome of this idiosyncratic African-American musical, it would suffice to mention the concluding scene. In particular, the backdrop of the closing episode is a massive “cyclorama”, an autoluminescent curved wall that continuously displays numerous African-themed motifs, depicting Judgment Day during the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The elegiac chants accompanying the slow descent of the psalmists, who stand next to a grand white piano in the role of Oedipus, gradually fade in comparison to an ecstatic outburst of joy emanating from the choral ensemble. This jubilation anticipates and subsequently follows the resurrection of the melodious singer Oedipus and his choral quintet. Indeed, the boundless harmony emanating from the gospel music, the enchanting hymn of the sweet-voiced choir, and the exuberant expressiveness of the improvisational variations not only mitigate any potential negative impressions that might arise from the occasionally awkward dialogues but also highlight the immeasurable power of the musical-dramatic language to breathe new life into Attic theatrical works.

The paradoxical case of *Gospel at Colonus* ends up being indeed an exemplary re-creation of an intricate system of interplay between ancient drama and African-American choral and liturgical traditions. In particular, the biblical and even Pentecostal adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy suggests unprecedented dramatic methods through which the perennial struggles of the human soul could traverse from the distant past to contemporary theatre. Such expansive

conduits connecting joyfully and seamlessly the theatrical productions of the ancient poets with the myriad aesthetic conceptions and literary ramifications of our era are not confined solely to scenic reconfigurations of Athenian dramatic tradition. They are also discernible within a wide spectrum of literary genres and artistic domains.<sup>8</sup> To remain within the familiar territory of the contemporary assimilation of the complex Oedipal paradigm, it would be fruitful to also recall two widely known French reimaginings of Sophoclean tragic poetry.

The theatrical work of Nobel laureate novelist and playwright André Gide, bearing the intertextually evocative title “Oedipe” (1930), primarily centers on the intense conflict that unfolds throughout its plot between Oedipus, who ardently seeks the truth about his tortured existence, and Tiresias, who, along with Jocasta, clings unwaveringly to soothing notions regarding the shadowy past of the House of Laius. The relentless desire of the eponymous hero to unveil his true identity leads to unexpected twists in the closing scenes of the play. These twists incorporate, among other things, pioneering thematic motifs of *Oedipus at Colonus* into a remarkable convergence of dramatic episodes and prophetic insights into the distant future. In parallel with André Gide’s theatrical reconstruction of these Sophoclean plays, another renowned French author, Jean Cocteau, who was also a painter and a filmmaker, crafted “La Machine Infernale” (1932), a surrealist, neo-romantic drama infused with profound psychoanalytic rudiments. The interpretive weight of this work largely hinges on the purported Freudian implications, which abundantly emerge, primarily from Oedipus’ incestuous relationship with his mother within the wretched Theban palace. Scholars of the play have, moreover, identified and often commended profoundly chilling dramaturgical inventions and techniques, such as the depiction on stage of the first night of the ill-fated couple’s marriage in the royal bedroom—a scene both surrealistically ironic and emotionally charged, as well as the unexpected appearance of Jocasta’s ghost, which, despite the general horror it provokes, conveys surrealistically sarcastic yet simultaneously emotionally poignant messages and comforting admonitions to the deeply tormented Oedipus. Thus, once again, the concluding scene of a theatrical re-creation of a Sophoclean drama induces profound astonishment, heightening the audience’s anticipation for the further unfolding of the fate of the Labdacids, by projecting particularly, in a prophetic manner, the impending redemption of the wandering Oedipus as a heroic figure at the Attic Colonus. In summary, the adaptations and reimaginings of Sophocles’ Oedipus stories by André Gide and Jean Cocteau offer rich and multidimensional perspectives on the enduring relevance and interpretive possibilities of these ancient Greek narratives.

8 See, among others, Andújar-Nikoloutsos 2020; Boshier et al. 2015; Powers 2018; van Weyenberg 2013.

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These plays not only reflect the enduring fascination with Oedipus as a character, but also demonstrate the capacity of classical themes to inspire innovative and thought-provoking interpretations in modern literature and theatre, thereby showcasing the enduring power of ancient Greek drama to captivate and engage contemporary audiences.

We could certainly multiply comparable cases and examples, archetypes and worthy imitations and adaptations, which prepared the ground for more occasions of literary reception and more active opportunities for artistic recreation of antiquity. However, it would be like someone trying to pull a few threads of numerous aspects and expressions of its woven fabric through a brief exploration, with the aim not only of highlighting the exceptionally dynamic character of the reconstitution of ancient tradition in Greece, but also the stunning universality of the resonance of all Attic dramas. Nevertheless, it saddens us to think that we cannot extensively refer to the long modern Greek literary tradition related to the creative assimilation of key themes of tragic poetry, which, among other things, anticipates in several cases similar attempts of reception by foreign poets, writers, visual artists, and filmmakers. For instance, we should at least mention the ancient Greek-inspired poetic composition 'Oedipus' (1896) by K. P. Cavafy, stemming from a vivid description of the famous painting 'Oedipus and the Sphinx' created by the romantic archeophile Gustav Moreau. This, in turn, contributes to the gradual formation of inconspicuous intertextual scale models that often determine the poetic effect of the ensuing Greek modernism, even if the latter regularly harbors by definition a reflexive hostility towards romantically refined reproductions.

It is also worth mentioning the well-known novel by Aris Alexandrou, 'To Kivótio' [*The Box*] (1974), in which, under the guise of a comprehensive assessment, in the conclusion of the book, the chaotic and tragic fate of Oedipus is juxtaposed with the fratricidal passions in post-war Greece of 1945-1949, resulting in painful conclusions about the futility of similar catastrophic internecine conflicts. Moreover, analogous to the bitter irony of K.P. Cavafy's poetic writing, in 1979, the Greek author and translator Kay Cicellis published a collection of novellas titled 'O Dromos pros ton Kolōno' [*The Road to Colonus*] But beyond the modern Greek reception of Attic drama, the distinguished Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami in the early 21st century composed as well an ambitious and playfully allegorical narrative, titled 'Kafka on the Shore' (2002), in which the central character, Kafka Tamura, and his adolescent alter ego, Satoru Nakata, make superhuman efforts to overcome the obstacles posed by family curses, both through their individual experiences and their continuous interaction with a peculiar yet captivating group of people.

This quintessential literary reimagining of the tragic myth as a satirical allegory of human fate has its counterpart in the rapidly evolving field of cinematic adaptation of Attic drama. For example, the renowned Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini in his film ‘Edipo Re’ (1967) manages, on the one hand, to break free from the sterile mannerisms of the cloak-wearing cinematic universe of previous decades, and on the other hand, to propose pioneering interpretations of the ancient texts through persistent portrayals of a dystopian and essentially political reality. Something similar, especially concerning the auditory exploration of the tumultuous mental world of mythological protagonists, was attempted by the notable American director and talented choreographer Amy Greenfield. In her multilayered film ‘Antigone/Rites for the Dead,’ she places special emphasis on the performative dynamics of the story of the Labdacids, aptly choosing to interconnect emblematic episodes from the Sophoclean tragedies *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus* into an inseparable set of evocative images and scenes that allude to contemporary political and social dilemmas as well as timeless human frailties, especially on the American continent.

### ***Epilogue***

To sum up: this inevitably ‘endless’ discussion, primarily concerning the global impact exerted and unquestionably continuing to be exerted by the masterpieces of Attic theatre on all forms of language and art, leads to the undeniable observation that each time the artistic immersion in the original matrix of Athenian drama, however it is accomplished, has the beneficial result of transferring the grandiose ancient texts into the arteries of modern thought. This sometimes-daring dialogue between the glorious past—which has now established itself in the collective memory as an unalterable life experience—and contemporary movements of human sensitivity occasionally produces exquisite intellectual fruits across the lengths and breadths of the world. This brief survey of the reception of ancient Greek theatre in our time reaffirms, we hope, the pervasive truth that the more conceptually fertile the exemplary model, the more its applications—in this case, Attic drama as an unparalleled intermediary genre connecting antiquity with the modern world, the past with the present, the deceased with the living throughout the ages.

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FROM THE SMALL VILLAGE COMMUNITY  
TO THE INACCESSIBLE  
LAND OF POSTMODERNISM:  
**PAPADIAMANTI'S *THE MURDERESS***  
**AND H. MÜLLER'S *MEDEA MATERIAL***

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**Abstract:** Medea follows a dangerous and destructive course, accompanied by the element of death and horror. She kills her brother and children for Jason's love. She has been described as having committed infanticide, a brutal murderess, rebellious and mentally disturbed. Her personality is scary as well as fascinating. She travels through the centuries and meets important creators who retell her story from their own perspective. Centuries later, Alexandros Papadiamantis would write about his own murderess, infanticide and psychologically unstable woman, Hadoula Fragogiannou, who, living in unbearable oppression, does the unthinkable. She kills little girls to redeem them. Half a century later, Heiner Müller, in the context of a new theatrical convention, that of metadramatic theatre, presents Medea as a material cause, as an active agent, who takes fate into her own hands. The title of *Medea Material* is indicative of how he perceives Euripides' myth. How do the two female figures of Medea and Fragogiannou converse? What are the points where their stories meet or diverge?

**Keywords:** Euripides, *Medea*; Alexandros Papadiamantis, *The Murderess*; Heiner Müller, *Medea Material*; intertextuality, critical reception.

### **Introduction**

A myth is a narrative, a set of elements structured in a sequence. They are the dreams of the world (Buxton, 2005, p. 18) and the voice of the collective unconscious. The myth deals with the great human problems. Myths are the ones that tell us “who we are and where we are” (Campbell, J., 1991, p. 31).

All known and great myths function as archetypes. They provide the right tools for systematizing human thinking. They give behavioral lessons that people over the centuries accept, embrace or reject (Kosmopoulou, 2017, p. 15).

The myth of Medea, the controversial female figure who has received many adjectives to characterize her—infanticide, cheated partner, witch, stranger, excluded, strange or mentally disturbed—has been a source of inspiration for many creators, thus acquiring her own advocates, apologists or doubters (Diamantakou, 2018, p. 42).

Medea, whose name is etymologically attributed to the verb *maedome* (“to care”, “to think”, but also *archo*, “to dominate”, according to *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Liddell-Scott, 1901) was introduced to the Athenian public in 431 BC, when the great master of Attic drama Euripides presented his work.

Euripides has received many characterizations over the centuries. Thus, he was characterized as a revolutionary, innovator, harbinger of a new era but, at the same time, an atheist, intransigent and misogynistic (Markantonatos, 2020, p. 1). Many scholars study his work, trying to highlight the striking contrasts and aspects of his personality and their possible reflections in the Euripidian drama. The barbaric (foreign) Medea betrayed her family in order to help her lover and later husband

Jason. Thus, she will follow a road of no return. She discovers that her husband is breaking their vows of eternal loyalty, since now he desires another woman: Creusa, the Greek daughter of King Creon. Her thirst for revenge overwhelms her. She ends up killing their two children to get revenge on him. Medea is a witch. She has been taught the secrets of magic by the dark Goddess Hecate:

*ἦν Ἐκάτη περίαλλα θεὰ δάε τεργήσασθαι  
φάρμαχ', ὅσ' ἤπειρός τε φύει καὶ νήχυτον ὕδωρ* (Apollonius Rhodius, 3.1128).  
[[whom the goddess Hecate) taught to handle magic herbs with  
exceeding skill all that the land and flowing waters produce]

Euripides presents us a woman with a complex and fascinating character, who is completely alien and deviates from the usual standards of female presence of the time of the great tragedian. Knox will comment that, as other “stranger” characters, Medea possesses a worthwhile wisdom and thought and plays a role similar to that of the male heroes of ancient tragedy (Knox, 1979, pp. 297-320). However, anger repeatedly shows its power, subdues her, and, in the end, it emerges stronger than any logic or wisdom that characterizes the heroine (Lesky, 2003, p. 72).

Certainly, thoughts and opinions about the archetypal figure of Medea and her actions are inexhaustible, but the figure of the female witch, murderess and infanticide that transcends social conventions and evokes collective sentiment is exceptionally rare. Another woman bearing the same characteristics is presented in the context of Modern Greek literature of the early 20th century—*The Murderess* Hadoula or otherwise Fragogiannou<sup>1</sup>—a sixty-year-old Skiathian midwife, and witch at the same time, who feels suffocated due to social restrictions and poverty, struggles with her own dead ends, traumas and demons and finally does the unthinkable—she kills a large number of young girls. The creator of this important social novel—as he described it—is Alexandros Papadiamantis<sup>2</sup>, one of the leading representatives of the literary generation of the 1880s.

1 The name “Fragogianou” derives from her lineage, specifically her descent from the Franks. The second part of the name, “Gianou”, originates from the name “Giannis”, possibly referring to her father or husband. The identity of women during that time was fundamentally tied to the male members of their family.

2 *Alexandros Papadiamantis* was born in 1851 in Skiathos. An unruly and restless spirit from a young age, Alexandros attends different schools. He graduated in 1874 from Varvakeio, then resided on Mount Athos, and then enrolled in the Philosophical School of the University of Athens. He settled permanently in Athens in 1887, where he followed the political and social developments that led, among other things, to the emergence of a new type of scholar who developed a new relationship with the reading public. An important factor that favored this change is the relationship between the daily printed press and literature. Papadiamantis begins his writing career with the historical novel, but soon turns to the realistic short story, by publishing in newspapers and magazines. Although his writings are mostly intended for an urban readership, as he himself lives in Athens for a long time, he never becomes a bourgeois, and he will never break his bond

This decade is the moment when Greeks, more than ever, are faced with the dilemma of turning to the West or highlighting and exploiting healthy traditions. On the political scene, the two partners Trikoupis and Diligiannis face each other. The showdown is between reforms and extreme nationalist politics. Literature could not help but follow the facts. At the time, the literary currents that dominated were mainly realism and naturalism (Vitti, 2003, p. 293) but also symbolism and Parnassism.

The original themes chosen by the writers of the 1880s generation are characterized by the density of folklore motifs, the exploitation of the past, but also by the presence and promotion of family life, with its real current everyday problems. And also the turn to the science of folklore by Nikolaos Politis in search of a purely national peculiarity (Moulas, 1993, p. 85).

Thus, what happens in the homeland becomes an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the writers of the time, as it is presented as the closest place for them to draw experiences. It is in this context that Papadiamantis lives and creates his realistic short stories focused mainly on the problems and concerns of the community of his island, Skiathos.

More than half a century after *The Murderess* and the generation of the 1880s, we are transported to Europe, where a strong current of questioning normalities with pervasive tendencies to deconstruct stereotypes can be traced back to the late 1960s. Theorists such as Bourdieu, Derrida, Barthes and others constitute a core of revisionist tendencies that stand critically against colonialism, racism, and gender inequalities (Patsalidis, 2012, p. 1).

With this in mind, the plot, the characters and the theatrical texts that talk about political and social changes lead many young creators in the 1960s to turn to ancient Greek drama (Campbell, P.A., 2008, p. 84).

The new form of theatre that is emerging is based on the abolition of traditional theatrical conventions and the departure from “absolute drama”. Drama, as defined by Aristotle, is characterized by the dominance of dialogue between the protagonists, interpersonal communication and the exclusion of everything external from the dramatic world, including the dramatist and the spectators, condemned to silent observation; it is also defined by the unfolding of time as a linear sequence in the present but also the respect of the three units of time, of place and action. Hans-Thies Lehmann’s study of post-drama theatre has apparently attempted to answer a vital need for a comprehensive theory that articulates the relationship between drama and the “no longer” dramatic

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with the province. Thus, the small society of his island is interpreted through the urban Athenian perspective. The value of his literary work is indisputable and lies in the fact that his themes concern issues that preoccupy people until today (Kopidakis, 2003, p. 229; Politis, 1998, p. 205; Farinos- Malamatari, 2014, p. 26-50).

forms of theatre that emerged in the 1970s (Lehmann, 2006, p. 1). Post-dramatic theatre, according to the term used by Lehmann, is a new theatrical paradigm that focuses on the deconstruction of characters and, based on postmodern theories of subjectivity, emphasizes the construction of meanings and subjects, while it has the power to destabilize and question normative ones, in contrast to the theatre of imitation, which remains trapped in the representation and imitation of the prevailing ideology<sup>3</sup>. In other words, the new form of theatre advocated for by Lehmann is not simply a mimetic transcription of action and dialogue, on the contrary, it focuses on the theatricality itself and assumes a destructive role within the play itself (Pefanis, 2007, p. 253).

The important German playwright Heiner Müller, with his performance *Medea Material* (1982-1983), which is based on the author's trilogy *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* introduces us to the interior of the post-dramatic theatrical convention, presenting his own Medea as a symbol of non-passive resistance against contemporary problems and social violence and injustice.

In light of the above, and having as a starting point the archetypal figure of Medea, this article aims to showcase a comparative analysis of the texts of the important authors Papadiamantis (*The Murderess*) and Müller (*Medea Material*) using as main tools the theories of intertextuality, perception and gender studies.

### ***Fragogiannou and Medea Material: Bodies of No Importance***

The titles of the two texts are of considerable interest for the principle of our analysis. Papadiamantis calls his work *The Murderess*. It is immediately apparent that the central axis of his work is a woman... who kills. But who and why?

Müller, on the other hand, chooses the title *Medea Material*. At first the archetypal figure of the infanticide Medea comes forth, and, then, the word “material”. What is the relation between the two?

*The Murderess* is written in 1903. History unfolds in a specific place and time – at the beginning of the 20th century, in Skiathos. The central figure is a sixty-year old woman, Hadoula Fragogiannou who is reflecting on her life, and realizes that she has always been a slave – of her parents initially, then of her husband and later of her children and grandchildren.

*Ήταν περί το πρώτον λάλημα του πετεινού, οπότε οι αναμνήσεις έρχονται εν είδει φαντασμάτων. Αφού την υπάνδρευσαν και την «εκουκούλωσαν» [...] η νεόνυμφος μετά του*

<sup>3</sup> On the deconstruction of the theatre of imitation, see: Diamond, E. (1997) *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and the Theatre*, London and New York: Routledge.

*συζύγου της εκατοικησεν στο σπίτι της ανδραδελφής της (Papadiamantis, 2011, p. 28)*  
 [It was about the first cry of the rooster, so the memories come in the form of ghosts. After they had married her and “decapitated” her [...] the newlywed with her husband lived in her husband’s sister house.]<sup>4</sup>

Wanting to save little girls from the fate that haunts all women, she comes up with the idea of killing them. So she commits a series of murders—infanticides. In the end, hunted by the authorities, she will end her life by jumping off a cliff into the sea. Hadoula, among others, is both a midwife and a *pseudo-doctor*, showing a remarkable knowledge of herbs and *mantzounia*<sup>5</sup>:

*Έδιδε βότανα, έκαμνε κηραλοιφάς, εξετέλει εντριβάς, θεράπευε την βασκανίαν, παρεσκευάζε φάρμακα διά τας πασχούσας (Papadiamantis, 2011, p. 37).*  
 [She gave herbs, made beeswax ointments, performed rubbing, cured torture, prepared medicines for sufferers.]

Her contact with wildlife—mountains, forests—and her ability to move around this space comfortably, without feeling fear, reinforces Hadoula’s identity as a woman who had power, ruled nature and was close to the magical element:

*εξήρχετο εις τους αγρούς, ανέβανεν εις τα όρη, διέτρεχε φάραγγας, κοιλάδας και ρεύματα, έφαγνε να εύρη τα βότανα, όσα αυτή εγνώριζε —την αγριοκρομμύδα, την δρακοντιά, το τρίμερο και άλλ ακόμη— (Papadiamantis, 2011, p. 37)*  
 [She went out into the fields, climbed the mountains, ran through gorges, valleys and streams, searched for herbs as much as she knew—the wild onion, the dragonfish, the tripartite and more—]

For Papadiamantis, women can be carriers of both good and evil. In his novels, his heroines are governed by mysterious powers, are a personification of ancient spirits, they know magic and sorcery. They radiate charm, but also fear as they can manipulate chthonic forces (idem, p. 37). They are magical light-hearted creatures: *ως «αλαφροϊσκιωτη» που ήτον, Αλαφροϊσκιωτη! τω όντι (idem)* [...as “moonstruck” she was, “Moonstruck” indeed!].

The relationship between women and nature is explainable if we consider that the female body and its functions are directly involved with birth and life.

4 Our translation for all the fragments to be quoted.

5 “Mantzounia” refers to traditional herbal remedies or concoctions, often made from a combination of natural ingredients such as herbs, spices, and honey. These preparations have been historically used in various cultures, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions, for their purported medicinal or therapeutic properties, reflecting a blend of empirical knowledge and cultural practices in traditional medicine.

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Subsequently, the female physiology (e.g. menstruation) place women in social roles that are inferior to those of men. Women's psychology also seems to be closer to nature. Hysteria and mental outbursts were phenomena that were directly related to the female gender and testified, according to many, to the uncontrollable womanhood (Ortner, 1997, pp. 73-75).

Knowing the art of midwifery and herbs, Hadoula helps women give birth to their children, but sometimes helps them “get rid of” them by giving them herbs or using other practices. Violence inflicted on women's bodies in order to induce a miscarriage through self-abortion due to an unwanted pregnancy or “illegal” in other cases, was common practice. The fear and anxiety of women about unwanted pregnancies leads them to adopt practices of suicide. Self-abortion using various “tools” such as wire, needle, or even bird feathers dipped in strange herbs is essentially an act of suicide (Rich, 1983, p. 383), that was sometimes entrusted to a third person, usually an elderly woman. Fragogiannou lives close to the pain to which the female body is subjected. But this pain is inherent in the woman's fate. It follows girls from their birth.

*Το θηγάτριον είχαν έλθει άρρωστον εις τον κόσμον [...] Από την κοιλίαν της μητρός του, η φθορά το είχε ακολουθήσει (Paradiamantis, 2011, p. 27).*

[The baby daughter has come sick into the world [...] From her mother's womb, decay followed her.]



*Φόνισσα/Fonissa/The Murderess* (2023), film directed by: Eva Nathena;  
Fragogiannou: actress Karyofyllia Karabeti.

© *Marilena Anastasiadou*

Source: <https://www.athensvoice.gr/politismos/kinimatografos/863049/fonissa-monadiki-provoli-sto-mikro-theatro-arhais-epidaouro-to-savvato-108/>

We witness how the female body is subjected to violence and pain, but so is the female soul. There are many images in the text that show us the horror of physical and verbal violence tolerated by women from their male family members<sup>6</sup>:

*Τότε τυφλός (ο Μούρος) [...] ορμήσας εκτόπησεν την αδελφήν του εις το πλευρόν  
όπισθεν κατά τη δεξιάν μασχάλη.[...]*

*Η Αμέρσα άφηκε σπαρακτικήν κραυγή. (Paradiamantis, 2011, p. 44)*

[Then blind (Murus) [...] rushed and struck his sister in the side behind  
the right armpit. [...] Amersa let out a heartbreaking cry.]

*Και ο γαμβρός της (Φραγκογιαννούς) είχε πει ρακί με το παραπάνω μετά το δείπνο  
επειδή είχε πει αρκετά ωμιλούσε μέσα στον ύπνο του.*

[And the son-in-law of Frangiannous, drunk raki more than enough  
after dinner ... drunk so much that he was talking in his sleep.]

Hearing the coughing baby, he cries: “Shut up!”

We observe here that both women’s bodies and women’s embodied selves are under constant oppression and subjected to violence in order to conform, to remain “acceptable” and “ethical”. In order to become “moral”, the individual follows a series of practices or self-management techniques that will allow him to modify and transform himself, in order to meet specific social and cultural criteria (Foucault, 2003, p. 19).

The female body thus becomes a field over which powers clash. The struggle between the prevailing morality and order and the will of the subject himself, which here takes second place.

Müller’s *Medea* does not place us in a specific place or timeline, since his theatre can only be tied to a natural process. The faces and actions of Müller’s heroes, like those of myth, take place in the context of natural history. They appear and then disappear, just as they do in nature. In this way, the action is dissolved in favor of the incidents. Thus, the action appears as a changing landscape (Lehmann 2006, p. 81).

Even theatrical expression in post-dramatic theatre bears elements of ideological decay and thus stands in stark contrast to the cohesion and unity that characterizes classical theatre. In this context, gestures, body movements and stillness are themselves transformed into objects – sources of meaning. So the body is not a matter incapable of transformation, but it is redefined and re-transformed (Barba, 2004, p. 157-158).

<sup>6</sup> Euripides also speaks of the sufferings of the female body in *Medea*: “First of all, we must, spending money and money, buy a husband and have him as master of our bodies.” (Euripides: pp. 231-234).

After all, it is Medea's material that interests us, not her actions. Material for Müller are all those elements that Euripides' *Medea* carries and can be used depending on the era of the play, its ideologies and its problems. Müller's *Medea* is material for thought. After all, the author uses ancient Greek myths as a raw material, as examples of collective experiences (Müller, 1997, p. 14). The play presents three characters: Medea, Jason and Medea's nanny. Three dramatic characters but the most iconic is Medea and the moment of her famous long monologue. Medea addresses Jason saying:

*Τούτο το κορμί δεν σημαίνει  
Τίποτε πια για σένα. Θέλεις να πιείς το αίμα του Ιάσων.* (Müller, 1997, p. 38)  
[This body means nothing to you anymore?  
You want to drink its blood, Jason?]

*«Ας έμεινα το ζώο που ήμουνα  
προτού ένας άντρας με κάνει γυναίκα του  
Μήδεια η βάρβαρη τώρα απορριγμένη»  
«Ήμουν η αγελάδα για άρμεγμα, τώρα υποπόδιό σας»* (Müller, 1997, p. 41)  
[“Let me remain the animal I was  
before a man made me his wife  
Medea the barbarian now rejected.”  
“I was the milking cow, now your footstool”.]

Müller, through Medea's mouth, highlights here women's oppression and devaluation, the power of men over women's bodies and characters, the betrayal they suffer from a male-dominated society that has marginalized them. A society that treats them as worthless persons and meaningless bodies. Within this framework, gender not only functions as a rule of who matters, but is also part of the authoritarian discourse that produces concepts, differentiates them, delimits and controls them (Butler, 1993, p. 2). Müller seems to use the face of Medea to denounce female enslavement and oppression by the dominant man/conqueror (Müller, 1997, p. 16).

### **Φόνος, θάνατος, λύτρωση/*Murder, death, redemption***

*The Murderess* constantly ponders the suffering and hardship that fate has in store for girls. She begins to murder them indiscriminately. Her purpose is to redeem them, as she will say. It is no coincidence that little girls here follow the same fate as their mothers. Growing up, they too will become subjects of violence (Tomara Sideris & Sideris, 1986, p. 87).

Hadoula, contemplating all this, is led to the explosion. She kills little girls believing she is resisting fate. But this resistance comes at a cost both socially and psychologically:

*Της Φραγογιαννούς άρχισε πράγματι να ψηλώνει ο νους της!  
Είχε παραλογίσει επί τέλους. Έκλινεν επί του λίκνου έχωσε τους δυο μακρούς  
σκληρούς δακτύλους στο στόμα του μικρού διά να το «σκάση»*

(Papadiamantis, 2011, p. 52)

[Fragogiannous' mind really started to get taller! (started to lose her mind)  
[She had reached the limits of her endurance and had finally lost her mind.  
She leaned on the cradle, inserted her two long hard fingers into the  
little one's mouth to smother her (the baby girl).]

Perhaps it is society itself that killed the little girls and not Fragogiannou? Could *The Murderess* be read as a manifesto of oppressed women? Papadiamantis surprises the reader not only with his knowledge of female psychology, but mainly by writing a woman-centered novel. The ever-present problem of the condition of women and everything related to it returned to the fore with his creation. He seems to talk about the problems of women through Hadoulas' mouth, as another feminist (Gasouka, 1998, p. 228).

Specifically, the recent Greek film adaptation of *The Murderess*, premiered in November 2023, directed by Eva Nathena and starring the important actress Karyophyllia Karabeti, without any intention of modernizing the discourse, the narrative or the perspective of things, brought back to the fore mental and physical abuse, blockages and despair of women. The film received significant accolades, both domestically and internationally. Indicatively, at the 18th Greek Film Festival in London, the film won 6 awards such as Best Film, Director and Best Actress. Subsequently, at the 18th Los Angeles Film Festival, the director won a Special Jury Award for Best Director, while Karyofyllia Karabeti won the Special Jury Award for Best Performance.

From the other perspective, in his *Medea*, Müller clearly shows how the social establishment that tramples on women's values and rights makes them appear barbarian, alien, it distances them from themselves and their desires.

*Ιάσων: Τί ήσουν πριν;*

**Μ:** **Ήμουν η Μήδεια** (Müller, 1997, p. 38)

[Jason: What were you before?

**Medea : I was Medea!**]

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Medea is a foreigner, she is barbaric and she will have the strength to answer Jason and bring her counterarguments for each of his statements. Don't we all feel foreigners at some point? Abandoned? Rejected? We don't admire the murderer, but the woman that has courage to defend herself.

Medea is then the mirror, our image, or, in Müller's words:

*Ο ακρωτηριασμένος ήρωας, (είναι κάτι που) μπορεί να συμβεί στον καθένα,  
δε σημαίνει τίποτα όμως. (Müller, 1997, p. 31)*

[The mutilated hero (it's something that) can happen to anyone,  
but it doesn't mean anything.]

## **Conclusions**

The archetypal figure of Medea travels through the centuries. Creators throughout the ages transform her myth or draw material from her personality. The two important creators, Papadiamantis and Müller, converse with Euripides' *Medea* in order to narrate their own reflections on the "women's question".

Although there are no clear references to the relationship of his work with the myth of Medea, Papadiamantis, however, as a genuine feminist, denounces unknowingly (?), through the mouth and actions of Fragogiannou, social injustice and oppression against women of his time. He uses the extreme practice of infanticide, like Euripides, to make her denunciation heard louder. Isn't it social norms and imperatives that killed those girls? Müller, always influenced, interested and inspired by his context, uses Medea as a "material" that he adapts in his spatial and temporal frame (German Democratic Republic) to denounce social, racial and gender inequality.



Murderesses — Group Exhibition | State of Concept Athens |  
25 September-16 November 2024

State of Concept presented the “Murderesses” exhibition by Konstantina Melachrinou and iLiana Fokianaki with the participation of Eleni Karakou, Markella Ksilogiannopoulou, Miammy, Malvina Panagiotidi, Eva Papamargariti<sup>7</sup>.

Installation Images by Stathis Mamalakis

All the works by Malvina Panagiotidi © the artist, Courtesy the artist and The Breeder.

Source: <https://elculture.com/exhibition/murderesses-women-violence-and-myth-rethinking-the-gender-stereotypes/>

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<sup>7</sup> “The five artists participating in the exhibition use oral narratives of violence, spells, sexual practices, caustic campaigns, medical trolley tables, and hybrid creatures that make us rethink the gender stereotypes. The narratives through their works strive to exorcise patriarchy [...] as it is experienced daily 121 years after Papdiamantis’ novel. Each work transforms violence and seeks to shed light on the darkness of the past for a brighter future where gender violence no longer exists.” (elculture.com)

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2. *I Fonissa/The Murderess* (1974) Directed by Kostas Ferris. [Film]. Writer: Alexandros Papadiamantis (novel), Costas Ferris and Dimos Theos (screenplay). Stars: Maria Alkeou, Dora Lutinaki, Dimitris Poulidakos. Producer: Milli Gregou-Delipetrou.
3. *I Fonissa/The Murderess* (1993) Directed by Angelos Kovotsos. [Film]. Writer: Alexandros Papadiamantis (novel), Vaso Hekimoglou (screenplay). Stars: Toulia Stathpolou, Anthi Andreopoulou, Thalia Argyriou. Producer: Nikos Pilavios.

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# THE ADVENTUROUS RECEPTION OF GALATEA KAZANTZAKIS IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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**Abstract:** The article refers to the particularly hostile reception by the intellectual community of the time of two plays by Galatea Kazantzakis. The writer was an important female presence in Greek literature in the first half of the 20th century, a key representative of the leftist ideology and the first wife of the acclaimed author Nikos Kazantzakis. These plays, having been influenced by the pioneering European currents of the time, proposing new ways of thinking and writing and above all promoting the female presence and action, experienced a reaction unprecedented in the annals of the intellectual life of the time. The rich dialogue caused by their performance, and indeed by *While the Ship Sails* of the newly founded National Theatre (1932), illuminates in various ways the theatrical and more generally the artistic and intellectual reality of the time, enriching with valuable material the history of ideas in the interwar period.

**Keywords:** Galatea Kazantzakis, dramaturgy, Avant-garde, ideology, reception, interwar period, criticism, female presence, female writing, performance.

### **Introduction**

The interwar period, like all transitional periods, is characterized by convergences and apparent or even substantial contradictions in all fields. Intersections are more frequent and stronger than continuations, a phenomenon that creates strong conflicts and continuous rearrangements. Therefore, the possibilities of interpreting the phenomena are limited. While attempting to go in this direction, we must remember that the twenty years between 1920 and 1940 were post-war for the people of the time, and not – as for us – inter-war. We must also take into account that immediately after the war, another war – internal this time – the Asia Minor devastation, once again changed the post-war facts, adding a new dynamic factor to the national, political, social and cultural history. The strengthening of the Left<sup>1</sup>, mainly in the first inter-war decade, will enrich significantly the ideological and aesthetic rearrangements.

Having its expressive organs in the daily and periodical press, it opposes all manifestations of urban art, consciously and explicitly putting ideology at the service of aesthetics. In this context, the interwar reflection developed particularly fruitfully, focusing on the timeless demands of Greekness and avant-garde. These now gain particular dynamics with various starting points, different faces or even masks. The theatre, by its nature, especially exposed to external influences, receives a variety of stimuli from which it creates its identity. In this image, we often recognize nuclei of evolution, which end up in our time. Among the

1 In 1924 the Socialist Labor Party of Greece was renamed the Communist Party. For the history of the Left in this period, see Άγγ. Ελεφάντης (1979) *Η επαγγελία της αδύνατης επανάστασης, Κ.Κ.Ε και αστισμός στον Μεσοπόλεμο*, Αθήνα: Θεμέλιο.// [Translated: Elefántis, Ang. (1979) *The promise of the impossible revolution*].

important pioneers of ideological and aesthetic ferments, in the field of theatrical practice, we can distinguish Sp. Melas, F. Politis, K. Koon, S. Karantinos, and in dramaturgy P. Horn, Ag. Terzakis, A. Lidorikis, Gal. Kazantzakis.



Galatea Kazantzakis (1881-1962)

Source: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/24692921.2021.1903286>

### ***Galatea Kazantzakis***

The last one, whose work and activity we analyze here<sup>2</sup>, is of particular interest, as a unique case of a female presence with extremely daring, but also noteworthy interventions in the field of ideological and aesthetic pursuits. This offer, whether consciously or out of ignorance, was not evaluated by the intellectuals of the time. Her gender, her ideological position but also the heavy shadow of her husband, Nikos Kazantzakis, lead us to a partial interpretation, but not sufficient justification of the phenomenon.

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<sup>2</sup> The author's personality as well as her theatrical activity have repeatedly occupied the undersigned in studies and articles; see the monograph: Β. Γεωργοπούλου (2011) *Γυναίκες διαδρομές. Η Γαλάτεια Καζαντζάκη και το θέατρο*, Αθήνα: Αιγόκερως.



Greek poet and writer Galatea Kazantzakis –  
Nikos Kazantzakis' wife from 1911 to 1926.

Source:

<https://www.historical-museum.gr/webapps/kazantzakis-pages/en/life/letters-galateia-intro.php>

### ***The Wounded Birds***

Among the pioneering dramaturgical contributions of the interwar period are two plays by Galatea Kazantzakis, which occupied the critical community a lot: *The Wounded Birds* and *While the Ship Sails*. *The Wounded Birds* was staged by one of the short-lived, but important interwar avant-garde troupes, the “Art Theatre” of Sp. Mela, in 1925 (Georgopoulou, 2008, pp. 130-150).

The play by Galatea Kazantzakis was the only original Greek play presented by the troupe, as well as the only play signed by a woman. According to K. Bastias, its author was “one of the most important Greek writers” (Bastias, 12.8.1925). Unfortunately, despite our efforts, we could not find the text of the much-discussed play, which would have solved several questions regarding the controversial issue of its reception.<sup>3</sup> According to Sp. Mela (Melas, 1960,

<sup>3</sup> I came to this conclusion after researching the accessible sources. Specifically, in the magazines that the author wrote for, in the manuscripts of ELIAS and the theatre library. The play does not exist in the file of the author's sister, Elli Alexiou, according to the information provided by the file manager Ms. Eugenia Zikou to Kostas Nitsos (on 23/10/1997). The author planned to publish it together with some other works, which are referenced as “to be published”, but in the end their publication didn't happen. Unfortunately, I could not even find the program of the performance in the archives of the Theatre Museum and ELIAS. The information about the play comes from newspaper reviews, which fortunately were quite informative, and from some letters to newspapers by the author herself.

pp. 202-209), the theme of the play refers to *Les Ratés*, by the pioneering French playwright Lenormand<sup>4</sup> – whose reception is of particular interest in the Greek interwar scene<sup>5</sup> – and to its general climate in Chekhov<sup>6</sup>. The play concerns the authors's contemporary Greek life and mainly the intellectuals of the time<sup>7</sup>.

The author had repeatedly expressed her opposition to the theatre of her time, which “only gave either slavish imitations of French art, or ethnographic depictions of conventional modern Greek life” (Kazantzakis, 9.8.1925). As she argues, with *Wounded Birds*, she tried on the one hand to escape from the “manganopigado” of ethnography, and on the other, starting from Greek reality, to showcase the tragedy of human fate, making a contrast between dream and reality. These visions of the author, remarkable as well as ambitious, aimed to move beyond ethnography – a concern shared by a significant part of the progressive intellectuals of the time, especially those on the Left – and to reduce her heroes to timeless symbols – a hallmark of all great dramatists. However, these aspirations seem to have gone unnoticed by the critics of the time, who rejected the play outright. According to Sp. Melas, the performance “was a theatrical feast” in the negative sense of the term (Melas, 1960, p. 205). The great faults that the critics attributed to the play were the lack of action and dramatic conflicts, their replacement by unrestrained philological and philosophical chatter, as well as the lack of a connective tissue, that would unite the different stories of the fourteen heroes of the play. The spirit of the relevant criticism is revealed by the proposal of the columnist of the *Athenaiki* newspaper, that the director of the theatre be punished together with the writer, “as the first person responsible for yesterday's theatrical filth” (“The corsair”, 11.8.1925).

4 Henri-René Lenormand wrote plays that emphasized man's submission to his fate and the decline of society and culture. Among his works, quite well known is *Les Ratés (The Fails)*, a play in 14 pictures, first performed in Paris in 1920. *The Fails* are Parisian actors who, disappointed by the public, tour the French provinces hoping for better luck, which unfortunately they never meet. The play impressed because of its realism and frequent scene changes [Grimon – C. Musil, (χχ) 1832].

5 In the same period, the “Art Theatre” presented *Time is a Dream* by the same author, while *Simun* was presented by “Elefthera Skeni” in 1929, with the author attending the performance. But also the collaboration troupe of the two protagonists Kiveli and Kotopouli presented *Medea* in 1932.

6 The author refers to the relationship of her play with Chekhov, while also giving interesting information about its plot: “*The Wounded Birds* reminds me of Chekhov, as Mr. Spyros Melas also said. Because they, like the heroes of the great Russian writer, live with the nostalgia of a better life. Each person, of the fourteen who exist in the drama, has their story, which is a sad drama.... I tried to present as vividly as possible the drama of the people of spirit and Art, who, for one reason or another, did not see their ideals fulfilled (Melas, 1960, pp. 203-204).

7 And even in very specific persons. According to Sp. Melas: “Kazantzakis drew her material from her circle of scholars, poets and actors, who frequented Dexameni at the time, without flattering those who inspired her in any way” (Melas, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 202-203). The author also admits this fact: “The heroes in this work are all taken from Greek, modern life and everyone can recognize them and give them their familiar names.” (Kazantzakis, 9.8.1925).

The criticisms of F. Politis (12.8.1925) and P. Kalogerikos (12.8.1925) were added to the overall rejection of the performance. The main innovative elements of the play, such as its modular cinematic structure and the existence of hints, which allowed its heroes to be identified with well-known figures of the intellectual life, were not only evaluated by the critics but also turned against the author. In particular, they had the effect of creating negative comments at the expense of her personal life.

A much more sober treatment of the play's weaknesses is attempted by the playwright Pantelis Horn, in his publication from the newspaper *Eleftheron Vima*. This text appears in the context of a more general criticism, which he exercises on the sloppiness and unbridled subjectivism of Greek criticism (Horn, 15.8.1925). He recognizes Mrs. Kazantzakis' originality in the conception of the subject. Regarding her relationship with Chekhov, he considers it "imitation but not slavish, because it presents types of our own taken from our lives, characters quite well designed around a central idea that does not deviate from it even for a moment" (Horn, *ibid*). This last statement about the play's central axis, coming in stark contrast to the general view of criticism, is of particular interest, since it is formulated by a successful playwright. Horn then makes interesting observations about the persons of the play, and with the look of the experienced dramatist, notes the lack of liveliness and naturalness of the characters. He also notices the uneven lighting between the main and secondary figures, which helps to reduce the interest in the play. But the main factor that in his opinion significantly reduces the dramatic effect, is the absence of plot in the play, a fact that could be overcome with a more poetic rendering. Horn particularly praises the dialogue, and emphasizes that the play should be judged positively by critics as an effort that, while not entirely successful, nevertheless paves the way for future ventures. This last conclusion of the columnist is in complete agreement with the opinion that the author herself expressed about her work on the eve of the performance that indicates, if nothing else, a genuine self-critical attitude on her part, an attitude that emphasizes even more the irrational passion of her critics: "If I succeeded, I don't know. I dare to set an example for those, better than me, who can go further. This drama is also purely a wounded bird, which moved wanting a lot and accomplishing as little as it could" (Kazantzakis, *ibid*, 9.8.1925). The reception of the play shows, among other things, the critics' indifference to the author's intentions and signals a lack of empathy and constructive engagement among Greek critics. In contrast, an exemplary approach is taken by P. Horn in his aforementioned critique.



Galatea Kazantzakis

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***While the Ship Sails. The text***

Equally adventurous, but also particularly interesting is the reception of the play *While the Ship Sails*, because – among others – the play was staged by the National Theatre. In the play, Kazantzakis attempts to render social protest, a familiar theme in her dramaturgy, using avant-garde European stage forms and contemporary aesthetic currents, more powerfully than in her previous attempts. The special character of the play is supported by the dramatic space (a traveling ship), the stage directions, its structure in separate images, as well as the Shakespearean motto that precedes the play, and which refers us to the idea of the theatre of the world.<sup>8</sup>

The play – a drama in three acts and ten scenes<sup>9</sup> – as characterized by the author – presents several peculiarities and creates several problems in understanding and interpretation, which certainly cannot be moved to a realistic level. The detailed stage directions give us the atmosphere of the play from the beginning and shed enough light on the author’s purposes: “When the curtain

8 “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Shakespeare (G. Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 9).

9 From the program of the performance, in 1932, we conclude that, in the 1959 collective volume of *Avlaia* published edition, the author must have made some changes. Of course, these are probably also due to directorial intervention.

raises we see a setting meant to resemble a port. This port will be depicted as expressionistically as possible” (Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 11).

Trying to illuminate the meaning of the play, the author notes: “As the passengers of the ship pass by, they will be illuminated by powerful spotlights, with such a color that the people will look like the dead” (idem). Also, all the faces will be made up in a “granguilosque” manner, as will be the whole atmosphere of the play.” Later, this attempt of the author to emphasize, with a dose of exaggeration – which far exceeds the realistic limits – the pathology of the situations, and to project the horror, becomes evident. In this context, it is obvious that the heroes of the play lose their individual characteristics and transform into figures capable of being a symbol (while not expressing too much vocally). This intention of the author is realized in the presentation of the characters, not with specific names, but with their temporary or permanent qualities. For example, they are referred to as the “sick”, “Mr. X”, the “entrepreneur”, the “second entrepreneur”, the “lady in love”, the “psychic”, the “crazy” etc. These characterizations give them a deliberate vagueness and a general character, which indicate the attempt to render more general situations. This element was also pointed out by the critics of the time and attributed a lack of vitality to the faces: “Mrs. Kazantzakis did not give life to any face, everything appears and disappears like lifeless shadows” (Thrylos, 1977, p. 418).

A stench of physical and moral death is constantly emerging. This stench of death emanates from the deck, which has been turned into a death camp, and from all seats, where the conversations of the passengers constantly revolve around the worthlessness of life and the inevitability of death. This state of terror is intensified even more by the news that leprosy is spreading among the passengers. The plot of the play comes second and also attempts to express this horror and impending destruction. What mainly characterizes the parts of the play and increases this pathological atmosphere is the complete lack of ideals and values, which deprives them of any reason for existence. In their general state of misery, some voices of protest arise. These represented either by the “man on the couch”, who envisions social equality and refers to author’s ideology, or by the amateur actress, who grounds her balance in her interest for theatre: “*The amateur actress*: The gentleman is sick because he has no purpose in his life... He who has an ideal is never sick. I’m not, because I want to be a great actress. I will enroll in Drama School” (Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 27). But apart from politics and art, there is consolation in people’s daily lives when they are able to maintain and express their feelings. On the contrary, religion is unable to alleviate human suffering, since it postpones everything to the afterlife, as the monk argues, disappointing the leper who hopes to be cured: “*Monk (crawling and unconscious)*: Not here, not

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here in the wordly life... in the eternal... where there is no pain or groaning... Down here, how do you dare to go?" (Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 16).<sup>10</sup>

The morbidity peaks in the presentation of the relationship of the two sexes, its complete perversion, which will become the cause of the final destruction of the ship. The erotic pathology will culminate in the relationship between the stoker of the ship, Hercules, and the "captain's daughter". Hercules' love represents the primitive, and perhaps the most genuine, instinctual manifestation of this emotion, as a desire for exclusive dominance and possession of the loved object, while the love of the "captain's daughter" expresses, on the contrary, its most hypocritical manifestation, aiming at the satisfaction of female companionship and vanity. This love, already burdened with the curse of death, – Hercules has killed his betrothed – is fated to spread destruction.

It is clear that Galatea uses the symbolism of the ship to express her views on society and human life, which are characterized by an excess of morbidity, as we have already identified. This projection of the pathological element, characteristic of naturalism, is projected by the Russian classics and especially by Maxim Gorky in his play *The Lower Depths*. Reference is made to this work both by the passengers of the third seat with their biological and physical deterioration, but also by the passengers of the other seats with their moral morbidity. The events in Gorky's play take place in an asylum, where various rejects and outcasts from society have been gathered. It is typical that there is also the "failed businessman", the "actor", and above all, the "ideologist", Luka, who envisions social change. Travel literature, too, with its tempting proposal of escaping to the vast sea, perhaps contributed to the inspiration of Galatea, who, however, is careful to eliminate the magic of travel from the beginning, constantly presenting the idea of death, which in the end also acquires a realistic basis. These constant preconceptions that we have already identified, reduce the interest in the development of the play. In some parts, the emphasis on social pathology deprives the play of its dramatic power and reaches the limits of cheap melodrama:

*The Couch Woman*: In a little while I will not see him anymore... I will never see him again (*Papsi*). Last night he accompanied me to the port. We sat in a small cafe and waited for the steamer... He was cool and cared about me. Was he asking me? Are you cold Teresa? Are you well

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<sup>10</sup> Galatea, despite all her progressive ideas, believed in God, but to whom she gave a completely human dimension in an attempt to unite Christianity with the socialist vision of changing society. She expresses these views in the short story: "The Repentance of Jesus", (Kazantzakis, G., 1936).

dressed? He was touching my back. I was silent... I couldn't say a word... I couldn't find... A little more time and we will part forever... (*cries*).  
(Kazantzakis, 1959, p. 17)

Critics took advantage of these weaknesses and rejected the play.

### ***The performance and the “festival” of reception***

*While the Ship Sails* by Galatea Kazantzakis was staged for the first and only time by the National Theatre in its second year of activity (1932-1933), as part of the promotion of modern Greek drama. It's the first multi-act Modern Greek play<sup>11</sup> staged at the National Theatre. The central female role was played by Katerina Andreadis, while the male role was played by Avlonitis. Important actors of the older and younger generations also participated, such as Sappho Alkaiou, Ludovikos Louis, N. Rozan, N. Paraskevas, G. Glinos, N. Dendramis, Il. Destounis, M. Katrakis, Al. Minotis, Vaso Manolidou et al. Despite the universal request and the constant appeals of intellectuals for staging a recent Greek play on the national stage, Galatea's work was considered completely inappropriate by the critics, who reacted violently. The peculiarity of the play caused many discussions, among others because the author was a woman and belonged to the intellectual Left. A clear example of the confusion in the criticism was that the bourgeois rejected it because of its leftist ideology (Barlas, 6.11.1932), while the leftist intellectuals rejected it because of its reactivity (Unsigned, 1932, pp. 453-454). Representing the bourgeois criticism, T. Barlas writes characteristically: “The writer belonging ideologically to the comrades of Moscow applied on the stage of the national theatre the new techniques found by communism to express the collective vision” (Barlas, *ibid*). From an aesthetic point of view, the play was also rejected by both sides, who considered the choice of F. Politis to be completely unsuccessful, and attributed it to a desire to showcase the technical capabilities of the national stage, driven by the spectacle required by the direction of the play, (Podas, 3.11.1932, Barlas, 6.11.1932, “The theatrical”, 3.11.1932).

T. Barlas even quite maliciously asserted: “Politis competes with Makedos and without success” (Barlas, 6.11.1932). On the contrary, the criticism of P. Haris completely disapproves of the play, but praises it as an opportunity to demonstrate the directing and scenographic skills of the staff of the state theatre (Haris, 1932, 1448).

11 The first one-act Modern Greek play was *The Divine Dream* by G. Xenopoulos, which was staged at the opening performance of the national stage together with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

In the same sense, Thyrylos, although having judged the play negatively by condemning the inexhaustible borrowings from the Russian avant-garde and American dramaturgy, supported the direction of the play and praised the initiative of the national stage to present a Greek play, condemning the negative position of the criticism:

“However, Greek criticism, which is unfortunately often practiced in many newspapers by people without any qualifications and any system, always offers surprises. The day after the premiere of *While the Ship Sails*, the same people who had almost asked for the closure of the National Theatre because it was not fulfilling its strictly national purpose, erupted with libels, not only against the play and the author, but also against the Theatre that presented a wretched and stupid contraption!” (Thrilos, 1927, p. 414)

Here it is worth adding the praise of the president of the Italian writers, Dr. Davanzati, who, being in Athens, attended the project. Expressing his admiration for the atmosphere, the acting and directing discipline, as well as the unity of the performance, he attributes this success to the directing intervention of F. Politis, which he places at the opposite end of the vendetta-driven approach, which he identified as a dominant element in *Maria Stewart's* performance, which was presented in the same period by the two protagonists Kyveli and Kotopoulos (Bastias, 10.11.1932).

### ***An attempt at interpretation***

The predominance of the sea element in Kazantzakis' play referred to the dramaturgy of the American playwright Eugene O'Neill and part of the criticism aptly identified the play's obvious relationship with the American playwright's *The Hairy Ape* (1922). An anonymous critic, in fact, supports his point of view by giving us detailed information about the reception and stage course of the play: it was published in 1929, performed in Paris by Pitoeff in the same year and published in French in Europe in 1930 (Th.N.T., 3.11.1932). These elements justify the relationship between the two plays, taking into account the French education of Kazantzakis and the date of writing of her play. However, not a single critic proceeded to find the most organic relationship that connects the two plays, which classifies them in the aesthetic current of expressionism. *The Hairy Ape* represents O'Neill's expressionist phase. The expressionistic elements of both plays are their separation into self-contained images, the personification of primitive individual

instinct in the face of a stoker<sup>12</sup>, the type of fatal woman who brings disaster, the destructive intervention of love but also its decisive role in the development of the play<sup>13</sup>, the projection of the class element<sup>14</sup>, the presentation of the persons not by name but by their qualities.

It is worth noting that the modernity of the play was detected by some of the critics, but without specifying this reference. In fact, the “theatrical” of *Vradini* (2.11.1932) and Kokkinakis of *Akropolis* rank the play among the best of recent years. Kokkinakis even compares it with the most innovative plays of European dramaturgy, arguing that *While the Ship Sails*, apart from its artless ending, is not inferior to *Maya* presented by “Elefthera Skeni” and to *The Sick Youth*, presented by Kyveli’s troupe. He also acknowledges that the advanced socialist views of the author are presented in a technical manner, to which he attributes the attack of the criticism (“Red”, 10.11.1932). Sofia Mavroidi Papadakis, bolder than her male colleagues in defending a female artist, and with shared ideological concerns, argues militantly that the play, modern and innovative, was not evaluated by the critics, because we always see the modern outside of Greece. The play – she continues – has a premise, vitality, psychological conflicts, a warm and human atmosphere. It is “symbolic, emotive, inspiring” (Papadakis, 1933, p. 111). Despite her good mood, Papadakis is unable to define the axes of modernity, which would be the most stable basis for the defense of the play. To conclude, it is worth adding the opinion of the always perceptive Gr. Xenopoulos. As a judge of the Stathatio’s Competition in 1931 (Petrahou-Mousmoutis, 1931, p. 163), he claims that *While the Ship Sails* was the best submitted play. He adds: if he did not insist on giving Kazantzakis the first prize, it was because the play was “too daring and too modern” (Xenopoulos, 1931, pp. 319-320). In her interview with K. Bastias, Galatea expresses the reasonable question about this really contradictory

12 Yank in O’Neill and Hercules (the choice of the name is not accidental) in G. Kazantzakis. These two persons have common characteristics, such as their dislike for women, their physical strength which is manifested both in their strange appearance and demeanor, and their destructive tendency to drink. But, in O’Neill’s play, Yank presents complete characteristics and his reduction to a symbol is given more successfully: “Beyond me nothing, I am the end, I am the beginning. A start and the world moves. Yes that’s me. The new that kills the old. I am what makes iron steel.” (O’Neill, *The Hairy Ape*, p. 25)

13 Yank’s meeting in the boiler room with Mildred, a pale rich girl dressed in white (an element that reminds us of the “captain’s daughter”) and the lightning love that automatically developed between them, is the strongest element connecting the two plays.

14 We read in O’Neill’s play (Scene I): “Long: All men is born free and ekal. That’s in the bleedin’ Bible, maties. But what d’they care for the Bible – them lazy, bloated swine what travels first cabin? Them’s the ones. They dragged us down ‘til we’re on’y wage slaves in the bowels of a bloody ship, sweatin’, burnin’ up, eatin’ coal dust! Hit’s them’s ter blame – the damned capitalist class!” (Available at: <https://www.sparknotes.com/drama/hairyape/full-text/scene-i/> Accessed at: 12 November 2024)/(O’Neill, *ibid.* p. 8). Similar discussions take place, in the play of Galatea Kazantzakis. However, in O’Neill play, this element is particularly intense and perfectly harmonized with the plot, contrary to its external inclusion in Galatea’s play.

statement by Xenopoulos and her general dissatisfaction with the rejection of her play by the competition jury, as well as her disappointment with the general theatrical situation of the time (Bastias, 1999, p. 123).

Other highly positive comments about the play are recorded in the general evaluation of the theatrical movement of 1932 by D.A. Kapetanaki in *Nea Zoi*, an Athenian magazine with a Greek-centric orientation. The critic characterizes *While the Ship Sails* as “a play of great value” and considers the level of criticism against Mrs. Kazantzakis’ play to be completely absurd and unreasonable. Continuing, he evaluates it as “one of the best works that graced the cult of true art in Greece”. Noting then its particularity and that “the features of the concept of drama are absent”, however, he identifies a “fragile, heartbreaking and desperate music, rising subtly but clearly through each scene of the drama”. The play expresses the sobs and heartbreak of the artist’s worldview, that life has no meaning. This confession – always according to the critic – “is worth saying, as long as it is sincere, as long as it was made with genuine effort and passion” (Kapetanalis, 1933, p. 73). This view completely agrees with the belief of the author, who in her article in newspaper *Proia* gives “certain explanations for the play”, trying to protect it from the attacks of the critics. In this interesting text, Galatea argues that a work of art does not necessarily have a specific position, nor is “the creator obliged to reveal their purposes”. Then, seeking to illuminate the thread of the play, she invokes the Shakespearean motto she puts forward, regarding the relationship of life with theatre and therefore its futility and comments

“as a feeling pervading the drama there is this sense of the tragic and pessimistic meaning of life. This is the atmosphere of the play, the gloomy spirit that wanders between the heroes in their reasonings and their actions: all hopes are in vain, life is pointless, senseless and chaotic, [while] death, raw and brutish, appears as the only constant and eternal reality.” (Kazantzakis, 8.11.1932)

Then Galatea separates the modern drama from the traditional one, by claiming that her play is “preeminently modernist in all its forms and content”. Documenting her point of view, Galatea invokes the lack of communication and meaningful dialogue between the characters in the play: “For this reason, often each of the characters in the drama does not respond directly to their interlocutor, but as if they rendered their internal meditations out loud, like monologues” (Kazantzakis, *ibid*). This last observation of Galatea brings us close to the theatre of the absurd, where the lack of contact between the persons is a main characteristic.

Both the play and the author's ideological and aesthetic positions are very far from her leftist ideology, which is surprising, as we are aware of Galatea's political involvement until that point, even as editor-in-chief of the leftist publication *New Pioneers*. Because of the play, she clashed with the official party line, which through the above-mentioned journal publicly accused her of reactionary and anti-revolutionary behavior, characterizing as "nonsense" the clarifications about the play that the author herself published, as we have seen, in *Proia* (Unsigned, 1933, p. 454). Due to this dispute, the author is removed from the journal for a while. *Rizospastis* criticizes the play even more harshly, publishing a pamphlet against the author and the play, which is signed by P. Theta, a worker-stoker (Thetas, 6.11.1932). The complete distortion of the meaning and the aggression against the hero-protagonist stoker, whose image seems to personally affect his fellow article writer, is accompanied by insulting comments about the author who made "a criminal falsification of the heroic proletariat" (Thetas, *ibid*). And the hysteria continues: "many sympathetic workers of the district of Agia Zoni", in a letter to *Rizospastis*, express their indignation against the play, demand the cessation of the performances, applaud Theta's criticism and ask for "weapons to fight it".

### **Conclusions**

This play, together with Palamas's *Triseugeni*, met the most adventurous reception. On the occasion of their performances, basic issues of ideology, aesthetics and the relationship between them were raised. The study of its reception constitutes a reliable indicator of the history of ideas of the interwar period. The main topics of the critical dialogue were: the role of art and especially theatre for bourgeois and leftist intellectuals, the relationship between content and form, the responsibility of the creator, the position and evaluation of the woman-writer, the choices of the national scene.

The critical evaluation of Galatea Kazantzakis' two original plays, proves once again the stereotypes and the impermissible ignorance of criticism. The plays themselves, the imperfections they present, nevertheless hold an important place in the history of theatre as attempts to combine the Greek reality of the time with European aesthetic currents, either of the previous twenty years, such as naturalism and symbolism, or more modern ones, such as expressionism. In particular, *While the Ship Sails* constitutes an important contribution to Greek dramaturgy, not only because it's the only expressionist drama of the interwar period but also because we have very few examples of the effect of this aesthetic trend in the entire Greek theatre, even in later years (Pouchner, 1988, pp. 399-401). Having the impression that the work was wronged by the direction of F. Politis,

a fanatical defender of the omnipotence of text, and fully believing that an inspired abstract direction, which would mainly highlight its symbolic and expository elements, would mean a real restoration of the play, we appeal to young directors. We assure them that the challenge is worthwhile, serving as proof, among other things, of how modern directorial approaches contribute to the exploitation of the past.<sup>15</sup>

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# **INSULARITY AND BEING AN ISLANDER IN ANCIENT GREEK THEATRICAL LITERATURE**

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the ways in which the theme of “insularity” is portrayed in ancient Greek drama and the meaning that is given to the attribute of being an islander in these theatrical works. The overview starts from a more general approach of Greek literature, from the example of Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*, and the modern poem of *Ithaka*, by K.P. Kavafis, then delves into the works of Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes. The theme of “insularity” is present, in the analyzed works, in various opposing ways. In some cases, as a form of isolation from society, going as far as to be considered a form of imprisonment, as is the case with the play *The Trojan Women* by Euripides or, at the other end of the spectrum, a safe haven in *The Birds* by Aristophanes. The characteristic of being an islander and the theme of “insularity” are not limited to the island location of the play’s action. They can appear in other geographical locations like the peninsula, or more abstract places like Hades and the “island in the sky”, all of them being characterized by common defining elements.

**Keywords:** island, insularity, ancient Greek drama, desire, isolation, utopia, otherness.

### ***Introduction. Islands beyond the ancient world horizon***

Greece is a country which is mostly surrounded by sea, with a very large number of islands and island networks. It is therefore natural, if not inevitable, that “insularity”, in all its manifestations, exerts a significant influence on the everyday life, as well as on the set of cultural and domestic elements that, as a natural consequence, are reflected in Greek literature, both ancient and modern.

In order to have a more holistic point of view about the concept of „insularity” in the literature of ancient Greece, it is necessary to make a small introductory description of ancient Greek literature and the perception that the authors have on “insularity”.

The ancient Greeks were not aware of the islands beyond their world horizon, as their geographic knowledge was limited to the areas of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Nevertheless, there were some Greek authors who wrote about islands beyond these regions, often portraying them in similar ways to the islands of the known world.

In one such case, in the works of Homer, there are references to islands beyond the Mediterranean, such as the “Island of the Blessed” or “Erytheia”, which was said to be located somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean. These islands were often depicted as places of paradise or utopias, where the inhabitants lived in a state of perfect happiness and contentment. *The Odyssey* by Homer (see 2006 translation by Robert Fagles) – while not a theatrical work, features several islands beyond the Greek horizon. For example, the island of Circe is depicted as a magical and exotic place, where the hero, Odysseus, encounters a powerful sorceress who transforms his men into swine. Similarly, the island of the Cyclops

is portrayed as a frightening and dangerous place, inhabited by giant one-eyed monsters who pose a grave threat to Odysseus and his crew.

“The island”, in a significant number of cases, in ancient and Modern Greek literature, is usually given the meaning of the dream, the hope, the home and the desire. The common theme, for example in *The Odyssey*, is that Odysseus and his crew sail from island to island in search of their homeland, the main purpose being to arrive there, as their desired destination. We face the same theme from another point of view, almost 3000 years later, in the poem *Ithaka* by K.P. Kavafis (2016), where the meaning of the island as a destination is not the main purpose of the itinerary, but arriving there is still the sought-after target. The island is still the desired place, the home.

In another way, the Greek historian Herodotus wrote about the island of Thule, which was said to be located somewhere in the far north. According to Herodotus, Thule was a land of perpetual darkness, where the sun never rose during the winter months. This portrayal of Thule as a distant and inhospitable place was common in ancient Greek literature. We could easily compare this strange island with the dystopian land of Hades where the great play *Frogs* by Aristophanes is taking place.

While the ancient Greeks did not have a comprehensive understanding of the world beyond their horizon, they still imagined these far-off lands and islands as remote and exotic places, often imbued with a sense of mystery and wonder. In many cases, islands in ancient Greek literature served as powerful symbols for otherness, difference, and the unknown. Many of the islands portrayed were said to be inhabited by mythical creatures, such as the Sirens. These creatures were often used as metaphors for the dangers and temptations that sailors faced in the open sea. As a result, they were sometimes used as political metaphors and were also associated with myths and legends, describing places of danger, isolation, and enchantment that captured the imagination of audiences for generations.

“The Islands” were also used to explore philosophical and ethical themes. In *The Republic* by Plato (2022), the island of Atlantis is used as a metaphor for an ideal society, where the citizens live in harmony and prosperity. Similarly, in *The Symposium*, the philosopher Diotima (Plato, 2003) describes love as a journey to a distant island, where one can find true beauty and wisdom.

Besides the literary contexts, from a social point of view, the sea and maritime culture have been very important since ancient times. The sea was part of daily life, and many Greeks were skilled sailors and fishermen. Islands were often seen as remote outposts in the vast expanse of the sea and were associated with seafaring cultures and traditions.

Entering the world of ancient Greek drama, we could detect some examples of islands beyond the ancient Greek horizon that are mentioned in Greek theatrical works. This fact advances the idea that “insularity”, or the state of being an islander, is a theme that appears in several ancient Greek dramas.

### ***The plays. Drama and “insularity”***

As to have a proper view of the ways that the theme of “insularity” appears in the works of ancient playwrights, we will go, in this chapter, through nine examples, six tragedies and three comedies.

1. *Philoctetes* by Sophocles (1970): The play centers around the character of Philoctetes, a skilled archer who was abandoned on the island of Lemnos by the Greek army on their way to Troy. Insularity in this play is emphasized by the hero’s decision to be physically separated from the other characters, who are fighting on the mainland. Philoctetes is portrayed as a lonely and isolated figure, living a life of suffering and pain on the remote island, when his companions decide to abandon him in the wasteland of Lemnos, since he was bitten by a venomous snake, making him scream constantly and giving off a foul smell from his wound. In this situation, being an islander is portrayed as something embarrassing and ostracizing, the island receiving the role of a prison, of forced isolation and incarceration. This point of view differs significantly in comparison with the importance that is given to being an islander in real life, a state of being that is usually seen as a positive attribute.
2. In similar terms, we face the theme of “insularity” in *The Cyclops* by Euripides (1995): This play is based on the myth of Odysseus and his encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus. Polyphemus is portrayed as a brutal and uncivilized creature, living in a cave on a remote island. The “Insularity” is also emphasized by his isolation from other humans and his lack of knowledge regarding their customs and ways of life. The only difference here, in relation with the previous example, is that the Cyclops is not a human being, but a creature belonging in the field of imagination.
3. *Helen* by Euripides (2008): The play is based on the myth of Helen of Troy, who is famously associated with the Trojan War and the city of Troy, located on the coast of Asia Minor. In this play, Helen is revealed to be living on the island of Pharos, where she has been stranded for many years. This island off the coast of Egypt is portrayed as a distant and exotic place, where the mythical character of Helen has been taken captive by the Egyptian

king. The island is also home to a powerful sorceress, who helps Helen and her husband Menelaus escape from the king's clutches. "Insularity" in this case has a particular meaning. Helen's physical separation from her homeland and her isolation on the remote island is a way to protect her from danger and make her the cause of someone else's misery. Being an islander in this play means protection and, in a way, positive isolation.

4. *The Trojan Women* by Euripides (1999): In this play, the women of Troy are taken captive by the Greeks and forced to leave their homeland behind. They are portrayed as being exiled to a distant land or island, where they are cut off from their families and their way of life. The island or a coastal region of Phthia, for example, represents a place of isolation and despair, where the women are forced to confront the harsh reality of their situation. Here, we face again a scene of imprisonment in a place which represents insularity. Being islanders for the Trojan women is the same as if they were prisoners.
5. *Iphigenia at Aulis* by Euripides (2003): In this play, the peninsula of Tauris is depicted as a remote and barbaric place, where Iphigenia has been taken captive by the Scythians. The place is also the site of a temple to the goddess Artemis, where human sacrifices are carried out. The play follows the efforts of Iphigenia's father, Agamemnon, to rescue her from this hostile and inhospitable place. We can interpret the symbol of the peninsula similarly to that of the island, by taking into consideration the common characteristics of the two, by analyzing, in this case, the problem of "insularity", or, as an extension, of "peninsularity", a state of being similar to that of being an islander.
6. Even in *Medea* by Euripides (1995) we could find some insularity elements. The title character, Medea, is a sorceress from the island of Colchis, more precisely a peninsula somewhere in today's Georgia. Her origins give her a different perspective on life and love, which ultimately leads her to commit terrible acts of revenge against her husband and his new wife. When Jason took her away from her family and country and brought her into the island of the Phaeacians, they both lived the insular way of life for a while, until they arrived in the society of Corinth, where the play is set. "Insularity" here is depicted as a hosting place which is safe and where islanders are hospitable and helpful.

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Islands are also mentioned in two of Aristophanes' comedies, more as utopian than real places:

1. *The Birds* by Aristophanes (2017): This play is set in an imaginary place, a so called "island in the sky", created by the birds in order to escape the meddling of the gods and humans. The "island" here is depicted as a utopia, where the birds live in peace and harmony, free from the chaos of the mortal world below. "Insularity", in this case, is depicted as a "purgatory" of everyday life.
2. *The Frogs* by Aristophanes (2017): This play is set in Hades, the underworld of Greek mythology. While not an island in the traditional sense, Hades is often depicted as a remote and inaccessible place, cut off from the mortal world. The play follows the god Dionysus as he travels to the underworld in search of a great poet, encountering a few famous Greek heroes and mythical creatures along the way.
3. *The Archanians (Archanes)* again by Aristophanes (1998): In this work it is mentioned that the Spartans claimed Aegina in order to deprive the Athenians of their poet, i.e. Aristophanes, and according to a source, the latter had estates on the island and often went there to isolate himself and write his works.

### ***Characteristics of insularity in the plays***

The islands portrayed in ancient Greek plays and literature, as we saw in the previous chapters, were often associated with a sense of otherness and difference. They were seen as places that were distant, remote, and sometimes difficult to access, with their own unique qualities, cultures, customs, and traditions. Here are some additional observations regarding the already described plays:

- a) Many of the islands portrayed in Greek literature were associated with danger and risk. For example, the island of the Cyclops in *The Odyssey* is portrayed as a place of great peril, where Odysseus and his crew are at risk of being devoured by the one-eyed monster who inhabits the island.
- b) Islands were also used as symbols of isolation and confinement. Characters who were exiled to islands were cut off from their families and their communities and forced to confront their own inner demons. In *The Trojan Women* (1999), for example, some of the women of Troy are taken captive and exiled to a distant island (or peninsula), where they are forced to confront the harsh reality of their situation, as we saw above. "Insularity" is used as a literary device to emphasize the isolation and uniqueness of the characters involved. It also serves to highlight the differences between island and mainland cultures, and to explore the themes of exile, alienation, and loneliness.

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From another perspective, insularity and being an islander, were often portrayed as unique characteristics that set certain characters apart from others. In this category we have, for example, *Ion* by Euripides (1999). In this play, the island of Delos is depicted as a sacred place, where the god Apollo is said to have been born. The island called “Ortygia” was an island drifting on the waves, until Zeus stabilized it after Apollo’s birth. Ortygia was called Delos, because that is where the god Apollo was revealed (became *delos* i.e. manifest). The island is also the site of an annual festival, where Athenian women gather to offer gifts and sacrifices to the god. In this play “insularity” has a positive meaning. It is a place where someone could find a refuge, a warm, safe and hospitable place.

Islands were, most of the times, seen as isolated and remote, this being reflected in the way the island as a place or islanders were portrayed in plays. As we already saw, this is the case for the character of Philoctetes in Sophocles’ play *Philoctetes* (1970), who is stranded on the island of Lemnos for ten years after being bitten by a snake. Another example is that of Medea in Euripides’ play *Medea* (1995), who is portrayed as exotic and foreign compared to the other characters in the play. Her origins give her a different perspective on life and love, which ultimately leads her to commit terrible acts of revenge against her husband and his new wife.

In both examples, the insularity of the characters appears as a defining characteristic that sets them apart from the other characters in the play. This can be seen as a reflection of the ancient Greek view of the islands, as remote and isolated places, inhabited by people who were different from those on the mainland.

Additionally, there are a few more examples of how insularity is portrayed in ancient Greek dramas which were inspired by Greek mythology and, of course, Homer and his epic poem, in which Odysseus encounters numerous obstacles, including the one-eyed giant Polyphemus, the sorceress Circe, and the sea monster Scylla. These characters are all portrayed as living on remote islands, far removed from the mainland and its inhabitants with a particular kind of “insularity” that is dependent on their distance from human society and their isolation from the customs and values of civilized life.

In other cases, islands were used to explore themes of gender and sexuality. In *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes (2022) for example, the women of Athens and Sparta go on a sex strike to protest against the war raged by their husbands, and they retreat to the nearby island of Salamis to carry out their plan. The island becomes a space of deliberation and freedom where the women can assert their power and challenge the traditional gender roles of ancient Greece. This context is also used to explore themes of colonialism and imperialism.

In *The Bacchae* by Euripides (2003), the god Dionysus is associated with the island of Naxos, which is said to have been conquered by the Athenians. The play can be seen as a commentary on the political and cultural tensions between Athens and its colonies. In other circumstances it can be seen as an exploration of themes such as exile and displacement.

### **Conclusion**

Islands played a significant role in ancient Greek literature, as they were used to explore a wide range of themes and ideas, from gender and sexuality to politics and power, from exile and displacement to transformation and change. They continue to captivate readers and audiences today, serving as powerful symbols of adventure, danger, and the unknown.

In all these plays, “insularity” is used to create a sense of otherness or difference between the characters and their surroundings. It serves to highlight the ways in which isolation and separation can lead to dislocation, loneliness, and even madness. At the same time, insularity can also create the conditions for new forms of community and culture to emerge, as people adapt to their new environments and form new relationships with one another.

Finally, the theme of “insularity” is also used in ancient Greek dramas to explore a wide range of issues, including alienation and isolation, cultural differences, exile, and the creation of new communities. Many of these plays also use “insularity” as a way to explore the theme of exile. Characters that are separated from their homes and communities can experience profound feelings of loss and separation.

Despite the challenges brought forth by the theme of “insularity”, many of these plays also show how new communities can emerge in isolated environments. Characters that are cut off from the larger society may form new relationships and alliances with one another, based on shared experiences and values.

In summary, by emphasizing the unique characteristics of island life, ancient Greek theatre plays, and ancient Greek literature offer a rich and nuanced portrayal of the human experience in all its complexity.

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**ELLI PAPADIMITRIOU'S *KOINOS LOGOS*  
(COMMON DISCOURSE) –  
NARRATING COLLECTIVE TRAUMA  
ON STAGE**

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**Abstract:** This article delves into *Koinos Logos (Common Discourse)* by Elli Papadimitriou, along with its highly acclaimed stage production at the 2013 Athens Festival, directed by Vangelis Theodoropoulos, which significantly influenced contemporary Greek theatre. The issue raises several challenges that extend beyond the performance itself and into the dramaturgy, as the work is based on oral testimonies of female refugees from Asia Minor, collected by Papadimitriou in the aftermath of the Asia Minor Catastrophe. The study focuses on both textual and performance analysis, with particular emphasis on the directorial approach. It contends that the director successfully navigated the challenges posed by the narrative-driven text by relying on certain key concepts. These included emphasizing emotional resonance over the depiction of violence, engaging the audience's imagination in a manner evocative of ancient tragedy, foregrounding the element of chorality, and intertwining personal and collective narratives. Ultimately, these choices imbued the entire endeavour with a sense of *ahistoricity*, which is, to a great extent, inherent in the oral testimonies themselves.

**Keywords:** Oral history, Theatre of the Real, reception of historical events, testimonies, Vangelis Theodoropoulos, Elli Papadimitriou, *Koinos Logos (Common Discourse)*, refugees, Asia Minor, Athens Festival.

In this article, I focus on *Koinos Logos (Common Discourse)* by Elli Papadimitriou and its highly engaging performance at the Athens Festival 2013, directed by Vangelis Theodoropoulos, which left a significant mark on the contemporary Greek stage.<sup>1</sup> The topic presents several challenges that pertain not only to the performance itself but also to the dramaturgy, as the latter represents a genuine example of oral history.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this article emphasizes both textual analysis and performance analysis, with a focus on the directorial approach, to highlight the ideological content of the work, showcase its unique qualities as a dramaturgical material, and illustrate how the director successfully transposed this content to the stage, overcoming difficulties posed by the text's "anti-theatrical" character. The article briefly touches on issues related to the reception of the performance and attempts to situate it within the context of contemporary Greek theatre.

Based on the power of unpretentious and authentic language, Elli Papadimitriou's *Koinos Logos* stands as a true example of oral history. It consists of oral testimonies of female refugees from Asia Minor, collected by Elli

1 Production Details: Direction: Vangelis Theodoropoulos. Set and Costume Design: Antonis Daglidis. Song Selection and Instruction: Kostas Vomvolos. Movement Direction: Angeliki Stelatou. Lighting Design: Sakis Birbilis. Photography: Marilena Stafylidou. Video: Nikos Mandarakas. Cast: Lydia Koniordou, Eleni Kokkidou, Maria Katsandri, Eleni Ouzounidou, Tania Palaiologou. For the trailer of the performance, see [https://www.athinorama.gr/theatre/performance/koinos\\_logos-10028406/](https://www.athinorama.gr/theatre/performance/koinos_logos-10028406/)

2 For discussions on the use of oral testimony in historiography, see, among others: Thompson (2017); Perks and Thomson (eds) (2015); Portelli (1991); Grele (1985).

Papadimitriou during the 1930s, which were published in multiple editions from 1964 to 2005.<sup>3</sup> In these texts, the first-person narrative is exclusively employed, lending immediacy, persuasiveness, and verisimilitude to them, as well as a quality of confidentiality and confession. These testimonies constituted the primary dramaturgical material for the performance directed by Vangelis Theodoropoulos, intertwining individual with collective memory to convey the violence and traumas of war and displacement.

Elli Papadimitriou<sup>4</sup> (Smyrna, 1906 – Athens, 1993), originally from Smyrna, was born into a wealthy and prominent family and received a middle-class education. She came to Greece after the Asia Minor Catastrophe and systematically documented the experiences of Asia Minor refugees from 1922 and the Population Exchanges between Greece and Turkey (Volume I)<sup>5</sup>, as well as those of various witnesses of the Occupation during the Second World War and the Greek Civil War (Volumes II and III, respectively). It should be noted that, at the time, systematic engagement with oral history, also known as “History of the Common People” or “History from Below,” was a rather pioneering endeavour by Greek standards. Papadimitriou’s interest in this field grew during her apprenticeship at the Centre for Asia Minor Studies, founded by the Merlier couple (Melpo Logotheti-Merlier, of Asia Minor descent, and Octave Merlier), who were her friends and collaborators in her early professional years. In the spirit of the 1930s and the ethos of folk expressionism, Papadimitriou, influenced by figures like Fotos Kontoglou, Yannis Tsarouchis, Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas, Nikos Engonopoulos, and Karolos Koun, devoted herself with genuine research interest to the collection of elements of folk narrative, the recording of vernacular speech, various dialects (such as Pontic), as well as Byzantine hymnography, folk poetry, and musical traditions. It is no coincidence that the use of interspersed folk songs in the performance of *Koinos Logos* by the director underscored the tragedy of the narratives at times, while at other times the songs served as a counterpoint to this tragedy.

Vangelis Theodoropoulos’s choice to stage Elli Papadimitriou’s *Koinos Logos* represents a groundbreaking endeavour for the Greek theatrical landscape of his time.<sup>6</sup> Theodoropoulos had previously engaged with

3 Papadimitriou, Elli (2015). The testimonies were published in three volumes under the common title *O Koinos Logos (The Common Discourse)* with the following subtitles, which indicate the historical periods covered by the testimonies: First Volume: *First War; Second War*. Second Volume: *1941-1945, 1945-1950*. Third Volume: *The Decade 1942-1950 (Resistance Texts) We Hear Your Voice, Homeland (Resistance Texts) Of Peaceful Life (Decade 1930-1940, Decade 1965-1975, Undated)*.

4 For a fascinating biography of Elli Papadimitriou, see also Petropoulou, I. (2022).

5 Her interest in the oral testimonies of refugees arose during the fulfillment of her duties as an agronomist, assigned by the Venizelos government in the land distribution service for refugees from the regions of Turkey.

6 Regarding his acquaintance with Elli Papadimitriou, V. Theodoropoulos said: “I met her at Kedros

Papadimitriou's text.<sup>7</sup> His first amateur attempt to bring *Koinos Logos* to the stage took place in 1988 alongside the University of Athens's Student Housing, a student theatre group, under the title *Askissi Afigissis (Narrative Exercise)*.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by a second, professional production in 1997, staged at the courtyard of the Fix Brewery, marking the inaugural performance for the newly established Theatre of Neos Kosmos.<sup>9</sup> This performance left a significant mark on the theatre scene of the 1990s and largely defined the character and overall identity of the Theatre of Neos Kosmos under the direction of Theodoropoulos.<sup>10</sup>

The 2013 Athens Festival performance was based on sixteen testimonies from Papadimitriou's book, primarily originating from the experiences of Asia Minor Hellenism. One of these testimonies refers to the exodus of Pontic Greeks, while three more refer to the Occupation of Athens during World War II.

Papadimitriou's title *Koinos Logos*, which was retained in Theodoropoulos's performance, refers both to the testimonies of ordinary, everyday people and the concept of a common, collective experience of violence, in order to ultimately convey the timeless human condition of suffering and violence, even from the very birth of humanity.<sup>11</sup>

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Publishing, where I worked for a while in 1974 when I was a student at the Athens Conservatory drama school. Elli was over 70 years old at the time, and I was in my twenties, but we became friends. We talked about everything you can imagine. I, still an inexperienced actor, was captivated by the narratives of *Koinos Logos* and had been imagining since then how it could be staged in the theatre". Interview of the director on July 12, 2022 in <https://www.olivenews.gr/el/sumvainoun/prosopa/elli-papadimitrioy-mia-zoi-ti-mikrasiatikikatastrofi-anevainei-theatro/> [Accessed 15 July 2024].

7 For Theodoropoulos' relationship with this text, see also: Theatre program for *Koinos Logos* (2013, pp. 7-8).

8 V. Theodoropoulos recalls: "The first time I became involved with *Koinos Logos* was in 1988 when I took over the Student Residence of the University of Athens theatre group. [...] Nearby was where I was born, and on the other side was Kaisariani, with many refugee houses where many of my mother's relatives lived. [...] In this first attempt at a theatrical presentation of *Koinos Logos*, our effort was not to imitate the narrators, but to discover the rhythms and colors of a language as genuine and direct as the events of life it conveys." Interview with the director, conducted by the author, 4 November 2023.

9 For the Theatre of Neos Kosmos, see also: <https://nkt.gr/> [Accessed: 4 September 2024].

10 Regarding this production, as well as the theatre tour of *Koinos Logos*, the director commented: "The play was first staged in the courtyard of the FIX beer warehouse, where the Neos Kosmos Theatre was later built. The natural set included a dilapidated house with a well in front, alongside scenic interventions by Antonis Danglidis. Even though the area was far from any established theatre district, and we were a new troupe, word about the play quickly spread, and reviews were unanimously enthusiastic. The production stayed on for months. [...] The following summer, the play was performed again at the Herodion, toured across Greece, Cyprus, and Germany, and was revived a few years later [...]. Shortly after, during the 2004-2005 season, it was performed on the main stage of Neos Kosmos Theatre, and in April 2005, it travelled to Adana, where a packed theatre of Turkish spectators wept for the hardships of the Greeks during the Asia Minor Catastrophe!". Interview with the director, conducted by the author, November 4, 2023.

11 Theatre program for *Koinos Logos* (2013, p. 11).

When *Koinos Logos* was first presented, it was one of the early performances of its time to utilize non-theatrical texts, aiming, as the director mentions, to explore the appropriate theatrical means for rendering narrative discourse on stage. At this point, the performance intersects with landmark works in the history of contemporary Greek theatre, such as *Morfes (Figures) from Vizyinos's work*,<sup>12</sup> which was staged in 1993 under the direction of Dimos Avdeliodis with A. Kokkinou in the lead role, and *The Murderess*, adapted and directed by Sotiris Hadzakis, featuring Lydia Koniordou in the title role, in 1998. These performances, highlighting genre fluidity, the end of dialogue, and performativity over-representation within the framework of postmodernism, are considered pioneering, as they paved the way for new theatrical practices, specifically an abundance of performances based on texts from other literary genres.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the traditional theatrical function of representing events, the performance in question exclusively utilizes narration. However, what is particularly groundbreaking about *Koinos Logos* for Greek theatre at the time is the connection it establishes between the theatrical and the real. The source text is not merely narrative; it consists of authentic testimonies by anonymous refugee women, conveying traumatic historical events that they experienced. In this context, the performance aligns with the contemporary trend of documentary theatre and more specifically verbatim theatre, a practice that brings oral testimonies to the stage.<sup>14</sup>

A similar approach was later adopted by many theatre companies in Greece. Typical examples include the 2012 performance *Sons and Daughters*, directed by Yiannis Kalavrianos, based on interviews conducted by the actors with elderly people; *That's Life* in 2013 by the Vice Versa theatre group, based on personal testimonies of 20 individuals from different countries, primarily focusing on social inequality; the 2013 performance *Telemachus: should I stay or should I go?*, directed by Anestis Azas and Prodromos Tsinikoris, based on testimonies about the migration of Greeks and their return to their homeland; and *Witnesses of Athens* by Manos Karatzogiannis in 2020, focusing on testimonies of people who experienced the events of the liberation of Athens from the Germans in 1944 (Rosi, 2021, p. 280).

The staging of *Koinos Logos*, however, presents greater complexity for several additional reasons: the five women coexist on stage throughout the performance without interacting with each other. Each one serves as the silent

12 For related information on the topic, see: Kyriakos, K. (2008).

13 The bibliography on the subject is vast. I will cite, as an example, the classic study by Lehmann (2006).

14 On the subject, see, among others: Forsyth and Megson (eds) (2009); Hammond and Steward (eds) (2008); Martin (2006); Paget (1987).

listener to the others. Even though these narratives contain features of the monologue form, the performance does not adhere to the conventions of that genre, since the coexistence of multiple speakers on stage ultimately creates a polyphonic narration of history. Moreover, the complex nature of the endeavour arises from the interplay of different temporal levels, from the phase of collecting the testimonies to their staging. In the first stage, the oral discourse was transcribed into writing. Naturally, the written text lacks the speed of speech, the expression of emotion, the rhythm of narration, the tone of voice, the articulation of local dialect, and the meanings that these very elements convey. Additionally, there has been an initial interpretative mediation of these narratives through musical punctuation (ellipses, exclamation marks, quotation marks, question marks).

At the same time, however, the written word is detached from the spatio-temporal context of its production and gains a sense of autonomy within the course of historical time. Thus, the discourse each time becomes the discourse of the “here and now,” boasting yet another fundamental similarity with theatrical discourse.<sup>15</sup> At a much later point in time, it acquires the identity of the dramatic, i.e. its primary aim is to be performed on stage. Nevertheless, even here, there is an appearance of orality in the discourse, as the actors have memorized the written text, which they deliver intending to convey an impression of naturalness and improvised speech.

In order to manage this complex character of the project, director Vangelis Theodoropoulos relied on certain key concepts, which I will summarize here before proceeding with their further analysis: 1. The performance, like the text, focuses not on the narrated actions but on the emotions. It does not so much emphasize the power of violence as its imprint on the human soul in the form of pain. 2. Narrating the violence has a cathartic effect on the narrator. 3. The dominance of speech and the non-representation of violence lends the narrative a quality of powerful emotional tension that stimulates the audience’s imagination in a way reminiscent of ancient tragedy. 4. The connection to ancient tragedy is further derived from the emphasis on the choral element: even though each narrative is drawn from the unique, personal story of the anonymous witness, it is integrated into a collective, cohesive narrative, like a body of voices that have experienced the same condition, in a way that functions complementarily.<sup>16</sup>

15 For the topic, see Carlson (2009, pp. 139-172).

16 As Ververopoulou aptly comments there are two ways in which the Greek theatrical scene incorporates the testimonies of refugees/migrants: the first pertains to the migration experience of modern Greeks, and the second refers to the recent reception of “foreigners” in the country. (Ververopoulou, 2023, p. 179). Ververopoulou’s book is a comprehensive study of the Theatre of the Real, with representative samples from Greek theatre. For *Koinos Logos*, see pp. 160-161.

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Thus, a merging of the personal and collective drama takes place, ultimately imparting a sense of *ahistoricity* through the shared condition of human suffering. Finally, both in the performance and the text, memory plays a pivotal role. As Papadimitriou herself comments:

In the narration and writing of ordinary people, there is a subconscious desire to keep memories alive and to ensure that their stories do not fade. For this reason, they follow unwritten rules, that is, the rules of art. (Theatre program for *Koinos Logos*, 2013, p. 7).

I would say that these rules of memory, oblivion, or repression of traumatic events were also followed reverently by the director: he attempted to allow the voice to be heard as unmediated as possible, as refracted through memory, to convey the living memory of violence in the way it is perceived by the ordinary people of an earlier era—the forgotten subjects of history—and can become the subject of narration at a later time. In any case, the violence of authority becomes the subject of narration without being represented on stage.

In the performance of *Koinos Logos* there are constant references to tragic events, atrocities, imprisonment, human casualties, hardships, and executions of loved ones, painting a picture of the inhuman reality of war. Here are some examples:

“I don’t even know how many were executed. [...] She had seen him once more at the Transport Division. In terrible shape, beaten. They had tortured him. His clothes were in tatters, and they wouldn’t let me get close if I said I was his fiancée.” [...] (Theatre program for *Koinos Logos*, 2013, p. 50).

“He was caught in Elefsina, don’t ask me how. I lie on the mattress. And in Goudi, they executed him, in 1944, a year marked with a cross. The other one came down from the mountain that same year.” [...] (idem, p. 53)

“They had beaten him and they paraded him through the village, drenched in his blood, as if he had been dipped into a pool of his own blood.”. [...] (idem, p. 54)

However, in these women’s narratives, there is an oxymoronic coupling between the atrocities of war and their theatrical staging that focuses on emotion and human suffering. The excerpt from the monologue of a mother who finds her child buried, splendidly performed by Lydia Koniordou, is characteristic of this:

“[...] with our nails, we were digging and wailing, going around in circles, the pit grew deeper, now the comrades dig them deep, as tall as a man, for protection so that the others won't find them. And suddenly, the little bones of the skull appeared, like pearls, my daughters, we started lamenting, searching, and sifting, we found a piece of khaki cloth, we found buttons, clasps, oh, your blood drains away at such moments, you become like a dry sponge, we found a leg too, but not the other one. Could it be that some bones decay better, or was my child maimed? We gathered even the buttons and kissed them, «My son, I sewed these on one night when you came down secretly», and oh, how the place was fragrant... Oh, my boy, is that you? My lion, my strong pine, and I am holding you in a little bundle, oh, under my arm...” (idem. p. 56)

These women, by speaking about their losses caused by the war, place themselves at the centre of the narrative. The emphasis is not so much on what exactly happened but rather on how they themselves experienced it, highlighting the subjective nature of their storytelling. At the same time, they recount these events from a distance, conveying a sense of *ahistoricity*. Interestingly, despite their tragic losses, they do not perpetuate violence or hatred. In doing so, they expand the horizons of official history, which often focuses on the brutality of violence and power, effectively transforming its social significance. Moreover, references are made to instances where the oppressor sheds their harsh demeanour and acts with solidarity towards the oppressed:

“The Italian guard sees me—God bless him, wherever he may be, may he have my blessings—he asks me what I want. I tell him, «I'm looking for my child, I come and go, my knees have given out, what can I do, oh...» And then, this Italian starts crying, crying hard, saying «Mama, Mama» and pointing up with his hand, «Which floor is he on?» «I don't even know if he's alive, and you're asking me about floors?» «Nome, nome.» I tell him the name, «Alekos», and he sends someone to call out. The child heard, «Oh, they're going to kill me...», that's where his mind went, he told us later.” (idem, p. 51)

The repetition of tragic events in narrative form or their repression by the victims as part of defense mechanisms often results in their beautification and healing within memory. Oral memory, in particular, is shaped not only by past events and the speaker's distance from them, but also by the present and the collective social memory (Connerton, 1989, pp. 22-25). The transformation of

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lived traumatic experience into narrative discourse, while agonizing for mothers who lost their children or women who lost their husbands, also serves as a form of psychotherapy, providing relief through storytelling and the filter of love, free from the agendas of official history. This process leads to a renegotiation of memories, often affirming life and the struggle for survival.<sup>17</sup>

However, the performance, despite its groundbreaking nature, as evidenced by the above, contrasts sharply with contemporary theatre, which is inundated with forms of violence—not only in thematic content but also in stage practice—where audiences are exposed to the most extreme and repulsive manifestations of violence. These include daring scenes (intense verbal abuse, as well as depictions of rape, mutilation, and dismemberment), aiming to awaken and shock the audience into sensory overload. The prime example of this is “In-Yer-Face” theatre—preceded by Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty—which emerged in the 1990s in England as a response to the country’s socio-political condition.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the performance of *Koinos Logos* once again recalls its connection to ancient Greek theatre, where violence was always implied but never depicted on stage.

The director utilizes all aspects of the performance in a way that highlights the dissonant fusion between the experience of extreme violence and the expression of emotion. The emphasis on emotion is evident from the very casting of the play: in contrast to Theodoropoulos’s first, amateur attempt with *Koinos Logos*, where the narrators were boys and girls, in all subsequent performances—including the one under discussion—the cast is exclusively female. As Theodoropoulos himself noted in an interview: “I chose women’s narratives because women are usually the ones who recount familiar tragedies through the filter of emotion, and this is a more theatrical method for me” (Theodoropoulos, 2013).<sup>19</sup>

The five women remain on stage throughout the entire performance, yet do not engage in dialogue with one another. Consequently, the performance does not adhere to the conventions of the typical monologue genre, as there is not just one speaker on stage. Although monologic elements are present in the narratives, their juxtaposition creates a polyphonic recounting of history. Within this context, the concept of “chorality” emerges: while each narrator highlights her own distinct personal story, it becomes part of the collective, cohesive narrative of the others, forming a unified body of voices that have shared the same experiences.

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17 For more on this function of testimony, see also Thomson (2007).

18 See, among others, Sierz (2001).

19 Interview of the director with Chara Koulopoulou, “Through *Koinos Logos*, we will hear how people’s decision to survive was expressed by preserving their values and dignity”, 29 August 2013, <https://kalamatain.gr/new/vagelis-theodoropoulos-interview/> [Accessed: 2 September 2024].

This recalls what Ryan Claycomb terms “communal subjectivity,” due to the complementarity of the testimonies (2003, pp. 95-122).



Photo no. 1: *Koinos Logos*, 2013 Athens Theatre Festival.  
Scenes from the performance.  
(V. Theodoropoulos's personal archive)

The five actresses (Photo no. 1)—Lydia Koniordou, Eleni Kokkidou, Eleni Ouzounidou, Tania Palaiologou, and Maria Katsandri, the last one being the only actress who had also performed in the 1997 production—convey the psychological fluctuations of the narrators while simultaneously commenting on the events from a distance. As K. Georgousopoulos noted in his review of Theodoropoulos's 1997 *Koinos Logos* production, the actresses “had to «perform» the text, to feel it, while simultaneously maintaining the necessary distance so that the director's intent—the preservation of the linguistic and emotional treasure, which was Papadimitriou's aim—could be realized” (Georgousopoulos, 1997). The stage presence of the women follows the dynamics of the narrative without excessive performance, within a realistic acting framework that captures the natural flow of speech with all the idiomatic nuances and linguistic specificities of their origins. A standout moment is the scene in which Eleni Kokkidou speaks in Pontic Greek.

An indicative review by Ioanna Kleftogianni states:

Elli Kokkidou continues her success from *The Woman of Patras* by Chronas. She delivers a performance of restrained exuberance, demonstrating a mastery of her craft. Lydia Koniordou, in her recent departure from

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the realm of ancient Greek tragedy, sings (superbly), dances, and mourns her grievous fate with restraint and measure, without wailing. (Kleftogianni, I., 2013)

The performance begins with the song “I brought you an earring, a single one, the button needs pounding,” and from there, the torrential, heartrending, emotionally dense yet direct monologues of the protagonists are artfully intertwined with interspersed verses sung on stage. These songs, selected, arranged, and taught to the actresses by Kostas Vomvolos, sometimes align with and emphasize the tragic nature of the narratives, while at other times they contrast with this tragedy, offering a cheerful and light-hearted tone that underscores the need for survival and continuity in life.

The inclusion of these interspersed songs, which dates back to the 1997 production of *Koinos Logos*, serves as another link to ancient tragedy. I quote here an interesting observation from a theatre review of that initial production in 1997:

The performance evokes ancient tragedy. The narrative always carries within it the song—when it is not entirely a song in itself. The same occurs in ancient tragedy, which is deeply rooted in centuries of choral and lyrical storytelling, as seen in the great epic tales or myths. (Christidis, 1997)

These musical interludes often interrupt the overall stillness of the narration—since the actresses mostly sit or stand—with a notable example being Maria Katsandri’s performance of a traditional wedding song, “Get up, my groom, and change,” which she addresses to her child while dancing (Photo no. 2). Similarly, Lydia Koniordou’s narration is followed by her static rendition of the well-known traditional lullaby from Smyrna, “Margaritarenia.” The performance concludes with the women addressing the dead, singing together the lines “Look at the smoke, look at the fire rising from my little house and spreading over the whole world,” underscoring the universal and timeless condition of pain and violence.



*Photo no. 2: Koinos Logos, 2013, V. Theodoropoulos's personal archive.*

In terms of set design, the transition from the realistic shell of the 1997 production, with the natural landscape of a ruined house at the Fix Warehouse, to the 2013 performance is significant. Here, the stage is transformed into a minimalist box, designed by Antonis Daglidis, with the only set pieces being white benches on which the protagonists alternate their positions (Photos 3&4).



*Photo no. 3: Koinos Logos, 2013 Athens Theatre Festival.  
Scenes from the performance.  
(V. Theodoropoulos's personal archive)*



*Photo no. 4: Koinos Logos, 2013 Athens Theatre Festival.*  
Scenes from the performance.  
(V. Theodoropoulos's personal archive)

A panel featuring black-and-white, timeworn photographs of the dead—many of whom, as revealed by the director, are relatives of the actresses or himself—enhances the evocative atmosphere. At times, the women narrate their stories directly to the audience, while at other times they turn towards the panel of photographs as if engaging in a dialogue between the living and the dead (Photo 5). One particularly emotionally charged scene involves the five women lighting candles in front of the images of the deceased.

### ***Conclusion***

Drawing on the dynamic of the unadorned and authentic language found in the oral testimonies of Elli Papadimitriou, which gives voice to the unsung heroes of history, the director managed to overcome the challenges of a demanding and daring stage project for its time. His focus shifted away from the power of violence and instead centred on its inscription in the human soul in the form of pain, as refracted through memory. This approach highlighted the element of “chorality” while merging personal and collective drama, imbuing the entire endeavour with a sense of *ahistoricity*, which is, to a great extent, inherent in the testimonies themselves.

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A CASE OF RECEPTION OF THE  
ANCIENT GREEK MEDEA OF EURIPIDES:  
**WHEN MEDEA OF EURIPIDES MEETS  
MEDEA OF ANOUILH AND OF  
BOSTANTZOGLOU**

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**Abstract:** The Archetype of Medea has been thoroughly examined and Medea has been identified as a symbol of darkness, vengeance and ferocity. Meticulous analysis of Euripides' Medea reveals a multi-dimensional personality, a divine creature, skillful, alluring and human in her essence. The article aims to examine how Euripides' character and speech were perceived by playwrights Jean Anouilh and Mentis Bostantzoglou (better known under the pen name of Bost). All three pieces of literature discuss the eternal themes of love, vengeance, motherhood, betrayal and moral ethics. Euripides, Anouilh and Bost showed fidelity to the myth of The Argonauts, drawing on its symbols and archetypes. Nevertheless, considering the historical era in which the dramatists created their plays, we could discern the adaptations they made in order to diversify the messages they intended to communicate. Anouilh, who was mainly affected by the Second World War, presents a more humanized Medea, sentimental and totally absorbed in her erotic passion for Jason. Medea becomes completely annihilated at the end of the play as the loss of her children leads to the end of her life. Bost reveals a hilarious Medea and the parody revolves around her and the other characters showcasing all traits of modern Greek society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All these varied approaches determine and deepen our belief in Medea's unique strong personality and the timelessness of human condition.

**Keywords:** Medea, Euripides, Ancient Greek drama reception, Medea's reception, Jean Anouilh, Mentis Bostantzoglou (Bost).

### ***Is Medea a vindictive dark soul?***

### ***The story of a woman as depicted by Euripides, Anouilh and Bostantzoglou.***

#### ***Introduction***

Ancient tragedies and comedies have always constituted the field where notions and ideas are presented, reflecting the times in which they were established. The examination of socio-political values exceeds the era of ancient times and, apparently, these values are reconsidered on a moral, political, psychological and contemporary basis. The themes of love, betrayal, loneliness, abandonment, motherhood and death emerge in the most vigorous manner in the tragedy of Medea. Euripides' Medea, an ambiguous personality, once magnanimous by her husband's side, is now experiencing loss and pain. Her trauma lies in the essence of her own being: rejected and excluded, she can no longer be considered powerful. When she is abandoned by her husband, it is a fundamental truth that she has surrendered all her powers and is ready to fulfill her fate. Medea enters a game of transformation, a metamorphosis reaching and exceeding the limits of her female role.

Euripides' Medea has earned the complete attention of numerous dramatists, playwrights and theatre critics, as she concentrates all the features of

a complicated character. Anouilh became interested in the myth of Medea, and developed his play in 1946, placing it under the category of post-war theatre. Bost (Mentis Bostantzoglou), on the other hand, a Greek playwright, transformed Medea into a parody of modern Greek theatre (1993), which bears no resemblance to the tragic archetype of Euripides.

All three texts are interconnected and the archetypal myth bridges the gap between “there with here” and “then with now” (Kosmopoulou, 2020, pp. 101-103). For this reason, intertextuality brings to the surface the elements that appear in the new text, which is the outcome of the data from an older one (Kraias, 2023, pp. 19-21). Euripides drew on the epic myth of Argonautica with a view to composing his tragedy Medea, thus interweaving the tragic elements of the myth with a new text (Miles, 2016, pp. 54). Obviously, each author, including Euripides, Anouilh and Bost created their plays from a personal perspective and based on their own historical context. Euripides exploits the ancient myth with a view to attributing a heroic temper to Medea (Boedeker, 1991, pp. 6), which is the ideal trait of tragic heroes. As Boedeker states, “Medea responds to Jason’s betrayal like a male hero...in the manner of an injured Achilles”. Anouilh systematically uses the ancient myth and, through the lenses of his reception of the ancient text of Euripides, creates a more human and contemporary Medea. He creates a hypertext, which leaves the original text (hypotext) to be partially discerned (Genette, 2018, pp. 7), thus creating a new multi-dimensional space for the readers.

In that light, Bost decides to totally transform the ancient tragic elements and utilize the characters to depict the reality of modern Greek society in a sarcastic and hilarious manner. His reception of the ancient drama pertains to the adaptation of the old text, in order to create what is, in fact, a new play.

The adaptations we have chosen to present, that of Anouilh and Bost, highlight the fact that “reception is not only a diachronic process, but also a synchronic cultural dynamic between an artist and his contemporaries” (Revermann, 2016, pp. 13). In that light, the reception of the archetype of Medea emerges in the works of Anouilh and Bost with new symbols and forms, rendering the interaction among all three plays powerful and simultaneously accommodating the needs of the audience of each historical era.

### ***Euripides’ Medea***

Medea is a renowned ancient Greek tragedy, produced by Euripides in the year when the Peloponnesian War began (431 BC). It displays the unleashed love of Medea turned to hate, passion to ferocity (Segal, 1968, pp. 33), along with the

major changes she undergoes. Medea denounces the passivity of her female role and seeks revenge, which in turn destroys her maternal love and leaves her husband Jason shattered. Euripides harnesses the myth of Argonautica to build up his play around Medea's complex personality. The primacy of the myth is rather precise. Mythos produces logos (Coupe, 2009, pp. 83-84) and people perceive the world through words. Consequently, myths create a solid foundation for the exploration of this world.

Euripides exploits the myth as a canvas to present the universal themes of human existence, including revenge, death, violence, fate and murder (Bierl, 2016, pp. 258). Political issues surface as well, such as the war, lamentation and power (Bierl, 2016, pp. 253), marking the art of ancient Greek theatre with a significant role. Its role involves the necessity to educate the citizens and to instill moral values, as the heroes' deeds are connected to sacrifices for the common good, enabling the archetypes to serve this purpose (Markantonatos, 2022, pp. 16). The myth of Argonautica relates to Jason's quest to steal the Golden Fleece. The gods are by Jason's side and make Medea fall in love with him. The princess of Colchis is a skillful witch and makes use of her potions for the sake of Jason. After retrieving the Golden Fleece, Jason kills Medea's brother, marries her and they both land at Jason's kingdom, at Iolkos. Then, Medea plots the king's death and the two lovers are banished from the kingdom. They seek refuge in Corinth, where they are both considered foreigners. Jason decides to marry Creon's daughter in order to advance socially and Medea begins to hatch a plan to get revenge. Euripides' tragedy begins with the scene of the Nurse informing the audience of Jason's abandoning of Medea. Then, Medea comes on stage and, through her discussion with the nurse, she gives hints of the evil plan to kill her children, and thus her insatiable thirst for revenge is revealed.

Medea's tragedy captivates the audiences and has a riveting power on them. Medea herself is a powerful witch with the ability to cast spells on people and the ability to produce magic potions and "pharmaka" (Tyminski, 2014, pp. 30), either to poison or to heal. Jason's successful mission of the Golden Fleece is attributed to this skill she has. She is a unique woman, who decides upon her actions and functions according to her strong will. The absence of intervention from the Gods serves Euripides' wish to give prominence to that particular aspect of her personality. Her absolute power is illustrated by her deed of creating life (her two children) and of destroying it (the infanticide).

By portraying her personality, we cannot disregard the fact that Euripides created a character open to various interpretations. Euripides used dichotomies to frame his ideas (Vassilopoulos, 2014, pp. 44). Medea oscillates between her human and divine nature. Apart from considering all

her superhuman traits (grand-daughter of Helios), Medea was a mother, a daughter and a wife. “She is merely a woman, an extraordinary woman to be sure, but still entirely human” (Schlesinger, 1966, pp. 43). Her failure is analyzed in terms of her relationship with Jason, who decided to wed another woman. Medea’s heartfelt betrayal initiated her need to set things right and awakened her superhuman nature.

Medea is a woman of barbarian identity, since she comes from Colchis. She defies societal norms, when she commits the blasphemous deed. Medea loves with a full heart (Allardyce, 1932, pp. 132). As a result, she fully devotes herself to the man she adores and she is completely immersed in the vengeance she is willing to take against him. Medea is an enraged woman who acts in cold-blood, and not in a state of madness. Judging from the context of the times, Euripides could not have possibly put other than a barbarian to commit the killing of her children. Otherwise, his play would be rejected by the audience of Athens. Moreover, the tragic nature of Medea is highlighted and makes her an ideal character, who embodies the qualities of a heroine, who commits hybris and is finally led to katharsis. The elements of tragic poetry are maintained to the extent that this tragedy is fully aligned to the prerequisites of the times.

Medea’s inner conflict goes beyond the antithesis between logic and emotions (Mastronarde, 2002, pp. 43). Medea is of heroic temper. She wants to avoid being laughed at, even at the cost of her own offsprings. The main motifs that emerge in the tragedy of Medea are the code of honor, oaths and betrayal (Mastronarde, 2002, pp. 31). The violation of oaths on Jason’s part is quite solemn and equals with betrayal. Medea adopts the male values which entail the notion of courage, honor and domination over enemies. “Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited/ a stay at home but rather just the opposite/one who hurt my enemies and help my friends/ For the lives of such persons are most remembered” (Warner, 1955, pp. 86).

In the above lines, she addresses the main elements of the heroic code, that is honor, loyalty to friends and immortality. All these values are of utmost importance to Medea and are illuminated by her words. She has an appreciation of honor and she is aware of her identity. Medea denotes an interest in protecting her reputation, which is a notion mainly entertained by men (Mastronarde, 2002, pp. 41). Unlike Jason, who is oriented towards social status and recognition by marrying Glauce (Creon’s daughter), Medea epitomizes the superior ideals of friendship and recognition through honorable deeds.

### ***The French Medea of Anouilh***

The French dramatist Jean Anouilh (1910-1987) took an interest in the myth of Argonautica and embarked on a journey to present his play *Medea*, written in 1946 and published in 1948. Nothing can be perceived outside the historical context of the particular era a play is created. For this reason, we are obliged to mention the fact that Anouilh's *Medea* belongs to post-war theatre and his work deals with themes of maintaining integrity in a world of moral compromise (Smith, 1985, pp. 440). Following the dark period of World War II, Anouilh's play is a combination of sarcasm and strong conviction. Through *Medea*, which belongs to his *Nouvelles pièces noires* (*New dark plays*, first published in 1956), the playwright viewed France's political attitude as a compromise with the same aversion which *Medea* expresses when she is forced to give up her ideals and yield to the ills of power. Anouilh highlights her struggle and disappointment against the conventional life she led with Jason and her decision to take revenge on him is a reflection of the playwright's need to oppose the political regime.

This particular play by Anouilh focuses on the main characters of *Medea*, Jason, Creon and *Medea's* servant. Anouilh's adaptation does not differentiate from the plot of the ancient text, since *Medea* still betrayed by Jason's decision to marry another woman, is bent on vengeance. Anouilh's *Medea* revolves around the theme of erotic betrayal. *Medea* experienced complete identification with her lover, she idealized Jason and failed to recognize that he was a human being with weaknesses. She refused to place Jason in a realistic setting, as she molded their relationship through the lenses of passion and perfection. Anouilh's Jason is down to earth, an ordinary man, who is terrified of *Medea's* passion. He is ready to compromise. *Medea* fails to accept Jason's imperfect human nature. He opts for peace and an ordinary life. Jason is incapable of dealing with *Medea's* dark instincts and passions and seeks a peaceful conventional life. His new wife is simple and with a pure heart (Allardyce, 2010, pp. 277-278).

Anouilh's reception of *Medea* as a character is interpreted from a new perspective, which leads us to apply new meanings and understanding to the contemporary *Medea* (Patsalides, 2019, pp. 277). The French *Medea* of Anouilh is more human and sentimental compared to the tragic *Medea* of Euripides. *Medea* is presented as more affectionate and the lack of violence in Anouilh's play renders her even more tranquil and accessible to the audience. She does not shed a tear during the infanticide, nevertheless the act of suicide places emphasis on the feelings of defeat and desperation she experiences (Abdulrahman, 2015, pp. 30). *Medea* has failed and resorts to suicide, thus Anouilh pinpoints a fragile character filled with weaknesses. Overwhelmed by

intense emotions, Medea is depicted as a human being rather than a tragic heroine. Anouilh represents melodrama (Allardyce, 2010, pp. 281), and in such cases the protagonists function as ordinary people, who reach a dead-end and try to find a way out. Anouilh humanizes Medea (Rambaux, 1972, pp. 1031) and makes references to the love Medea experiences as part of her essence. Medea exceeds the boundaries of a tragic heroine and becomes a woman who is devastated by the loss and betrayal of Jason.

Medea is all about conflict. Though, the theme of conflict is handled differently by the two dramatists. Euripides focuses on Medea's inner conflict, while in Anouilh the conflict is placed on the world outside her (Kosmopoulou, 2022, pp. 276). Medea rebels against social conventions. The modern heroine fights with the "others". Anouilh's *Medea* is a play of constant rebellion (Mercier, 1995, pp. 38-39). Her wish is to be consistent to herself and in order to achieve this condition she has to defy social rules. Medea is in search of the absolute, an uncompromising woman, unfit to a society which revolves around happiness. Medea's dark soul is motivated by passion, evil and deep feelings. She cannot possibly accept a life without Jason and the betrayal on his part. In her attempt to sustain the heroic image of Jason, her world falls apart. "You will never be free, Jason, Medea will always be your wife!" (Kosmopoulou, 2022, pp. 277), utters Medea. It is evident that Medea's passionate words reveal her vindictive soul and her contempt for social norms.

Anouilh's point of view places Euripides' Medea in the contemporary era. While Euripides uses the Archetype of Medea as a symbol to present all the "shades" of the human soul to his audience (Lambadaridou-Pothou, 2007, pp. 152-153), Anouilh's Medea has to walk the path of personal transformation and fulfill her destiny. Anouilh is recreating the true essence of the Attic form in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Schlesinger, 1966, pp. 75), by providing the lysis of suicide at the end of the play. He stages a glorious exit of Medea by having her jump into the fire. Medea is left alone to face her destiny. She is deprived of any sort of help, as she is abandoned by friends, family and Jason. Not only has she lost friends, but also herself for the sake of Jason. Her act of suicide is an act that represents a mode of expression appropriate to the modern world. On the contrary, in Euripides' play, Medea receives divine help and she escapes by means of the Sun-God's chariot. The infanticide in the ancient drama is registered in a whole different sense, as the playwright has to create all the conditions to release the heroine's emotional baggage.

*A satirical Medea by Mentis Bostantzoglou*

Medea by Bost was written in 1993 and belongs to the genre of Burlesque<sup>1</sup>. It is a form of performance that aims to mimic and distort its subject matter for comic purpose rather than invective criticism<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, Bost used the character of Medea to create an allegory of the political situation of modern Greece.

Bost made use of the ancient myth as part of the human reality (Touchard, 1991, pp. 9), in order to reflect the socio-political system of Athens in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He chose to reject the glorious ancient Greek past and added new elements to develop a new identity for his play. He saw the ancient play in a whole new light. Bost drew on the myth of Medea with a view that transformed the drama into comedy, parody (Bakonikola – Georgopoulou, 2000, pp. 122). The reception of the ancient drama aims to shed new light to the contemporary issues, realities and politics. Bost revisited the ancient myth of Euripides and preserved the original elements, that of the wronged wife and the infanticide. Bost's reception of the myth transformed the tragic Medea into an absurd hilarious character.

Bost's parody kept the main protagonists Medea, Jason and their children and added a monk, a nun, Oedipus, Antigone and Euripides himself, but subverted the location, placing the action in the town of Volos. Medea is illustrated as a bloody killer, who slaughtered the nun and her two sons, as her offspring had an affair with the nun and abstained from their studies. His ability to reconstruct and ridicule the myth is unique. In Bost, the paradox is a virtue (Pefanis, 2001, pp. 84). It serves his tendency to exaggerate and distort reality beyond any logical sense. Medea engages in hilarious acts, since not only does she kill her children, but she also admits that they were not hers eventually.

Bost's play was written in 15 syllable iambic rhyming couplets. Bost made use of the colloquial and purist Greek language, as well as similes to comment, criticize and express his resentment. He also used language in a metaphorical and literal meaning in order to evoke comical elements (Bergson, 1998, pp. 94). He also used homophones moving from the side of being literal to being metaphorical, in order to bring about confusion along with laughter to his audience. As for the linguistic aspect of the play, Bost oscillates between linguistic accuracy and verbal distortion (Bakonikola – Georgopoulou, 2000, pp. 120), aiming to accentuate the comical elements. This is evident in the scene where Medea listens to the nun's distorted words. The audience, on the one hand, questions the words' grammatical accuracy and, on the other hand, bursts into laughter.

1 See: Encyclopedia Universalis France, word: 'comédie-burlesque' <https://www.universalis.fr/index/comedie-burlesque-cinema/>

2 See: Norton Anthology of Drama Glossary <https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nadrama/content/review/glossary/B.aspx>

Apart from that, his play is characterized by a black sense of humor and an undertone of irony (Pefanis, 2001, p. 86). For example, he criticizes the current situation with his reference to Oedipus, who is rather nostalgic of his homeland, indirectly alluding to King Konstantinos of Glyxbourg. His slightly ironic tone accommodates his initial aim to satirize the current political affairs. Bost touches upon the issues of modern Greece and it seems impossible not to comment on the unregulated construction, tax evasion, lack of meritocracy, unemployment, irresponsible leaders and voters and the corrupt judiciary system. He denounces money and foreign goods and simultaneously exerts criticism on the educational system. Bost attacks shallow seriousness, arrogance, globalization, hypocrisy and rigid social rules. He spoofs the ills of modern Greek society.

Another innovation Euripides utilizes is that of Meta-theatre, which is fully aware of its theatricality (Slater, 1985, p. 14). The heroes address the audience directly, which did not occur in the ancient tragedy of Euripides. Euripides, as a character appears on stage and discusses the topic of his tragedy with Medea. Bost manages to make his characters more intimate to the audience and also accentuates the comic elements successfully. Depth and seriousness are concealed behind Bost's hilarious characters. Nevertheless, by addressing the audience directly, Bost motivates the spectators to think and reflect on the messages of the parody.

Bost distorted Euripides' tragedy from a "noble play" into a "hideous act" (Diamantakou – Agathou, 2010, p. 6). Even the last scene was subjected to Bost's whims. The lysis in Bost's Medea is given through a song. Unexpectedly, the sonnet highlights all the elements of the parody. The melodious joyful finale alleviates the gloomy situations, leaving the audience with a feeling of katharsis, rendering it the most appropriate ending.

### ***Conclusion***

Medea, the archetype of the Terrible Mother, as most people tend to identify her, exchanged oaths with Jason and committed to helping him obtain the Golden Fleece. Jason's decision to marry the daughter of Creon, Glauce, will lead Medea to carry out her plan of vengeance and perform the act of infanticide. In Euripides' tragedy, this deed goes beyond the narrow belief that Medea could have acted otherwise. Medea's inner conflict touches upon themes of love-hate, civilization-barbarism, vengeance-forgiveness. Medea is a woman who seeks vengeance when betrayed by her husband. This is a universal situation, which has occurred across different times and places throughout human history. There is inner conflict in Medea's heart, which serves the aim of the tragic poetry. That is, to lead the heroine to Katharsis, the release of all negative emotions.

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The theme of erotic vengeance comes back transformed in Anouilh's Medea. Anouilh maintained the myth of Euripides, but the archetype of Medea takes a whole new form, as her human nature emerges in Anouilh's text. He humanizes Medea to make her a contemporary heroine of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Medea cannot possibly find fulfillment by pursuing happiness. Anouilh creates a character, who is in search of the absolute. For this reason, she does not hesitate to harm her children and consequently herself in order to give meaning to her life.

On the other hand, Bost reshapes the archetype of Medea in his parody. He gives a comical dimension to his Medea, where Euripides' initial text can barely be discerned. Bost synthesizes a parody with even Euripides as a character on stage, and a Medea who is willing to kill her children as they are infatuated by the nun and they refuse to study. Apart from the comical elements, Bost manages to criticize modern Greece society, which differentiates his play from the original text of Euripides. He gives prominence to the political development and malfunctions of a contemporary society, demonstrating lack of fidelity to the ancient Greek drama. Nonetheless, his approach creates a unique Medea.

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GREEK THEATRE FROM ANTIQUITY  
TO MODERN TIMES

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# EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* AND ATHENIAN DEMOCRATIC IDEOLOGY: AN INTERPRETATION

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**Abstract:** In this article, I argue that in *Bacchae*, Euripides masterfully attempts to combine the essential qualities of the Dionysian cult, which seek to temporarily alleviate human suffering and drastically alleviate mental anguish, with the fundamental principles and values of the Athenian democratic city-state. These principles prioritise, *inter alia*, every possible celebratory occasion for the emotional relief and moral fortification of citizens. The gruesome dismemberment of Pentheus illustrates, in the most shocking way possible, the disastrous consequences that could arise in a city where, in the name of egocentric intellectuality and inflated narcissism, the ruling class stubbornly denies the populace's inalienable right to enjoy the uplifting effect of religious enthusiasm and festive frivolity, including the subversive, *prima facie*, but essentially therapeutic Bacchic relaxation, which can sometimes culminate in celebratory defiance and dreamlike illusion.

**Keywords:** Euripides, Dionysus, Bacchic ecstasy, Athenian religion, democracy.

**Note:** All Greek passages follow the OCT edition of Euripides by James Diggle. (1994). *Euripidis Fabulae, Tomus III*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, and all English translations are reproduced from the Loeb edition of Euripides by David Kovacs. 2002. *Euripides VI, Bacchae, Iphigenia at Aulis, Rhesus*. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, unless otherwise stated.

### **Introduction**

As early as the 1970s, an extremely important development occurred in the field of the interpretive analysis of Attic drama, which in fact remains equally influential even to this day. A beneficial result of this remarkable intellectual progress that arose in relation to the more thoughtful examination of the ancient Greek theatre was that scholars were able to shed light on a very broad set of intractable semantic problems and difficult dramaturgical issues primarily regarding the historical coordinates of the tragic and comic works of the classical period.

The contemporary theoretical trend of New Historicism, as well as the fairly recent concerted effort aiming at the most 'authentic' reading of ancient texts in particular, has motivated many researchers to concur on the helpful view that each age has its own reference value code, which is constituted by certain historical principles and conditions, with which literary creations are inextricably intertwined; and therefore, it would be advisable to answer all related interpretive questions within the political, social, moral and religious context where they arose in the beginning. In other words, the Attic dramatic works should be interpreted through the eyes of the ancient spectators; above all, the overriding themes and prominent ideas from which these magnificent theatrical creations draw inspiration and stimulus must be thoroughly analysed and explained within the historical and political contours defined by the wider value system of fifth-century BCE democratic Athens (Markantonatos, 2020, 2021a *passim*, 2021b, 2022 with further bibliography and 2023).

Taking into account this remarkable development that paved the way for a clearly more effective elucidation of the central motifs and thoughts of the Attic theatre, in this article I shall attempt to highlight, through a brief interpretive analysis of Euripides' *Bacchae*, the multilayered connection of the religious *ferveur* underpinning the plot of an iconic Attic tragedy with the rich and varied political and social nuances of Athenian democratic ideology. A number of scholars in particular have aptly argued that during the radical Athenian democracy religion acquired a particularly significant role in the ever-evolving political and social process, even more so than at any other time in the distant past (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1988, 1990, 2003 and 2008. Cf. also the related discussions in Markantonatos, 2002, 2007 and 2013 with exhaustive bibliography). In a similar way, in *Bacchae*, Euripides draws from the rich sources of political, social, moral and theological reflection in the Athenian city-state in order to give a greater depth of meaning and more dramatic force to his theatrical compositions.

In Euripides' *Bacchae*, the triumphant though chillingly merciless imposition of the Dionysian cult upon the sceptical and fiercely reactionary Theban leadership underlines, by way of a peculiar symbolic illustration, the dominant Athenian ideal of the open and liberal city-state, which must always cater to the emotional comfort and moral rearmament of its citizens through popular celebratory rituals and special festive events. After all, the latter are primarily aimed at both the recreation of the participants and the strengthening of those policies which aim at relieving social tension and mitigating life's stresses and anxieties.

In short, once again in the context of Attic tragedy, the long-suffering Thebes, as a typical mythological counterexample of a failed city-state, serves as a concave mirror, into which the glorious Athens of the classical period is reflected in an absolutely inverted manner, and in particular her exemplary institutions and unparalleled moral values (Zeitlin, 1990). Indeed, according to primary constitutional conventions of the Athenian democratic policy the establishment of numerous annual festivals and cultic sacrificial ceremonies — which mark, among other things, the unreserved enfoldment of all the manifestations of human nature in a time of liturgical excitement and recreational exuberance, beginning with the reverent modesty of the worshipper and reaching the Bacchic ecstasy of the celebrant — invigorates the citizens' spirits and subsequently revives their devotion to their beloved city. Indeed, any attempt on the part of the state to suppress people's primal need to seek respite from labour and relief from sorrow — through sometimes even deviant but essentially harmless and benign behaviour — is not only doomed to failure, but also deemed as highly subversive of the moral intelligence and martial virtue of all the citizens.

### ***Dionysian Cult and Athenian Democratic Ideology***

In order to understand more deeply the wider benefits arising from this momentary tendency of humankind to sometimes indulge in amusements and seek opportunities of celebratory bliss, with a view to forgetting their sufferings and, if possible, to rise to a higher sphere of existence, it would be appropriate to reference Pericles' famous words in his Funeral Speech preserved for eternity by Thucydides (II.38.1):

*Καὶ μὴν καὶ τῶν πόνων πλείστας ἀναπαύλας τῇ γνώμῃ ἐπορισάμεθα, ἀγῶσι μὲν γε καὶ θυσίαις διετησίαις νομιζόντες, ἰδίαις δὲ κατασκευαῖς εὐπρεπέσιν, ὧν καθ' ἡμέραν ἡ τέρψις τὸ λυπηρὸν ἐκπλήσσει. (ed. H. S. Jones & J. E. Powell)*

[Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure and helps to banish the spleen.] (transl. R. Crawley)

It is not beyond accident that immediately after his proud boast about the beneficial effects of the popular festivals and fairs that adorn the Athenian calendar with impressive frequency, as well as the comforting pleasures arising from leisurely private pursuits, Pericles singles out the markedly welcoming attitude of the democratic city-state, which is not at all possessed by feelings of obsessive suspicion and xenophobia about the probable intentions and pursuits of its foreign visitors, since it certainly has unlimited confidence in the devotion which all the Athenian citizens have in their hearts for it (II.39). Such a city, which lavishly bestows the most precious goods of the world on its residents and at the same time ensures such an enviable way of life, need not be anxious about its future; for its people are always willing to undergo any sacrifice in order to defend this privileged prosperity.

More than this, it is indisputable that the regular observance of widely-held holidays and festivals, framed by pre-holiday events and post-holiday procedures, not only brings indescribable euphoria to the citizens through a variety of joyous activities, but more importantly forges cohesive bonds within the wider community. The profuse enthusiasm that flows freely from the celebration of special days and historical anniversaries often turns into patriotic fervour, national pride, and ultimately into such a profound experience that promotes philanthropy and mutual respect through the conscious realisation on the part of the participants that these religious and political events essentially mark the unbreakable continuity of ancestral traditions and the uninterrupted succession

of numerous generations. Memories, therefore, immortalised in time-honoured rituals and majestic ceremonies, are those imperishable pockets of wisdom and knowledge that do not only evoke powerful emotions, but also galvanise unsuspected psychic powers in every populace and in every individual.

It would be remiss if we did not sufficiently emphasise here the prominent role played by banquets in the lives of the citizens of an ancient Greek city-state, and especially the populous Athenian polis. Banquet gatherings in particular cross the lines between public and private; for they include in a surprising way multiple aspects of the social, political, intellectual and religious activity of the fellow banqueteers. Feasting euphemisms are not only intended to provide entertainment but primarily seek to forge unique personalities through witty banter, lyrical gaiety, theatrical indulgence and philosophical contemplation (Parker, 1996 and Sourvinou-Inwood, 2011. Cf. also Scullion, 2007 and Carbon, 2015 with recent bibliographical updates). In Ancient Greece, therefore, the festive feast aimed to apply a balm of consolation to the souls of the citizens and at the same time was of great importance for the optimal formation of their character.

Similarly, in *Bacchae*, the myth of the unanticipated arrival of Dionysus in his native city, after the sad event of the unintentional striking-down of his mother Semele by Zeus' thunderbolt, serves as an allegory of humanity's imperative need for mental relief from life's weariness through kindly joviality, dance communion and boisterous performance of jubilant songs and chants. But simultaneously, the same unexpected event is a summative condensation of key democratic values regarding the inextricable connection between festive respite and civic valour.

Already in the scene of the frantically dancing Lydian Maenads (ll. 64-166), comes into full view the dominant idea that governs all manifestations of the Bacchic cult — that is to say, every pain undertaken with the aim of highlighting Dionysus as a supreme divine entity with indisputable authority is not at all due to unbearable suffering and severe trial but the diametric opposite:

*Ἀσίας ἀπὸ γαίας  
 ἱερὸν Τιμόλων ἀμείψασα θοάζω  
 Βρομίου πόνον ἠδὲν  
 κάματόν τ' εὐκάματον, Βακ-  
 χιον εὐαζομένα.*

(ll. 64-67)

[From the land of Asia,  
 leaving behind Tmolus the sacred mount, I have sped,  
 toiling for Bromios a toil that is sweet  
 and a weariness that wearies happily.]

Closely connected with the aforesaid concept of redemptive labour, which is undertaken in the service of the god, is the inexplicable feeling of the aged bacchanals, that under the state of an unbridled orgy they can not only forget the sufferings of old age but, more crucially, regain the powers of their past youth. Cadmus, former king of Thebes, enters the scene as a pious Dionysian devotee clad in deerskin, crowned with ivy branches, and holding in his hand the thyrsus, all these peculiar ritual accessories of Bacchus. When indeed he meets the seer Tiresias outside the palace, he immediately expresses his uninhibited enthusiasm for the new-found worship of Dionysus, and moreover in the very final turn of his speech he declares that he is ready to begin the dancing and revelry, since he now feels completely reinvigorated. The elder Teiresias confirms those wonderful and strange things that Cadmus is so eager to proclaim:

[ΚΑ.] *ποῖ δεῖ χορεύειν, ποῖ καθιστάναί ποδα  
καὶ κρᾶτα σείσαι πολλόν; ἐξηγοῦ σὺ μοι  
γέρον γέροντι, Τειρεσία· σὺ γὰρ σοφός.  
ὡς οὐ κάμοιμι ἄν οὔτε νύκτ' οὔθ' ἡμέραν  
θύρσω κροτῶν γῆν· ἐπιλελήσμεθ' ἠδέως  
γέροντες ὄντες. ΤΕ. ταῦτ' ἐμοὶ πάσχεις ἄρα·  
κάγω γὰρ ἠβῶ κάπιχειρήσω χοροῖς.*

(ll. 184-190)

[{CADMUS} Where shall our dance steps take us, where shall we set our feet and shake our aged heads? You must give me guidance, Teiresias, grey head to grey head: you are wise. I will not grow weary day or night of beating the ground with my Bacchic wand. How delightful it is that we forget our age!

{TEIRESIAS} So your experience is the same as mine: I too am young and ready to try to dance.]

In the same way, as the play strides forward, the wise soothsayer tries in vain to convince the young king Pentheus about the reality of Dionysus' supernatural existence by thoroughly enumerating in a lengthy speech the various aspects and qualities of the recently arrived mighty god (ll. 266-327). And in this expository reference to Dionysus there is conspicuous mention of the euphoric and healing effect which the juice of the vine exerts on the rioters, who, with their boisterous chants and lively dances, succeed in both temporarily forgetting their sufferings and repelling for a while the exhausting hardships of an arduous everyday life:

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ὅς δ' ἤλθ' ἔπειτ', ἀντίπαλον ὁ Σεμέλης γόνος  
βότρυος ὑγρὸν πῶμ' ἠῆρε κάσινέγκατο  
θηητοῖς, ὃ παύει τοὺς ταλαιπώρους βροτοὺς  
λύπης, ὅταν πλησθῶσαν ἀμπέλου ρόης,  
ἔπνον τε λήθην τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν κακῶν  
δίδωσιν, οὐδ' ἔστ' ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων.  
οὔτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς,  
ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τὰ γὰθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.

(ll. 278-285)

[But he who came next, the son of Semele, discovered as its counterpart the drink that flows from the grape cluster and introduced it to mortals. It is this that frees trouble-laden mortals from their pain — when they fill themselves with the juice of the vine — this that gives sleep to make one forget the day's troubles: there is no other treatment for misery. Himself a god, he is poured out in libations to the gods and so it is because of him that men win blessings from them.]

It is worth pointing out here that the ill-starred king of Thebes, Pentheus, who as an unrepentant opponent of the gods competes with furious ferocity against the ecstatic Dionysian cult, would have touched a raw nerve with the Athenian spectators, who, as in the similar case of an intolerant and short-sighted Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*, would have perceived such a dismissive tactic towards revered divine beings and highly respected unwritten laws as profoundly anti-democratic and completely irrational. In other words, in contrast to the pious Cadmus and Tiresias, Pentheus behaves as another egotistical and narrow-minded tyrant, who, blinded by his bottomless arrogance and seduced by a myopic rationality, not only fails to appreciate the obvious weaknesses of his mortal nature, but he is also not in the least inclined to listen to the admonitions of political and religious leaders and the innermost desires of the simple but prudent people; so that he is seized with an unyielding stubbornness and is inevitably annihilated in a horrible way because of his shameless disrespect to the almighty Olympian gods.

Indeed, Pentheus as a *theomachos* is unable to understand the deeper wisdom contained within the inner core of the Dionysian cult, but he stubbornly likes to display cold braininess, though it is well known that reason is often forced to yield to the inmost yearnings of the human heart (Henrichs, 2019 and Bierl, 1991). In essence, this paranoid conceit that relies on a deplorable illusion of palatial power and spiritual supremacy leads to complete ignorance of reality and awakens chimerical pursuits. The polarity defined by the at first sight diametrical opposition between reason and impulse turns out to be highly complex and puzzling, with

the result that often what appear to be different modes of regretful reasoning turn out to be in the end honest assessments of human life. Further, on account of the unnoticeable smothering of subconscious desires and visceral urges this thoughtless vanity creates societies of petrified human beings — that is, mentally deficient individuals, whose gaze remains ominously restricted, and their mental horizon is fixed obsessively on an enclosed landscape of controlled emotions.

Indeed, in *Bacchae*, Euripides places strong emphasis on the anthropomorphic dimension of the divine beings, with the aim of making it clear that those primal feelings and ancient traditions, such as compassion and excellence, but at the same time the burning desire for revenge and the supreme need for survival and subsequently power, pervade the life and deeds of gods and men with equal impetuosity. There can be therefore no escape from age-old instinctual motivations for action; mortals and immortals undeniably declare a willing submission to the unsurpassed spontaneity of these ancestral feelings (cf. ll. 319-321, 330-331, 395-401, 430-431, 641-642, 877-881, 902-912, 1009-1010 & 1349-1350).

After all, the celebratory frenzy of the worshipper, which often spills out unrestrainedly into crude jokes, wine-fuelled revelry and uncontained dancing, is essentially that euphoric and pain-relieving springboard that contributes the most to achieving the desired ecstatic transformation of the Bacchic reveller, i.e., the quest for divine elevation. The paradisiacal images of the elated Maenads on the mountaintops of Cithaeron, where milk, wine and honey gush forth from the ground (ll. 142-143), as well as magical events that exceed all human imagination, allude to primordial cosmogonic narratives, closely related to a pain-free life of an earlier golden age. These genealogical stories are set forth with incomparable lucidity in the archaic Hesiodic poem *Works and Days* and especially in its highly mythological initial section (ll. 42-212), according to which the human species was once fortunate enough to enjoy such coveted utopian privileges corresponding, so to speak, to those of the immortal gods themselves.

In a sense, the Dionysian enthusiasm temporarily suppresses those burdensome feelings, which as a rule cause people mental pain and existential anguish, as it simultaneously overpowers for a while the debilitating reasoning that arise from prosaic intellect and over-analytical thinking, with the consequence that the mortal worshipper soars lightly into the semi-divine realm of god-like entities and experience fleetingly the omnipresence of the transcendent essence of divinity, without at the same time renouncing the immutable limits of the human condition. It is characteristic, as I have already pointed out, that Euripides attaches particular importance to the miraculous revival of the aged characters, Cadmus and Teiresias, who in the end surrender themselves readily to the ecstatic diversions of Bacchus and thus seem to acquire unimaginable physical and psychic

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powers, without at the same time denying in the least the irrevocable limitations and inflexible impediments of mortality. In a similar way and according mainly to the two detailed messenger-narratives (ll. 677-774 & 1043-1152), the elated women of Thebes and especially the three daughters of Cadmus, Agave, Autonoe and Ino, are shielded with superhuman strength and thus go on to defeat all male invaders with incredible ease, while at the same time indulging in unthinkable acts of carnage and cannibalism, which of course foreshadow the grisly end of king Pentheus at the murderous hands of his own mother. It would therefore be desirable that both advanced intelligence and sharpened spirit facilitate all citizens and especially those in power to acknowledge the murky depths of the human consciousness and the visceral cravings of the mortal heart.

### *Epilogue*

In *Bacchae* Euripides masterfully attempts to combine essential qualities of the Dionysian cult, which aim at the temporary alleviation of human suffering and the drastic mitigation of mental anguish, with fundamental principles and values of the Athenian democratic city-state, which prioritise, *inter alia*, every possible celebratory occasion for the emotional relief and moral fortification of the citizens. The gruesome dismemberment of Pentheus illustrates in the most shocking way possible the disastrous consequences that could arise in a city where, in the name of an egocentric intellectuality and an inflated narcissism, the ruling class stubbornly denies the inalienable right of the populace to enjoy the uplifting effect of religious enthusiasm and festive frivolity, and even that *prima face* subversive but essentially therapeutic Bacchic relaxation, which can sometimes culminate in celebratory defiance and dreamlike illusion.

It appears to be beyond belief that this transitory ceremonial intermingling with the omnipotence of the divinity, which in particular takes place with irresistible intensity in the space of the Dionysiac theatre, is paradoxically a fundamental process of readjustment and self-awareness; even so it restores the fighting spirit of the citizens, consolidates social cohesion and, most importantly, rekindles the love for country. A monotonous, depressing and restless life, waiting for a constantly postponed consoling redemption, which, however, never materialises, relentlessly crushes the patriotic spirit instead of nurturing it and thereupon converting it to optimistic stances on life. After all, in *Bacchae* Euripides once again serves as on the one hand a subtle scale that calculates with extreme precision the weight of the moral responsibility assumed by the Athenian democratic regime towards its citizens, and on the other hand as a sensitive thermometer that measures with amazing reliability the temperature of the epoch-making historical and social events happening during

the late fifth century BCE in Athens and more widely in the Greek world, where the need for sobriety, moderation and unselfishness is far more than crucial.

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# 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*<sup>1</sup>, *Lens Maintainer: The Living Profession of Baruch/Benedict Spinoza*<sup>2</sup>, *The Fatal Exit of Professor Henri Bergson*<sup>3</sup>, and *Accidental Loves: and Some Other Aspects of the Life and Work of the Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre*<sup>4</sup> – 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.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL THEATRE OF THEODOSIOS PELEGRINIS<sup>5</sup>

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 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

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

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

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

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

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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.<sup>6</sup> 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, 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

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.

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.<sup>7</sup> 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 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).

7 From the personal archives of Konstantina Ziropoulou, specifically her introduction at the presentation of the two new philosophical theatrical plays of Theodosios 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.

### ***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

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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 theatrological 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 (Petraou, 2015, p. 387) Philosophy illuminates Theatre, Theatre illuminates Philosophy.

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THEATRE IN GREECE  
**DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD:**  
A GENERAL OVERVIEW

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**Abstract:** The article attempts to provide an overall overview of the Greek theatre during the interwar period. Specifically, it examines the conditions that influenced playwrighting and the establishment and operation of theatrical troupes and institutions. The interwar period sheds light on modern Greek theatre and its darker side, leading up to the current theatrical landscape. The article summarises its impact on theatrical practice, the reception of ancient drama, and the emergence and consolidation of important domains such as directing and theatre criticism within the institutionalisation of basic demands.

**Keywords:** interwar period, dramaturgy, actors, national theatre, commercial theatre, direction, criticism.

**Note:** The article is based on the author's three-volume study on the subject: *Theatrical Criticism in Athens during the Interwar Period* (2008, 2009, 2022) Athens: Egokeros/Γεωργοπούλου, Βαρβάρα (2008, 2009, 2022) Η Θεατρική κριτική στην Αθήνα του Μεσοπολέμου, τόμ. Α', Β', Γ', Αθήνα: Αιγόκερως.

### **Introduction**

The economic and social crisis caused by the first World War brought radical changes to the political and cultural map of Europe. At the same time, the prevalence of the communist revolution in Russia and the strengthening of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany caused serious breaches in the democratic states and the institutions of those states.

The reverberations of these events in Greece were very serious which took the form of the greatest tragedy in Greek recent history, namely the Asia Minor Catastrophe. At the same time, the previous Balkan wars and the national division had a catalytic effect on the political and social balance and inhibited intellectual and cultural development. The permanent overthrows of governments and the establishment of dictatorship seemed to be the most convenient solution for the management of extraordinary conditions, as shown by the short-lived dictatorships of Kondylis, Pagalos and the longest and most painful one, that of Ioannis Metaxas (Grammatas, 2017, 111).

### **1. THE DECLINE**

During the two decades of the interwar period, the theatrical decline was experienced with greater or lesser intensity by all theatrical factors. Both intra-theatrical and extra-theatrical factors contributed to this decline. Among them, the most important was the repertoire of troupes. The domestic dramaturgy was characterised by thinness, inadequacy, and a lack of quality, while the

foreign repertoire was marked by an absence of artistic value, dominating the French boulevard.

The external and internal shocks left profound traces in the spiritual field. In particular, in the theatre sector, the experts talked about the “death” of theatre, the theatrical past of the “New Stage” and the “Royal Theatre” being presented in a beautified way, stressing the urgent need to address the situation.

The loss of lucrative Eastern markets, crucial for the economic sustainability of the Greek travelling theatre, the expensive tickets, the summer season, the inappropriate hours, the diversification of entertainment means, the heavy taxation, the sloppy performances, and the indifference of the managers of theatre companies were considered the main reasons of the decline by the press of the time. The emergence of the new, more attractive and above all more easily and cheaply accessible art of cinema was also a reason for the dwindling theatre audiences. Eminent intellectuals and ardent devotees of theatre turned passionately against the new art. In this context of the sudden changes in the theatrical production landscape, the quality of the repertoire was immediately affected, and the French boulevard became the permanent source for the troupes.

## 2. THE MUSIC THEATRE

The end of the First World War sparked a deep desire in people, whether on the battlefields or among civilians, to enjoy life and escape from unpleasant memories. Neither the economic crash of 1929 nor the escalating threat of a second war in the 1930s could stop this desire (Seiragakis 2009, vol. A, 28-29). This climate of frantic Dionysianism, embracing all social classes, also dominated interwar Athens. In these conditions, light musical theatre was the dominant theatrical genre in the first interwar decade.

The Athenians had already been exposed to musical theatre ever since the foundation of the modern Greek state through the Italian opera and operetta performances. At the same time, this genre cemented its connection with other European cultures. (Seiragakis, 2009, vol. A, 31). The revue, drawing its themes from current affairs, was the most suitable genre to celebrate the victories of the wars. Despite criticism in the interwar period, the revue persisted, with occasional attempts at renewal and improvement. However, none of those attempts matched the brilliance of the annual revues of the 1910s.

After 1922, the revue’s popularity diminished as the new political and national trends, and, in particular, the great Idea debacle, took away its satirical dimension.

The coexistence of authors from the older and younger generations and the flexibility of the older ones in adapting to the new requirements ensured the

revue's continuity. The heyday of the operetta continued throughout the first decade of the interwar period, and according to Sideris, until the 1930s, Athens was certainly a brilliant temple of the operetta (Sideris 2008, 319-320).

### 3. THE REPERTOIRE. GREEK DRAMATURGY

Greek troupes, as led by the protagonists Kyvelis and Kotopoulos, were constantly called to support Greek plays., with the short-lived quality troupes emerging from time to time being the ones entrusted with this task. The comparison with foreign theatrical plays was a constant point of reference, and emancipation from foreign influence was an imperative request (Georgopoulou, 2008, 319-320).

The external adoption of modernist ideas and forms and the inability of creative assimilation and artistic transformation of sociological and metaphysical concerns by the Greek playwrights were seen as obstacles to the development of dramaturgy. The state's indifference and the lack of an organised state institution could also be seen as one of the main causes of the decline of dramaturgy. However, the improvement of stage performance conditions was proposed as a possible solution for the development of domestic drama.

During the first interwar decade, dramaturgy was still under the influence of older dramatists such as P. Horn, Sp. Mela, G. Xenopoulos. The new playwrights did not have a comparable contribution to that of the older ones.

In the 1930s, the older writers did not play a leading role in the field of drama. However, the lack of important dramatists, the uncritical imitation of foreign patterns, the global post-war crisis, the state's indifference, and the time required to transform history into fiction continued to be considered the most important causes of the decline of dramaturgy.

As the most durable and clearly dominant genre in the dramatic field, **ethography** became the centre of intellectual and theatrical dialogue. Ethography is often identified with the past, but its transcendence characterises the attempts of the avant-garde. Thus, the study of Greek dramaturgy is directly linked to the subject of ethography, which joins the broader dimension of the demand for Greekness, a concept that regularly resurfaces and affirms its importance. We ascertain that its influence is so profound that it accompanies every attempt to escape from it, and ethographic elements are found in all dramatic genres, even in those considered opposites, as, for example, urban drama. Ethography survived the entire interwar period as the basis of experimentation for the application of newer intellectual movements and trends (Vassiliou, 2005, 131). Among the older playwrights, Gr. Xenopoulos and P. Horn consistently and efficiently engage in ethography, while among the younger ones, we find Dim. Bogris.

The relationship of Xenopoulos's plays with Greek life in both the capital and the countryside, is particularly direct and lively, and therefore the ethnographic dimension strongly characterises his dramaturgical production. However, we would not call Xenopoulos an ethnographer, as we call Bogris and Horn after 1921. The main focus of Xenopoulos' dramaturgy is the erotic, the presentation of the erotic emotion in all its manifestations and digressions (Pefanis, 2001, 168-169). The other focal points of his plays, such as the political or social aspects, are always dimly lit and serve as the dominant erotic element. These other focal points are always weaker. In this context, at least some of his plays would match the "emotional ethnography" term attributed by M. Lygizos (Lygizos, 1980, 102).

It is worth noting that, in the early interwar period, two of the best examples of the ethnographic genre were written, which were staged many times to this day. *Fidanaki*, Pantelis Horn's first and perfect attempt in the ethnographic field, was staged for the first time by the Kyveli's troupe in 1921 without her own participation. With Aim. Veakis and Maria Alkaïou in the leading roles, the play has had a rich stage career since then. The play was a successful representation of an Athenian court as a space for the cohabitation of the popular class. The dominant motif was the naturalistic depiction of the moral impoverishment caused by material poverty. *Fidanaki* (or *To Fintanaki*) was performed several times on the interwar Athenian stage by major and minor troupes (Sideris, 1961, 1351-1353). The performance of the National Theatre in 1934, directed by F. Politis, highlighted its successful ethnography dimension by utilising the modern facilities of the state stage.

Dimitris Bogris is one of the young playwrights who emerged during the interwar period, being mainly recognised in the field of ethnography. After an initial attempt in the field of urban drama with *Iatro Mavridis* in 1921, his first dynamic appearance was with *Engagements*. The play was presented by the "Youth troupe" in Pagrati in 1925. With the author's hometown of Salamis as a dramatic space, the play shows the traditional values and social conventions of provincial life, emphasizing the relentless force of fate. Although it was later considered a milestone in interwar dramaturgy, it did not receive sufficient acclaim from the critics of the era, perhaps because of its indifferent or even negative attitude towards the troupe. By contrast, the performance of the National Theatre in 1936, directed by Dim. Rontiri and with the perfect interpretations of Aim. Veakis, Alexis Minotis, Sapphos Alkaïou, and Nikos Paraskevas, highlighted the ethnographic richness and garnered appreciative comments. However, the more refined critics had greater demands from the author and pressed him to move away from ethnography and move on to more qualitative theatrical genres (Oikonomidis, 1936).

**The** theatrical genre of **urban drama** introduced by Xenopoulos, who was also its theoretical exponent, which was identified with the regeneration of

modern Greek theatre at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, experienced a late revival in the first decade of the interwar period. This phenomenon can be partially explained by historical and ideological factors: the delayed urbanisation of Greek society and the dynamic intervention of the left in the first interwar decade (Vasieliou, 2005, 100-101).

This theatrical genre is represented either by older playwrights such as Sp. Melas and Dim. Tagopoulos or by younger ones such as Th.N. Synadinos, K. Bastias, and Mich. Rhodes. In the second decade, the increased demand for Greekness leading to the past, the renewed interest in both ancient and modern classical drama, the gradual weakening of the leftist ideology, and the establishment of the Metaxa's dictatorship in 1936 are some of the causes that led to the noticeable decline of urban drama.

**Poetic theatre**, whether in metre or poetic prose, is a rare theatrical genre, which presents several difficulties in its stage presentation. It requires special acting and vocal skills from the actors. Commercial troupes therefore refuse to include poetic dramas in their repertoire, and the public systematically avoids them. Thus, the acceptance of the poetic theatre needed a strong practical foundation, which was provided by the performance of *Triseugene* by K. Palamas in 1935-1936 at the National Theatre, directed by Dim. Rontiri, with Alexis Minoti and Katina Paxinou in the lead roles. The quantity, the length, and also the discussions on the critical and theoretical texts written about the performance (Puchner, 1995, 497-548) enriched the dramaturgical theory, overturning the opinion about the unsuitability of poetic texts for the stage and promoting the new scenic ways to highlight the texts (Georgopoulou, 2008, 355-35).

## NEW DRAMATIC GENRES. THE AVANT-GARDE.

Along with the older dramatic genres, new ones enriched dramaturgy in the interwar period. In the second interwar decade, historical drama attracted the interest of younger and older playwrights alike. This genre gave the authors the opportunity to use new aesthetic currents and dramaturgical techniques, as well as psychography, both in the content and structure of the cinematic form of tableau-images. *Lord Byron's Lidorikis*, *Emperor Michael* of Agg. Terzakis, *Iulianos* of N. Kazantzakis, *Ioudas*, and *Papaflessas* of Sp. Mela thus represented the new ideological and aesthetic directions.

Lighter dramatic genres were revived, while *comédie* hovered between comedy and light drama, echoing the interwar laxity and need for cheerfulness. Gr. Xenopoulos belongs to the serious representatives of *comédie*, being one of the first to try to define the term theoretically. This genre perfectly suited

Xenopoulos' temperament and dramatic choices, as he ardently desired to be "the chosen one" of the Greek theatre. He used the genre to the fullest in his theatrical plays.

The **comedy of morals**, deeply rooted in the Greek tradition, was systematically cultivated in the interwar period, especially from the middle of the second decade onwards. The social and political circumstances of the time were suitable for satirical treatment. The common themes of such comedies were the modern emancipated-intellectual woman, marital and extramarital affairs, the corruption of morals, the worldly display, and the out-of-bounds desire for social advancement. The genre was represented either by the older authors, among whom T. Moraitinis, Th. Synadinos, and Gr. Xenopoulos held an important position, or by the younger ones, such as Dim. Ioannopoulos.

Despite dramaturgy's general perception of stagnation, the interwar period saw the emergence of important examples of innovation. Apart from the troupes, who established the renewal of the Greek stage as their objective, both the commercial troupes and the national theatre, in their effort not to lag behind, presented plays that were innovative in both content and form. Also, some of the older playwrights, such as Xenopoulos and Horn, repeatedly attempted to introduce modern techniques and themes in their dramaturgy. Among the older authors, P. Horn was the one who advanced pioneering dramatic proposals, which sparked a wave of criticism. A representative example is *Sentzas*, a character-driven comedy that focused on shedding light on the multiple facets of the central character. To achieve this, the author used magnification, exaggeration, and repetition. Unfortunately, theatre criticism focused on the ideological axis of immorality of the central character and failed to assess the various aesthetic parameters of the play, specifically ignoring the relationship with European currents, such as Freud's psychoanalysis.

In the field of the interwar avant-garde, two plays by Galatea Kazantzakis<sup>1</sup>, a prominent personality of the feminist movement, occupy an important position. The *Wounded Birds* stand out as the sole play by a female writer that was presented in 1925 by the pioneering troupe "Theatre of Art" of Sp. Melas. The troupe promised a substantial theatrical renaissance and presented to the Athenian public the contemporary successes of the French stage and the general plays of the European avant-garde.

1 This is the first wife of N. Kazantzakis, whose work remained unknown for many years. Recent research has revealed a rich literary and theatrical work, *Καστρινάκη Αγγέλα, (1997): «Γαλάτεια Καζαντζάκη», Η παλαιότερη πεζογραφία μας. Από τις αρχές της ως τον Πρώτο Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο, τ. Ι, Αθήνα: Σοκόλης.σ. 422-446—B. Γεωργοπούλου, Β. (2011). Γυναικείες διαδρομές. Η Γαλάτεια Καζαντζάκη και το θέατρο, Αθήνα: Αιγόκερως.*

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The text of the play is lost, our knowledge of it is based on its reception, which was indeed noteworthy. Kazantzakis was influenced by the French playwright Lenormand in respect to the theme, specifically by the play *Les rates* (*The Unsuccessful*), and by Chekhov in general in respect to atmosphere. Social protest appeared in new and interesting expressive ways in G. Kazantzakis' much-discussed play, *While the Ship Sails*. It has several peculiarities and presents challenges in understanding and interpretation that cannot be easily addressed on a realistic level. More generally, Kazantzakis' play falls within the framework of expressionism. Specifically, it shows many similarities with O'Neill's *Hairy Ape*, which belongs to the expressionist phase of the American playwright. Despite their imperfections and negative reception by critics, Kazantzakis' two plays occupy an important place in the history of modern Greek theatre. They are seen as attempts to combine the Greek reality of the era with the European aesthetic of the previous twenty years, such as naturalism and symbolism, or with more modern ones, such as expressionism.

Aggelos Terzakis, in *Gamilio Embatario*, referring to the Chekhovian atmosphere of the *Three Sisters*, attempted to combine ethnography with psychography, as he depicted very successfully the drama of a family in the Greek countryside. Alekos Lidorikis in *Megali Stigmi*, in 1933, inaugurated pioneering techniques by presenting three different versions of his hero's life, based on his decisions, and by introducing the motif of the commentator in the epilogue. Lidorikis, continuing his experiments in psychographic drama in *The Waiting Room* in 1939, delved deeper into the topic of human happiness – a common theme in his dramaturgy.

## THE RECEPTION OF ANCIENT DRAMA

The most important performances of ancient drama until the establishment of the state stage in 1932 were presented in the context of sustained efforts to improve the theatrical landscape. These endeavours were undertaken intermittently by various troupes outside commercial theatre. Such performances sparked ample reflection regarding the manner of staging ancient dramas, especially the chorus parts. Two of the most important performances of the first interwar decade are Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* by Angelos Sikelianos in Delphi and Euripides' *Hekabe* in the Panathinaikos Stadium by Marika Kotopoulis, directed by F. Politis.

“The Delphic attempt” of Angelos Sikelianos is an important step in the revival of ancient drama, despite not being included in the plans of its initiators (Georgopoulou, 2003, 127-134). The whole project was part of the general plan of Sikelianos to make Delphi the “omphalos of the earth”/the centre of

the world again. The second Delphic Festival took place in May 1930, during which *Prometheus* was reprised and Aeschylus' *Iketides* was presented for the first time on the Greek stage. The Delphic festivals inaugurated the open space for ancient drama performances. Moreover, for the first time, the chorus followed the imaginative choreography taught by Eva Sikelianou based on ancient vessels and modern traditional Greek dances.

The performance of Euripides' *Hekabe* in 1927 was the professional theatre's response to Sikelianos' challenge. It was performed at the Panathinaikos Stadium, and it was directed by F. Politis, with a translation – especially penned for the performance by Ap. Melachrinos. Marika Kotopoulis and Emilios Veakis were in the lead roles of Hekabe and Polymestor, respectively. The performances of *Prometheus* and *Hekabe* created a wide field of reflection regarding the public's relationship with ancient tragedy and the need to educate them in this direction.

In 1932, with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, F. Politis inaugurated the National Theatre. The director considered Aeschylus a model of a high poetic style and since there was a new translation ready, courtesy of Gryparis, it needed to be tested on stage. The performance was highly anticipated by both the press and the public at the time as an important artistic event. The twenty years of strict criticism that F. Politis applied to the performances of other creators, his constant theoretical positions on the stage presentation of ancient tragedies, the perfect material equipment, the financial flexibility that the National Theatre granted to the new director, and the fatal confrontation with commercial theatre increased the demand for direction.

In 1934, true to his declarations, L. Karzis presented Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Phoenices* (*The Phoenician Women*) at the Panathinaiko Stadium, insisting on the archaeological reconstruction of the ancient performances with the use of masks and the other accessories of the ancient “ὄφης”. Serious objections were raised, the main arguments being the loss of the basic components of the ancient performance and the need to approach ancient drama from a modern audience perspective and not the opposite.

In October 1936, at the Royal Theatre, previously called the National Theatre before the change of state, K. Bastias kept his promise and established the Week of Ancient Drama, an event that was praised by intellectuals and opened new perspectives in the field of ancient drama revival. The first play presented in October was Sophocles' *Electra*, directed by Dim. Rontiri. The roles of Electra and Clytemnestra were performed by Katina Paxinou and Eleni Papadaki, respectively, and the translation was penned by G. Gryparis. In September 1938, with the cooperation of the Travelling Club, the state stage presented the Sophoclean *Electra* at the Theatre of Epidaurus, which was a highly praised event. It was the first time since antiquity that the tragic speech resonated in the Polykleitos Theatre.

In 1939, Sophocles' *Electra* was also chosen by M. Kotopoulos to celebrate thirty years of her presence as a trouper in the modern Greek theatre. The translation belonged to the poet Ap. Melachrinos, while music to Ant. Evagelatos. The director K. Koon, directing a tragedy for the first time with a commercial troupe, attempted to apply his realistic performance concepts to ancient drama. This innovation, reinforced by Engonopoulos's artistic intervention and the protagonist's inability – despite honourable efforts – to adapt to the new acting style, caused a wave of reactions (Georgopoulou, 2011, 108-109). The last ancient drama performance in the interwar period was *Antigone* by the state theatre, directed by T. Mouzenidis, for the first time in the ancient theatre. Unlike tragedies, Aristophanic comedies did not thrive in the interwar period. The National Theatre and the commercial troupes did not present Aristophanes at all. This project was undertaken by pioneering theatre groups.

## THE STAGE ACT

### *i. The commercial theatre*

The stage act in interwar Athens presented much greater interest than dramaturgy, especially in the field of new goals and achievements and the relationship with Europe. The troupes showed variety in composition but also in terms of formation, organisation and operation. Along with the older troupes of the commercial theatre, new troupes appeared, which in most cases also functioned as drama schools. These presented a specific programme and artistic vision, with the common goal of upgrading the theatrical art at the level of dramaturgy and stage performance, and especially promoting Greek plays. These troupes, although short-lived and lacking in personnel and material resources, operated in competition with commercial troupes and often pushed them to renew their repertoire.

In the second interwar decade, the establishment and operation of the National Theatre and the competition with the commercial theatre were stronger and led to new theatre forms and collaborations. Moreover, the arrival of new actors and directors from Europe, becoming members of the troupes, strengthened the course and consolidated the avant-garde trends.

The two protagonists of the commercial theatre, Kotopoulos and Kyveli, dominated the first interwar decade. The largest percentage of foreign plays presented in the interwar period by the commercial theatre belongs to the boulevard genre, mainly French, with Verneig, Bataille, and Bernstein as main representatives (Kodekaki, 2004, 275-280). Trying to upgrade its repertoire as a counterbalance to the French boulevard, Kotopoulos, in addition to traditional honours performances, also established artistic evening ones where he presented quality classical, ancient, and contemporary plays.

In the first interwar decade, Shakespearean staging in the professional theatre was represented by the attempts of Kotopoulis, which aspired to continue the successful tradition of the Royal Theatre of the early twentieth century (1901-1905). The ancient-theme plays of the European authors of the Romantic period were included very early in the repertoire of the Greek troupes, replacing the ancient tragedy. Goethe's *Iphigenia* and the Austrian poet and dramatist Hofmannsthal's *Electra* were the "tragic" triumphs of Kotopoulis in Greece as well as in the troupe's tours abroad. In the second interwar decade, the actress systematically turned to the quality repertoire, using everything new available to the Greek theatre in all fields. In particular, her groundbreaking choices manifested themselves with clearly positive results in direction, scenography, and acting, expanding her aesthetic and artistic horizons.

The collaboration with pioneering directors of the free theatre, such as K. Koon (Kyriakos, 2012, 16-56), and the newly arrived from France, Giannoulis Sarantidis, as well as with imaginative and daring scenographers, such as N. Eggonopoulos, G. Tsarouhis, and Hatzikyriakos Gikas, constituted a contribution to the history of the interwar stage. The establishment of the National Theatre in 1932 prompted the two protagonists – Kotopoulis and Kyvelis – to stop their legendary rivalry and to join forces to employ a permanent director, Sp. Melas, and to collaborate with renowned artists such as painter Pericles Byzantios and the architect Dim. Pikionis. Although the presence of the two actresses on the same stage was initially impressive, the individual promotion, the inappropriate repertoire, and the lack of adequate preparation were negatively commented on (Sideris, 1932, 117; Thrylos, B', 1934, 48-50).

In the field of comedy, the troupe of Vassilis Argyropoulos stands out. Argyropoulos's favourite authors were Arnold Franz and Bach Ernst, whose comedies he often presented throughout the interwar period and which usually provoked negative comments due to their low level. In the second interwar decade, the troupe played several Greek comedies. At the same time, Argyropoulos turned to the quality repertoire, if we judge from Molière's comedies he approached, with himself playing the lead role (*Tartoufos* 1936, *Misanthropos* 1939).

Aliki Theodoridou-Nor, daughter of Kyveli and second wife of K. Theodoridis, began her career in 1932 (in collaboration with K. Mousouris until 1937). Having studied in Paris, she belonged to the new generation of educated actors, who, emerging in the second interwar decade, constituted a turning point in the theatrical landscape in contrast to the self-taught and empirical theatre players of the previous generation. The troupe had special performances of light plays, mainly from the typical interwar drama genre of *comédie* with the main representative, Hungarian writer, Fr. Molnár.

In 1936, Kat. Andreadis, having studied in Germany, founded her own troupe, which was added to the professional troupes of the interwar period. The performances of the troupe were mainly English comedies of morals. They usually had a major female role to highlight the talents of the protagonist. Although they were not approved by the most demanding part of the critics due to their lack of deeper intellectual content, they were nevertheless considered preferable to the French boulevard, satisfying the requirements of the average viewer.

**ii. *The National Theatre***

In 1932, the establishment of the National Theatre, after long-term processes and considerations, prompted a shift in the field of drama and theatrical performance. The repertoire policy of the new theatre organisation provoked intense reactions. The marginalisation of important older actors, together with the authoritarian behaviour of managers, strengthened the competitive climate that prevailed in the artistic field. The classical repertoire, Greek and foreign, was part of the priorities of the state stage, which aspired to reach the level of the corresponding European ones.

**iii. *Attempts to upgrade and pioneer***

In the context of the efforts to elevate the theatrical landscape and of the establishment of art theatre, which were imperative goals, especially in the first interwar decade, important attempts were made by organisations or persons with an amateur, semi-amateur or even professional character. These extraordinary and short-lived theatre formations – some of them started and functioned as drama schools as well – were often presented at the premiere of important plays, highlighted actors with a rich subsequent stage activity, and showcased innovative stage achievements (Hatzipantazis, 2014, 423). However, their short duration, lack of preparation, insufficient technical equipment, and, in general, their operation on the fringes of the commercial theatre, prevented them from being taken into consideration, with some important pioneering achievements going unnoticed. One of the important achievements of those troupes was the restoration of Aristophanes, whose reception was underestimated until then due to the performances of the neighbourhood troupes, with an exaggeration of the farcical and sexual elements.

Performance-stations in the presentation of Aristophanes, which claimed an artistic character, were *Ivini* from the “Hellenic Theatre Company” in 1919, *Plutus* from the troupe of “Neos” in 1924, *Ornithes* from “Eleftheran Skine” in 1929, and the performances of K. Koun in the second interwar decade (Diamantakou, 2021, 112-115).

The troupe of the “Athens Conservatory” in 1918-1924, directed by Thomas Oikonomou, and the “Hellenic Theatre Company” in 1919, founded

by the Society of Greek Playwrights (*Oedipus Tyrannus* directed by F. Politis in “Olympia” with Veakis in the main role), marked important steps in the promotion of both Greek drama and theatrical practice.

In 1922, the Veakis-Nezer troupe became famous with the appearance of Veakis in Shakespearean roles (*Macbeth*, *Othello*) and Nezer in Molière roles (*Filargyros*, *The Imaginary Patient*).

In 1924, the Union of Greek Actors founded the “Professional Theatre School,” where F. Politis would test his directing skills by presenting, among other plays, for the first time *Vasilikos* by Antonio Matesis in 1927.

In 1925, the “Art Theatre” of Sp. Melas, with the students of the Hellenic Conservatory and the Athens Conservatory, established L. Pirandello and introduced the necessity of direction and visual coverage of the performance, using special artists for this purpose. New actors were tested with success, including Eleni Papadaki. After his term in Paris, Sp. Melas established “Free Stage” in collaboration with Mitsos Myrat and Marika Kotopoulis.

The exoticism combined with imaginative directing proposals, according to the example of the French avant-garde, impressed the Athenian public and established the directing institution. Young actors – later protagonists – Minotis, Paxinou, Glinos, and Katrakis successfully emerged, and the visual artists were recognised as essential contributors to the performance.

In 1931, Veakis’ troupe presented for the first time Eugene O’Neill’s *Desires under the Elms* and, also for the first time, Chekhov’s multi-act work, *Uncle Vanya*. Then, in the summer of 1932, Kyveli presented the *Three Sisters* and Kotopoulis *The Seagull*.

The neighbourhood theatre was promoted, and Pagrati hosted the “Youth” Troupe in the summer months (1924-1929) and the “People’s Theatre” of Vasilis Rotas in 1930. Young playwrights showcased their skills together with the neighbourhood troupes, among which we can mention Dim. Bogris in *Engagements* and *Doctor Mavridis*, along with young emerging actors like K. Mousouris, Ant. Giannidis, and Eleni Chalkousi.

The young professor of the College, Karolos Koon, experimented with his students by renewing Aristophanes (*Frogs*, *Birds* 1932, 1933). In 1934, with the collaboration of Devaris and Tsarouhis, he founded the “Popular Stage,” looking for the foundations of “popular expressionism” in tradition (*Erofilis*, *Alcistis*). From 1939 onwards, he moved to the domain of psychological realism, which he ended up systematically cultivating in the following years.

The actor profession underwent significant changes, both in the trade union area (in the early 1930s, the actor’s work permit was instituted) and in the qualitative upgrading of the profession through the systematisation of theatre education.

In the field of theatrical achievements, the systematisation of theatre criticism can also be included, in 1928 acquiring its own union, namely the Union of Greek Theatre and Music Critics. The new generation of critics, including F. Politis, Alkis Thyrylos, K. Bastias, P. Haris, Athanasiadis Novas, ensured significant progress was made in critical and theoretical thinking. Young intellectuals who returned from Europe after finishing their theatre studies, such as Mouzenidis, Katselis, and Karantinos (“New Dramatic School,” 1936), enriched the theatrical thought and, at the same time, actively engaged in theatrical practice.

### ***Conclusions – Discussion***

Theatre in the interwar period, so far, has been insufficiently studied. For this reason, many dark and obscure aspects were brought to light by modern studies in the 1990s. According to these studies, the ever-recurring decline due to historical reasons caused significant rearrangements in the theatre field. In the dramaturgy field, although dominated by ethnography, new theatrical genres appeared, with historical drama taking the first place and offering notable examples. The contact with European artistic trends, although it presented problems of assimilation, nevertheless offered important samples, which criticism failed to assess due to a lack of proper skills.

The progress in the reception of ancient drama is significant. The “schools” that prevailed from then on were formed in that period. In 1938, the Theatre of Epidaurus was opened for the first time with a performance by Sofoklis – *Electra* (*Hlektra*). With the same performance and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the National Theatre triumphed on the stages of London and Berlin.

In the theatrical landscape, compared to the previous period, the achievements are more evident. The long-awaited establishment and operation of the National Theatre significantly improved theatrical life, acting as a solid counterweight to the commercial theatre, which was forced to adapt to the new demands, collaborate with directors, and improve their acting. The institution of the director was thus consolidated through the work of new directors, most of whom have been educated in Europe. The achievements in the field of theatre criticism were also impressive due to the improvement of the press and the contribution of educated critics, who penned articles in the most important newspapers and magazines. Among them, the most important were F. Politis and Alkis Thyrylos, nickname of Helen Uranus.

Theatrical education also underwent major improvements with the establishment and operation of drama schools, along with the consolidation of the demands for the professional and financial improvement of the actors.

The theatrical interwar period illuminates many dark or obscure parts of the modern Greek theatre, which leads us to today’s theatrical landscape.

We thus summarised the period's contribution to the current fields of theatrical practice, the reception of ancient drama, the emergence and consolidation of important professions such as directing and theatre criticism, and the contribution to the establishment of basic artistic and administrative theatre institutions.

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THE "OTHER" *PERSIANS* OF  
**THEODOROS TERZOPOULOS**

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## CONCEPT STUDIES

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the 2006 interpretation of Aeschylus' *Persians* by the Greek theatre director Theodoros Terzopoulos. Through his systematic method, Terzopoulos incorporates actions and traditions into his productions, drawing from rituals, practices, and ceremonies from the East. Terzopoulos' rendition of the historical play *Persae*, which examines the reception of the news about the Persians' defeat by the Greeks in the "other" Persia, correlates "otherness" with universality. By employing a Greek and Turkish cast as well as rituals from "other" cultures, the director makes a claim that human attitudes and reactions are universally shared among all human beings.

**Keywords:** Theodoros Terzopoulos, *Persians* by Aeschylus, otherness, method, interculturalism, lamentation, universality.

### *Introduction*

In the light of contemporary theatre theorists, the theatrical and performance space represents the "otherness" which is realised, mainly, through bodily representation.

Within the spaces of theatre and the performing arts, the differential bounds demarcating otherness, such as national, cultural, religious, socio-political, sexual, gender, and diasporic delineations, are continually and constantly dramatised, disrupted, negotiated, and redrawn. (Sebedtyén, 2016, p. 5)

In the case of Theodoros Terzopoulos<sup>1</sup>, "otherness" is expressed via interculturalism. The director through his Method incorporates in his approach actions and traditions of the Greek world using rituals, practices and ceremonies from East, thus creating a new mythology based on corporeality and rituals. The actor's "Energy body" (*The Return of Dionysos*, p. 15), through painful exercises of his biodynamic method, acquires a "ritualistic dimension" which transforms it into the Dionysiac body. According to Erika Fischer-Lichte "Dionysus is also the god of endless transformations. He appears as a man and woman, as God and beast, as a lion, snake or bull, permanently blurring the line between madness and reason, order and chaos, I and non-I" (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 11). At the same time, Dionysos, the dominant god of Terzopoulos' theatre, embodies the intercultural nature of his Method. Significantly, the book in which the director analyses his Method is entitled *The Return of Dionysos*, while his own theatre venue based

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<sup>1</sup> Greek director Theodoros Terzopoulos has gained international recognition through his numerous performances which have been staged, since mid-1980s, around the world. His production of Euripides' *Bacchae* (1986) marked an alternative approach to Greek tragedy based on the bodily, ritualistic training of his actors and actresses and on the geometrical, abstract stage design.

in Athens is called “Attis,” after the Winter Dionysos, who arrives from Phrygia (Terzopoulos, 2000, p. 74). Apparently, Terzopoulos’ theatre “is closely related to the god Dionysos. One could even go so far as to state that it is an ongoing attempt to lure the god into returning from his exile” (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 9). In an interview with Frank M. Raddatz, Terzopoulos made the following statement:

Dionysos came from India. We find the same god as Osiris in Egypt, Adonis in Syria, while in Thrace is named Dionysos again. He is always on the move. Each of these cultures considers him as a traveller. That is the history of his metamorphosis. This phenomenon does not mean that one culture imitates the other. Rather, it testifies a profound dialogue with the energy of the Other, the foreign culture. (Terzopoulos, 2006, p. 169)

Thus, Theodoros Terzopoulos’ intercultural theatrical experience is strongly related to the idea of employing and integrating the foreigner, the “other” into the performance.



Theodoros Terzopoulos, © Johanna Weber  
 Photo source: <https://urania.szfe.hu/2023/03/the-return-of-dionysus/?lang=en>  
 (*The Return Of Dionysus*, András Kozma’s Interview with Theodoros Terzopoulos,  
 Urania Interdisciplinary Academic Journal, Vol.2 No.1/2022)

### *The 2006 Persians of Theodoros Terzopoulos*

Within the above context of universality, achieved through the ultra-cultural tools of Terzopoulos' Method which goes beyond the limits of certain cultures and explores the "otherness" in the performer's language and movement (Pavis, 1996, pp. 1-21), my article will focus on the staging of Aeschylus' *Persians* in 2006, directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos with Greek and Turkish actors co-produced by the Attis Theatre, the Istanbul International Festival, the Athens-Epidaurus Festival and the 4th Theatrical Olympiad. Besides, the Aeschylus's *Persians* (472 BC) are placed in the realm of "otherness" and dramatised, in the context of the different culture, the management of the crushing defeat from the point of view of the "other" Persians.

"Otherness" is highlighted in the lines of Aeschylus's play, mainly in the themes of exaggeration which moves away from the Attic measure as seen in the bulk of Persian troops and the description of their expeditionary means (Verses: 1-117, 302-330) as well as in the issue of wealth and opulence. In the original play, the Persian wealth is, in many cases, stressed as such as the following examples indicate: "great wealth" (Collard, 2008, verse 163) and "O, you land of Persia and great harbour of wealth" (Collard 2008, verse 250). In other cases, the theme of wealth is indirectly recurrent in textual references to rich garments: "Two women in fine clothing, one attired in Persian dress and the other in Greek" (verses 181-2), "And now you, Xerxes' aged and loving mother [...] Fetch suitable fine clothing and go to meet your son; tatters of his embroidered garments hang in torn shreds round his body, wholly from grief at his disaster" (Collard, 2008, verses 831-5). Finally, the Aeschylean text emphasises the different conception of political power, as the verse: "They call themselves no man's slaves or subjects." (Collard, 2008, verse 242) referring to the Greeks is in stark contrast to Atossa's phrase: "but were he to have had success—he is not answerable to the people, and if he is saved, he is no less the ruler of this land" (Collard, 2008, verses 212-213), which refers to Persians. At the same time, in the text of Aeschylus, hubris emerges as a threatening example, common to all human beings.

The *Persians* of 2006 was Theodoros Terzopoulos' fourth approach to the text of Aeschylus. He first presented the play in 1990 with his Attis Theatre Company. This was a static staging which clearly pronounced the embodied threnody over the woes the war imposes on human beings. His second approach of 1991 (Attis Theatre Company) focused on the pattern of fortune's reversal and the entailing state of mourning. However, Terzopoulos' third approach to the Aeschylus' play, produced by the Moscow Meyerhold Foundation in 2003, had a strong political interpretation. The director, in an interview, states that "the play is about the lost and defeated Soviet Union" (Terzopoulos, 2003). Terzopoulos in all

his stagings of the play makes the best of elements inherent in religious ceremonies, which focus on the deep-rooted human and at the same time universal pain of the loss. Through controlling their breath, the performers develop somatic awareness, embody the rhythm and pronounce sounds rather than words. After all, the director is not interested in the conceptual interpretation of speech but in its description, in the image of the structure of the word, that is, its internal cause (Terzopoulos, 2000, p. 57). Therefore, his approaches are dominated by the ritual lamentation that materialises through “radical kinesiology” (Sampatakakis, 2019, p. 27) and the pulsating body of the actors. Terzopoulos’ theatre is neither intellectual nor cerebral, but physical which projects rhythm, gesture and Dionysian ecstasy. The somatization of the rhythm of speech makes possible the multilingualism (Greek, Turkish and ancient Greek) that characterises the all-male multinational ensemble of the *Persians* of 2006. At the same time, Terzopoulos believes that dialogue is based on rhythm (Terzopoulos, 2000, p. 61). According to the director, there is no need for someone to understand the lyrics, which are nonetheless reinforced by “the description produced by the hands and the head” (Terzopoulos, 2000, p. 61). Terzopoulos’ actors have also “perfected the energy force of the human sound”, which is a “primeval cultural element of communication and action by transforming the word into a rhythm” (Tsatsoulis, 2019, p. 116).

The most important, therefore, element of “otherness” in the 2006 representation of the *Persians* is the use of different languages. The Greek translation of the play by Eleni Varopoulou alternates with the Turkish translation of Gungor Dilmen Kalionsu and the ancient Greek of the original. According to Varopoulou, “the translated text, partially integrated in Terzopoulos’ performance with an idiom not easily accessible, was a valuable conceptive and acoustic material in this genre of proximity and distance” since the ancient text came from distant antiquity (Varopoulou, 2021, p. 149). The Turkish, mournful *amanesh* is delivered by all fourteen members of the Greek-Turkish Chorus and marks the *Kommós* (dirge) that would follow the disastrous campaign of Xerxes. Retorting to the use of the “other” language for the expression of the innermost pain by the members of the Chorus is an element of “otherness” as well. At the same time, the scene of the invocation of the dead Darius in ancient Greek, the repeated phrase “despot, despot, appear!” (“Despota, despotan fanethi!”/“Master! O, master, appear!”) (Collard 2008, verse 666) is an additional element of “otherness” as all the members of the Chorus express themselves in a “different” language than their own. “Otherness” expressed in the use of different languages (for example, Darius’s Turkish and the mournful cries of Xerxes and Chorus) defamiliarises the text and runs through the whole performance. At the end, as it will be shown below, language is self-deconstructed.

The second element which refers to the director's use of "otherness" in his approach to the play, although with the purpose to reject it at the end and turn it to "universality," is the choice of the performances' venues of the 2006 production: The church of Saint Eirini in Istanbul, a place ideologically, politically, religiously and culturally charged, initially hosted the Greek and Turkish actors in this intercultural approach of Theodoros Terzopoulos. Then Epidaurus, the predominantly "ideological" place of representation of ancient Greek tragedy in which the perception of the "correct interpretation" was cultivated in direct relation to the utterance of speech and the conceptual content of the word. Terzopoulos' stage realisation of the "other" *Persians* overturns the status quo regarding the performance of tragedy in the same place where it was cultivated.

At the same time, the scenery of the 2006 performances of Aeschylus' *Persians* is dominated by the circle (Photo no. 1: The circular setting of the performance in Saint Eirini's church). The circular surface, highlighted in white colour "establishes direct references to ancient Greek theatre where the disc of an orchestra was surrounded by rising tiers for the audience, thus to emphasise the vertical" (Dreyer, 2019, p. 36) which leads to depth, to the inner structure and to the "deepest layers of the psyche" (Terzopoulos, 2000, p. 50). Moreover, the circle delimits the space of "otherness" which is differentiated from the space of social activity and marks the diverted frame within which the performance's ritual will take place. According to Dimitris Tsatsoulis, "actors and actresses enter the threshold of no space in which trespassing is forbidden" (Tsatsoulis, 2011, p. 77). Therefore, the performance space is differentiated from the social space which surrounds it. At the same time, the circle marks the protective boundary, the safety net, of the actors and actresses. However, Darius's eerie ghost appearance transcends the boundaries of the circle since the former King possesses "the archetypal knowledge of the dead past" (Sampatakakis, 2008, p. 116) which the people inside the circle can't decipher. Darius's epiphany takes place at the same stage level but at the back of the stage. Consequently, his prophetic words cause upheaval, evident in the Chorus's escape movement on the elevated benches of the church of Saint Eirini, outside the safety of the circle which is abolished by the news of the imminent destruction and the ensuing lamentation. The scenery of Giorgos Patsas is completed by the two diagonals that intersect the centre of the circle. The geometric space and the intersecting lines seem to determine the actors' relationship with the space and, at the same time, with themselves (Tsatsoulis, 2011, p. 71). Moreover, in the centre of the circle, at the point of intersection of the diagonal lines, the Messenger (Savvas Stroumpos) will stand, in order to deliver the news of the ultimate destruction of the Persian army which will mark the reversal of fortunes of the people inside the circle, and it will trigger suffering and lamentation. At the same time, Messenger's speech will dissolve

the linear arrangement of Chorus' members, who abandon the harmony of the straight line as they try to escape the truth.

The all-male company of the 2006 production of Aeschylus' *The Persians* consisted of Greek and Turkish actors and thus, Terzopoulos managed to even transcend the already existed "otherness" of the original play which was set in the capital of the defeated, "other" Persians. Accordingly, in Terzopoulos' approach, Greek and Turkish actors who are historically identified as "others" participate as members of the same community in the lamentation over the destruction of a city as a fatal consequence of the expansionist, aggressive war. In fact, "Turkish and Greek actors suffer together, after Persians were killed due to the policies of Xerxes and mourn for all the ones that died in the wars" (Karaboğa 2019, p. 156). At the same time, the part of Xerxes is shared by one Turkish (Yigit Ozsener) and one Greek (Antonis Myriagkos) actor. Devrim Nas as Darius addresses his people and his wife, Atossa, the only female role of the original, who is played by a man (Meletis Helias). Therefore, "otherness" in the form of gender identity is also integrated in Terzopoulos' approach of 2006, through the enactment of the female role of the queen and mother of Xerxes by a male actor. Moreover, the theme of sexual "otherness" is further stressed as the male Atossa appears holding two white dresses which illustrate the Queen's dream (Photo no. 2: The two white dresses on the hands of the male Atossa), and, at the same time, they make a direct reference to the dressing of the dead body before the funeral service. The emphasis given by the original text on costumes is associated with the ornament "kosmon" (833, 849) and the bliss ("olvon" 164, 252, 709, 756, 826).



Theodoros Terzopoulos, *Persians*, 2006

Photo no. 1: The circular setting of the performance in Saint Eirini's church.  
Source: <http://attistheatre.com/en/show/persians-2006/>



Photo no. 2: The two white dresses on the hands of the male Atossa.  
Source: <http://attistheatre.com/en/show/persians-2006/>



Photo no. 3: The representation of the combat.  
Source: <http://attistheatre.com/en/show/persians-2006/>



Photo no. 4: Soldiers' boots on the hands of the actors.  
Source: <http://attistheatre.com/en/show/persians-2006/>

However, both words are deconstructed on stage by the director as his actors wear black costumes, a clear reference to mourning, and they are barefoot. The naked, from the waist up, bodies of the members of the Chorus strongly contrast the textual description of the old men. Consequently, Terzopoulos advances the issue of “otherness”.

Furthermore, Theodoros Terzopoulos, transcends the borders by using “otherness” to underline the “identity” and the “oneness” of all people’s suffering. At the same time the “universality” of peoples’ needs and concerns is stressed (Tsatsoulis, 2011, p. 55), through director’s, deep knowledge of the different cultural traditions, on the one hand, and his awareness of the communal character of the human rituals on the other. Thus, Terzopoulos’ intercultural approach and his ultra-cultural Method highlight the community of emotions and reactions of all human beings to common problems that concern their existence. The director’s intercultural approach becomes possible through the use of myth and the mythological motifs, which exceed the space-time limits of a particular social and cultural background. The mythical stories depict the universal concerns of the human beings and their reactions to situations and phenomena, which are also “universal”. As Decreus argued, “Terzopoulos staged a great number of stories that were important for the common identity of our culture” (Decreus, 2019, p. 73). Subsequently, the actors and actresses of his performances, by somaticizing the expression, control physically their body which “starts thinking, sensing, listening and speaking” (Stroumpos, 2019, p. 101). Thus, the performer’s body becomes the source of communication and moves away from the conceptual

content of the word. Nevertheless, the ecstatic body refers to “primordial ritual practices and religious rites” (Arvaniti, 2011, p. 100). Therefore, Terzopoulos’ body idiom becomes a universal stage language and expresses the needs and worries of all humans through cultural processes common to most peoples.

In the 2006 production of Aeschylus’s *Persians*, Terzopoulos uses elements inherent in ceremonies that focus on the universal pain of destruction and loss. It concerns “the historical lament for the fall or destruction of cities” (Alexiou, 2002, p. 160) as expressed through ritual practices common to most peoples, especially in the East. And because “laments for cities are inspired initially by historical events” (Alexiou, 2002, p. 160), the structure of Aeschylus’ *Persians* appears to have been traditional to the lament for cities:

In Aeschylus’ *Persians*, the news of the defeat of the Persian army is brought by the Messenger. Four lines of lamentation spell out the extent of the disaster (249-52) ... There follows a *kommós* in which the lyrical lament of the chorus is interrupted by the Messenger’s bald statement of facts ... (268-73). The theme is taken up in lyrical form in the first stasimon (532-97), in narrative form by the spirit of Dareios (759-86), by the chorus again (852-906) until the climax is reached in the closing *Kommós*, where the chorus’ persistent questions about the fate of Persia’s heroes are answered by Xerxes (955-77). (Alexiou, 2002, pp. 160-1)

Theodoros Terzopoulos, in his 2006 approach to Aeschylus’ play, projects the collective lament following the mourning rituals of the grieving people. However, the director chooses to stage the common elements inherent in the religious ceremonies of lamenting between two peoples who are considered “opposed” to each other. Thereby, he aims at deconstructing the “otherness” and stressing the communal reaction to the pain and loss. This is achieved, mainly, through actors’ vibrating and ecstatic bodies. Moreover, in the particular approach, the conceptual content of the words bears no significance since the words are delivered in three different languages—Greek, Turkish, ancient Greek. It is rather the way the words are reflected in the actors’ bodies. Hence, through the embodiment of words of tension and of ecstasy, Terzopoulos’ stage language is transformed into the universal language of the ritual lamentation. Through controlling their breath, wheezing, and extending the syllables, the actors embody the rhythm and pronounce the “pain-word”. The controlling of the breath also characterises the ritual of the modern historical laments. For Theodoros Terzopoulos, Aeschylus’ tragedy forms a common field in which two conflicting nations, who share the same *psyche*, are united through the common lamentation ritual.

Within the same context of the common reaction to the issues of loss and utter destruction in both Greek and Turkish cultures, Terzopoulos' approach to the *Persians* highlights the ubiquity of grief by focusing on the "otherness" of Greek and Turkish actors who share moments of collective suffering and anti-war sentiment. According to Avra Sidiropoulou, "the transnational scope and strong anti-war sentiment can certainly vouch for Terzopoulos' use of joined lamentation as across-cultural bridge, albeit imaginary" (Sidiropoulou, 2021, p. 212). Greek and Turkish actors express their deep sorrow and grief through mournful cries of pain and despair in ancient Greek (io, io, moi, ee, oioi, oa, ototototi). The bewailing cries emanate directly from the body and render the seamless continuity of the ritual. At the end of the performance, Greek and Turkish actors mourn as they are cast down on the ground and make an effort to exit the stage in crawling mode. Before that, two actors reenacted the fatal combat and the violence of the battlefield (Photo no. 3: The representation of the combat). The mournful melody at the end of the performance alludes to the Byzantine melody of the funeral service, whereas the Eastern music at the beginning is reminiscent of the Imam's call to prayer. Thus, in Terzopoulos' approach, "otherness" is a connotation of identity as it is expressed through the common manifestations of mourning and religious rituals in Greek and Turkish cultures. At the same time, as in previous versions of the play, the men of the Chorus appear holding black and white photographs of the real war victims: Greek, Turkish, Cypriot and Kurdish casualties are displayed on stage, reminders of the common fatality of wars to all people involved. At the same time, the Chorus' members display pieces of paper featuring names of the dead Persian generals, "thus highlighting the political dimensions of a remote historic fact" (Sidiropoulou, 2021, p. 212).

Furthermore, the people's common reaction to the devastating consequences of the war is also depicted by the ecstatic mutism of the Chorus' leader as he hears the news of the war defeat: this is one of Terzopoulos' recurrent facial image caused by extreme anguish which results in mouth freezing into a gaping hole and "vocal inaudibility due to lack of breath and vocal control" (Jarema, 2019, p. 147). Moreover, towards the end of the performance, the Chorus members appear with the soldiers' boots in their hands, signalling the common condition of war and the subsequent destruction of all men involved (Photo no. 4: Soldiers' boots on the hands of the actors). Additionally, the red kerchiefs of the Chorus members symbolise the blood of the war fatalities indicative of the human plight which transcends the limits of space and time. Finally, the ontological focus of the performance on the identity of human suffering which emerges from the stage management of "otherness" is reflected in the desperate embraces of the Turkish and the Greek actors. According to the director: "when

we meet the other, the foreigner, and we look at him in the eyes ... there are two options for us: either we reach eros in its ontological meaning, or war, in its literal meaning” (Dimadi, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

Theodoros Terzopoulos approached Aeschylus’ *Persians* in 2006 with a mixed cast of Greek and Turkish actors, uniting on stage two nations that represent the “otherness”. The director’s intercultural approach became possible using the myth, the biodynamic movement of the actors and the integration of ritual events of “other” cultures. He, thus, became the collective voice of human suffering. “Terzopoulos’ ultra-cultural Method highlighted the community of emotions and reactions of all human beings to common problems that concern the ‘Homo Universalis’” (Arvaniti, 2021, p. 224).

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CONCEPT STUDIES

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EARLY VENTURES AND IDEAS  
LEADING TO THE  
**GREEK FESTIVAL OF ANCIENT DRAMA**

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**Abstract:** During the 19th century, as the newly formed Greek state was shaping its national identity, the concept of Greekness emerged in a compelling, almost existential way. Gradually, the preservation and restoration of the ancient monuments, theatres, odea, and stadiums where the events, feasts, and dramatic and athletic competitions of antiquity were held became a matter of great national importance. The use of ancient monuments and their connection with the events of modern Greece surged during the first international extroversion action: the organisation of the first Olympic Games of 1896 at the Panathenaic Stadium<sup>11</sup>, reflecting the same ideological point of view. The emergence of the first Greek stage directors saw the dissociation of the interest in ancient drama from its national calling and its inclusion in the repertoire of professional troupes. In the years that followed, amidst the difficulties generated by the Asia Minor disaster and the distant vision of cultural development and international promotion, the couple Eva Palmer and Angelos Sikelianos organised and financed the Delphic Festivals (1927 and 1930). The “sanctity of the space,” specifically for Epidaurus, raised concerns regarding the limitations on the use of the “monument.” Since its inception, the Epidaurus Festival has been associated with performances of ancient drama, reigniting the debate about this theatrical genre.

**Keywords:** Greek festival, revival of ancient Greek drama, Delphic Festivals, Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus, National Theatre of Greece, Constantinos Kyriakos Aristias, Georgios Mistriotis, Eva Palmer – Angelos Sikelianos, Dimitris Rondiris.

As early as ancient times, the idea of large city festivals in which tragic contests were to be included created a primordial tradition. Artistic events of occasionally competitive nature are held at regular intervals, usually every year in designated places and during the same time period. Since ancient times, as H.C. Baldry points out in his well-known study *The Greek Tragic Theatre*, drama contests have been a pole of attraction for visitors from all over the Hellenophone world to attend the Great Dionysia (Baldry, 1971, p. 34-35). Furthermore, Sociology of Tourism scholar Andrew Holden points out that, despite the difficulty of travel and the peril involved thereupon, the ancient Greeks travelled frequently to visit divination, attend artistic and sporting events with special reference to the widely acclaimed Oracle of Delphi as well as the Asklepicion at Epidaurus as a healing centre attracting great numbers of patients (Holden, 2008, p. 29). The temperate climate favoured outdoor performances that expanded in the ancient world, thus encouraging the creation of great theatres in which ancient Greek drama was performed. Their rescue and restoration has sparked off the institutionalisation of the country’s Festivals. Since the 19th century, when the newly formed Greek state was shaping its national identity, the narrative of Greekness has emerged in a compelling, almost existential way. The discovery and rescue of the antiquities of Greece during the 19th century had many motives: the connection of the new

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Greek state and the young Greeks with classical Greek antiquity, of which they were the direct descendants and successors (Kavvadias, 1900, pp. 16-17)

The direct relationship between ancient and modern Greece was strengthened by the foundation of the Archaeological Society at Athens. The establishment of the Society was approved by the Royal Decree of January 5/27, 1837 and the members first convened on the Acropolis on April 28, 1837 they appointed the first administrative board, the Ephorate. The convention was chaired by the Minister of Education Iakovos Pizos Neroulos (*Jacovaky Rizo Neroulos*). Alexandros Rizos Rangavis spoke enthusiastically about the future projects of the Society, the excavations and restorations that would take place and emphasised that European scientists had fixed their attention on those from whom they expected new scientific material for their studies (Kastorchis, 1879, pp.7-9). Gradually the preservation and restoration of the ancient monuments, theatres, odea, stadiums where the events, feasts, dramatic and athletic competitions of antiquity were held became a matter of great national importance. In particular, the issue of ancient theatres was a key pillar on which the *spectacle* was structured and its projection in modern Greece, with the ultimate aim of highlighting the past that strengthened the national profile oriented towards the West and the humanistic values of antiquity, which formed the background of the Neo-Hellenic and European Enlightenment. In this context, the performances of ancient Greek drama, which were already gathering the interest of artists and spectators in Europe, were a fertile ground.

Without doubt, the cultural achievements of Western Europe affected to a large degree people of the theatre and more notably intellectuals, who through the revival of ancient tragedy sought from the early stages of the Greek nation-state a means of asserting their national identity and, at the same time, of resisting “Westernisation”. Indeed, this was done in a way that at a cursory glance seems paradoxical, yet is rather typical of nations under direct but inconspicuous dependence on more powerful forces, for the Greeks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century sought the intellectual defences against European cultural invasion in Europe itself. (Andreadis, 2005, p. 77).

From that period until the first Greek performance of ancient drama we find various minor but at the same time important theatrical events that had intervened, such as the various performances in the Principalities upon the Danube directed by the first Greek woman director, Rallou Karatza (1799-1870), who, in 1817, in Bucharest (Wallachia) presented *Ecavi* with a group of Greek

students, some of which were heroically killed, while fighting for the Sacred Command (“Ieros Lochos”) in the battle of Dragatsani. When the revolution was over, discussion on the revival of Greek drama was on the one hand affected by European performances and, on the other hand, by the need to create a national state on European standards. The domination of the Italian melodrama on the poor Greek theatrical stages urged a few intellectuals to seek artistic defences against a possible Westernisation in ancient drama, which would prevent Greek civilization from losing its identity and becoming “Westernised” (Mavroleon, 2005, pp. 122-123).

The first amateur stage attempts were made in 1840 by the “Philodrama Society” (The Greek Drama Lovers Society) led by Constantinos Kyriakos Aristias (*Costache Aristia/Constantinŭ Aristia*), one of *Rallou Karatza’s* (*Ralu Caragea’s*) troupe and eminent artist of Bucharest as well as a Sacred Band Trooper. The Philodrama Society saw the ancient drama as the “antidote to the Westernisation” of the Greeks by the melodrama that had overwhelmed the meagre Greek stage:

Because of this, therefore, this, and because the Italian theatre was now introduced on the one hand, in order to release our youth’s excessive indulgence of languor, contrasting the mollycoddle melodies of Italian melodramas with the short, useful and masculine charms of the venerable serious Greek tragedy and high comedy; on the other hand, to see our mother tongue refined and beautified on stage, in front of the Parthenon and the Pnyx, in that same sacred and primary cradle of the fine arts floating on the winds of recitation and resting on the rod of imitation.<sup>1</sup> (Laskaris, 1939, pp. 268-273)

But the efforts of The Philodrama Society did not pay off. The ancient drama will be performed for the first time in 1867, with *Antigone* by Sophocles in the recently excavated Herodium (Mavroleon, 2003, pp. 62-65) (see images on the next page) as part of the celebrations for the royal weddings of George I and Olga, daughter of the Grand Duke of Russia.

The translation was by Alexandros Rizos Rangavis, the first secretary of the Archaeological Society, and the teaching by Athanasios Roussopoulos

1 *Vide* Appeal for the Greek Theatre, Athens (Kon. Garpolas print shop). The appeal, made by K. K. Aristias himself, is signed by: G. Leventis, I. Rizos, Panagiotis Soutsos, Sp. P. Triantaphyllis, P. S. Omiridis, K. Garpolas, K.N. Galatis, Loukas Pyrros, G. Gennadios, I.An. Somakis, A.R. Ragavis, D. Drosos, K. Domnatos, P.K. Ipitis, N.D. Fotilas, K. Kokkidis.

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(Roussopoulos, 1885) professor of Archaeology. While Mendelssohn's famous choir music was accompanied by "a full-scale harmonium". The troupe was made up of students and some professional actors, such as Pipina Bonasera as Antigone, and Demosthenes Alexiadis as Teiresias. The *Antigone of the Royal Weddings* was the first performance at the Odeon of Herodus Atticus in the modern era (Sideris, 1976, pp. 43-44), on 7/12/1867 at 11:30 am, where "... it was never taught in ancient times" ... because it was Roman as stated by Palingenesis newspaper... "There can be no other greater mockery than this..." (*Palingenesis* newspaper, 17/11/1867, Athens: Sideris 1976, pp. 42-43). However, the beginning was made and the performances of ancient drama enhanced the profile of the small country with its long history. The revival of ancient drama has been connected with the search for national identity in Greece, through the speculation over theatrical codes as well as the values that would support the newly-formed Greek nation-state in its first steps.

The issue of the use of ancient monuments and their connection with the events of modern Greece will escalate in the first international movement of extroversion: organising the first Olympic Games of 1896 at the Panathenaic Stadium<sup>2</sup> from the same ideological point of view. In his inaugural speech, King George I, expressed his desire to see Greece "an international centre for peace" (*The History of the Olympic Games*, 1976, p. 308). At that time, the performances of ancient drama were characterised by "enlightened amateurism" aiming at museum representation.



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<sup>2</sup> Sports competitions had previously been organised in 1870 and 1875 at the Panathenaic Stadium within the frame of the Zappeian Olympiads, funded by the national benefactor Zappas.



**Odeon of Herodus Atticus**  
(on the southwest slope of the Acropolis of Athens) © Thomas\_Daskalakis  
Source: <https://aefestival.gr/venues/odeon-of-herodes-atticus/?lang=en>



Then the Society for the Teaching of Ancient Drama will make its debut, founded by the University professor Georgios Mistriotis, with various prominent members of the time, among them Panagiotis Kavadias, the archaeologist who excavated the Theatre of Epidaurus in 1881. Mistriotis was a controversial figure. He remained in the history of the language issue for the hard position he took, and for his involvement in the “Oresteia riots,” on the occasion of staging the *Oresteia* at the Royal Theatre in 1903. In the confusion of linguistic bigotry, he formulated interesting proposals about the ancient drama, which in his time were considered paradoxical and dismissed as the ravings of a fanatic. Mistriotis considered that ancient theatres are the natural milieu for ancient drama, in fact he notes in the company’s announcement – the Proclamation published by the Society for the Teaching of Ancient Drama: “We are going to do the same (ancient drama performances) especially in springtime, when music-loving travellers flock to our country. And many more will flock if this theatre thrives” (Sideris, 1976, pp. 116-125).

The appearance of the first Greek stage directors saw the dissociation of the interest in the ancient drama from its national calling and its inclusion in the repertoire of professional troupes. Konstantinos Christomanos at the New Scene, Thomas Oikonomou at the Royal Theatre, but also professional troupes such as those of Kyveli and Kotopouli produced ancient drama. As a matter of fact, Kotopouli staged *Antigone* at the Odeon of Herodus Atticus and *Hecuba of Troy* at the Panathenaic Stadium horseshoe-shaped cavea (see images on the next page). The period featured the issue of extravagant events, the Athens 1896 Olympic Games and the 1906 Intercalated Games were followed by various events, such as the celebration of the Centenary of Independence. Especially the Panathenaic Stadium allowed the organisation of large spectacles, due to its capacity (45,000 spectators) often with the aim of strengthening the patriotism of the Hellenes. In 1930, a big spectacle is presented belatedly at the Panathenaic Stadium for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Revolution of 1821. The ill-fated Asia Minor military expedition prevented the planned celebration of 1921, and so, in 1930, it was no longer the start of the Revolution but the Greek independence that was celebrated with festivities led by the President of the Republic, Alexander Zaimis.



**Above: The Panathenaic Stadium in Athens**

Source: <https://ftrc.blog/panathenaic-stadium-in-athens/> © Fotostrasse

**Below: The opening ceremony of the 1896 Olympics**

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panathenaic\\_Stadium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panathenaic_Stadium)



In the years that followed, with all the woes of the Asia Minor disaster plaguing the country and the vision of cultural development and international promotion seeming distant, the couple Eva Palmer and Angelos Sikelianos organised and financed the Delphic Festivals. The Delphic Festivals involved a holistic presentation of the “cultural reserve”: a revival of ancient Greek drama, Olympic sports, a presentation of traditional dances, an exhibition of works of folk art and a concert of Byzantine Music (Sideris, 1976, pp. 342-367). The Delphic Idea, which was inspired by the institution of the Amphictyones<sup>3</sup> summarised in its vision the emergence of Delphi as a place of universal, modern “navel of the Earth,” a meeting point of spiritual people, who could achieve the synthesis of opposing ideologies and mitigate the clash of views. Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* and *The Suppliant Maidens* were performed in the ancient theatre of Delphi (Sideris, 1976, pp. 320-366 & 403-425). Performances based on Eva Palmer’s thorough research and feeling for language, the chanting, the setting, the costume, the dance of the ancient drama. The project also included the financing of numerous infrastructure projects in order to ensure the positive impressions of a large number of Greek and especially prominent foreigner visitors.

Delphi was at the time a small traditional village which acquired a road network connecting Athens and Itea, to which visitors would travel by boat (which they also used as a floating hotel, due to a lack of accommodation). They also took care to clean and arrange the settlement of Delphi, so that the natural landscape and archaeological wealth of the area could be highlighted. (Palmer-Sikelianou, 1992, pp. 120-135). The venture was successful, and, despite its universal acclaim, it was discontinued without state support, however it cultivated the idea of the festival because it highlighted the connection of ancient drama performances in ancient theatres with international outreach and the tourist phenomenon, which at the time was in an early phase, and above all it provided expertise in the matter of organisation and the high aesthetics of the shows for the time.

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3 It should be noted that the term “Amphictyony” is an institution so old, that the founding of the first Amphictyony is confused with legend. The myth claims that it had been founded by Amphictyon, son of Deucalion and Pyrrha and brother of Hellen, the common ancestor of all Greeks. The Delphic Amphictyony, which took place twice a year, was a conference event where the league of the then twelve tribes of Central Greece and Thessaly participated. The Amphictyonic representatives, having both judiciary powers and possibly following the ancient written laws of “Amphictyony” (based on Dionysius of Halicarnassus), solved disputes and regulated relations between city-states of the then known world. This means that the Amphictyonies of Ancient Greece, by establishing the first rules of International Law, may be soundly paralleled to the League of Nations and the UN. (Constantine Paparrigopoulos, *History of the Hellenic Nation* v.2 “Early Historic Times; Vassilios C. Petrakos, “Delphi”; Petros Kolonaros, “History of Amfissa Town”) *Vide* [http://history-pages.blogspot.gr/2012/04/blog-post\\_5489.html](http://history-pages.blogspot.gr/2012/04/blog-post_5489.html). Posted on Hellenic International Scientific Institute Amfiktionies <https://www.amfiktionies.org>. (15/10/2023).

As has been noted, beginning with the Delphic Celebrations of the Sikelianos couple, the issue of space was fundamental in relation to voice, emotion and ethos as well as other aspects of staging. The very important scenic experiments tried in the closed theatres of Western Europe since the 19<sup>th</sup> century had offered solutions that could only partly be appropriated in Greece from the moment Angelos and Eva Sikelianos opened the way for use of ancient, and more generally open theatres, as the privileged place for performances of ancient tragedies in Greece. Indeed, an ancient theatre provides an almost complete stage set, a given relation among actors, chorus and spectators, its own acoustics and other elements which decisively affect the acting and also the spoken dialogue and song. (Andreadis, 2005, p 104) The Delphic Festival is probably of the utmost importance in the history of the revival of ancient drama. The “Delphic idea,” as Angelos Sikelianos envisioned it, apart from the messages for universal unity, focused on Greece as the “Cultural Centre of the world”. Obviously, the tremendous amounts of money needed for the realisation of this dream allowed the Sikelianos – Palmer couple to only stage the Delphic Festival in 1927 and 1930.

In 1936 (3-18/10) Sophocles’ *Electra* was performed by the troupe of the National Theatre directed by Dimitris Rondiris at the Odeon of Herodus Atticus adding wooden linings to facilitate the audience, inaugurating the “Ancient Drama Week” while, in 1938 (11/9) the performance was also presented at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus.<sup>4</sup> These performances were the forerunner of the Festival. Especially for Epidaurus, it was the first performance at the ancient theatre since antiquity.<sup>5</sup> Sophocles’ *Electra* was staged without sets of scenes or artificial lighting at the orchestra of the theatre of Epidaurus, but in the natural afternoon light only. The role of Electra was played by Katina Paxinou, while the role of Clytemnestra was played by Eleni Papadaki (Georgopoulou, 2008, pp. 244-245). The aim was to establish an “Epidavros Season” of the National Theatre, but the declaration of World War II and the civil war that followed led to suspension of efforts.

Several years later, in 1954, when Georgios Rallis was Minister of the Presidency in Papagos government, it was decided to organise a “high arts festival” in Athens. In 1954 *Hippolytus* was presented at Epidaurus, directed by Dimitris Rondiris whereas the following year the Epidaurus Festival officially became an institution devoted exclusively to the tragedy productions of the National Theatre

<sup>4</sup>*Vide* posted programmes and publications in the digital archive of the National Theatre of Greece <http://www.nt-archive.gr/playDetails.aspx?playID=831> (15/10/2023).

<sup>5</sup> In 1921, the Hellenic Mountaineering Association was founded, which evolved into the Hellenic Touring Club (EPL) in 1937. *Vide* the official website of the ELP, posted at <https://periigitiki.com> (2/4/2023).

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of Greece. The first performance of the Festival in 1955 was *Ecavi* with Katina Paxinou. In 1957 Comedy was included in the Festival. Twenty years passed before the monopoly of the National Theatre of Greece broke, but those years remain the cradle of revival. Legendary personalities co-operated in the creation of excellent landmark-performances. The successes of the National Theatre created a formidable tradition and a constructive competition. Many theatrical companies turned to ancient drama and staged remarkable performances. Since 1975, Epidaurus hospitality accommodated the major theatrical companies of the country, trying to maintain a high quality of performance and the interest of spectators.

However, the decades-long management of the Festival by the Greek National Tourism Organisation (EOT) has included it as part of the tourism development. Both the Odeon of Herodus Atticus in the wider area of the Sacred Rock and the ancient theatre of Epidaurus and the wider archaeological area of the Asklepion, attracted visitors from far and wide. But their use, both as musical and theatrical scenes, took the cultural projection to its apex. The issue required a number of interventions that created the conditions so that they could receive thousands of spectators, but also provide musical groups and troupes with the possibility of performances. The “sanctity of the space,” specifically for Epidaurus, raised concerns regarding the limitations on the use of the monument. Since its foundation, the Epidaurus Festival has been associated with the performances of ancient drama and has renewed the debate about this theatrical genre. Epidaurus is one of the most important theatres in the world, and the growth of the Festival should be primarily linked to the evolution of theatrical art. It has become a meeting place for international figures and troupes. For many years it has been and still is a dream for many artists, despite its being a theatre stage with various particularities.

The performances of tragedy in modern Greece not only expressed the ethos of the society from which its spectators came, but also reached impressive numbers of many thousands creating a theatrically educated audience that has acquired a remarkable culturally-constituted specialisation since the time Epidaurus and other open theatres first functioned. (Andreadis, 2005, p. 106).

However, the Festival has always addressed the international theatre community, even when the only troupe presented was the National Theatre of Greece.



**The ancient theatre of Epidauros**

Source: <https://aefestival.gr/venues/ancient-theatre-of-epidauros/?lang=en>

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- Markantonatos, A. (2024) "The Reception of Attic Drama in Modern Times: An Outline", *Concept* 2(29), pp. 2-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37130/32wews53>
- Kosmopoulou, D. (2024) "From the Small Village Community to the Inaccessible Land of Postmodernism: Papadiamanti's *The Murderess* and H. Müller's *Medea Material*", *Concept* 2(29), pp. 17-30. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37130/z9rbaq62>
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