Greek and European Theatre: A Comparative Dimension

Edited by Andreas Markantonatos, Mihaela Bețiu, and Despina Kosmopoulou



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THEODOSIS N. PELEGRINIS

The Demythologization of Beckett's 'happy days'

The demythologization of the world in 'happy days' occurs through its confrontation with reality, which, however, is not expressed by describing another world, but exists through nothingness. "Nothing is more real than nothing," Beckett states elsewhere, specifically in the play *Malone Dies*. Nothingness, as nothing, cannot be expressed in any way or described for what it is. Its presence can only be sensed indirectly, through the highlighting of things and situations that undermine the world, if they do not entirely nullify it, thereby demythologizing it.

The world consists of countless things that surround us. Winnie is preoccupied with some of these—trivial things—that in no way evoke the grandeur of a world in which, having been cast, one might feel the desire to remain in order to enjoy it. Yet even these trivial things, at some point, when Winnie sinks up to her neck and can no longer manage them, are further diminished and rendered useless, marking the end of the world to which they once referred.

What remains, then, are words, the substitutes for things, which, due to their inefficacy, ambiguities, and contradictions, hardly facilitate living harmoniously in the world where we have been cast. "Every word," Beckett states, "is a useless stain… on nothing," the only true reality. After things, after words, nothing remains but darkness and silence, the great allies of nothingness. Unlike silence, which manifests directly in 'happy days' through the pauses interspersed throughout Winnie's relentless chatter, darkness is conveyed indirectly—for functional reasons. How else could we perceive Winnie's entrapment except in light? But a blinding light, so intense that it resembles darkness, forcing one to close one's eyes and rendering vision impossible. Both silence, through the successive pauses in Winnie's chatter, and darkness, through the blinding light, permeate 'happy days' within a fundamentally dead landscape, where plot is absent and stasis dominates, vividly suggested by Winnie's state of entrapment.

The dead landscape of 'happy days' ultimately signals the demythologization of the uncanny world in which we have been cast—a world filled with things and words, to which habit has led us to become attached. The field is now clear for the "bird with oiled wings" to fly. The journey, as Winnie sinks, slipping away from the mythologized world, has already begun. The sound of the bell, which marks the sequence of 'happy days,' sets the rhythm for the flight of the "bird with oiled wings" toward nothingness—the true reality.

INTRODUCTION

Greek and European Theatre in Comparative Perspective

The relationship between Greek and European theatre is at once foundational, continuous, and profoundly unstable. Greek drama has long occupied a privileged position within European cultural history, functioning as an aesthetic model, an educational instrument, a political vocabulary, and a contested repository of myths, forms, and performance traditions. Yet this relationship cannot be adequately described through a linear narrative of inheritance, influence, or survival. Greek theatre has never simply passed unchanged into European culture, nor has European theatre merely received a fixed classical legacy. The encounter has instead been shaped by translation, adaptation, performance, institutional mediation, ideological appropriation, and repeated acts of reinterpretation. Each return to Greek drama produces a different object, conditioned by the historical pressures, theatrical conventions, linguistic structures, and cultural expectations of the receiving context.

The essays collected in *Greek and European Theatre: A Comparative Dimension* approach this complex field through comparison. Comparison here is not understood as the straightforward identification of similarities and differences between self-contained national traditions. Nor does it assume that Greek theatre constitutes an original and stable point of reference against which later European works may be measured. Rather, comparison is treated as a critical method for examining relations: relations between texts and performances, antiquity and modernity, source cultures and receiving cultures, local theatrical practices and transnational networks. The comparative perspective makes visible the processes through which theatre travels, changes form, acquires new meanings, and intervenes in different cultural and political environments.

Such an approach necessarily unsettles traditional distinctions between "Greek" and "European" theatre. The title of this volume does not position the two terms as mutually exclusive or historically symmetrical categories. Ancient Greek drama is deeply embedded within the formation of European theatrical traditions, while modern Greek theatre has itself developed through sustained dialogue with wider European movements, institutions, and aesthetic practices. At the same time, the concept of Europe is neither culturally neutral nor historically fixed. It has been constructed through changing geographical,

political, linguistic, and ideological boundaries. To speak of Greek and European theatre comparatively is therefore to investigate not only artistic exchange but also the categories through which theatrical history has been organised.

The volume's comparative dimension emerges most clearly in its engagement with adaptation and reception. Reception is not treated as the passive preservation of an authoritative past. It is an active and frequently conflictual process through which earlier works are selected, reframed, translated, staged, and made to address the concerns of new audiences. Greek drama has been repeatedly mobilised in European contexts to articulate questions of political authority, civic identity, gender, violence, exile, war, mourning, justice, and collective responsibility. These appropriations reveal as much about the receiving culture as they do about the ancient work. A production of tragedy is never only an interpretation of antiquity. It is also an intervention in the present.

Adaptation intensifies this process by exposing the transformative character of theatrical transmission. Adaptations may preserve recognisable plots and characters while radically altering structure, language, genre, setting, or political emphasis. They may challenge the authority of the ancient text, recover marginalised voices, relocate myth within contemporary conflicts, or combine classical material with modern theatrical forms. The comparative study of adaptation therefore shifts attention away from fidelity as the primary criterion of evaluation. The most productive question is not whether a modern work accurately reproduces its classical source, but what it does with that source, why particular elements are retained or abandoned, and how the resulting transformation generates new theatrical meaning.

This emphasis on transformation is inseparable from translation. In theatre, translation is never a purely linguistic operation. A dramatic translation anticipates bodies, voices, movement, rhythm, space, and spectatorship. It negotiates between textual precision and performative effectiveness, between the historical distance of the source and the immediacy required by the stage. Every translation of Greek drama embodies assumptions about accessibility, poetic language, theatrical convention, and cultural difference. It determines whether antiquity will sound elevated or familiar, foreign or contemporary, ritualised or conversational. Translation thus occupies a crucial position between reception and performance: it is both an interpretation of the text and a blueprint for its theatrical realisation.

The comparative analysis of theatrical translation also reveals the unequal conditions under which texts circulate. Some languages, traditions, and theatrical institutions possess greater visibility and cultural authority than others. Translations may be produced directly from Greek or mediated through

dominant European languages. Productions may travel through international festivals, publishing networks, academic institutions, diplomatic initiatives, or commercial circuits. These routes of transmission affect what is translated, which works become canonical, and how particular theatrical cultures are represented beyond their national boundaries. Comparison must therefore remain attentive to hierarchy as well as exchange.

Performance introduces a further level of complexity. Theatre does not exist solely as a literary text but as an event produced through collaboration among actors, directors, designers, translators, dramaturgs, musicians, institutions, and audiences. Meaning arises through vocal delivery, gesture, spatial organisation, scenography, sound, costume, pacing, and the specific conditions of spectatorship. A comparative approach to performance cannot be limited to thematic parallels between plays. It must also consider how theatrical systems differ: how acting traditions, rehearsal practices, architectural spaces, funding structures, festival cultures, and audience expectations shape the interpretation of dramatic material.

This performative emphasis is especially important in the study of Greek drama, whose modern reception has often been dominated by philological and literary frameworks. The stage, however, does not merely illustrate the findings of textual scholarship. Performance generates its own forms of knowledge. It tests the possibilities of the text, exposes tensions that may remain latent in reading, and creates meanings that cannot be reduced to verbal language. The same play may acquire sharply different political, emotional, or ethical force when staged in an ancient theatre, a national institution, an experimental venue, or a public space marked by contemporary conflict. Comparison across productions makes visible this plurality without presuming that one performance offers a definitive interpretation.

The dialogue between ancient and modern theatre developed throughout the volume likewise resists a simple chronological opposition. Antiquity and modernity do not exist as isolated historical moments. Modern theatre repeatedly constructs its own version of the ancient, while contemporary readings alter the questions scholars and practitioners bring to Greek drama. The ancient text becomes modern through performance and interpretation; the modern stage, conversely, defines itself through selective engagements with antiquity. The relationship is reciprocal, though not equal. Ancient drama carries the authority of canonisation, but modern theatrical practice has the power to expose, revise, parody, reject, or redistribute that authority.

This reciprocal relationship is particularly evident when Greek drama enters modern debates about identity and belonging. The classical past has frequently been invoked as evidence of European cultural unity, but such claims may conceal the diversity, discontinuity, and conflict that structure both Greek

and European history. Comparative theatre studies can challenge narratives of a homogeneous classical inheritance by tracing the different political and aesthetic uses to which antiquity has been put. The same tragedy may be framed as a universal human document, a national possession, a European cultural monument, a critique of imperial power, or a vehicle for postcolonial resistance. Its meaning depends on who claims it, where it is performed, and which histories are activated through that claim.

Modern Greek theatre occupies a particularly revealing position within these debates. It is at once connected to the material and linguistic legacy of antiquity and shaped by the aesthetic, political, and institutional developments of modern Europe. Its relationship to ancient drama is therefore neither one of simple continuity nor external reception. Modern Greek artists engage with classical material under the pressure of national narratives that have often treated antiquity as both cultural privilege and ideological burden. At the same time, Greek theatre has participated actively in European modernism, avant-garde experimentation, political theatre, intercultural performance, and contemporary festival networks. A comparative approach allows modern Greek theatre to be examined not as a peripheral derivative of dominant European models, but as a dynamic site of negotiation between local histories and transnational forms.

Transnational exchange constitutes one of the volume's central concerns. Theatre crosses borders through touring productions, translated editions, co-productions, festivals, migration, education, digital circulation, and the movement of artists and ideas. Such movement does not eliminate cultural specificity. On the contrary, it often intensifies questions of language, identity, ownership, and representation. A performance transferred from one context to another may be celebrated as intercultural dialogue, but it may also expose unequal access to resources, divergent interpretative frameworks, or the exoticisation of particular traditions.

The concept of transnational theatre therefore requires critical precision. It should not be equated with an idealised space of unrestricted cultural exchange. Borders remain materially and symbolically powerful. Artists, texts, and performances do not circulate with equal freedom, and cultural mobility is shaped by economic structures, political institutions, and inherited hierarchies of prestige. The comparative method adopted in this volume attends to both connection and friction. It examines not only how traditions meet, but also what is lost, resisted, misunderstood, or transformed in the encounter.

Comparison itself must consequently be understood as a situated practice. The act of comparing is never innocent. It selects objects, establishes criteria, and produces relations of proximity or distance. Earlier models of comparative

literature and theatre often depended upon national frameworks or narratives of direct influence. More recent approaches have emphasised circulation, translation, cultural transfer, entanglement, and multidirectional reception. These models recognise that theatrical relations rarely move along a single route from origin to imitation. They develop through networks in which texts, performances, concepts, and practices are repeatedly recontextualised.

The comparative readings presented in this volume do not seek to dissolve differences into an abstract account of universality. Theatre's capacity to cross historical and cultural boundaries does not mean that all performances articulate the same human truths. Claims to universality can obscure the specific conditions under which meaning is produced. Productive comparison depends on maintaining a tension between connection and difference. It asks how works become intelligible across contexts while preserving attention to what resists assimilation. This tension is particularly significant in relation to Greek tragedy and comedy, which have often been described as universal forms. Their long European afterlives certainly demonstrate an extraordinary capacity for reinterpretation. Yet their persistence should not be mistaken for timeless transparency. Ancient dramatic forms emerge from specific civic, religious, political, and performative conditions. Later European theatres engage with them through their own conventions and crises. Comparison allows us to explore both the force of continuity and the depth of historical rupture.

The contributions to this volume collectively demonstrate that Greek and European theatre are best understood not as separate traditions brought together retrospectively, but as fields constituted through encounter. Their histories are marked by acts of translation, adaptation, appropriation, resistance, and renewal. Texts become performances; performances reshape texts; national traditions are produced through transnational exchange; and the ancient past is continually reconstructed in response to the demands of the present. The comparative dimension of the volume is therefore more than an organising theme. It is an invitation to reconsider how theatrical history is written. Rather than tracing stable genealogies, the essays investigate movement and mediation. Rather than treating reception as secondary to creation, they reveal reception as a creative practice in its own right. Rather than opposing antiquity and modernity, they examine the processes through which each is constituted in relation to the other. And rather than invoking Europe as a unified cultural space, they explore the differences, inequalities, and crossings through which European theatre has taken shape.

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A mosaic of Iphigenia with her parents, Clytemnestra (center) and Agamemnon (right).

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iphigenia#/media/File:Antakya_Archaeological_Museum_Antakya_Iphigenia_in_Aulis_mosaic_in_2008_06.jpg

TRAGIC IPHIGENIA FROM AESCHYLUS AND EURIPIDES TO MODERN TIMES: SKETCHES OF RECEPTION

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Abstract: This article examines the evolving figure of Iphigenia in Greek tragedy, tracing her transformation from a passive sacrificial victim in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* to a courageous and autonomous agent in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Through close textual analysis and intertextual comparison with the *Oresteia*, it argues that Euripides refashions the tragic paradigm of sacrifice into a vehicle for political and ethical reflection, especially pertinent to the crisis-ridden context of late fifth-century Athens. The study further explores the reception of Iphigenia's myth in modern operatic reinterpretations, particularly Christoph Willibald Gluck's twin *Iphigenie* operas, as revitalised in Dmitri Tcherniakov's contemporary productions. By situating Iphigenia's story within broader discourses of self-sacrifice, agency, and political responsibility, the article illuminates the enduring relevance of tragic models in articulating both ancient and modern anxieties about communal cohesion and individual moral choice.

Keywords: Iphigenia, Greek tragedy, Aeschylus, Euripides, reception, performance.

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Introduction

In his compelling autobiographical account, aptly entitled *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the distinguished British writer, soldier, and ardent philhellene Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888–1935)—widely celebrated as Lawrence of Arabia—reflects that "to see the world clearly, no vantage point is higher than a cross." Nowhere, I would contend, could the harrowing significance of self-sacrifice—both for humanity at large and for the individual himself—be rendered with greater eloquence and vividness. Through this supreme act of self-renunciation, the one who sacrifices himself gains a new vision of the world; in effect, his spiritual sight is purged of all extraneous veils, enabling him to comprehend more fully the nature of his destiny. The concept of sacrifice as a sublime and conscious choice, undertaken both for the benefit of others and as the ultimate validation of a life shaped by unwavering integrity and indomitable courage, runs as a unifying theme throughout the tragic works of Attic drama. Among the most compelling exemplars is the case of Iphigenia, the ill-fated daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, whose life constitutes a paradigmatic instance of heroic existence reaching its zenith of moral fortitude through the performance of an awe-inspiring act of self-sacrifice.

Iphigenia, as a purely tragic figure, appears obliquely in the emotionally charged lyrical recollection (lines 193–247) by the Chorus of Argive Elders in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the inaugural play of the renowned *Oresteia* trilogy—the

acknowledged wellspring of Athenian tragic theatre. According to the Chorus' vivid narration, Iphigenia is brutally dragged to the altar and, powerless to resist, is slain by her own father, in a desperate attempt to placate Artemis and thereby to dispel the windless calm that had long immobilised the Greek fleet *en route* to Troy. It is noteworthy that the brutal depiction of her merciless sacrifice in Aeschylus' drama undergoes a radical transformation in Euripides' later reinterpretations of the Argive legend. In both *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (c. 414–411 BC) and *Iphigenia at Aulis* (c. 405 BC), the Athenian tragedian portrays the eponymous heroine as a figure of remarkable courage and autonomy, who not only consents of her own free will to lay down her life for Greece but, through Artemis' miraculous intervention, resolutely fulfils her sacred duties in the remote barbarian land of Tauris.

From Aeschylus and Euripides to Gluck

In *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, Euripides portrays the heroine as a devoted priestess of Artemis, participating—though with evident moral conflict—in the horrific local custom of human sacrifice. Nevertheless, the denouement of the drama proves favourable to both Iphigenia and her long-suffering brother. Although Aristotle in his *Poetics* praises with comparable frequency both Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, especially commending the dramaturgical brilliance of the recognition scene between Iphigenia and Orestes (1452b 5–8, 1455b 2–15), much modern criticism has reacted with disapproval or, at best, unease towards this work. The principal cause of such ambivalence lies in the scholarly difficulty of categorising the play unequivocally as a tragedy. Numerous attempts have been made to subsume it under alternative literary genres, such as romantic melodrama or tragicomedy, citing its ostensibly sentimental plotlines and recurrently fortunate resolutions, which repeatedly thwart the expectation of impending disaster.

However, the intertextual affinity between Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*—whose reconciliatory conclusion, as Aristotle astutely observes (1451a 13–15), does not undermine its tragic essence—serves to highlight the profound tragic dimension underpinning Iphigenia's fate. From the outset, Euripides' play sketches a grim sequence of events shaped by the inexorable law of reciprocal suffering (*antipeponthos*), echoing the brutal causalities that pervade Aeschylus' trilogy. Yet the protagonists in both works are not passive victims; at critical junctures they contest, and occasionally rebel against, the enigmatic designs of the gods.

In *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, the opening is suffused with anxiety, dread, and ominous premonition. Through successive allusions to past traumas —soon to

resurface with increasing intensity— the play establishes a hallmark of tragic art: the cyclical repetition of historical suffering. From her first expository monologue (lines 1–66), Iphigenia frames the drama as a desperate attempt to break free from divine plots rooted in a nightmarish past and pointing towards a similarly foreboding future. Even within the prologue, one discerns pointed criticisms of an unforgiving cosmic order under which human beings are inexorably crushed. It may thus be posited that, while in the *Oresteia* the succession of abominable deeds spans an entire trilogy, Euripides concentrates this fatal sequence within a single play. In *Agamemnon*, the cycle of blood is inaugurated through veiled allusions to ancestral crimes and vengeance; the sacrifice of the innocent Iphigenia, as lamented by the Chorus (lines 184–257), constitutes an act of extreme cruelty that provokes profound disquiet concerning divine justice. The subsequent ten-year slaughter at Troy, culminating in the sack of the city, not only brings Greek triumph but also leads to the annihilation of the victors themselves, notably through Agamemnon's murder. Similarly, in *The Libation Bearers*, Orestes and Electra, ensnared within the law of blood revenge, conspire matricide, with Orestes' momentary hesitation (line 899) reflecting his uncertainty regarding divine will. In *The Eumenides*, the grim demand for retribution finds embodiment in the terrifying Erinyes.

Despite the seemingly relentless accumulation of suffering, Euripides introduces a sudden and fortuitous turn: immediately following Iphigenia's departure, Orestes and Pylades appear, surveying the hostile terrain. This unexpected arrival parallels Orestes' dramatic entrances in other tragedies: in *The Libation Bearers*, in Euripides' *Electra*, and in Sophocles' *Electra*, each time heralding critical moments of recognition and emotional catharsis. Yet it is in the final choral ode (lines 1234–1283) that Euripides outstrips even Aeschylus in his depiction of divine violence: a hymn to Apollo and Artemis that recounts the brutal displacement of older, chthonic deities by Olympian forces at Delphi. According to myth, Apollo slays the Python and expels Gaia's daughter, Themis, from her sanctuary. Despite Gaia's founding of a rival oracle, Zeus ultimately ensures Apollo's uncontested supremacy. In *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, the barbaric law of self-vindication holds such sway that even the venerable Areopagus is impotent to appease the Erinyes. Only with the final exhaustion of this grim mythology can moral and cosmic harmony be restored — a process arguably depicted with even sterner inevitability than in Aeschylus' trilogy.

Conversely, *Iphigenia at Aulis* offers a salient instance of the complex entanglement between tragic poetry and Athenian political life in the late fifth century BC. Far from simply reflecting or contesting contemporary mores, Athenian tragedy functions as a medium for critical engagement, prompting

audiences to interrogate moral evaluation and reconsider the nature of the common good. In this context, *Iphigenia at Aulis* gazes nostalgically back to an era when Greek leaders could foster consensus through negotiation and diplomacy. The generals at Aulis, by contrast, appear paralysed and inept, unable to grasp the gravity of the political dilemmas they face. Against this backdrop, Iphigenia's voluntary embrace of a Panhellenic ideal stands as a luminous contrast: her self-sacrifice constitutes a fragile yet vital glimmer of hope for the whole of Greece.

The political and moral ramifications of Iphigenia's self-offering were not lost on later poets and writers, each of whom reinterpreted the Argive legend through the lens of their own epoch. A characteristic example of modern reception will suffice, given the limited scope of this article. Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787) stands among the most visionary composers of the eighteenth century, and his profound reworking of operatic conventions left an indelible mark upon the trajectory of Western music drama. Nowhere is Gluck's reforming genius more evident than in his twin operatic masterpieces, *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774) and *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779). These works, inspired by the harrowing myth of Iphigenia and profoundly influenced by the tragic spirit of Euripides, represent not merely musical achievements but bold philosophical engagements with the ethical dilemmas at the heart of classical tragedy. They exemplify Gluck's enduring ambition: to restore opera to its original function as a vessel of emotional and moral truth, purged of empty virtuosity and imbued once more with the noble simplicity and grandeur of ancient art.

Gluck's operatic reforms were crystallised in his celebrated *Preface* to *Alceste* (1767), where he denounced the artificiality of contemporary Italian opera and called for a return to the primacy of dramatic expression. In his view, music was to serve poetry by intensifying its affective power, not by overwhelming it with technical display. This aesthetic ideal naturally led Gluck to antiquity, where he found in Greek tragedy a model of structural clarity, ethical seriousness, and emotional directness that perfectly suited his aims. The figure of Iphigenia, poised between innocence and destiny, self-sacrifice and human suffering, provided a thematic matrix uniquely suited to this musical and dramatic vision.

Premiering at the Paris Opéra in 1774, *Iphigénie en Aulide* adapts Jean Racine's *Iphigénie* (1674), itself a reworking of Euripides' lost *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Gluck's libretto, fashioned by François-Louis Gand Le Bland Du Roullet, remains strikingly faithful to Racine's sombre vision while subtly infusing the drama with heightened emotional urgency. In *Iphigénie en Aulide*, Agamemnon faces the agonising dilemma of sacrificing his daughter to ensure the Greeks' departure for Troy. Gluck eschews excessive ornamentation in favour of stark, declamatory vocal writing that lays bare the characters' psychological torment. The opera's

famous overture, with its oscillations between solemnity and agitation, anticipates the unfolding drama and creates an atmosphere of impending doom. Throughout, Gluck employs the chorus not as a decorative element but as an integral dramatic force, representing the collective emotions of the Greek people and intensifying the moral pressure upon the protagonists. Notably, in Gluck's version, divine intervention ultimately spares Iphigenia, preserving the moral dignity of the characters while offering the audience a cathartic resolution. Yet the opera never permits easy consolation; it insists on the terrifying cost of political and personal decision-making. In this, *Iphigénie en Aulide* remains profoundly faithful to the tragic spirit, if not always to the unrelenting bleakness of its ancient models.

Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, first performed in Paris in 1779, represents the culmination of his operatic ideals. Drawing once more on Euripidean material—specifically *Iphigenia among the Taurians*—Gluck achieves here a masterful fusion of dramatic economy, psychological depth, and musical austerity. The opera opens in medias res, with Iphigenia already serving as a priestess among the barbarous Taurians, condemned to officiate human sacrifices. Gluck's musical language in *Iphigénie en Tauride* is lean, incisive, and almost elemental. There are no extraneous arias inserted to flatter singers; every musical moment arises organically from the demands of the drama. The opening storm scene, the sombre prayers, the breathless sequences of recognition and near-death—all are rendered with a musical urgency that strips the myth to its emotional core.

Iphigenia's character is drawn with particular poignancy: torn between her loyalty to the goddess Artemis and her horror at the bloodshed she must enact, she embodies the tragic conflict between duty and conscience. Her recognition of Orestes, her brother, precipitates a moment of spiritual liberation as the siblings, united once more, defy the barbarous rites of Tauris and flee toward freedom. Unlike the earlier opera, *Iphigénie en Tauride* does not dilute the tragic experience with deus ex machina devices; rather, the salvation of the protagonists feels hard-won, arising from their own resilience and moral clarity.

Taken together, Gluck's two *Iphigénie* operas constitute a radical re-envisioning of Greek myth for the Enlightenment era. They explore the individual's confrontation with political necessity, divine mandate, and personal sacrifice—central concerns of ancient tragedy but now reframed within an eighteenth-century discourse on rational autonomy and ethical self-determination. Musically, Gluck's innovations—his rejection of florid vocalism, his revalorisation of the chorus, his emphasis on orchestral colour and expressive declamation—paved the way for subsequent generations of composers, notably Cherubini, Spontini, and even Beethoven. Dramatically, his operas demand a new kind of theatrical truth: an unflinching engagement with the human cost

of historical and mythological destiny. Indeed, it is no accident that modern directors, such as Dmitri Tcherniakov, have found in Gluck's *Iphigénie* operas fertile ground for contemporary reinterpretations, reading in them profound reflections on the horrors of war, the crises of political legitimacy, and the fragile hope for redemption.

In *Iphigénie en Aulide* and *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Christoph Willibald Gluck achieved an unparalleled synthesis of classical myth and modern sensibility. His portrayal of Iphigenia not only revives a figure of ancient sorrow but reimagines her as an enduring symbol of human dignity in the face of existential despair. Through these operas, Gluck not only revolutionised the musical stage but offered a timeless meditation on sacrifice, moral agency, and the possibility of grace amid the darkest ordeals. In doing so, he restored to opera the tragic grandeur it had all but forgotten—and bequeathed to posterity a vision of art as both a mirror of suffering and a beacon of hope.

Closing Remark

It would not be overbold to conclude, in closing, that Christoph Willibald Gluck's twin operatic masterpieces—Iphigénie *en Tauride* and *Iphigénie en Aulide*— especially as reimagined in Dmitri Tcherniakov's profoundly insightful joint production, represent the most impressive modern reception of Euripides' treatment of the myth. In a recent interview, Tcherniakov laid particular emphasis on the horror of Iphigenia's paternal sacrifice, while simultaneously underlining the political and moral resonance of her later stance, set against the blood-drenched backdrop of the Trojan siege. Indeed, in the sensitive artistry of both Gluck and Tcherniakov, the pacifist humanism of Euripides finds its most eloquent modern expression.

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THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE DREAM AS AN ELEMENT OF FOLK TRADITION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: This paper explores the dream as a universal folk motif and dramaturgical tool in German and Greek literature. Beginning with Ancient Greek drama (*Persians*, *Choephori*, *Electra*), where dreams act as omens, warnings, or catharsis rooted in popular oneirology and choral lament, the study centers on a comparative analysis of two dream dramas: Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Assumption of Hannele* and Giannis Kampysis's work (which inspired Manolis Kalomoiris's opera). Both texts share key traditional motifs, including death as a transitional ritual, child innocence, protective amulets or rings, angelic iconography, and the liminal space between dream and reality. The study highlights how dream narratives navigate suffering to offer consolation and redemption. By tracing intertextual influences from Hauptmann to Kampysis within a European continuum—spanning ancient tragedy to Symbolism—the paper shows how dreams serve as a timeless cultural language. Ultimately, this shared code bridges the tragic and the hopeful, illuminating both the human psyche and the creative act.

Keywords: Dream drama, *The Assumption of Hannele*, *The Mother's Ring*, Folk culture, Comparative studies.

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Introduction

The dream constitutes one of the most enduring and profound axes of Greek culture, from antiquity to modern Greek tradition. The form of the dream—whether as a vision, prophecy, warning, psychological revelation, or a liminal experience between life and death—functions as a threshold, where humans come into contact with the divine, the demonic, the traumatic, or even the redemptive. The Greek worldview, as depicted in both ancient tragedy and modern folk tradition, treats the dream not as a subjective psychological phenomenon but as an objective event, a 'sign' endowed with the power to influence reality (Kalofonos, 2008, p. 16; Thomadaki, 1990, pp. 20–21; Zamarou, 2006, pp. 14–16).

In Greek folklore, the dream is associated with divination, fate, posthumous communication, the presence of supernatural beings, and the liminal experience of the soul's journey. The passage of the dream from antiquity to later tradition is neither linear nor merely a survival, since it constitutes a transformation and re-signification of deeper beliefs concerning fear, hope, grace, and violence. Greek dreams retain 'their dual character: the revelatory and the threatening.' (Megas, 1975, p. 126 and pp. 134–136; Varvounis, 2018, pp. 193–195; Kamilaki–Polymerou & Karamanes, 2011, pp. 118, 135, 152). The above elements reveal the continuity of the role of dreams, which, in both ancient and modern contexts,

in myth and everyday life, in dream and reality, allow for a dual reading of two major works of European dramaturgy that converge precisely in the space of the dream: *Hanneles Himmelfahrt* by Gerhart Hauptmann and the Greek *The Mother's Ring* by Giannis Kampysis. Both works exist at the boundaries between life and death, dream and nature, the real and the imaginary, human suffering and metaphysical redemption.

We are therefore called to examine the Greek dramatic tradition in dialogue with other national and European traditions. The comparison of *The Mother's Ring* with *Hannele* is not merely a philological exercise but reveals a common European matrix of dream poetics, in which the child's soul becomes the bearer of a ritual passage into another reality. Both works create a space where folk cosmology intersects with modernism, featuring dreamlike, fairy-tale landscapes, divine light, angelic figures, mountain fairies, visions, wounds, ascension, death, and healing. This study will briefly examine the role of the dream in ancient Greek drama, in the modern Greek folk tradition, and on the modern European stage, while also analyzing the function of the dream in *Hannele* and *The Mother's Ring*. Finally, a comparative analysis of the two works will be undertaken, always in light of both the modern Greek and the corresponding European tradition.

1. The dream in Ancient Greek drama

In ancient Greek tragedy, the dream is integrated as a fundamental dramaturgical tool, as it is not merely an illusion but a form of divine intervention—a channel between mortals and transcendent powers—and, in many cases, serves as a harbinger of impending disaster. Moreover, the dream in ancient tragedy can function as a revelatory boundary, since humans do not inhabit the dream; rather, the dream inhabits them. This distinctive feature sets ancient Greek dreams apart from other mythological traditions, as the dream is not a personal psychological experience but an objective or divine message. Thus, in tragedy, the dream can constitute an intermediary level that functions as foreshadowing, as in Atossa's dream in *The Persians* and Clytemnestra's dream in Aeschylus' *Choephori*, which simultaneously activates subsequent action. Similarly, the dream functions as a revelation of guilt in Clytemnestra's dream in Sophocles' *Electra* (Van Lieshout, 1980).

More specifically, the archetype of the dream as a dramaturgical mechanism is exemplified by Atossa's prophetic dream in Aeschylus' *Persians*. The two well-dressed women that Atossa dreams of symbolize Greece and Persia, who struggle while tied to a chariot driven by Xerxes; however, the Greek woman manages to free herself and overthrow Xerxes (Aeschylus, 2015a, *Persae*, 181–199). The interpretation of this dream is evident, as it possesses the characteristics

of a traditional vision, including the symbolic duality of the women, the national allegory, and the prophetic content, among others. A significant element is that Atossa fears the dream and fully comprehends the gravity of its meaning, prompting her to seek its interpretation—an attitude that reflects the later folk tradition of dream interpretation (Van Lieshout, 1980, pp. 207–216).

Similarly, in Aeschylus' *Choephori*, Clytemnestra dreams that she gives birth to, swaddles, and nurses a serpent, from which, together with the milk, a drop of blood also emerges. This dream foreshadows the forthcoming action, as Clytemnestra feels guilt over Agamemnon's murder, and the serpent symbolizes the revenge that will be exacted by her son Orestes—that is, by the child she bore and nursed—and expresses her fear of him (Aeschylus, 2015b, *Choephori*, 523–533). In Sophocles' *Electra*, we learn through Chrysothemis that Clytemnestra dreamed that Atreus, murdered by Aegisthus, thrust his scepter into the ground, from which a tree grew and spread across all of Mycenae. It should be noted that this scepter was now in Aegisthus' hands, and essentially, Clytemnestra's guilt is revealed through the dream (Sophocles, 2015, *Electra*, 417–424; Van Lieshout, 1980).

2. The dream in modern Greek folk tradition

The dream constitutes a continuous thread from antiquity to contemporary dramaturgy, and indeed, this thread becomes a tradition over time in Greek and Modern Greek literature and drama. In *Apokopos* by Bergadis, dating to the 15th century, the protagonist recounts an allegorical dream in which he descends into Hades (Kallinos, 2014, pp. 11–20; Alexiou, 1997, pp. 293–336). Modern Greek oneirology is not a simple continuation of ancient dream divination but represents a complex system of symbolism, incorporating dream-interpretive beliefs, encounters with fairies, out-of-body experiences, signs of death, contact with the dead, and more (Meraklis, 2011, pp. 189–200, 197–198, 253).

As Modern Greek folklore shows, human interaction with transcendent powers is not limited to waking hours but occurs in liminal states—moments of transition, solitary places, silent hours of the day—where humans feel vulnerable to the "other." Fairies, benevolent spirits, and other pre-Christian supernatural beings function as agents of trial, illusion, or protection, surviving in later tradition as forces that influence human destiny (Meraklis, 2011, pp. 197–198, 253–260; Kamilaki–Polymerou & Karamanes, 2011, p. 135). At the same time, in folk songs, the dream experience operates as a means of communication with the beloved, the mother, or the deceased (Meraklis, 2011, p. 350).

3. Dream drama: aesthetic principles, dramaturgical forms, and theoretical approaches

The term *dream drama* (or *dream play*) is used to describe a dramaturgical structure that imitates the logic, fluidity, and psychological topography of a dream. A dream drama is composed of discontinuous temporalities, transformations of space and characters, violations of causality, and pronounced subjectivity—elements that place it at the intersection of symbolism, expressionism, and the principles of psychoanalytic thought. Time does not exist, and anything is possible during the course of a dream drama (Strindberg, 1995, pp. 235–236; von Rosen, 2020, pp. 141–146). The emergence of the genre is associated with late symbolism and the search for a dramaturgical form that represents not the "external" but an "internal" reality. In this way, dream drama seeks to theatrically convey the discontinuity and shifting centrality of the dream, in which each image gives rise to the next without necessarily maintaining logical coherence (Szondi, 1987, pp. 20–23).

The logic of stage and dramatic succession, rather than causality, constitutes a fundamental feature of dream drama, while the action is organized more as a chain of associations than as a traditional dramatic plot (Balme, 2008, p. 82). The stage visualization of the dream experience, as opposed to a character's mere narration of a dream, emerges in modern dramaturgy as an autonomous technique with particular aesthetic and epistemological significance (Innes, 1992, pp. 45–46). The dream ceases to be merely a "revelatory scene" that unravels a complex myth, as, for example, in the highly informative vision of Posthumus in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. Instead, the dream is transformed into a dramaturgical framework within which the supernatural, the magical, and the fantastical can be legitimately presented, as in Kampysis's *The Mother's Ring* and Hauptmann's *Hanneles Himmelfahrt*, which will be examined below.

4. The dream in *The Assumption of Hannele* by Gerhart Hauptmann

The dream form acquires a more "internal" orientation, functioning as a means of revealing the unconscious mental state of the characters and exploring the subconscious (Nicholson, 1981, p. 285). Although Strindberg established the term *dream drama* with *A Dream Play* (1902), he did not limit himself to it. In the German-speaking sphere, Gerhart Hauptmann cultivated forms of dream dramaturgy as early as 1893 with *The Assumption of Hannele*, reaching a peak with *The Sunken Bell* in 1896, where the real and the imaginary coexist within a unified poetic structure. Hauptmann introduces a hybrid dramaturgy that combines naturalistic observation, symbolism, and dreamlike spectacle, anticipating features later associated with expressionism (Sinden, 1957, pp. 99–148; Michaels, 2014, pp.

101–102). *The Assumption of Hannele* represents a seminal work of early European modernist dream dramaturgy. Hauptmann places his twelve-year-old heroine in a destitute social environment dominated by poverty, abandonment, and abuse, where the dream functions as a forewarning of death—a transitional passage that, at the moment of death, is presented as a metaphysical form of healing.

More specifically, Hannele, in her attempt to escape her abusive stepfather, falls into the icy water and ends up fighting for her life in the doctor's office, where she is brought by compassionate villagers. She falls silent when asked about her stepfather, but on her deathbed she exists in a state between dream and reality. She confesses to the nurse her unfulfilled love for the schoolteacher, and within her vision, she experiences, as an "other Cinderella," the preparation for a marriage that does not constitute a rite of passage into adulthood, as it should, but rather a passage toward death. The room becomes a hall of light, where the real and the imagined intertwine to such a degree that, in the end, they form elements of the same dramaturgical framework. The angel serves as the "intermediary" who will receive little Hannele, and the community bears witness to her suffering and will liberate her from earthly pain. In her dream appear God, the Virgin Mary, Death, and the Angel, while at the same time, figures from the community—such as the schoolteacher, the doctor, the nurse, and the harsh stepfather—participate in the action. Until her redemption and "sanctification," Hannele remains at the threshold between dream and reality (Hauptmann, 1894, pp. 3–95; Archer, 1894, pp. ix–xxi).

In this work, Hauptmann emerges simultaneously as an exceptional naturalist and an outstanding neo-Romantic modern German dramatist, while also introducing Christian-mystical and neo-pagan elements into his play. Throughout the dramaturgical text, he employs motifs from ecclesiastical tradition, yet at the same time dramatizes the religious element, giving it material form. He is not, however, a genius or pioneering creator, as his writing lacks an "organic character" and instead presents him as a "mechanical" author who carries out what he decides to render (Bentley, 1987, p. 316). The sanctification of Hannele, as well as the punishment of her father, cannot be considered strictly Christian elements, since they do not belong to the real world but to the spiritual realm, to which mortals do not normally have access. The climax of the play occurs with Hannele's ascension; however, this does not coincide with an emotional climax, as it conveys a more detached sense, perhaps aiming to represent the "divine" in a more realistic manner.

5. The dream in *The Mother's Ring* by Giannis Kampysis

Giannis Kampysis (1872–1901) is one of the earliest Greek writers to have been influenced by German intellectual currents. Although Kampysis resided in Munich from 1898 to 1899, he had already been in epistolary contact with the German philologist Dieterich as early as 1897 (Dimitrakopoulos, 1996–1997, p. 8). This journey transformed him into a receptive conduit of the intellectual flourishing and political prestige of Germany during the Bismarckian era (Sehopoulou, 2016, p. 276). *The Mother's Ring* was published in 1898 and constitutes one of the very few Modern Greek dream dramas influenced by two works by Hauptmann: *The Assumption of Hannele* (1893), which will be discussed later, and *The Sunken Bell* (1896). The "Nordic fascination" of Greek writers of that period, Kampysis included, fostered the perception that Scandinavian authors created within shadowy and mist-laden landscapes, in contrast to the luminous landscapes of the South; nevertheless, the dreamlike qualities they articulated elicited the admiration of local writers (Sehopoulou, 2016, pp. 269–271).

The Mother's Ring follows the Scandinavian dream-dramaturgical framework, into which it incorporates elements of Greek tradition, drawing on motifs such as fairies, the fairy's journey, and the Fates, while also adding traditional elements of his own time, such as carols of his contemporary period, as well as carols from earlier generations, which by then were considered obsolete (Politis, 1994, pp. 413–416, 285–362; Meraklis, 2007, p. 144). His turn toward tradition appears to trouble him particularly in this work, and in a letter, he expresses doubts about the outcome (Valetas, 1972, p. 617). He thus creates poetic dramas that draw on Greek folk tradition and constitute some of the earliest attempts to merge European avant-garde, the initial stages of Symbolism, and Greek folk tradition (Hatzipantazis, 2014, pp. 382 and 394–395).

More specifically, the protagonist's illness brings him to the brink of death, and although he is already twenty-five years old, he seems to regress to childhood, longing for his mother's caresses and fairy tales. His love for Erofili remains unfulfilled due to his illness, and he reminisces about the mountains of his homeland and their folk traditions. Approaching the threshold of death, he sinks into a dream, in which he seeks the mountain fairy, whom he manages to "catch" and compels to travel with him to the most remote mountain, as it is his childhood dream—which, ultimately, remains unrealized. The protagonist exists between dream and reality, as he simultaneously experiences the chill of death and adapts it to his dream-imagery. In his dream, he conquers a point of the mountain that no one had reached, yet at the same time, he asks the fairy to bring him Erofili, who in reality is already beside him. The dream functions as a

transitional stage, guiding him toward the light of the sun—that is, toward death (Kampysis, 1898, pp. 52–71).

There are numerous elements that demonstrate the author's interaction with Greek folklore and popular tradition, while some of these elements derive from earlier texts, such as the successive changes in the form of the fairy, which allude to Homer and the transformations of Nereus. Moreover, the influence of Scandinavian literature is evident in the fact that Yiannakis's desire is not for the fairy's heart, as would be the case in folk tradition, but for the conquest of the mountain peak, since his heart belonged to Erofili from the beginning (Kampysis, 1898, pp. 59, 63–64). Furthermore, the use of the Fates as an element of folk tradition is initially apparent in the story of the ring, which Yiannakis asks Zacharoula to tell him, and later in his dream, where Kera determines the fate of the children to be born (Kampysis, 1898, pp. 44–46, 54–56).

Closing Remarks

The two dream dramas examined converge in their dreamlike substratum, in the use of supernatural figures, and in the function of the dream as a means of revelation. Hauptmann's influence on Kampysis' writing is evident; however, *The Mother's Ring* originates from Greek folk tradition and the *paraloges*, where the dream serves moralistic and fairy-tale storytelling, whereas in *The Assumption of Hannele*, the vision functions psychologically and mystically, transforming the heroine's journey into a ritual of salvation. Kampysis employs magic, while Hauptmann uses the metaphysical, yet both create worlds beyond reality with completely different orientations and ideological weight. More specifically, the structure of Hauptmann's work leads to the dream-drama "transference" of the heroine just before her death, gradually replacing reality with the "divine," that is, angels, luminous forms, and visions. Similarly, Kampysis creates a metaphysical adventure that the protagonist passionately desires to experience even in reality.

Linear narration does not exist in either dream drama. In *Hannele*, reality and vision intertwine to such a degree that they ultimately cannot be separated, whereas in *The Mother's Ring*, the scenes alternate without strict logic. For Giannakis, fleeing normality means entering the world of fairies and fairy tales, while the dying Hannele is already on the threshold of death, and her vision has a psycho-spiritual character. These characteristics of the two dramatic works lead Kampysis to use fairy-tale material, such as magical rings, fate-determining fairies, and so on, while Hauptmann draws on Christian tradition, such as angels, light, and the like. In both dream dramas, the supernatural is not decorative but serves as a means of revealing truth, exploring the protagonists' psychic worlds, and opening a path toward liberation and death.

The use of folk narrative motifs is present in both works, as the dream functions as a passage to death, a journey of the soul, where elements from other worlds appear. Hauptmann's work displays strong elements of German tradition and mysticism and fits within the psychological literature of the 19th century, transforming the dream into a dramaturgical tool of psychology and salvation rather than a folkloric motif. Likewise, Kampysis' work shows a strong connection to Greek folk tradition and the *paraloges*, featuring fairies, magical objects, and other fairy-tale elements, turning the dream into folk storytelling and a means of moral teaching. Both protagonists exist on the threshold of death: Hannele due to her hardships and the fall into the icy water, and Giannakis due to his illness. Their condition brings them closer to the dream world, and the supernatural gives both new meaning or relief. Symbolism, poetic expression, and the metaphysical element characterize both works. While *The Mother's Ring* is brighter and lacks intense elements of fear, *Hannele* exhibits expressionistic, mystical, and dark poetics, strongly associated with pain and abuse.

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THE OEDIPUS MYTH: FROM THOMAS OSTERMEIER TO YANNIS HOUVARDAS— TWO DIRECTORIAL READINGS

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Abstract: This study undertakes a comparative analysis of two recent directorial engagements with the Oedipus myth within the Athens Epidaurus Festival: Thomas Ostermeier's *Ödipus* (2021) and Yannis Houvardas' *Oedipus: From Darkness to Light* (2025). By examining dramaturgical structure, directorial language, the relation to the ancient performance space, and theoretical axes that inform the contemporary revival of ancient drama, the article assesses the myth's function as a living cultural mechanism. It compares the aesthetics of technological transcription in Ostermeier with the existential–symbolic poetics in Houvardas, focusing on the dynamic triangulation between direction, space, and spectator.

Keywords: The Oedipus Myth, Thomas Ostermeier, Yannis Houvardas, directorial perspectives, comparative studies.

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From the Athenian tragic stage to contemporary performance, the Oedipus myth remains one of the most resilient and enduring narrative matrices of Western culture. From Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* to the Freudian and Lacanian turns of the twentieth century, Oedipus operates as a symbol of self-knowledge, guilt, and inescapable destiny. In contemporary European theatre discourse, the myth acquires renewed urgency, becoming a vehicle for political and social critique, being remediated through new technologies, and re-signified via the deconstruction of identity, paternity, and power.

Between 2021 and 2025, the Athens Epidaurus Festival presented two significant re-inscriptions of the Oedipus myth: *Ödipus*, directed by Thomas Ostermeier based on a text by Maja Zade (2021), and *Oedipus: From Darkness to Light*, a synthesis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* in translation, adaptation, and direction by Yannis Houvardas (2025). These productions propose divergent rewritings of the myth, along two lines identified in contemporary scholarship: in the first instance, a technologically oriented re-inscription that may be read through Lehmann's concept of the "postdramatic" (2006), and, in the second, an inward-looking existential and metaphysical reading that reconnects body, word, and space (cf. Carlson, 2004).

The comparative analysis proceeds along three theoretical axes: (1) **scenic reconfiguration**, whereby performance functions as a "translation" of myth into the present and the aesthetics of the event shape textual meaning (Carlson, 2004; Fischer-Lichte, 2008); (2) **theatrical temporality**, the onstage management and representation of time as a mechanism of memory

and recurrence—particularly apt for a myth whose temporality is circular and tragically reiterative (Pavis, 2013); and (3) **the dramaturgy of space** (Fischer-Lichte, 2014), in which the *koilon* of the ancient theatre acts as an active agent and co-interpreter rather than a neutral container[1]. Through these axes, the study illuminates how the material, technological, and symbolic form of performance reconfigures the tragic condition of knowledge and blindness.

Thomas Ostermeier and Maja Zade's *Ödipus*

Ostermeier's *Ödipus* was presented at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus in September 2021 as a co-production between the Athens Epidaurus Festival and the Schaubühne Berlin. Zade's text is not a translation of Sophocles but a dramaturgical "transcription": a new play inspired by the myth, relocating the action to a contemporary upper-class German family on holiday in Greece. The protagonist—a CEO of a large company—suffers an accident that triggers memories, revelations, and guilt. Cassandra, Jocasta, and Tiresias are not mythic figures but psychic imprints of guilt.

Directorially, Ostermeier's approach—mediated by Zade's meta-mythic framework—foregrounds technological intermediation: video, live camera, screens, drone footage, sound design, and a domestic interior evoking a "modern house." The ancient theatre becomes a platform for "virtual realism". Ostermeier eschews ancient "tragicality" in favour of the contemporary subject's psychological alienation, while catharsis shifts to a register of ethical disquiet. His Oedipus does not blind himself but collapses under the pressures of a society of transparency and surveillance; in this respect, the production can usefully be interpreted through Lehmann's earlier theorisation of postdramatic theatre (2006), rather than as an example discussed by Lehmann himself.

Numerous critics noted an incompatibility between this idiom and Epidaurus' monumental setting. The reliance on media, the enclosure within a "holiday home," and the chamber scale of the action appeared at odds with the open, collective spirit of the site. The production read less as tragedy and more as a contemporary installation. Nevertheless, Zade's transcription and Ostermeier's staging materially refreshed Oedipus through a postdramatic optic, relocating the myth from the orbit of fate to that of conscience—hence from divine will to human responsibility.

1 A caveat applies to the latter point with respect to Thomas Ostermeier's production, where it is not certain that the "sacred" space of the ancient theatre was implicated in the sense outlined above.

Yannis Houvardas and *Oedipus: From Darkness to Light*

Houvardas' production was presented at Epidaurus on 25–26 July 2025, co-produced by the Athens Epidaurus Festival and the cultural organisation Lykofos. It is an original dramaturgical synthesis uniting *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* into a single work in reverse chronology: the narration begins with Oedipus' death and proceeds towards the start of *OT*. This dramaturgical inversion organises the production's central conceit—"from darkness to light." The hero moves towards knowledge and release; narrative and "real" time become a trajectory of inner catharsis, a ritual of return and recognition that reasserts the inevitability of fate.

Houvardas' stage narrative is symbolic and, in a sense, minimalist. The orchestra of Epidaurus is reimagined as a cemetery, where actors circulate among marble slabs, white draperies, and cool-spectrum lighting. Music functions subterraneously, inflecting affect and subconscious through Byzantine modes; the movement vocabulary evokes a transhistorical liturgy or rite.

Nikos Karathanos' Oedipus emerges as a human figure stripped of rhetoric, a man "reborn" through his own death. The directorial emphasis falls on the myth's existential dimension; blindness becomes not punishment but an act of inner sight. The production belongs to the lineage of "postmodern re-readings of ancient drama" (Elam, 2002), treating tragedy as a field of philosophical self-knowledge. In sharp contrast to Ostermeier, the near absence of technological media recentres the human body within the theatrical experience. As Apostolos Lakasas (2025) observes, one structural axis is signposted by the epigraph from Edgar Allan Poe—"All that we see or seem/Is but a dream within a dream"—which also appears as a surtitled motto: "Oedipus at Epidaurus for the «well-read»." Audience response was emphatic: more than 17,000 spectators attended the two nights at Epidaurus, and the production received a warm response from both the public and critics (Athens Voice, 2025; Karaoglou, 2025). The engagement with the myth was realised through formal economy and a ritualistic sense of rhythm.

Comparative Analysis

In Ostermeier (2021), the dramaturgical foundation is Zade's new play tailored to transpose the myth into contemporary society; in counterpoint, Houvardas (2025) offers a free adaptation of the two Sophoclean tragedies built on reverse chronology. In terms of narrative time, Ostermeier's text and staging retain a broadly linear trajectory oriented to a "psychological present," whereas Houvardas' adaptation moves backwards from death towards the beginning of the story, articulating a "circular temporality."

Regarding "directorial language," Ostermeier embraces a realist register saturated with technological means (video, camera, screens). Houvardas tends towards symbolism, guided by economy of means, ritual, and the construction of a metaphysical universe through atmospheric lighting that renders the production's symbolic logic.

With respect to the "use" of the ancient theatre, Ostermeier's technological apparatus did not ultimately harmonise with Epidaurus' open, imposing environment; technology, so to speak, "clashed" with the site's awe-inspiring natural scale. By contrast, in Houvardas the space becomes part of the rite, "playing" alongside the actors. The focused narration incorporates the natural environment into the performance's semiotic economy, producing an organic rapport with the theatre as a "whole."

In "thematic" terms, Zade and Ostermeier foreground "guilt" and the "dissolution" of the subject in late modernity; Houvardas pivots to "self-knowledge" and "metaphysical release," conceiving Oedipus as *mystes*. As for "reception," Ostermeier's venture drew interest yet also reserve concerning its site-specific fit; Houvardas' production, by contrast, enjoyed broad acclaim.

These differences map onto two intellectual traditions: a European dramaturgical deconstruction, where myth becomes an instrument of social critique, and a Greek ritual hermeneutics—shaped, among others, by the Rontiris "school" (itself influenced—eclectically rather than imitatively—by Max Reinhardt)—in which myth endures as a source of existential and cultural identity (Antoniou, 2017). Within this frame, Ostermeier treats Oedipus—and the tragic hero—as a cultural phenomenon of postmodernity; Houvardas confronts him as an eternal enigma of human existence.

Conclusions

The Oedipus of the twenty-first century is no longer merely the king of Thebes but the contemporary individual, seeking meaning amid information overload, crisis, technology, and spiritual estrangement. This is pronounced in Zade's text and in Ostermeier's staging, though traces appear as well in Houvardas' approach—mounted on the occasion of the director's fifty-year creative trajectory in Greek theatre. For all their differences, the two productions converge where myth ceases to be merely a story and becomes a mirror of the self—recalling Houvardas' dictum: "The audience is your mirror" (Bozoni, 2025).

Ostermeier's contribution lies in the radical contemporisation of the tragic as an ethical mechanism; Houvardas', in the philosophical restitution of tragedy as a practice of redemption. The ancient theatre of Epidaurus—through

its longue durée and the awe it induces—functions as a proving ground, a place where an ancient voice contends with a contemporary gaze. In both cases, the Oedipus myth again proves inexhaustible, a timeless paradigm of theatrical and human self-knowledge.

Afterword: Oedipus as a Contemporary Stage Metaphor

The re-emergence of the Oedipus myth at Epidaurus twice within four years, and through two distinct artistic lenses, demonstrates that tragedy is not a museum piece but a dynamic cultural archive capable of provoking new readings in an unending dialectic with the bequeathed fragments of ancient poetry. Ostermeier and Houvardas operate as two poles of a single continuum: from the dramaturgy of deconstruction to the directing of transformation. The former "modernises" form—also through Zade's new text—in order to speak to the dissolution of the contemporary ego; the latter "de-historicises" myth to seek the human being's metaphysical core. The ancient theatre remains the site where theatre surpasses representation and becomes a rite of knowledge. There, Oedipus—whether as a twenty-first-century corporate figure or as a "naked man" before the light—continues to ask and to wonder, without a final answer.

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HOMERIC HEROINES ON STAGE:
THE CASE OF ANDROMACHE

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Abstract: By presenting the Catholic man in his individual, social, political and spiritual dimensions, the Homeric epics have served as an endless source of inspiration through the centuries. This material is a plastic substance which the tragic muse particularly utilized. Andromache, although occupying a small part in *Iliad*, has become a symbol in universal literature. Among the three great tragic poets, Euripides chose Andromache as a secondary heroine in *Troades* and as the protagonist in *Andromache*. Racine's French *Andromaque* belongs to his first tragedies with which the 27-year-old—but already experienced in human passions—poet established himself in the Parisian theatre and emerged as equal to his rival, Corneille. Some centuries later, on the eve of the Second World War, another French playwright, Jean Giraudoux, remembered Andromache. Through his play *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*. Andromache became his mouthpiece for expressing his pacifist ideal and his belief in the power of fate. In the postmodern monologue of the Greek Akis Dimou, *Andromache, or Woman's Landscape at the Height of the Night*, Andromache appears stripped of her mythological past and also of all the past personas that shaped her long literary career. The course of Homeric Andromache from the Trojan walls to the postmodern paths of the subconscious, proves the authenticity and her enduring figure as anti-war and women's symbol.

Keywords: Andromache, *Iliad*, Euripides, Racine, Giraudoux, tragedy, Akis Dimou, war, symbol.

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Introduction

By presenting the Catholic man in his individual, social, political and spiritual dimensions, the Homeric epics have served as an endless source of inspiration through the centuries. They contain live human essence, picturing all the manifestations of human fate, human passions and the passions of the gods. This material is a plastic substance which the tragic muse particularly utilized. The tragic poets used the Homeric heroes, ideas and patterns in order to set off the driving force of the tragic genre, that is the conflict between the individual and external and internal forces. This essay aims at exploring the reception of the Homeric figure of Andromache within the dramatic genre across cultures and contexts. The transformation of the Homeric material by Euripides, Seneca, Racine, Jean Giraudoux and Akis Dimou could provide an overview of the cultural processes shaping its refiguration in different periods, cultures and, in turn, within different intellectual and artistic contexts (Hardwick, 2003, pp. 3–11; Hardwick and Stray, 2008, pp. 1–5; Martindale, 2007, pp. 297–311).

1. The Homeric Andromache

Although Andromache's appearance in the *Iliad* is rather limited, she has become a symbolic figure in world literature. This is mainly due to the moral and aesthetic function of the famous meeting of Hector and Andromache at the walls of Troy in the Iliadic passage (6.390–493). Within the ominous war atmosphere culminating in the duel of its two protagonists (Achilles and Hector), the peaceful and harmonious encounter of the couple in a military epic is an impressive indication of Homer's knowledge of human nature focusing on human needs in tension with social norms. Andromache, the daughter of the great Eetion, a nobleman of Thebe (6. 395), enjoyed the honour of becoming the wife of brave Hector and a noblewoman of Troy. The serenity and happiness of her home were suddenly overturned by the invasion of the Achaeans which deprived her violently of her paternal family. As she says to Hector: *Ἕκτορ ἀτὰρ σύ μοί ἐσσι πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ/ ἠδὲ κασίγνητος, σύ δέ μοι θαλερὸς παρακοίτης* (6.429–31). One cannot help admiring their feelings for each other and Hector's warm sympathy expressing his anxiety about her fate (6.429) (Schein, 1984, pp. 173–177; Graziosi and Haubold, 2010, pp. 29–31). Andromache's fears are soon to be justified: as she is preparing Hector's bath to relieve his exhausted body after the battle, Achilles' horses are dragging his corpse (22.448). Andromache rushes out of her house *μαινάδι ἴσῃ* (22.461), as she sees the terrible sight she swoons, and when she comes to her senses again, she bursts into a heart-rending lament (22.477–514), *τὴν δὲ κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρεβεννὴ νὺξ ἐκάλυψεν* (22. 466) (Segal, 1971, pp. 33–57; Grethlein, 2006, pp. 247–251; Dué, 2006, ch. 1).

2. Sappho's lyricism

An eloquent contrast may be drawn between the dark atmosphere of the Homeric farewell scene between husband and wife and Sappho's *epithalamium* preserved in fr. 44. 24–34 L.-P., which describes the arrival of the two newlyweds in Troy. The latter scene is perfectly structured in both content and form reflecting social and artistic contexts, the outer and inner world of the poetess (Bowra, 1961, pp. 236–239).

3. The Andromache of the tragic myth

The figure of Andromache, the noblewoman and the model wife and mother of Homeric heritage losing everything and becoming a captive and a slave-concubine, was subsequently taken up by the tragic Muse, who continued her story, appropriating, as well as deviating from the Homeric source-text.

Of the three great tragic poets, Euripides was especially innovative in his representation of human passions and of female psychology. The political circumstances of the Peloponnesian War and the social resonances of the sophistic movement formulate the key lines of the framework within which his plays may be located and assessed. Euripides refigured the Homeric Andromache presenting her as the protagonist in the tragedy of the same title and as a secondary character in the *Trojan Women.*

Andromache was produced in the 420s (possibly in 425 BC) (Stevens, 1971, pp. 15–18; Lloyd, 1994, pp. 11–12) and treats the events following the Trojan War. The title-heroine lives in Phthia as a captive and concubine of Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, who was her husband's murderer. Neoptolemus is absent and his lawful wife, Hermione, threatens to kill Andromache together with the little son whom she has borne to Neoptolemus. Andromache has fled as a suppliant to Thetis' altar. Her character in this play, as it emerges from her formal debate with Hermione, is consistent with the Homeric model as far as wisdom, patience and maternal love are concerned (*Andr.* 147–273). At the same time, Euripides reshapes Andromache's persona, in that she employs rhetorical elaboration and solid argumentation. This agon is most interesting not least because it touches on issues of female psychology by presenting two diametrically opposite views of the female role. The haughty behaviour and female independence of Hermione as a high-born wife are eloquently contrasted to Andromache's representation of the submissive, devoted and tolerant wife. As the latter advises the arrogant Spartan Hermione: *φίλτρον δὲ καὶ τόδ' · οὐ τὸ κάλλος, ὦ γύναι, ἀλλ' ἀρεταὶ τέρπουσι τοὺς ξυνευνέτας* (*Andr.* 207–08: "it is not our beauty but our virtues that fascinate our bed-partners"). This onstage conflict between the two rivals disputing over their twin beds, which is an innovation in the treatment of this legend, is a significant piece of evidence for Euripidean ideology and aesthetics (Allan, 2000, passim; Gould, 1980, p. 56; Lloyd, 1994, pp. 6–9; Conacher, 1967, pp. 167–169). Euripides also exploits this particular dramatic situation to implicitly criticize the Spartans, as well as to challenge the widely held polarity between Greeks and 'barbarians' and the unjustified bragging of the Greeks. Andromache constantly stresses that she still regards Hector as her husband and that she was coerced to become Neoptolemus' concubine (McClure, 1999, ch. 5; Mastronarde, 2010, pp. 275–279).

In the ensuing dialogue with Menelaus Andromache deviates from the Homeric standards of female virtue and argues so strongly before the Spartan king that the chorus accuse her: *ἄγαν ἔλεξας ὡς γυνὴ πρὸς ἄρσενας* (*Andr.* 364: "you said a lot to men, you being a woman"). Then, in her lament when Menelaus threatens to kill her son if she does not leave the altar, she is presented as the affectionate and grief-stricken mother we have seen in Homer; this theme recurs in the *Trojan*

Women (Lloyd, 1994, pp. 124–135). Regarding erotic enchantment and sensuality, the barbarian Andromache pleads for prudence and continence, which is a dominant idea in Euripides' critical and poetical reflection. This tragedy displays certain peculiarities not only with regard to its diverse plot structure, but also in terms of Andromache's elegiac lamentation in the Doric dialect (*Andr.* 103–116). This lament, which is the only example of the elegiac metre in extant Greek tragedy, has led some critics to assume that it may originate in a lost tradition of threnodic elegy (Page, 1936, pp. 206–230; contra Bowie, 1986, p. 22).

The *Trojan Women* was produced later in 415 BC, when the Athenians were preparing for the Sicilian expedition and had already invaded the island of Melos (in the previous year), which they occupied, having slaughtered the men and enslaved children and women. The fate of the Homeric heroine has been interpreted as an implicit Euripidean criticism of the aggressive Athenian policy and of the effects of war on the human condition (Murray, 1932, pp. 645–646; Croally, 1994, pp. 232–233; de Romilly, 1986, ch. 5; Shapiro and Burian, 2009, pp. 4–7; Delebecque, 1951, pp. 254ff.; Goossens, 1962, pp. 520ff.). In the second episode of the *Trojan Women* (*Tr.* 577–779) Andromache maintains her Homeric profile, consisting chiefly of female wisdom, dignity and companionship, which however enhance her misery, as they inspire Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, with the desire to take her with him to Greece. Andromache cries bitterly because she would rather die than betray Hector with another man, but Hecabe advises her to submit herself to her new master and forget her dear late husband, in the hope of helping the future resurrection of Troy perhaps through her offspring (*Tr.* 577–683) (Barlow, 1986, pp. 190–191; Dué, 2006, pp. 13–14). However, a new lamentation of Andromache follows Talthybius' announcement that Odysseus has decided to have Astyanax thrown down from the walls of Troy (*Tr.* 709–779). The image of Andromache, clasping her little son on her bosom, has been recorded in world art as a symbol of maternal affection, as well as of the brutality of war.

4. Seneca's Andromache

In his *Troades*, Seneca innovates compared to Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecabe*, which are his main source-texts (Schiesaro, 2003, pp. 190–202; Fantham, 2011, pp. 457–474; Ahl, 1986, pp. 35–40; Calder, 1970). According to his aesthetic preferences, he increases the *pathos* of his drama by adding to Astyanax's execution the repulsive sacrifice of the Trojan princess Polyxena on Achilles' tomb. Andromache becomes totally obsessed with fear and lies to Odysseus about Astyanax's fate, as her maternal love makes her abandon her regal dignity: "Show

me flames, wounds and the terrible art of tortures, hunger, cruel thirst, several punishments. All kinds of irons in my suffering flesh, a prison with suffocating darkness and everything that a victor dares to do when he is angry or afraid. A mother's soul is not scared" (*Tro.* 582–88). As in most of her literary refigurations, Andromache is seeing the dead Hector in Astyanax: "In my son, Hector, I love only you. Make him live, so that you will live again" (*Tro*. 646–48). Virgil's influence (*Aen*. 2. 270–97) is evident in her wish that her son lives to create a new Troy (Schiesaro, 2003, p. 195).

5. The Andromache of Passion (Racine)

In the context of French classicism, Racine returns to Virgil, whilst bringing erotic passion to the fore. Jean Racine's *Andromaque* is one of his early plays helping him to establish himself on the Parisian stage and emerge as a worthy rival of Pierre Corneille, the dominant poet of the time. Despite his young age, Racine was already experienced in handling human passions. According to his own account given in the prologue he had written for his play (1994, pp. 15–16), he derived the dramatic locale, the plot and heroes from the third book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, except for Hermione, who originates in Euripides. He studied and admired the plays of the latter in the humanistic environment of the Port-Royal monastery, where he had been raised and educated. Still, in the same prologue he emphatically draws attention to his conscious deviation from the Euripidean plot: in contrast to Euripides' *Andromache*, who had a son by Pyrrhus, his own Andromache "does not recognize another husband besides Hector and has no other son besides Astyanax" (Racine, 1994, p. 19). Racine defends poetic freedom in his handling of the mythical material and focuses on the manner in which a poet adapts the available material to his subject, thus raising many issues of intertextuality (Goodkin, 1989). He bases his poetic licence in the handling of the ancient myth on the fact that Virgil, who is his main source, presents Andromache as married to another son of Priam, the seer Helenus, who grabbed from Aeacus' son, Pyrrhus, his wife and royal power (*Aen*. 3.294–504); thus, "Andromache came again into the possession of a paternal husband" (3.297). Racine retains chiefly from Virgil Andromache's devotion to Hector, which characteristically emerges from her description as "wife of Hector" (3.488: *coniugis Hectoreae*), and the transfer of Troy to her new country symbolized by Hector's cenotaph and the false Simoens (3.300–05) (Berthelot, 1992; Couprie, 1996; Décélé, 2005; Elliott, 1969, passim; Defaux, 1977, pp. 22–31 Martinez Cuadrado, 1986, pp. 159–214; Otis, 1964, pp. 253–261;).

The French dramatist places unreciprocated love and passion to the core of his tragedy: his Andromache continues to be in love with her dead Trojan

husband and, albeit a captive and a slave, does not dare to reciprocate the love of her master, Pyrrhus. The latter is passionately in love with her, despising Hermione provocatively. Hermione is madly in love with Pyrrhus and rejects the love of Orestes, her childhood friend, who is eager to commit crimes for her sake. Of this group of love-stricken people, only Andromache has enjoyed mutual love and wants to remain faithful to Hector's memory by adoring her son, Astyanax, whom she identifies with Hector, thus enraging Pyrrhus:

> "She always talked about Hector. In vain did I guarantee her son's safety, 'he is Hector', she said and clasped her offspring 'his hands, his lips, his courage I recognize it's you my precious husband, the one I am now touching'. What is she thinking? That I am going to leave her son with her to keep the flame of her love alive?"

Racine's characters talk incessantly about the object of their love, change moods and feelings all the time contradicting themselves (de Romilly, 1995, pp. 36–37; Racevskis, 2008, pp. 75–85); only Andromache remains stable and clear-minded. In her eyes, Pyrrhus is the violent and bloodthirsty conqueror who killed her brothers and sisters during the fatal night when Troy fell, and nothing can erase this memory. Hector's image is dominant in her thoughts, which she interrupts only to address him, talking to him as if he were alive. The memories of the fall of Troy, of the violent extinction of her compatriots and the atrocities of the conquerors are always present for her, and by visiting Hector's cenotaph she is searching for a solution to her dilemmas, when Pyrrhus's threat to kill her son becomes oppressive. Eventually, she decides to commit suicide immediately after the wedding, in order to save her son and at the same time remain faithful to Hector. Nonetheless, fate works in her favour: Pyrrhus' unexpected death releases her from her gnawing dilemma and makes her a queen. Once more the Trojan woman has the divine favour of fulfilling her desire to remain faithful to her real love. Racinean passion is a substitute for God or Fate, is all-powerful and thus destructive. The lovelorn Pyrhhus says: "Love wins and uproots perniciously" (Racine, 1994, p. 1297). He has totally succumbed to the erotic spell, which leads him to confront Trojans and Greeks, and before dying he crowns Andromache as Queen. In Racine's plays, madness and passions are dominant: Pyrrhus and Hermione die, Orestes loses his mind. Through his portrayal of Andromache, Racine reaffirms Trojan merit, identity and status, as legend has it that French people descend from them (Bizer, 2011, ch. 1).

6. Andromache, symbol of peace (Giraudoux)

Some centuries later, Jean Giraudoux, the most prominent French playwright of interwar years, revisited Andromache, appropriating the Homeric legend to correspond to his anti-war visions. Giraudoux had an excellent classical education and was also trained theoretically and practically in the school of war – he was wounded in World War I and decorated for bravery. Subsequently, he had a solid theatrical presence, especially through his co-operation with a famous man of the theatre, Louis Jouvet, who staged almost all of his plays. In 1936 Jouvet produced, directed and played in Giraudoux's *The Trojan War will not Take Place* on the Théâtre de l'Athénée. Giraudoux drew his material on ancient myths, in order to express the humanistic quests of his turbulent times. This play presents dominant features of his dramaturgy: humanism, the conflict with destiny, dilemmas concerning the choice between two opposite options, the emergence of simplicity in complexity and of the extraordinary in the ordinary. A master of style at a time when theatre directing was taking precedence, Giraudoux made stage language a sublime tool of expression (Brockett, 1995, p. 482; Body, 1986, esp. ch. 1; Reilly, 1978; Moraud, 1936, pp. 13–29; Le Sage, 1958; Mercier-Campiche, 1954).

Giraudoux places Andromache in the opening scene of his play, in order to express his ideological position – based on wish and hope at the same time – when she announces to the prophetess Cassandra that "The Trojan war will not take place" (Act 1, Scene 1). As always, Andromache is Hector's beloved and loyal wife and is pregnant with his son, in whom she sees Hector, as she did earlier in Euripides, Seneca and Racine: "I am interested in him because he is yours". Her question to Hector, "Do you love war?" (Act 1, Scene 3) reveals the pervasive influence of war on human conscience and the contradictory feelings towards the enemy. Andromache is constantly defending peace, refuting Priam's arguments: "You always die for your country, when you have lived as a worthy, active, wise man" (Act 1, Scene 6).

Giraudoux's idiosyncratic irony, which makes him resemble the playwrights of the Absurd (Kofidou, 2004, passim), demystifies the love affair between Paris and Helen as much as the marital harmony between Andromache and Hector: "Hector is my direct opposite. He does not share any of my tastes. We spend every day either by beating one another or by sacrificing ourselves. Happy spouses do not have clear faces". In his portrayal of the couple Giraudoux follows the dramatic path opened by August Strindberg's incessantly fighting couples, which will be later taken over by the hostile couples of the Absurd. Andromache represents ordinary and peaceful life and is aware of destiny, whose sound and echo dominate in the play (Albérès, 1957; Frois and Lesot, 1998, pp. 21–24;

Robichez, 1976), giving a tragic dimension even to humorous scenes. "I do not know what destiny is", Andromache confesses to Cassandra, whose very figure encapsulates destiny (Act 1, Scene 1). The only power against almighty destiny is love. Perhaps love is the only thing worthy of a war, so "Helen must love Paris, since no one, not even destiny itself, can attack destiny light-heartedly" (Act 2, Scene 8) is Andromache's argument towards unrepentant Helen.

7. The female Andromache of Aki Demos

In Greek drama the use of tragic myth (Chasapi-Christodoulou, 2002) opens with *Iphigenia* (1720) by the Kefalonian playwright Petros Katsaitis, engagement pursued more systematically during the interwar period. But the dialogue with the mythical past brings imaginative results after the second world war. In the theatrical texts of the period, the tragic heroes were clearly differentiated from their tragic matrix. A notable example is Iakovos Kambanellis's trilogy *The Supper*, first staged in 1993 and comprising *Letter to Orestes*, *The Supper*, and *Thebes Side Street*. The trilogy offers a dynamic perspective on intertextual dialogue.

The monologue written by the Greek playwright Akis Dimou entitled *Andromache, or Woman's Landscape at the Height of Night* can be situated in this context of postmodernist trends towards deconstruction of the ancient myths. Dimou is a main representative of postmodernism in modern Greek theatre and his production belongs to the genre of poetic drama. The dominant features of all his plays are intertextual dialogue and female presence (Georgopoulou, 2008).

In the prologue the dramatist mentions that he has selected Virgil's version, according to which Neoptolemus gave Andromache to Helenus, Hector's brother, who is a seer and has ended up being a captive and a slave like her. She finds refuge in a place in Epirus and settles there in a quasi-Trojan landscape, an imitation of Troy, watered by an equally artificial river, Simoeis, a tributary of Scamander (Dimou, 2006, p. 244). Dimou's heroine has experienced deportation, male deception and violence in every possible way. Hence, she imagines and 'creates' a false reality, to which she totally adjusts and with which she identifies herself: "This city is me, away from cities" (Dimou, 2006, p. 246). She searches in vain within the Greek language "a language that can bear the horrible burden of memory" (Dimou, 2006, p. 245).

Andromache's words reflect insufferable memories full of bloodshed and violent loss: native country, husband, child, her bodily and moral freedom, her womanhood. The ideal vehicle to convey her despair is associative illogical speech, going far and deeply into the dreams and the subconscious and even reaching at some moments a real delirium. Gradually, however, the memories

fade and the feelings become blunted: "I say Helen and I think that I am calling an old friend" (Dimou, 2006, p. 247). Her female nature claims its rights, as she becomes obsessed with the matter of her erotic deprivation: "no man has touched me since the first darkness of the world". This isolation leads her imagination to her first and perhaps one and only erotic interest: "In the last summer before the war, her erotic instinct woke up and she felt a strong desire for a man who was bathing singing" (Dimou, 2006, p. 251). This remembrance gives her some stamina, and she reveals her suppressed female nature: "I am a woman and my knowledge, what is left in the mirror's teeth, a lock of my plaits, an edge of my worn-out glance" (Dimou, 2006, p. 256).

Realizing all these, she becomes stronger and comes out of the inertia of ignorance and agony to plunge into conscious action. Weak Andromache at last makes up her mind: "Forget the promised epic, ignore that they have you as a model, gallop deeply inside yourself, so that the doctrines of time will not touch you". She is no more the fallen princess of Troy, the devoted wife and affectionate mother. An outcast and isolated, she has found her own self and the strength to manifest it and decide upon her own fate: "I shall draw vespers, I shall let no one forget". Dimou's *Andromache* draws on the Iliadic Andromache and the farewell scene, sharing the theme of male cruelty with its Homeric model. At the same time, features drawn from the Homeric myth are interwoven with everyday episodes and games of the imagination and the subconscious.

Conclusions

Andromache's journey from the walls of Troy to the postmodern paths of the subconscious makes her an authentic and everlasting symbol, whose destiny has been shaped by the polarity between love and war. Andromache as the protagonist in the Euripidean tragedy of the same title and as a secondary character in the *Trojan Women* is appropriated by Euripides to criticize war by castigating the militarism of the Athenian empire and the violence of human nature. At the same time, Andromache's rhetorically elaborate argumentation in her agon with Hermione succeeds in revealing diverse views of the female role. Subsequently, Seneca amplifies the elements of revenge and bloody violence according to his aesthetic predilections, by adding to Astyanax's execution the repulsive sacrifice of the Trojan princess Polyxena on Achilles' tomb. Racine brings erotic passion to the fore by identifying it with unreciprocated love within the literary contexts of French Classicism. Some centuries later, on the eve of the Second World War, Jean Giraudoux conveys an anti-military message in his play *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*. Andromache becomes his mouthpiece expressing his pacifistic

ideas and, at the same time, his belief in the power of fate. In the postmodern monologue of the Greek playwright Akis Dimou *Andromache, or Woman's Landscape at the Height of Night*, Andromache appears as stripped of her mythical past and engaged in shaping a new identity. The ending of Dimou's *Andromache*, perhaps the saddest of all Andromaches, concludes the literary route of her figure through time, whilst reflecting all her earlier personas: "I do not know another chain except for love that holds the other so absolutely bound… in this way, born victors become slaves and the defeated triumph" (Dimou, 2006, p. 248).

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Antigone Cybele, music Mendelssohn 1

‘MELOS’ IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY REVIVAL PERFORMANCES ON THE GREEK STAGE: **F. MENDELSSOHN’S *ANTIGONE* AND THE *ANTIGONE* OF I. SAKELLARIDIS**

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Abstract: In nineteenth-century Greece, the idea of reviving ancient drama was derived from the Europe of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The way Western theatre approached tragedy—through the theatrical codes of opera—generated strong aesthetic trends. George Steiner pointed out the influence that Mendelssohn's musical composition for *Antigone* exerted on the predominance of Sophoclean drama. On the Greek theatrical stage, Italian melodrama was dominant, and Greek scholars pursued the revival of ancient drama by focusing on elements that would reinforce the cultural identity of the newly established Greek state within the European community of nations. The revival began in Greece in 1867, with Sophocles' *Antigone* translated into the scholarly form of the Greek language and performed with Mendelssohn's musical composition. Some years later, Georgios Mistriotis founded the "Company for the Instruction of Ancient Drama," which put forward a comprehensive proposal for the revival of tragedy, encompassing theatrical space, language, and *melos*. When I. Sakellaridis, a scholar of Byzantine and traditional Greek music, composed music for the Company's *Antigone*, he provoked strong reactions from members of the press, who accused him of debasing the supreme art of tragedy. Although, for many, tragedy represented the ideal antidote to Western influence and frivolous melodrama, Mendelssohn's composition was regarded as the most suitable means of expressing the supreme ideal of Ancient Greece. Nevertheless, in Sakellaridis' musical proposal, one can discern a connection between Neo-Hellenic civilization and ancient Greece mediated through Byzantium—a direction that many twentieth-century theatre directors would later follow in practice.

Keywords: *Antigone* by Sophocles, revival of Ancient Greek drama, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, I. Sakellaridis, Society for the Teaching of Ancient Drama, melos (musique).

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Revival performances on the Greek theatrical stage during the nineteenth century constituted a significant arena in which Greek intellectuals articulated their efforts to consolidate the cultural profile of the newly established Greek state within the society of European nations. By this time, ancient Greek drama had already acquired a prominent position on the European stage, a development that provided a decisive stimulus for analogous initiatives in Greece. Ancient tragedy functioned as a "channel" of communication through which Greek culture was projected as a form of universal cultural heritage. At the same time, however, in nineteenth-century Greece it posed a challenge of management—both with regard to the search for the cultural identity of modern Greeks and the quest for a theatrical code that would signal this process.

From around 1835, when Athens began to develop theatrical life, performances consisted primarily of variety shows and Italian melodramas (Bakounakis, 1991, p.

27). Italian troupes toured what was then a small Greece—its towns modest in size and its theatrical audience limited—throughout the year. In the major European urban centers of the nineteenth century, theatre was one of the principal arenas of sociability. The very concept of the "city" functioned as a hub of cultural activity, a defining characteristic of both small and large European cities.

The presence of melodrama in Greek cities of the nineteenth century appeared threatening to the cultural identity of modern Greeks. This perception was reinforced by the need of the Greek state to promote foreign troupes—particularly lyric artists and opera evenings—so that "small Greece" might resemble a European capital (Sideris, 1976, pp. 22–26). During the same period, Europe's growing interest in ancient Greek drama created new conditions.

In 1841 (28 October), Sophocles' Antigone was presented in Potsdam, directed by Ludwig Tieck, in a translation by J.J. Chr. Donner, with musical composition by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847) (Todd, 1991; Mendelssohn, n.d.). This production was preceded by Goethe's staging of Antigone in 1808 and 1809, which did not achieve great success; however, the performance featuring Mendelssohn's music captivated audiences and strengthened the emerging "cult" surrounding the Sophoclean heroine:

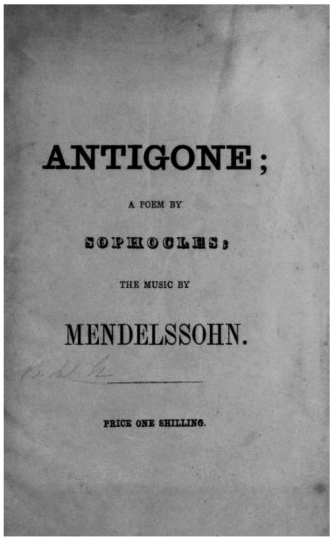
> The third cause of the Antigone predominance may well have been one of theatrical history. Goethe's presentation of the play, in Joha nn Friedrich Rochlitz's infirm and truncated version in 1808 and 1809, was no great success.But that staged on 28 October 1841 proved a triumph and a landmark. Directed by Ludwig Tieck, the choruses set to music by Mendelssohn, J.J. Chr.Donner's translation of Sofocles was acclaimed as the first authentic re-creation of classical Greek tragedy in modern Europe. Pace Heine's acerbic sniping in 'Der Neue Alexander', the "Mendelssohn" Antigone, with is attempts at antique costumes and choreography, swept Europe. Less than a year after the Potsdam premiere, the play was mounted in Berlin. Paris followed suit in 1844, making of Antigone the first Greek drama to be produced in antique style on the French national stage. London and Edinburgh came next. We know from the recollections of the eminent Orientalist and mythologist choruses from Antigone were a staple of family and amateur chorales (Steiner, 1984, p. 8).

The 1841 production in Potsdam was regarded as the first authentic revival of classical Greek tragedy in modern Europe. The play was subsequently staged in Berlin, in 1844 in Paris, and later in London and Edinburgh. The significance of

this production was underscored by G. Steiner, who sought to explain the reasons for the predominance of Antigone over other works of ancient Greek drama.

It was the production of Sophocles' Antigone that opened at the Hoftheater in the Neuen Palais in Potsdam on 28 October 1841 that secured the pre-eminence of Sophocles' play in the nineteenth-century European repertoire. Although generally referred to as the 'Mendelssohn Antigone' on account of the orchestral introduction and the choral settings that were composed by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, the production was in fact a collaborative undertaking overseen by Friendrich Wilhelm IV. The translation which was by Johann Jacob Christian Donner, was both accurate and lucid as well as being metrically complex; and Augusrt Bockh was called in from Berlin University as called in from Berlin University as the philological adviser. The play was performed in the Vitruvian theatre in the palace, and the responsibility for the staging fell largely to Ludwig Tieck, who sough to avoid all illusionist techniques that had preodominated on Goethe's Weimar stage (Macintosh, 1997, p. 286).

The romantic music composed for Sophocles' play achieved wide reception across numerous European countries. During the 1840s, Antigone, accompanied by the music of Mendelssohn, occupied a leading position in the repertoire of amateur and domestic choral societies, a fact also reflected in the translational reception of the ancient drama. Fifty translations are recorded, compared to approximately twenty for the works of Aeschylus and Euripides (Puchner, 1993, p. 61).



Antigone: a poem by Mendelssohn



Sakellaridis, I. Th. 1907. Tyrtaios 1

The renown of these European performances influenced Greek intellectuals, who had not yet succeeded in witnessing ancient drama staged on the Greek theatrical scene. Alexander Rizos Rangavis, embittered by Greek "mockery" and the "indifference" with which "the dramatic Muse, the modest daughter of Greece, has nowhere to rest her head" (Sideris, 1976, p. 25), recounts in his memoirs that the British ambassador Thomas Wyse longed to see Antigone with Mendelssohn's music and reproached the Greek government for not having conceived such an initiative (Sideris, 1976, p. 31). Consequently, Rangavis translated the play into katharevousa, an effort that appears to have been supported and praised by several foreign diplomats. The wife of the Prussian ambassador, Hermann von Thiele, even undertook to bring Mendelssohn's musical scores from Germany. Thus, in 1867, the Greek University organized the first performance of ancient drama as a gift celebrating the royal marriage of George I and Olga, daughter of the Grand Duke of Russia. The wedding took place in Saint Petersburg, while the entire Greek populace organized festivities for the royal couple's return.

It should be noted that before the staging of Antigone was entrusted to the University, the composer Pavlos Carrer (Karrer), renowned for his nationally inspired melodramas, had also been proposed to assemble a melodramatic troupe for the same purpose in the autumn of 1867 (Xepapadakou, 2005, p. 132). However, Carrer requested the sum of sixty thousand drachmas, which apparently seemed exorbitant and was therefore rejected. Carrer later recalled in his memoirs:

> As soon as the gentlemen saw the figure of sixty thousand, they immediately grew apprehensive and began questioning me. — 'Could the prima donna or the tenor not be engaged for less?' — 'They could, gentlemen, even for fifteen thousand; but then we would no longer be speaking of an exceptional spectacle, nor of celebrating Olga's arrival in a manner worthy and splendid. (Konomos, 1962, pp. 271–272)

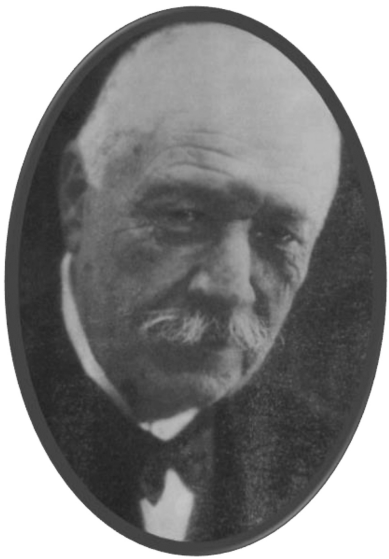
Thus, it was decided to present a more economical production, namely a "university performance" of Antigone (7 December 1867), featuring students in the chorus and the celebrated music of Mendelssohn. The performance was organized at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus (Mavroleon, 2023, p. 59) and introduced Mendelssohn's renowned musical composition—henceforth closely identified with Sophocles' masterpiece—whose presence on the Greek theatrical stage proved remarkably enduring, spanning the period from 1867 to 1937. In the 1888 production of Antigone by the National Dramatic Company, contemporary

newspapers, despite their overall negative reviews, praised the "majestic archaizing music of Mendelssohn," which compensated for the shortcomings of the performers (Sideris, 1967, pp. 82–83). The continuation followed shortly thereafter: Mendelssohn's music was again used in the Antigone performance of 24 October 1888 (Nea Ephimeris, 12 October 1888), directed by the writer of comical idylls Dimitrios Koromilas, in collaboration with the prominent man of letters Georgios Vizyinos and the tenor Ioannis Apostolou (Mavroleon, 2003, pp. 11–12).

Further productions of Antigone featuring the celebrated score followed, including the performance staged in 1900 by the Hellenic Philological Association of Constantinople with the Tavoularis family troupe (Mavroleon, 2003, p. 151); the 1903 production by the demoticist director Kostas Christomanos (Mavroleon, 2003, p. 88); and the performances of Kyveli's theatrical company in 1910, 1911, and 1930. The presence of Mendelssohn's music on the Greek stage ultimately completed its historical cycle in the same manner in which it had begun. In 1937 (22 April 1937), at the Herodeion, the University of Athens organized an anniversary performance of Sophocles' Antigone to celebrate the centenary of its foundation (Museum of History of the University of Athens, n.d., A.K. 119; National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Rectorate, 1937), directed by Spyros Melas and performed in the ancient language (Mavroleon, 2003, p. 105).



Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdys



Ioannis Sakellaridis

More broadly, the idea of revival entered Greek intellectual life alongside the movements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, during which opera, as G. Andreas notes, claimed "the role of the modern equivalent of Greek tragedy" (Andreadis, 2005, p. 30). Indeed, since the sixteenth century, the West has musically articulated—through opera—the stimuli it received from ancient Greek drama (Mamalis, 2011, pp. 49–56). Europe's influence on the political and economic life of the country, together with the foreign monarchs of Greece, encouraged and imposed Western cultural models, seeking to marginalize the Oriental element and anything that connected Greece of that period with patterns deemed unacceptable by the society of European nations. This process of modernization and Europeanization appeared to hold many promises for the country.

European influence on Greek theatre predominated for many years. This was due, on the one hand, to the personal interest of King George I in establishing a modernized Greek theatre and, on the other, to the fact that many theatre practitioners had received a European—indeed predominantly German—education, such as Vernardakis, G. Mistriotis, Kostas Christomanos, Thomas Oikonomou, and later Fotos Politis, who was influenced by Max Reinhardt. The impact of German intellectual and theatrical training on Greek theatre directors remained evident in twentieth-century productions as well:

> The only fully developed interpretative approach—indeed, school—of ancient tragedy in our country is that of the National Theatre (to which I also attribute the decisive contribution of Rondiris). Regardless of its German roots, it created its own yet complete code of stage conduct, visual aesthetics, and acting technique. (Michailidis, 1988, p. 510)

The revival of tragedy thus appeared inextricably linked to a modernizing ambition among Greek intellectuals, who sought by every means to reject associations with elements of Greek popular culture. Nevertheless, this tendency toward Europeanization encountered opposition, which naturally emerged from scholars attempting to promote a more Hellenocentric orientation in both theatre and music. Seeking to advance his views on the presentation of ancient Greek drama, the University of Athens professor Georgios Mistriotis founded, on 10 February 1895, the Society for the Teaching of Ancient Drama (Ἑταιρεία ὑπὲρ τῆς Διδασκαλίας Ἀρχαίων Δραμάτων), serving as its president alongside various distinguished academics, politicians, and intellectuals of the period. Its aim was the regeneration of national life through the promotion of modern Greek culture within the civilized world. Writing in the newspaper *Proia* (25 March 1899), he stated: "Through the teaching of ancient dramas we may both elevate national

life and demonstrate to the civilized world the lofty sphere through which the education of the descendants of the tragedians advances along its long course."

The Society's first activity was the staging of Antigone on 27 March 1896, within the framework of the celebrations of the first Olympic Games. This was an Antigone performed in the ancient language and incorporating The

The Society's first activity was the staging of Antigone on 27 March 1896, within the framework of the celebrations of the first Olympic Games. This was an Antigone performed in the ancient language and incorporating all the characteristics that G. Mistriotis sought to establish in his productions (Sideris, 1976, pp. 116–125). As for the musical component (melos) of the performance, it was undertaken by the composer and church cantor Ioannis Sakellaridis (1853-1938), who also appeared as leader of the chorus. The remaining performers, as was customary in productions of the Society for the Teaching of Ancient Drama, were students.The newspaper *Proia*, which had been invited to attend rehearsals, commented in highly laudatory terms on the overall production and particularly on the musical setting:

> Above all, the audience was astonished by Mr. Sakellaridis' musical composition, which shall remain a national possession. The spectators, applauding repeatedly, demonstrated their appreciation of the initiative undertaken by those responsible Above all, the audience was astonished by Mr. Sakellaridis' musical composition, which shall remain a national possession. The spectators, applauding repeatedly, demonstrated their appreciation of the initiative undertaken by those responsible for the teaching of Antigone. (*Proia*, 4 March 1896).

Following the premiere (27 March 1896), the reactions of the Athenian press were largely favorable, although dissenting voices also emerged, characterizing the production as a "parody." The newspaper *Asty* (28 March 1896) dismissed the performance with vehement disapproval: Sakellaridis' musical setting was deemed "fit for whistling," Mistriotis' teaching was said to warrant the revocation of his right to teach at the Greek University, and the Minister of Education was urged to prohibit the "monstrous" Antigone:

> A more dreadful performance of the masterpiece has never taken place. Antigone was transformed into a pitiable, irreverent, horrific, and monstrous parody. The actors were unworthy of mention. The music fit only for whistling, and Mr. Mistriotis fit for dismissal from the University. Fortunately, there were no… foreigners present. Yet why does the Minister of Education not forbid such monstrous parodies? (*Asty*, 28 March 1896).

Mistriotis' productions generally provoked the press into extreme characterizations; however, the criticism directed at the musical setting composed by Sakellaridis was closely connected to the fact that Mendelssohn's music had already established a fixed aesthetic model for performances of Antigone. Sakellaridis' composition, grounded in traditional and Byzantine modal systems, made the production appear as a "provincial" approach lacking the perceived "European" refinement (Mavroleon, 2003, pp. 76–82). Mendelssohn's work had by then become as "classical" as Sophocles' drama itself. Mistriotis' decision to employ Sakellaridis' composition may have caused shock and may even have been regarded as an act of "irreverence"; nevertheless, this musical approach proved significant insofar as it underscored historical continuities and cultural connections within Greek civilization.

Ioannis Sakellaridis, however, was an important musician who actively promoted Greek musical tradition and worked passionately toward its development. In November 1903, he presented two concerts of Greek folk music in Munich together with his three children—also musicians—Theophrastos (later regarded as the father of Greek operetta), Aristoxenos, and Antigone. Laudatory press reports inform us that in his lectures he referred to the richness of folk music and song, in which remnants of ancient music were preserved, elements that "must be purified so as to reveal the perfect beauty of ancient art." At the conclusion of his lectures, he performed folk songs and, with his remarkable voice, imitated the nightingale, the scops owl, and the shepherd's flute (Romanou, 1995, p. 176, n. 16). Sakellaridis was also a "heretical" reformer of Byzantine music, introducing four-part harmony. His controversial stance even reached the Holy Synod. In an 1886 document sent by the Archbishop of Athens Prokopios, the removal of Sakellaridis from his position as cantor at the church of Hagia Eirene—then the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens—was requested on account of his introduction of the "degenerate and foreign four-part harmony into our ecclesiastical music." (Prokopios of Athens, 1886; Psaltologion Forums, n.d.)

In the musical setting of Antigone, Sakellaridis pursued a lyrical idiom, thereby establishing a Hellenocentric stylistic orientation aligned with Mistriotis' broader pedagogical principles. On 4 November 1895, within the framework of the Society's preparations and rehearsals for Antigone, a musical evening was organized in a hall of the University, during which Sakellaridis presented the choral odes accompanied by two auloi rather than by an orchestra, "so that the song might not be obscured and the words not stifled" (Sakellaridis, 1907, p. 25). This choice followed ancient Greek practice, according to which, in the performances of drama in antiquity, the choral songs were accompanied by an auletes (aulos-player).

The event was attended by Prime Minister Theodoros Deligiannis, government ministers, and various foreign guests, among them Benjamin Ide Wheeler, deputy director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. In correspondence with Eugenios Rizos Rangavis, Wheeler emphasized the dimension of Greekness that dominated Sakellaridis' music. In a published letter, Wheeler's emphatic manner of approaching the issue is also evident, particularly where he asserts that any alternative treatment of the choral odes would constitute a "distortion":

> Dear Mr. Rangavis,
> I greatly admired the music composed by Mr. Sakellaridis for the choral sections of Antigone. I consider this music highly appropriate to the spirit of the various choral songs and, in itself, most interesting and excellent. Yet what impressed me most—and what, in my opinion, is of greatest importance in this matter—is the fact that this music remains faithful to the ancient rhythm. Any attempt to render the ancient choruses in any other manner would, in my view, be not merely superfluous but altogether unjustifiable and an arbitrary distortion… I am especially pleased that for the performance of Antigone we shall have music written by a Greek and in full continuity with the ancient traditions of Greek music, as these have been preserved in sacred music.
> Your most sincere friend,
> Benjamin I. Wheeler (Sakellaridis, 1907, p. 25)

In 1900 (20 April), Sophocles' Antigone was staged once again, though part of the press reacted more negatively than it had to the first performance of 1896. The newspaper Hestia (30 April 1900) reported that Sakellaridis had employed kontakia and folk melodies, including the folk song Kato stou valtou, set in the rhythm of the tsamiko, to accompany the "choral ode of incomparable beauty, 'Polyonymos'" (Sideris, 1976, p. 164), namely the fifth stasimon of Antigone. In the same issue of Hestia, a feuilleton entitled "Sophocles the Man of the Marshes" (O Sophoklis Valtinos) was published. Describing Sakellaridis' stage presence, it noted that, as leader of the chorus, he kept time with his hand and foot, in the manner customary among church cantors. The same newspaper ironically remarked that Sakellaridis' music contained elements reminiscent of amanedes as well as contemporary operettas.

Sakellaridis' musical scores, together with many texts concerning his work on Sophocles' Antigone, were published in 1907 in his volume *Tyrtaios — or a Musical Book Containing New Educational, Orchestral, and Gymnastic Songs, as well as*

the Choruses of Sophocles' Electra and Antigone (Athens, 1907). The reproduction of Sakellaridis' musical setting reveals the hostility and exaggerations of the press of the period, since his search for the lost ancient melos focused on the study of Greek folk tradition and Byzantine music—an approach that his own era was evidently not yet prepared to accept as a legitimate form of cultural mediation:

> We presented to them [referring to a gathering of distinguished foreign and Greek intellectuals] all the testimonies of the ancient sources, all our studies concerning Byzantine music, which was preserved within the sanctuary of the Church. We further explained that no small contribution to our work had also been the knowledge of folk melodies, which, like distant echoes of the Odes of Pindar and Simonides, still resound in the inaccessible groves of Olympus, Helicon, and Parnassus—the ancient abodes of the Muses and the Graces. (Sakellaridis, 1907, p. 192).

Sakellaridis' musical setting (melos) was presented in the Antigone productions of 1896 (27 March), 1900 (20 April), and 1905 (28 March–10 April) at the Panathenaic Stadium (Kallimarmaro). The last performance to feature Sakellaridis' melos, however, took place in 1965, in a production of Antigone staged in New York by the company of Aliki and Paul Nord in collaboration with the Group of Ancient Drama, using a translation by Paul Nord (Mavroleon, 2003, p. 175).

The first musical composition to oppose the dominance of European symphonic music in nineteenth-century Greek stagings of Antigone thus emerged from the proposal of an innovative church cantor. A crucial aspect of Sakellaridis' musical intervention lies in his attempt to forge a connection between ancient and modern Greece by incorporating elements of Byzantine and folk music, thereby articulating a sense of historical continuity. The project of "Greekness" in the revival of ancient Greek drama found continuators in the work of later directors, who integrated elements of Greek popular culture not only into the musical setting but also into choreography, costume, and the broader aesthetic framework of theatrical productions. The reception of ancient Greek drama may therefore be understood through the diachronic prism of a "Greekness" conscious of its dual constitution, both Western and Eastern:

> Whether we like it or not, we are made of the past, since a significant part of what has been has never entirely passed away, but always remains alive, always present within us. (Kiourtsakis, 1989, pp. 28–29)

Mistriotis, although a fervent defender of the ancient language and himself shaped by German education, did not choose for his Antigone the well-established

and widely accepted musical composition of Mendelssohn, but instead selected the music of Sakellaridis. Convinced that antiquity survived through Byzantine and folk music—which at that time still constituted living popular traditions, though regarded as undesirable by a large segment of enlightened Greeks—he challenged prevailing cultural hierarchies. For many intellectuals of the period, the "barbaric" or "Oriental" element was associated with a traumatic past linked to the years of Ottoman rule.

The intense focus on antiquity and on the high cultural legacy it bequeathed often obscured—and in many cases negated—the historical significance of the periods that followed it. It is characteristic that in times of profound sociopolitical crisis, peoples seek their roots, a tendency frequently connected to their particular geopolitical position. Contemporary Greek culture increasingly reflects the understanding that a rigid and exclusive approach to the ancient past distorts the present and struggles to achieve the transcendences necessary for shaping the future. The development of the cultural identity of modern Hellenism thus constitutes a crucial field of cultural management, one that inevitably compels us to study the past as the greatest challenge—and opportunity—for creative engagement.



Antigone by Mistriotis, music Sakellaridis

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RECONFIGURING OEDIPUS: COMPARATIVE RECEPTION AND DRAMATURGY IN THE WORK OF SERGIO BLANCO AND ROBERT ICKE

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Abstract: This article offers a comparative dramaturgical analysis of Sergio Blanco's *Tebas Land* (2012) and Robert Icke's *Oedipus* (2018), examining how contemporary theatre reactivates and reconfigures the Oedipus myth. Moving beyond traditional adaptation, both works treat the myth as a framework to interrogate truth, crime, responsibility, and identity, while exploring the conditions of their representation across private and public domains. Grounded in reception studies, hypertextual theory, and postdramatic aesthetics, the study contrasts two distinct dramaturgical trajectories. Blanco's *Tebas Land* employs a metatheatrical, deconstructive approach that frame patricide not as a fate born of tragic ignorance, but as an event rooted in familial trauma. Unfolding through fragmented, self-reflexive storytelling and role-doubling, Blanco stages the impossibility of stabilizing a single truth, positioning truth as an ongoing process of theatrical construction and narration. In contrast, Icke's *Oedipus* retains the structural arc and characters of the Sophoclean model, relocating the tragedy to a contemporary, media-saturated political election headquarters. Operating within the Aristotelian unities of time and place, Icke transforms tragic recognition into a high-stakes event of public exposure, surveillance, and political fallout, where private trauma interpenetrates the public sphere. Ultimately, the comparison highlights two divergent modes of contemporary tragic reception: one grounded in postdramatic self-reflexivity and the opacity of personal narration, and the other in the reactivation of classical dramatic form within a modern framework of public visibility and media mediation.

Keywords: The Oedipal myth, comparative reading, Sergio Blanco, *Tebas Land* (2012), Robert Icke, *Oedipus* (2018), Gérard Genette's hypertextuality, postdramatic theatre theory (Lehmann, Fischer-Lichte), trauma theory.

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Introduction

The Oedipus myth has long functioned as a paradigmatic hypertextual structure, continually reactivated across different historical periods through various dramatic reconfigurations. What distinguishes contemporary dramaturgy, however, is not a departure from the practice of adaptation itself, but a shift in how adaptation becomes an object of dramaturgical inquiry. The myth no longer operates merely as a narrative substratum; rather, it is subjected to scrutiny, deconstructed, and reframed within the work itself (Hardwick and Stray, 2008, p. 4). This shift concerns not only the content of the narrative but also its conditions of production, rendering visible the mechanisms of representation and the processes through which tragic experience is constructed. Within this framework, the present article

offers a comparative reading of *Tebas Land* (2012) by the Uruguayan playwright Sergio Blanco and *Oedipus* (2018) by the British director Robert Icke, approaching them as two distinct yet interrelated rewritings of the Oedipus myth. In both works, the myth serves as a means of exploring issues such as truth, crime, responsibility, and identity, as well as the conditions of their representation, while foregrounding their staging across both private and public domains.

Blanco's play is structured as a metatheatrical investigation into the possibility of representing patricide, as well as an ethical and interpretive inquiry into the crime itself. The act is not presented as the result of tragic ignorance –as in the Oedipus myth– but as an event inscribed within a network of familial violence, trauma, and biographical experience, reconstructed through processes of narration and dramaturgical shaping aimed at its theatrical representation. By contrast, Icke relocates the myth within a contemporary political and media-saturated environment, in which tragedy is constituted as both political and familial. The investigation of the past unfolds under conditions of public visibility, transforming a private event into a matter of public exposure and collective reception. In this context, revelation concerns not only the tragic subject but also reshapes public perception, power relations, and the broader socio-political framework.

The analysis adopts a comparative approach that combines dramaturgical analysis with theoretical tools drawn from reception studies and contemporary theatre theory, with the aim of examining how the Oedipus myth is activated and reconfigured within contemporary socio-historical and ideological contexts.

Sergio Blanco, *Tebas Land*

The play is structured around the encounter between a writer and a young patricide, Martin, within a prison setting, in order to create a play about the crime. This encounter, which is repeated under surveillance and within a clearly defined setting, establishes a double –or rather triple structure: the narration of the crime by the perpetrator himself, the writer's search for the conditions of its representation, and an actor's attempt to embody Martin on stage. This metatheatrical condition is foregrounded through the work's sustained focus on the process of theatrical construction, as the play does not merely present the crime but exposes the conditions under which it can be represented. As the writer figure in the play suggests, "para mí esa distancia es la que hace justamente que el arte siempre sea mejor que la realidad"[1] (Blanco, 2017, p. 67),

1 The Spanish quotation reads: "para mí esa distancia es la que hace justamente que el arte siempre sea mejor que la realidad" (Blanco, 2017, p. 67). Translation: "for me, it is precisely this distance that makes art always better than reality." All translations from Spanish are the author's own.

highlighting the constitutive distance between lived experience and its theatrical representation. In this respect, the dramaturgy aligns with broader tendencies of postdramatic theatre, where emphasis shifts from representation to the processes that produce it (Lehmann, 2006, p. 104). In line with this perspective, both the writer-character and the actor function as agents of interpretive mediation: the former seeks to understand and reconstruct the event by shaping a dramaturgically coherent version of it, while the latter is tasked with translating it into performance through the embodiment of the role, thereby foregrounding the performative dimension of meaning-making (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 147–150).

The structure of the play, organized into four parts and an "overtime," – modeled on a basketball game– does not operate merely as an external framework, but shapes a narrative that does not unfold linearly. The "overtime" serves as a moment of return and re-examination of what has already been said, suggesting that the narrative does not arrive at a final, stabilized version but remains open and subject to revision. The story thus appears not as a unified whole but as a construction in process, reflecting a dramaturgy of repetition and reconfiguration rather than linear resolution. The dramatic material of the crime is articulated through Martin's narratives, as he recalls his childhood and the violence both he and his mother suffered at the hands of his father. Patricide is not presented as the result of ignorance, but as an act embedded in a history of familial abuse and traumatic experience, shifting the perception of the crime from the realm of fate toward an understanding of the conditions that produced it. This approach resonates with trauma theory, which understands narrative not as a transparent vehicle of truth but as a fragmented and mediated attempt to articulate experience (Caruth, 1996, pp. 11–24).

Martin's account does not negate the ethical weight of the act, but rather complicates it, as the crime becomes simultaneously an object of understanding and of judgment. Truth, therefore, does not pre-exist as a stable given, but emerges through narration and reworking, shaped by the interaction of different voices and interpretations. As the writer figure in the play suggests, "Lo que dice es que finalmente todos matamos un poco a nuestro padre sin saberlo"[2] (Blanco, 2017, p. 86), a formulation that displaces patricide from a singular act to a more diffuse and interpretive condition. The play further emphasizes this instability by evoking a space "en donde las cosas nunca son muy claras… una Tebas un tanto

2 The Spanish quotation reads: "Lo que dice es que finalmente todos matamos un poco a nuestro padre sin saberlo" (Blanco, 2017, p. 86). Translation: "what he ultimately suggests is that we all, in a way, kill our father without knowing it." The translation is the author's own.

ambigua, un poco confusa y oscura"[3] (Blanco, 2017, p. 86), thereby foregrounding the opacity and indeterminacy that characterize both the crime and its narration. This emphasis on narratability is further reinforced in Blanco's own reflections on his dramaturgical practice. As argued in an interview, his work operates through fragmentation, offering the spectator a series of narrative "puzzle pieces" that may never fully cohere into a stable account (Blanco, quoted in Vicente, 2018). In this sense, the play does not aim at reconstructing a definitive truth but at staging the very impossibility of its stabilization, inviting the spectator to participate in the production of meaning.

Robert Icke, *Oedipus*

While *Tebas Land* focuses on the processes of narrating and representing the crime, Icke's *Oedipus* shifts the emphasis to the conditions of its public disclosure, situating the Oedipal myth within a contemporary political environment shaped by media mediation. In this respect, the play exemplifies a mode of reception in which ancient tragedy is reconfigured within a contemporary political and media environment, where meaning is inseparable from processes of public exposure and mediation, situating Icke's work within a broader tradition of modern reworkings of the Oedipus myth across diverse theatrical contexts (Lauriola, 2017, pp. 271–290). The play is set in an election headquarters on the night of the protagonist's anticipated electoral victory, where the exploration of his past leads to the revelation of patricide and incest, largely retaining the basic dramaturgical structure and dramatic figures of the Sophoclean model. This political framework is closely intertwined with the familial one, which does not remain private but is exposed within the public sphere through the presence of voters, media coverage, and continuous visual surveillance, rendering the private visible and immediately legible. This blurring of boundaries resonates with broader analyses of the public sphere as a space in which personal narratives become subject to collective scrutiny and political significance (Arendt, 1958, pp. 50–58).

Icke retains the key figures of the myth while also activating figures from the Theban cycle, such as Oedipus's children –Antigone, Polynices, and Eteocles– who function as bearers of the consequences of the past. In doing so, the tragedy is brought into the present, and the family emerges as a site of fissures and renegotiation of power. At the same time, the dramaturgy incorporates contemporary dimensions of identity that reshape the relationships between the

3 The Spanish quotation reads: "en donde las cosas nunca son muy claras… una Tebas un tanto ambigua, un poco confusa y oscura" (Blanco, 2017, p. 86). Translation: "a place where things are never entirely clear… a somewhat ambiguous Thebes, confused and obscure." The translation is the author's own.

figures. In line with Genette's notion of hypertextuality, such transformations do not simply reproduce a prior text but reconfigure it through processes of selection, displacement, and reinterpretation (Genette, 1997, pp. 7–8). Moreover, the play recasts the myth within a framework that engages with contemporary concerns surrounding violence, patriarchy, and the exploitation of minors. Laius's relationship with the young Jocasta –whom he impregnates at a very early age– is presented as an abuse of power. In contrast to the Sophoclean version, where the abandonment of the infant is dictated by an oracle, here it emerges as the result of Laius's conscious choices, aimed at concealing their consequences and protecting his public image. This shift foregrounds human agency over divine causality, aligning the tragedy with modern conceptions of responsibility.

Within this context, the revelation of patricide –linked to an apparently accidental incident involving the young Oedipus– extends beyond the protagonist's personal identity and becomes a matter of collective negotiation and public contestation with immediate consequences for both his public standing and political position. Media mediation intensifies this process, transforming revelation into both an act of knowledge and an event of public exposure, a dimension that Icke has linked to his broader approach to classical adaptation to classical adaptation, comparing it to the restoration of a painting aimed at recovering its original impact within a contemporary context (Barone, 2025). The dramaturgy is structured around a process of exploration that retains the core mechanism of tragic recognition, reconfigured within an environment of constant surveillance and information management. The presence of the crowd and the continuous flow of information reshape the function of the collective recipient of tragedy, as the Chorus of the Sophoclean model (Hall, 2004, p. 30) re-emerges here not as a unified lyrical voice but as a reconfigured and mediated collectivity. Tragedy, therefore, does not arise from ignorance of a predetermined fate, but from the consequences of choices that seek to conceal the past–choices that are ultimately exposed to the light of a public sphere that functions both as a space of revelation and as a mechanism of judgment. In this sense, Icke's adaptation remains structurally close to the Sophoclean play while simultaneously recontextualizing its dynamics within a contemporary media ecology.

Contemporary Dramaturgical Forms and Strategies

The divergence between the two plays becomes particularly evident at the level of the dramaturgical forms they employ. Blanco's *Tebas Land* is constructed as a distinctly metatheatrical and experimental endeavor, making use of theatre-within-the-theatre, role-switching, and the explicit exposure of theatrical construction.

In this respect, the play aligns with broader tendencies in contemporary theatre that foreground reflexivity and challenge the boundaries between representation and performance (Lehmann, 2006, p. 141). The decision to have the same actor play both the imprisoned patricide and the actor who represents him underscores the fluidity of identity and intensifies the ambiguity between the real and the represented. At the same time, the extensive use of narrative monologues and the shift toward a confessional mode of storytelling transform the stage into a space of narration, where drama is interwoven with testimony and interpretation. Such strategies resonate with the performative reconfiguration of theatrical presence through which meaning emerges from the interaction between actor, text, and spectator (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 38–40). Rather than presenting a unified dramatic action, Blanco's dramaturgy unfolds as a layered, self-reflexive process that continually interrogates its own means of representation. In line with postdramatic aesthetics, the emphasis is placed not on the coherence of plot but on the exposure of the mechanisms through which theatrical meaning is produced. As a result, the stage becomes less a site of mimetic representation and more a space of critical reflection, where the act of staging itself becomes the primary object of inquiry.

By contrast, Icke's *Oedipus*, while incorporating contemporary staging practices, is organized around a unified dramaturgical structure that reactivates key elements of classical tragedy. The action unfolds within a single space –an election headquarters– and within a dramatic time that coincides with the duration of the performance itself. A visible onstage countdown clock, marking the time remaining until the announcement of the election results, aligns stage time with real time, thereby intensifying the sense of immediacy and inevitability. In this way, the play reactivates the Aristotelian unities of time and place in a contemporary form, while maintaining unity of action through its sustained focus on the investigation of the crime. Within this framework, Icke also mobilizes the device of tragic irony: the audience's prior knowledge of the myth is taken for granted, while the stage action unfolds as a gradual movement toward an already determined revelation. This irony is further intensified by the public exposure of the event, as the process of revelation takes place under the gaze of a collective body. The presence of the crowd, the cameras, and the continuous connection to the outside world function as a contemporary reconfiguration of the Chorus, structured by the logic of the media age. This collective body does not speak through lyrical discourse, but through public exposure, political communication, and surveillance, transforming the stage into a space that is at once one of action and of observation.

This contrast reveals two distinct dramaturgical trajectories: on the one hand, a metatheatrical and deconstructive mode of writing, as in Blanco's work,

which reflects on the very conditions of representation; on the other, a renewed dramatic composition, as in Icke's work, which reactivates the form of tragedy within a contemporary framework of public visibility and media mediation. The two plays thus differ not only in their dramaturgical construction, but also in the ways they redefine the relationship between dramaturgical form and the constitution of the tragic experience.

Dramatis Personae and Transformations of the Oedipal Framework

The comparative reading of the two plays is particularly illuminating at the level of dramatis personae, where the Oedipal myth is not simply transferred but redistributed into new forms and relationships. In this sense, the myth operates not as a fixed narrative model but as a structure that enables the redistribution of roles and functions, rather than their direct reproduction, a process that can be understood through Genette's notion of hypertextual transformation (Genette, 1997, pp. 1–7). In *Tebas Land*, the identity of "Oedipus" does not reside in a single character but is distributed between Martin and the writer, who together form a dual framework for reactivating the myth within a metatheatrical structure. Martin, as a patricide, bears the weight of the act, which is no longer framed within the logic of ignorance but within a context of familial violence and trauma. The writer, while not the agent of the act, becomes implicated through his desire to narrate and represent it, shifting the Oedipal axis from the deed itself to the inquiry surrounding it. Oedipus thus ceases to function as a stable dramatic character and instead emerges as a dramaturgical position occupied by different subjects, reflecting the fluidity of identity in contemporary dramaturgy.

This shift extends to family relationships as well. Martin's relationship with his mother, marked by care and protection, moves away from the framework of forbidden desire without entirely negating its darker dimension. At the same time, the latent erotic tension between Martin and the writer –primarily from the former's side– introduces a dimension of desire that repositions the myth within contemporary configurations of identity and sexuality beyond heteronormative frameworks. Within this context, the reference to Martin's past–specifically his involvement in sex work as a child–reconfigures sexuality not as a taboo desire, as in the Oedipal myth, but as an experience shaped by violence and exploitation. The body thus appears less as the site of a fatal error and more as an already wounded terrain upon which relations of power and desire are inscribed, foregrounding the shift from mythic causality to lived experience. In this way, the Oedipal framework is transformed from a structure grounded in ignorance into one shaped by traumatic experience, redefining the relationship between

sexuality and the tragic condition. The play is structured around a very limited number of characters, forming a closed, almost self-contained relational system in which the tragic experience unfolds through an intense focus on the same event and its continual renegotiation.

In Icke's *Oedipus*, by contrast, the relationship to the Sophoclean model (Sophocles, 1994) is more directly maintained at the level of character, with figures retaining their names and broadly analogous dramaturgical functions while being simultaneously reconfigured and extended. Alongside Oedipus and Jocasta, figures such as Tiresias and Creon reappear, preserving their core roles: Tiresias as the bearer of a contemporary form of prophetic knowledge, and Creon as the object of suspicion and political rivalry. At the same time, the inclusion of Merope –absent onstage in Sophocles– becomes dramaturgically pivotal, actively contributing to the process of revelation. These relationships are reframed in ways that foreground sexuality, the body, and power. Jocasta is portrayed as an intensely erotic and passionate figure, deeply attached to Oedipus, yet also marked by trauma and the burden of the past. Her supportive stance coexists with her attempt to halt the investigation as the magnitude of the revelation begins to emerge, a dynamic that echoes, while also reconfiguring, the Sophoclean model. Furthermore, the dramaturgical foregrounding of the children –Antigone, Polynices, and Eteocles, who remain offstage in the Sophoclean model– shifts the weight of the tragedy onto the next generation, bringing into focus its intergenerational dimension. Their relationships are shaped by contemporary concerns surrounding identity: Polynices is presented as homosexual, and although Oedipus explicitly affirms his acceptance, the absence of his partner from a crucial family moment suggests underlying tensions and the limits of that acceptance. The family thus emerges as a site where difference is negotiated and where inclusion remains unstable and contingent. In this way, Icke's characters move away from the logic of fate toward one of public exposure, where identity and responsibility are constituted under the gaze of others.

This divergence is also evident at the level of stage objects, which are directly linked to the tragic act itself. In *Tebas Land*, the patricide is carried out with a fork–a mundane domestic object transformed into an instrument of extreme violence, embedding the crime within the very fabric of the domestic sphere. In *Oedipus*, by contrast, self-blinding is performed using Jocasta's high heels, transforming an object associated with the body and public image into a tool of self-destruction. Thus, while violence in Blanco appears internalized and experiential, in Icke it becomes physically exposed and immediately visible, closely tied to the dynamics of visibility and public exposure. Through these shifts, the two works do not simply reproduce figures of classical tragedy but reconfigure the

relations between them, transforming the Oedipal myth into a site for exploring identity, desire, and the structure of the family. Tragedy no longer rests solely on the act of patricide but also on the forms of relation it brings into view, both at the level of the *oikos* and in the constitution of contemporary subjectivity.

Truth, Crime, and Public Exposure

The divergence between the two works is particularly clear in the ways truth is constructed, crime is understood, forms of responsibility and punishment are articulated, and the conditions of their public exposure are established. In *Tebas Land*, truth does not appear as a pre-existing fact to be discovered but as a product of narration and theatrical construction. The crime is known from the outset, and the dramaturgy does not aim at its revelation but at its elaboration through successive narrations, reenactments, and performative trials. The tension thus shifts from "what happened" to "how it can be told" and "whether it can be understood." Representation does not function as the reproduction of a stable reality but as an open process of meaning-making, in which the event remains unstable and is continuously reformulated, a process that has been described as an "authentic fiction" in Blanco's dramaturgy (Misemer, 2023, pp. 496–518). In this respect, the play aligns with broader understandings of truth as discursively produced rather than given, emerging through processes of narration and mediation rather than as an objective fact, in line with Foucauldian approaches to the production of truth (Foucault, 1980, pp. 109–133).

This instability is further intensified by Martin's biographical material, particularly his experience of childhood sexual exploitation, which does not function as explanatory evidence but rather as a factor that further destabilizes the narrative, rendering truth open to multiple and often conflicting interpretations. Patricide is not presented as the result of tragic ignorance or fatal error, but as an act embedded in a history of violence and traumatic experience. Martin's account does not seek to establish an objective version of events but to explore the conditions that render the crime intelligible, aligning with trauma theory, which understands such narratives as resisting closure and coherence and instead emerging as fragmented attempts to articulate experiences that exceed straightforward representation (Caruth, 1996).

The focus thus shifts from the attribution of guilt to the understanding of its formation, without diminishing the ethical weight of the act. Punishment, however, in Blanco's work has already taken place and assumes a distinctly institutional form: Martin, having taken responsibility for his actions – by calling the police and confessing the crime – is imprisoned and serving a life sentence.

The crime thus appears as a closed event, situated within a clearly defined legal framework. The dramaturgy leads not to revelation but to retrospective interpretive engagement. Tragic force lies not in the act itself but in the impossibility of fully comprehending it and in the repeated attempt to assign meaning to it through narration. Trauma, in this context, does not emerge as a transgenerational condition but as a lived and accumulated experience of violence, reactivated each time through the act of recounting.

In Icke's *Oedipus*, by contrast, truth is articulated as a process of gradual revelation unfolding under conditions of constant public exposure. Although the mythic framework is already known, the dramaturgy is structured around the activation of knowledge through the accumulation and cross-examination of information. Revelation is not merely a cognitive process but a public event, asserting itself as indisputable and producing immediate political and personal consequences. Tension lies not in uncertainty about the outcome but in the moment of full exposure of what is already inscribed. Here, patricide activates questions of responsibility that extend beyond the individual to the political and collective sphere. The revelation of the crime leads not only to personal collapse but produces immediate consequences, transforming responsibility into a matter of public concern. Punishment does not take the form of institutional enforcement but unfolds as the disintegration of the *oikos* and of the subject's public standing: Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus's self-blinding, and the breakdown of familial cohesion constitute forms of punishment arising from the characters' own actions and choices. In this sense, tragedy exceeds the figure of Oedipus, extending into the familial and social environment, particularly through the children, who become bearers of the consequences of the past. This dimension resonates with the ancient tragic conception according to which guilt does not pertain solely to the individual but is embedded within the structure of the oikos. As Vernant and Vidal-Naquet argue, tragedy destabilizes the boundary between oikos and polis, revealing how the private sphere is always already implicated in the public domain (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990, pp. 313–6). Such a conception is clearly visible in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, where the consequences of the act extend beyond the individual. Icke reactivates this structure in contemporary terms, relocating tragic consequence within both the family and the public sphere.

By contrast, in *Tebas Land*, trauma remains tied to individual experience and to the possibility –or impossibility– of narrating it, whereas in *Oedipus* it extends beyond the subject of the act, inscribing itself in the relations of others and becoming an active force within the collective field. This divergence is closely linked to the reconfiguration of the relationship between *oikos* and *polis*. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the search for truth is from the outset a political act: the private crime concerns the

city as a whole, and its recognition leads to a form of restoration of order. In *Tebas Land*, however, this relationship does not take the form of a direct transition from the private to the public, but of mediation. The crime is not immediately exposed to a collective body but is reworked within a controlled theatrical framework, where performance functions as a mechanism for the reconfiguration of experience. The stage thus operates not merely as a space of presentation but as a site in which the private is reconstructed through narration, rehearsal, and repetition, without becoming the immediate object of public judgment.

Within this framework, the central figure's identity as a writer acquires particular significance, as the investigation of the crime unfolds through an artistic and self-reflexive discourse addressed to a limited, indirectly present audience. The stage therefore functions less as a space of direct public exposure and more as a site for the mediated processing of experience through writing and performance. In Icke's *Oedipus*, by contrast, the distinction between private and public ceases to function as a stable boundary and is transformed into a condition of constant interpenetration. The play is situated within a political environment in formation, where power is not yet secured but contested, and where the protagonist's personal past becomes visible within a network of surveillance, mediation, and collective reception. Revelation does not simply transfer the private into the public; rather, it demonstrates that the private is constituted from the outset under the gaze of the public, as something always liable to exposure and capable of reshaping relations of power.

This shift is also reflected in the position of the tragic subject. In Icke, the central figure is a politician whose discourse operates within a field of direct public address, where the management of the past is inseparable from the management of image and information before a mass audience. In contrast to the reflective and self-referential discourse of the writer in *Tebas Land*, discourse here assumes a distinctly public and media-mediated character, intensifying the diffusion of the private into the collective sphere. Despite these differences, in both plays truth moves away from the notion of immediate and transparent access to the real. In Blanco, emphasis is placed on the theatricality of construction and the impossibility of definitive stabilization; in Icke, on the conditions of public appearance and the cost it entails. Thus, while in *Tebas Land* truth emerges as an open and iterative process of representation and the crime as an object of understanding through narration, in *Oedipus* truth becomes an event of public force, producing immediate consequences and activating mechanisms of exposure, judgment, and reconfiguration of power. The two works therefore reveal not only different dramaturgical configurations of truth but also distinct regimes through which responsibility, punishment, and the tragic experience are constituted in a contemporary media-saturated world.

Conclusion

The comparative reading of *Tebas Land* by Sergio Blanco and *Oedipus* by Robert Icke reveals the Oedipal myth not as a fixed structure but as a field in which the tragic experience is redefined in contemporary theatre. Although both works draw on the same mythic substratum, they activate it in markedly different ways, reflecting broader shifts in how theatre engages with questions of truth, crime, responsibility, identity, and power. In *Tebas Land*, tragedy is displaced onto the processes of narration and theatrical construction, where truth remains open, ambiguous, and continuously renegotiated. By contrast, in Icke's *Oedipus*, emphasis falls on the public dimension of revelation and its consequences, as truth emerges as an event that affects both the individual and the collective body. This contrast brings into focus two distinct configurations of tragic experience: one grounded in the impossibility of definitive understanding, the other in the exposure and management of knowledge within the public sphere.

In light of Genette's theory of hypertextuality, the relationship of the two works to the Sophoclean model is not symmetrical. In Blanco's case, the reference to the Oedipal myth remains indirect and deconstructive, as the play does not reproduce the structure or dramatis personae of ancient tragedy but draws on the core motif of patricide foregrounding instead the processes of narration and representation. By contrast, Icke undertakes a more direct dramaturgical reactivation of the Sophoclean play, preserving its fundamental structure while recontextualizing it within a contemporary political and media environment. Icke's adaptation can also be situated within a broader tradition of modern reworkings of the Oedipus myth, which have reinterpreted its structures across different historical and theatrical contexts. This divergence is also reflected in different modes of reception. *Tebas Land* retains a degree of interpretive autonomy, allowing for multiple readings even in the absence of explicit reference to the Oedipal substratum, whereas *Oedipus* derives much of its dramaturgical force from the continuous activation of its relationship to the ancient model. The comparison ultimately highlights not only different approaches to rewriting the myth but also different ways of constituting the tragic experience itself: from an open, reflexive process of understanding and representing the crime to a framework in which truth becomes a public event with immediate consequences for social relations, structures of power, and collective perception within a contemporary media environment defined by constant visibility and surveillance.

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ENTRE MOLIÈRE ET LA TRADITION COMIQUE: *LA FILLE D'APERGIS* DE PANAYOTIS ZANOS (1868)

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Abstract: This article presents a dramaturgical study of *La Fille d'Apergis (Η κόρη του Απέργη)*, an early comedy by Panayotis Zanos, written in 1868. Submitted that same year to the Voutsinaios poetry competition under the title *Le Prosélyte*, the play was rejected by the committee on account of its religious theme, which was deemed likely to fuel tensions between Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Zanos subsequently altered the title and its ending, notably introducing a reflection on education and the transmission of knowledge. This study examines the main influences shaping the comedy, in particular those of Molière, Aristophanes, and the comic tradition, notably the *Commedia dell'arte*. It analyses the parallels between Zanos's characters and certain Molièresque types, as well as the use of quidproquos, travesties, plot twists and scenic and verbal *lazzi*. Particular attention is paid to the political and social dimensions of the work, which addresses proselytism, education, the issue of the Laurium, and electoral clientelism. Finally, the article highlights the play's strong theatricality, despite the absence of any known performance, and demonstrates how Zanos combines comic heritage, social satire and the ideals of the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment.

Keywords: Panayotis Zanos, *The Daughter of Apergis*, Molière, Greek drama, Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment, 19th century.

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Introduction

Ο Προσήλυτος ou *Η κόρη του Απέργη* [Le Prosélyte ou La Fille d'Apergis[1]] est une comédie de jeunesse de Panayotis Zanos, écrite en 1868 et publiée à Athènes par l'imprimerie de Nikitas Passaris (Zanos, 1868). Des exemplaires de la pièce sont aujourd'hui conservés dans la collection de livres de la bibliothèque Iakovateios, à Lixouri, en Céphalonie, à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Grèce et à la bibliothèque de l'Université Aristote de Thessalonique. Une reproduction photocopiée est également conservée dans les archives du Département d'Études Théâtrales de l'Université Nationale et Capodistrienne d'Athènes (NKUA), sur laquelle s'appuie la présente étude. Bien que des exemplaires de la comédie soient conservés dans différents fonds d'archives en Grèce, ce qui témoigne de sa diffusion et, peut-être, de sa popularité, aucune attention comparable n'a été accordée à son analyse dramaturgique. La comédie a été considérée comme une tentative maladroite par les chercheurs en études théâtrales (Chatzipantazis, 2003, p. 78), et demeure, de ce fait, très peu étudiée jusqu'à ce jour.

1 Les titres et les citations sont conservés dans leur langue originale et suivis de leur traduction française, réalisée par l'auteure.

Panayotis Zanos, dont nous ne possédons que peu d'informations biographiques, est né à Athènes en 1848 et a étudié le droit, dans le but de faire carrière dans la magistrature. Dès l'âge de vingt ans, il **se consacra** à l'écriture théâtrale et s'est principalement distingué dans le domaine de la comédie. Parmi ses comédies les plus connues figurent *Ανδρογυναικομαχία* [*La Guerre des sexes*], pour laquelle il s'est inspiré du modèle aristophanien; la pièce en un acte *Η ανεψιά του θείου της* [*La Nièce de son oncle]*, qui est la pièce la plus jouée sur la scène grecque du XIXe siècle; *Ερωτική απόπειρα* [*Tentative amoureuse]*; ainsi que *Δημάρχου εκλογή* [*L'Élection du maire*] et *Αλεπού* [*Le Renard*], deux pièces qui ont respectivement remporté le Concours dramatique Lassaneios en 1889 et en 1891 (Petrakou, 1999; Moullas, 1989).[2] Il s'est également consacré au *komeidyllio*,[3] au drame et à la tragédie, sans toutefois rencontrer le même succès.

Ο Προσήλυτος [Le Prosélyte] est la première comédie écrite par Zanos, en 1868, et fut soumise à l'évaluation du Concours poétique Voutsinaios la même année. Le titre complet de la pièce était initialement *Ο Προσήλυτος, κωμωδία εις πράξεις τρεις και εις ιαμβικόν τρίμετρον* [*Le Prosélyte, comédie en trois actes et en trimètres iambiques*], tandis que la seconde version, intitulée *Η κόρη του Απέργη* [*La Fille d'Apergis*], est celle qui nous est parvenue jusqu'à nous. La pièce compte quatre-vingts pages, est divisée en trois parties et comprend au total quinze scènes: la première partie compte trois scènes, la deuxième huit et la troisième quatre. L'alternance des scènes est déterminée par les entrées et les sorties des personnages.

L'intrigue

Les personnages de la pièce sont au nombre de sept : Avakoum, Petrakis, Apergis, Kiara,[4] la Fille—qui est baptisée Artemis—, Markos et un Porteur. L'action se déroule à Athènes. La pièce commence *in medias res*. Dans la première partie, l'exposition des événements nous est donnée dès la première scène à travers le dialogue entre Avakoum et Petrakis, qui se connaissent depuis longtemps. Avakoum est présenté comme un aventurier espagnol arrivé à Athènes seize ans auparavant, vêtu de haillons et cherchant un moyen de gagner de l'argent.

Après avoir rencontré Petrakis, qui lui vient en aide en lui donnant des vêtements et un peu d'argent, il se réfugie sur l'île de Tinos, où vit un hiéromoine, ancien ami de sa mère, qui accepte de l'héberger en lui cédant le rez-de-chaussée

2 Les concours poétiques et dramatiques avaient pour objectif de faire émerger, par le biais de l'émulation, de nouveaux dramaturges grecs et d'enrichir la dramaturgie grecque de nouvelles œuvres «de haut style».

3 *Le komeidyllio*, genre théâtral grec mêlant comédie, dialogue et chansons.

4 Dans le rapport de la commission du Concours Voutsinaios, publié en 1868, l'épouse d'Apergis est mentionnée sous le nom de Satla, nom que l'auteur semble avoir utilisé dans la première version de la pièce, avant de le remplacer par celui de Kiara.

de sa maison. Pendant son séjour, Avakoum revêt les vêtements du moine et parvient à subvenir à ses besoins en trompant les habitants, qui le prennent pour un saint homme, et en leur soutirant de l'argent au nom d'œuvres de bienfaisance. Parmi eux, il fait la connaissance d'Apergis, un insulaire naïf qu'Avakoum parvient à convertir, à séparer de sa femme en lui affirmant que les femmes sont des créatures du diable, et à convaincre de lui céder sa maison dans la capitale. Il y garde dès lors enfermée la fille d'Apergis afin de l'élever à l'écart du monde extérieur et à l'abri de toute tentation.

La comédie commence treize ans après ces événements. Apergis doit bientôt venir chercher sa fille, restée pure, tandis qu'Avakoum souhaite vendre la maison à Petrakis afin de pouvoir, avec l'argent qu'il en tirera, retourner dans son pays. Lorsque, à la fin de la première partie, Petrakis désobéit aux instructions strictes d'Avakoum en ouvrant la chambre fermée à clé, il y découvre la fille cachée et s'y glisse, désireux de lui apprendre en un seul jour tout ce que son tuteur avait évité de lui enseigner pendant tant d'années.

C'est alors que les rôles s'inversent soudainement : dès que la jeune fille, telle une nouvelle Ève, goûte au fruit défendu, elle se met à poursuivre Petrakis avec frénésie. Celui-ci, cherchant à éviter à la fois la jeune fille et les ennuis qu'il encourrait si sa faute venait à être découverte, se déguise avec les vêtements d'Apergis—qui vient justement d'arriver—afin de pouvoir s'enfuir.

S'ensuit une série de quiproquos comiques. Tout d'abord, Markos, le serviteur d'Apergis, prend Petrakis déguisé pour un porteur et lui fait transporter les coffres de son maître. Ensuite, il entend Avakoum ronfler, mais croit qu'il chante des psaumes et hésite à le réveiller de peur que celui-ci ne l'excommunie. Dans une autre scène, Avakoum fait un sermon à Apergis, qui, de son côté, interprète de travers tout ce qu'il entend, donnant lieu à des associations d'idées comiques. La deuxième partie de la pièce s'achève sur la tromperie d'Apergis et sur la cession de sa maison à Avakoum, en compensation de tout ce que celui-ci aurait fait au fil des années pour l'éducation de sa fille.

Les quiproquos atteignent leur paroxysme dans la troisième et dernière partie de la comédie, lorsque Kiara, l'épouse d'Apergis, arrive à Athènes. Pour tenter de lui échapper, ce dernier se fait raser par son serviteur afin que sa femme ne le reconnaisse pas. Il revêt ensuite les vêtements de Petrakis, qu'il trouve abandonnés par hasard, et se réfugie dans la première chambre qui se présente à lui. Il y rencontre cependant la jeune fille qui, à la grande surprise de ce dernier, croit voir Petrakis dès qu'elle l'aperçoit et se jette sur lui avec enthousiasme pour l'embrasser. Kiara, qui les trouve ensemble, interprète mal la scène et les deux femmes finissent par tirer Apergis chacune de son côté, sans comprendre qu'elles sont mère et fille et en croyant qu'elles sont rivales.

Dans la dernière scène de la pièce, tous les personnages sont présents à l'exception d'Avakoum, qui a déjà embarqué pour l'Espagne. Le véritable Petrakis apparaît alors comme un *deus ex machina* et intervient comme catalyseur, permettant la reconnaissance des personnages et la réunification de la famille. La pièce s'achève sur la demande en mariage de Petrakis à Artemis et sur son intention de sauver la maison d'Apergis en réparant l'injustice commise.

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L'intrigue de la pièce présente des influences évidentes de la dramaturgie moliéresque, tout en faisant appel à des motifs et à des mécanismes issus de la longue tradition comique, tels que les quiproquos, les renversements de situation, les serviteurs rusés et les maîtres naïfs (Altouva, 2023, p. 217-218). Zanos fait également référence à Aristophane, dont il semble avoir une bonne connaissance, suivant ainsi l'exemple d'autres dramaturges importants des Lumières néohelléniques, qui cherchaient à établir un lien entre la littérature grecque moderne et ses modèles antiques.

Un exemple particulièrement caractéristique est le monologue d'Avakoum dans la première scène de la pièce, dans lequel il décrit les moyens auxquels il est prêt à recourir afin d'acquérir de l'argent, en imitant le monologue correspondant de Strepsiade dans *Νεφέλαι* [*Les Nuées*] d'Aristophane (v. 439-456) :

«Ἂς μὲ κάμουν οἱ Τήνιοι ὅ,τι ποθοῦν,
τοῖς παρέχω τὸ σῶμά μου, ἂς τὸ κτυποῦν,
ἂς πεινᾷ, ἂς διψᾷ ἢ ἂς συγκαᾖ,
ἂς κρυώνῃ, ἂς γέν' ἀπ' τὸ ξύλον ἀσκός·
ν' ἀποκτήσω 'γὼ χρήματα μόνο ζητῶ.
Τοῖς ἀνθρώποις δ' ἄν ἴσως, πῶς εἶμαι, φανῶ
τολμηρός, ἀναιδής, εὐφραδὴς ἢ θρασύς,
βδελυρός, ἢ φευμάτων καλὸς κολλητής,
λογοπλάστης, περίφημος τρίφτης δικῶν,
νομοδείκτης, σφονδύλι, ἀλώπηξ, φαλίς,
πονηρός, γελαστής, φθονερός, ἀλαζών,
τετραπέρατος, φαῦλος, ἀγύρτης, σκαιὸς
ἢ φαγᾶς διαφόρου τροφῆς φοβερός,
ἢ μοῦ φωνάζουν ταῦτα, ἐντυγχάνοντες,
ὀλίγον θὰ μὲ μέλῃ». (Partie I, scène 1)[5]

5 «Que les habitants de Tinos fassent de moi ce qu'ils voudront : je leur abandonne mon corps ; qu'ils le frappent, qu'il ait faim, qu'il ait soif ou qu'il soit brûlé, qu'il souffre du froid, qu'ils fassent de moi une outre

Parallèlement, il porte un regard critique sur la réalité politique et sociale de son époque. De cette manière, l'œuvre intègre les influences historiques et les caractéristiques dramatiques qui ont contribué à façonner la comédie et la satire grecques du XIXe siècle, principalement de nature politique, et qui avaient pour objectif national de contribuer à la formation des mœurs et à la transmission des enseignements des Lumières européennes, par le biais du langage accessible de la comédie, notamment de la comédie moliéresque (Tabaki, 2002, p. 149-164 et 127-147; Tabaki, 2025, p. 55-62).

Influences de la dramaturgie de Molière et de la tradition comique

Les principales références de la pièce aux modèles moliéresques concernent les comédies *Tartuffe* et *L'École des femmes*.

Le personnage central de la pièce, Avakoum, renvoie à la figure de l'imposteur Tartuffe qui, se faisant passer pour un homme d'Église, cherche à s'approprier la fortune d'Apergis. L'auteur nous dévoile dès le début de la pièce le caractère ridicule du personnage, en le faisant se présenter lui-même dès son entrée en scène de la manière suivante :

> «Αἴ! τέλος πάντων εὖγε μου! τρὶς εὖγε μου! κ' ἑκατοντάκις εὖγε ἐπὶ εὖγε μου!—[3]Ω! εἶμαι... εἶμαι... τί εἶμαι;—ὅ,τι ἤθελα νὰ γένω καὶ νὰ ἦμαι, εἶμαι κ' ἔγεινα.». (Partie I, scène 1)[6]

Par la suite, tout en racontant son histoire, il prend soin de se décharger de toute responsabilité en expliquant que, par hasard, un soir, pour cacher sa nudité, il avait revêtu la robe d'un hiéromoine, ce qui avait conduit les gens à le considérer comme un saint sans qu'il l'ait jamais recherché lui-même, et de justifier ainsi ses actes en se drapant dans le manteau du prêtre respectable, en véritable Tartuffe. Ainsi, profitant de la naïveté d'Apergis, il parvient à l'éloigner de sa famille, aussi bien de sa femme, afin de ne pas courir le risque qu'elle découvre la supercherie, que de sa fille unique, en lui proposant de se charger de son éducation selon les bonnes mœurs, en échange de sa fortune.

Néanmoins, Avakoum ne reproduit pas entièrement le caractère sombre du Tartuffe moliéresque, car Zanos, afin de lui conférer des traits plus comiques,

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de bois ; je ne cherche qu'à acquérir de l'argent. Et si, aux yeux des hommes, je me montre tel que je suis, audacieux, impudent, disert ou effronté, odieux, bon compagnon de mensonges, fabricant de discours, fameux expert en procès, interprète des lois, tordu, renard, rusé, fourbe, moqueur, envieux, fanfaron, capable de tout, vil, charlatan, grossier, ou redoutable mangeur de toutes sortes de nourritures, ou s'ils me lancent ces noms lorsqu'ils me rencontrent, cela m'importera peu.»

6 «Ah ! Enfin, bravo à moi-même ! Trois fois bravo ! Et cent fois bravo sur bravo ! Ô... je suis... je suis... que suis-je ? Ce que je voulais devenir et être, je le suis, et je le suis devenu.»

emprunte également des éléments au type du pseudo-intellectuel que l'on rencontre dans la comédiographie de l'époque, en tant qu'évolution du Dottore de la Commedia dell'arte et de la comédie *crétoise et heptanésienne*. Il exige, par exemple, qu'on l'appelle «maître» et non «prêtre», et se donne des airs savants devant l'ignorant Apergis, qui peine à le suivre, engendrant ainsi toute une série de situations comiques. À la fin de la pièce, il disparaît avec l'argent de ce dernier, qui se trouve néanmoins moralement réhabilité grâce à l'intervention de Petrakis, permettant ainsi à la comédie de connaître un dénouement heureux.

Des analogies similaires se retrouvent dans *L'École des femmes*. La jeune fille enfermée, nommée Artemis, rappelle la jeune Agnès que le vieil Arnolphe tient prisonnière chez lui afin qu'elle reste pure et qu'il puisse l'épouser. Comme dans la comédie de Molière, le résultat, dans *Η Κόρη του Απέργη* [*La Fille d'Apergis*], est que la jeune recluse tombe amoureuse d'un jeune homme qui parvient à pénétrer dans sa petite prison en déjouant toutes les précautions — les obstacles mis en place par celui qui aspire à être son protecteur ou son tuteur.

L'intrigue dramaturgique de la pièce de Zanos reproduit le célèbre quadrilatère mélodramatique que forment les personnages principaux de l'œuvre, à savoir : une jeune fille persécutée qui a besoin d'aide (Artemis), son tuteur tyrannique qui l'opprime (Avakoum, puis Apergis), et le jeune homme qui s'empresse de la libérer (Petrakis), en collaboration avec un adjuvant, généralement un serviteur.

Dans le cas présent, ce rôle de serviteur-adjuvant est tenu par Markos, originaire de Syros, dont les traits renvoient tantôt à l'Arlequin de la Commedia dell'arte, tantôt au type du Capitano, tantôt encore au Figaro de Beaumarchais. Habituellement affamé, bavard, assez vantard et poltron, il endosse au besoin le rôle de barbier, se pose lui-même en supérieur du porteur placé sous ses ordres— qu'il qualifie de «Maniote», du fait qu'il est originaire du Magne sans jamais l'appeler par son nom—, et ne manque jamais, bien sûr, de commenter sur un ton comique et accessible les travers du microcosme social qui l'entoure, offrant ainsi une vision plus globale des événements, grâce à l'intelligence qui le caractérise et qui lui permet de survivre malgré sa pauvreté. L'auteur lui confère en outre la capacité de devenir le conseiller de son maître, tout en conservant toujours son caractère comique. Il dit à Apergis, tournant en dérision le comportement hypocrite des faux dévots :

> «Νὰ μὴ μιλήσῃς; σοῦ τὸ εἶπ' ὁ δάσκαλος; αἴ, τότ', αὐθέντη, κάμε μιά παρένθεσιν. Πολλαῖς γυναῖκες εἶδα 'γὼ 'στὴν ἐκκλησιά μὲ δέησι μεγάλη καὶ κατάνυξι, καὶ μὲ σταυροκοπήδια 'σὰν προσεύχωνται, νὰ στρέφουν 'πίσω κ' αἴφνης "Αἴ, κοκκόνα μου" νὰ 'ποῦν εἰς μίαν ἄλλην, ἤτις ἔτυχε

περνῶντας νὰ τῆς σείσῃ τὸ φουστάνι των, "στραβή 'σαι; δὲν προσέχεις; πῶς μᾶς θεωρεῖς;" κι' ἂν ἦναι Πάσχα μάλιστα, μὲ τὸ κερί νὰ τὴν κτυπήσουν κ' ἔπειτα γονατισταῖς ν' ἀρχίσουν πάλιν τὰ σταυροκοπήματα. Παρένθεσιν, αὐθέντη, κάμε κ' ἔγνοια σου.» (Partie III, scène 1)[7]

Markos incarne le type populaire de l'insulaire, porteur des mœurs de son époque et de son lieu d'origine, croyant à diverses superstitions, sans pour autant manquer de perspicacité. Dans la structure dramaturgique, il joue un rôle de liaison et exerce une fonction catalytique dans le développement de l'intrigue, par exemple lorsqu'il avertit Apergis de l'arrivée de Kiara à Athènes, lorsqu'il pousse son maître à changer d'apparence pour que sa femme ne le reconnaisse pas, ou encore lorsqu'il intervient, dans la scène finale de reconnaissance entre Apergis, Kiara et leur fille, en tant que quatrième membre à part entière de la famille.

Le couple formé par Apergis et Kiara fonctionne de manière complémentaire, bien qu'Apergis apparaisse pendant la plus grande partie de la pièce, tandis que Kiara n'intervient qu'à la fin de la comédie pour contribuer à son dénouement. Il s'agit d'un couple de gens sans instruction, originaires de Tinos, qui, en raison de leur naïveté, sont victimes de la ruse d'Avakoum et perdent d'abord leur famille, qui se disloque, puis leur fortune. Il est intéressant de noter que l'auteur les fait s'exprimer dans le dialecte local de Tinos, transposant ainsi sur scène la couleur sonore insulaire, dans le but de renforcer l'élément éthographique et de suivre la tendance générale qui caractérise l'évolution de la comédie au XIXe siècle (Puchner, 2001, p. 360-377).

Apergis est l'Orgon de l'histoire et, tout comme Avakoum, il s'agit d'un rôle apparenté aux personnages farcesques correspondants que l'on trouve dans les œuvres des Lumières néohelléniques du début du siècle, fondées sur le modèle moliéresque. Il représente le mode de pensée à la fois autoritaire et obscurantiste de figures telles que l'Exintavelonis de Konstantinos Oikonomos, qui rejettent le savoir et tout ce qui est progressiste. Il dit notamment :

«οὖλα τὰ παιδιά καὶ κοπελλιαῖς κι' ἀγόρια διαολόπουλα 'πὸ τὸ σχολειὸ ἠβγαίνουν· ἦρθεν ὁ καιρὸς ὁ κόσμος νὰ χαλάσῃ, τό 'π' ὁ δάσκαλος. Ἀλλοίμονο! ποιὸς πρῶτ' ἀπὸ ἐλόου μας 'ς τὰ χρόνια τά 'δικά μας δὲν

7 « Ne pas parler ? C'est le maître qui te l'a dit ? Eh bien, alors, maître, fais une parenthèse. J'ai vu bien des femmes à l'église, en grande prière et pleines de componction, se signer tout en priant, puis se retourner soudain pour dire à une autre — qui passait par là et avait par mégarde effleuré leur robe — : "Eh, ma belle ! Es-tu aveugle ? Tu ne fais pas attention ? Pour qui nous prends-tu ?" Et si c'est justement Pâques, elles la frappent avec leur cierge, puis se remettent à genoux et recommencent à se signer. Fais donc cette parenthèse, maître, et ne t'inquiète pas. »

> ἠπήγαινεν ’ς τὴν ἐκκλησιά τ’, ν’ ἀκούσῃ, νὰ λειτουργηθῇ; παιδὶ κανένα τώρα πλειὸ ’ς τὴν ἐκκλησιὰ δὲ βλέπεις νὰ παγαίνῃ, μόνε κἄποτε ’μματιαῖς νὰ ῥίχνῃ φλογεραῖς κἀνένανε τὸν βλέπεις ’ς τὸ γυναίκειο.— Ἄ! ἠχρείεφεν, ἠχρείεφεν ὁ κόσμος, τό ῾π’ ὁ δάσκαλος.». (Partie II, scène 6)[8]

À l’opposé, le personnage de Petrakis est comique parce qu’il se retrouve mêlé à des situations semblables, mais il est également porteur des idées progressistes des Lumières, formulant même l’idée centrale de la comédie dans les vers suivants : «τοῦ ἀθώου καὶ μέτρον καὶ γνώμων / ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι κ’ ἡ φύσις» (Partie I, scène 3).[9]

Ce vers, qui figure également en épigraphe sous le titre de la pièce, sur la couverture de l’édition (Zanos, 1868), est tiré de la traduction grecque en vers de Nicolaos Piccolos, *Τα κατά Παύλον και Βιργινίαν* (*Paul et Virginie*) publiée en 1824 à Paris (Spathis, 1986, p. 149-150). Le transfert de cette épigraphe révèle une autre source de réception des idées des Lumières dans la comédie néohellénique, ainsi qu’une autre influence sur l’œuvre de Zanos, laquelle est liée au roman de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (1788) écrit à la veille de la Révolution française. Elle révèle, en outre, une convergence de l’auteur avec Piccolos et le cercle d’Adamantios Coray.

À la fin de la comédie, Petrakis apporte la solution définitive en jouant le rôle d’un « mortel deus ex machina » qui transmet la leçon morale de la pièce. S’adressant à Apergis, devenu désormais son beau-père, il dit :

> «Λοιπὸν παρακαλῶ σε, τὰ ἐγγόνια σου, τουτέστι τὰ παιδιά ποῦ θ’ ἀποκτήσωμεν, —καθότι, πενθερέ μου, τί νὰ σοῦ εἰπῶ; σκοπεύω νὰ γεννήσω πλήρη οὐλαμόν,— ἐὰν δὲν μοῦ χαλάσῃ τὸ ’ργοστάσιον,— μὴ ἀπαιτήσῃς νὰ τὰ στείλωμεν ἀλλοῦ, τὰ γράμματα νὰ μάθουν καὶ σπουδάσωσι. Σχολεῖα εἰς Ἀθήνας, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, διάφορα ὑπάρχουν· μὴ νομίσῃς δὲ, πῶς, ἂν τὰ κατακλείσῃς, θὰ ἁγιάσωσιν, ὡς νὰ πιστεύσῃς σ’ ἔκαμεν ὁ Ἀβακούμ. Ἂν οὕτως εἶχε, διατί δὲν ἔσπευδεν ὁ ἴδιος ν’ ἁγιάσῃ;»[10]

8 « Tous les enfants, filles et garçons, sortent de l’école comme de véritables petits diables. Le temps est venu où le monde va se corrompre, à ce que dit le maître. Hélas ! Qui, parmi nous, dans notre jeunesse, n’allait pas à l’église pour écouter la messe et communier ? Aujourd’hui, on ne voit plus aucun enfant s’y rendre ; tout au plus en voit-on parfois un lancer des regards enflammés du côté des femmes. — Ah! Le monde s’est corrompu, le monde s’est corrompu, à ce que dit le maître. »

9 Ce vers est tiré de la traduction grecque en vers de Nicolaos Piccolos, dans le passage où Virginie, se trouvant nue, embrasse Paul avec innocence : « [...] καὶ ὡς ἦτο γυμνὴ ἡ παρθένος / κατεφίλει τὸν Παῦλον εὐγνώμων. / Τοῦ ἀθώου καὶ μέτρον καὶ γνώμων / ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι κ’ ἡ φύσις. » (« [...] et comme la vierge était nue, elle embrassait Paul avec gratitude. Pour l’innocent, la vérité et la nature sont à la fois la mesure et le critère. »).

10 Je te prie donc de ne pas exiger que nous envoyions ailleurs tes petits-enfants, c’est-à-dire les enfants que nous aurons […], pour qu’ils apprennent les lettres et fassent des études. Il existe, Dieu merci, diverses

Il reçoit ensuite la confirmation d'Apergis:

«Ὤ, πῶ, πῶ, πῶ, πῶ! μὲ Φράγκους πλειό, παιδάκι μ', δὲν 'μπερδεύομαι·
ὅπως ὁρίζεις κάνε.». (Partie III, scène 4)[11]

Thématique et réception de la comédie

Dans sa première version, intitulée *Ο Προσήλυτος* [Le Prosélyte], la pièce fut rejetée par le concours Voutsinaios car, selon le rapport du comité, elle traitait du prosélytisme «prétendument exercé en Grèce par les catholiques sur les orthodoxes grecs », raison pour laquelle, comme le conclut le rapport, « nous écartons de la scène un sujet destiné à attiser les haines religieuses, auxquelles la Grèce doit en grande partie non seulement son asservissement séculaire, mais aussi l'étau qui l'enserre aujourd'hui dans cette partie du monde, où nous étouffons comme des sangsues qui mordent et sont mordues, tout en tournant un regard avide vers cet Occident catholique, dans l'attente de son secours»[12] (Rapport du comité sur le concours Voutsinaios de 1868, p. 40-41).

Pour des raisons religieuses et politiques, donc, touchant, d'une part, à des questions d'unité nationale et, d'autre part, à la survie du nouvel État grâce au soutien de l'Occident, l'œuvre fut rejetée par le comité au motif qu'il n'existait aucune tentative organisée de prosélytisme auprès des fidèles orthodoxes en Grèce, bien que des moines jésuites fussent actifs dans les îles de la mer Égée depuis la fin du XVIe siècle, y menant une œuvre à la fois prosélyte et éducative;[13] il est d'ailleurs intéressant de noter qu'Avakoum est originaire d'Espagne, patrie du fondateur de la Compagnie de Jésus, Ignace de Loyola (1491-1556).

Mais, l'exigence de renforcement de l'identité nationale et de la cohésion collective, dominante depuis la période pré-révolutionnaire dans le cadre de l'expansion des Lumières néohelléniques—dont le théâtre, du reste, contribua largement à diffuser les idées—ne laissait aucune place à une remise en cause susceptible de faire naître de nouvelles discordes ou de raviver d'anciennes

écoles à Athènes. Et ne crois pas qu'en les enfermant, ils en deviendraient des saints, comme Avakoum a voulu te le faire croire. S'il en était ainsi, pourquoi ne se serait-il pas empressé lui-même de le devenir ? »

11 « Oh là là là là ! Avec les Francs, mon petit, je ne me mêle plus de rien. Fais comme tu l'entends. »

12 *Dans l'original grec :* « τὸν ἐν Ἑλλάδι ἐκτελούμενον δῆθεν ἐπὶ τῶν ὀρθοδόζων Ἑλλήνων ὑπὸ τῶν Καθολικῶν» « ἡμεῖς πάλιν ἀποκρούομεν ἀπὸ τῆς σκηνῆς θέμα, σκοποῦν νὰ ἐξάψῃ τὰ θρησκευτικὰ μίση, εἰς τὰ ὁποῖα κατὰ μέγα μέρος ὀφείλει ἡ Ἑλλὰς οὐ μόνον τὴν προαιώνιον δούλωσίν της, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν νῦν περίσφιγξιν ἐν τῷ κυπέλλῳ τούτῳ τῆς γῆς, ἐν ᾧ ἀποπνιγόμεθα ὡς βδέλλαι δάκνοντες καὶ δακνόμενοι, καὶ παπταίνομεν κεχηκότες πρὸς αὐτὴν τὴν καθολικὴν Δύσιν ὑπὲρ ἀρωγῆς ».

13 C'est dans ce cadre que se développa le théâtre égéopélagique, lié à l'ordre des jésuites et à leur œuvre éducative dans les quelque 500 collèges qui fonctionnèrent jusqu'au XVIIIe siècle dans la région. Voir Puchner, 1997, p. 21-35.

querelles. À plus forte raison lorsqu'il s'agit d'un concours poétique destiné à enrichir la dramaturgie grecque.

Zanos, répondant à cette critique et « afin que la Grèce ne soit pas mortellement mordue par mon fait »,[14] comme il l'écrit d'un ton mordant dans la préface de l'édition, modifia aussitôt, d'une part, le titre de l'œuvre, de *Ο Προσήλυτος* [*Le Prosélyte*] à *Η Κόρη του Απέργη* [*La Fille d'Apergis*], et, d'autre part, la fin de la comédie, suivant l'invitation du comité à « tourner en dérision, plutôt que le prosélytisme, le zèle véritablement ridicule de nombreuses familles à envoyer leurs propres enfants dans des écoles tenues par des étrangers et des personnes d'une autre confession, afin qu'ils apprennent le français et d'autres matières, alors même qu'ils ignorent les rudiments de leur propre langue »[15] (Rapport du comité sur le concours Voutsinaios de 1868, 1868, p. 40). La question de la langue revêtait d'ailleurs, elle aussi, une importance nationale, et une telle orientation aurait servi les objectifs du concours.

Aussi, peu de temps après la publication des résultats, parut la comédie dans sa seconde version, corrigée, à laquelle fut probablement ajouté, à la fin, le dialogue entre Petrakis et Apergis sur l'éducation des jeunes gens, et en particulier des jeunes filles, à propos du cas de la fille. Il est intéressant, à cet égard, de relever le lien indirect de cette question avec la réalité de l'époque: en 1862, quelques années avant la parution de la comédie, fut fondée la première école des religieuses Ursulines dans la région de Loutra, à Tinos, île d'origine de la famille Apergis.

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La pièce aborde également d'autres questions d'intérêt politique et national, telle l'affaire du Laurium, relative à l'exploitation des mines de la région de Laurium par la société franco-italienne H. Roux et Cie, entre 1867 et 1874 (Kekropoulou, 2015). Zanos suit cette affaire, qui semble le préoccuper, et la commente à travers le personnage de Petrakis qui, s'interrogeant sur l'enrichissement soudain et rapide d'Avakoum, lui dit:

> «Ἦ μήπως ἤσουν ὄφις τάχα μου καὶ σὺ καὶ ἔφαγες σκωρίαν Λαυριωτικήν,
> ὡς τόσοι ἄλλοι ὄφεις ἔφαγον ἐδῶ κ' εἶναι τὴν σήμερον ἡμέραν *ἄνθρωποι*;».[16]

14 *Dans l'original grec:* «ἵνα μὴ δ η χ θ ῇ θανατηφόρως ἐξ ἐμοῦ ἡ Ἑλλάς»

15 *Dans l'original grec:* «νὰ διακωμῳδήσῃ τὴν ὄντως γελοίαν σπουδὴν πολλῶν οἰκογενειῶν τοῦ πέμπειν τὰ ἑαυτῶν τέκνα εἰς σχολεῖα ἀλλοεθνῶν τε καὶ ἀλλοθρήσκων, ὅπως μάθωσιν Γαλλικὰ καὶ εἴ τινα ἄλλα, ἐνῷ καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς γλώσσης των ἀγνοοῦν.»

16 « Aurais-tu donc été toi aussi un serpent, et aurais-tu mangé du laitier du Laurium, comme tant d'autres serpents en ont mangé ici et sont aujourd'hui des hommes ? »

Et il poursuit, répondant à la prétendue ignorance d'Avakoum sur le sujet:

> «[…] "ὤδινεν ὄρος κ' ἔτεκε μῦν", ἡ παροιμία λέγει· πλὴν τὸ Λαύριον κοιλοπονῆσαν, τὴν σκωρίαν ἔτεκεν αντί μυός, κόρην πλουσίαν κι' ἀργυρᾶν· τινὲς λοιπὸν τὰ κάλλη τοῦ ἀργύρου της ἐρωτευθέντες, τὴν ἐπῆραν δι' αὐτούς, χωρὶς νὰ ἐρωτήσουν τὰ *πεθερικά*, καὶ ζυρογλύφουν ταύτην, μὴ φροντίζοντες ἂν ἦναι καπνισμένη ἢ μαυριδερὴ τὸ χρῶμα ὡς ἐκ τῆς ἐκκαμινεύσεως, ἀρκεῖ νὰ ξύουν οἱ ὀδόντες ἄργυρον.» (Partie I, scène 1)[17]

Cette réplique de Petrakis montre qu'à l'époque où la comédie fut écrite, le conflit entre la société et l'État grecs commençait déjà à se dessiner. Avec sa perspicacité, Zanos voulut stigmatiser cette affaire, qui allait bientôt devenir le premier scandale boursier de l'histoire de la Grèce moderne.

Enfin, la question du clientélisme électoral est également abordée lorsque, dans la dernière scène, Markos, voyant Petrakis vêtu en grand seigneur alors qu'il le prenait auparavant pour un portefaix, s'exclame :

> «Μωρ' ἀδελφέ, γιὰ 'δέ τον πῶς ἐνδύθηκε· φτωχὸς βαστάζος χρήματα ποῦ εὗρηκε; ἢ μήπως ἦναι ψηφοφόρος καὶ αὐτὸς κ' ἐτράβηξε *τραμπούκο* γιὰ τὸν ψῆφό του;» (Partie III, scène 4)[18]

La "maladie électorale" des Grecs préoccupe déjà Zanos dans cette œuvre de jeunesse, mais il s'y attarde plus longuement dans sa comédie intitulée *Δημάρχου εκλογή* [L'Élection du maire] (1889), qui est récompensée par le Concours dramatique Lassaneios.

Théâtralité de la comédie

Bien que la pièce n'ait jamais été représentée, ni dans sa première version ni dans sa seconde version corrigée, il ressort clairement de son contenu qu'elle fut écrite dans l'intention d'être portée à la scène, et non simplement destinée à la lecture. Nombreuses sont les indications scéniques que l'auteur donne entre parenthèses,

17 « La montagne était en travail et enfanta une souris, dit le proverbe. Or le Laurium, dans ses douleurs, enfanta, au lieu d'une souris, le laitier — une fille riche et argentée. Certains donc, épris des charmes de son argent, l'épousèrent pour leur propre compte, sans même demander l'avis des beaux-parents, et la ciselèrent sans se soucier de savoir si sa peau noircie provenait de la fumée de la fonderie, pourvu que leurs dents puissent en gratter l›argent »

18 « Eh, mon frère, regarde-moi comment il s'est habillé. Un pauvre portefaix, où aurait-il trouvé cet argent ? À moins qu›il ne soit lui aussi électeur et qu›on ne lui ait fait du forcing pour son vote ? »

non seulement au début de chaque scène mais aussi au fil des dialogues. Ces notes sont détaillées et concernent l'ensemble des éléments de la représentation, comme par exemple le costume des personnages, leurs mouvements ou leur posture, l'expression de l'émotion, ou encore des sons devant être entendus comme partie intégrante de la dramaturgie.[19]

On trouve également de nombreuses scènes comiques fondées sur des *lazzi* scéniques, comme par exemple la scène de l'évanouissement de Markos, qui imagine son maître mort, mais que son réveil soudain ramène brusquement à la réalité (Partie II, scène 5), ou encore la scène où Apergis se retrouve tiré simultanément des deux côtés par la mère et la fille (Partie III, scène 3). Tout aussi caractéristiques sont les scènes de travestissement, assez nombreuses dans la pièce, ainsi que les *lazzi* verbaux fondés sur le malentendu ou l'assonance des mots. Ces scènes se distinguent par l'intense gestuelle des personnages et l'immédiateté des dialogues qui renforcent la théâtralité, portent l'empreinte de la Commedia dell'arte et nous transmettent des images de la mise en scène de la comédie du XIXe siècle.

Enfin, révélateur de l'intention de l'auteur de voir sa comédie jouée est le bref dialogue qui se déroule au début de la pièce entre Avakoum et Petrakis, où il est fait allusion au public supposé de la représentation, et qui se lit comme suit :

> «Πετρακης: Πλὴν διατί τοσοῦτον ἀποστρέφεσαι, δάσκαλε, τὰς γυναῖκας; Αβακούμ: Ὦ! τὸ διατὶ εἰς αἴσχη τυλιγμένον ὑποκρύπτεται. Πετρακης: Λοιπὸν 'ξεγύμνωσέ το. Αβακουμ: Ἄ!.. εἶν' ἐντροπή· δὲν βλέπεις πόσοι μᾶς κυττάζουν ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες; Πετρακης: Πλὴν τὸ διατὶ δὲν εἶναι τὸ καϋμένον οὔτ' ἀρσενικόν, ὥσ' αἱ γυναῖκες νὰ ἐρυθριάσωσιν, ἐὰν τὸ 'ξεγυμνώσῃς, οὔτε θηλυκόν, οἱ ἄνδρες νὰ γογγίσουν, ξηροβήχοντες, ἀλλ' ἓν ἁπλοῦν, ἁπλούστατον οὐδέτερον. —Ἔλα 'ξεγύμνωσέ το τώρα, δάσκαλε, καὶ ἐντροπὴ δὲν εἶναι, ἂν οὐδέτερον γυμνὸν παρουσιάσῃς. Αβακουμ: Ἄκουσε λοιπόν... —Πλὴν ὄχι, ὄχι! δὲν τὸ λέγω! κάλλιον νὰ σιωπήσω, μήτις σεμνοπρόσωπος εἰσαγγελεὺς μ' ἐνάξῃ ὡς ἀνήθικον καὶ μάθω νὰ μὴ λέγω τὰ ἀπόκρυφα». (Partie I, scène 1)[20]

19 Lisons, à titre indicatif : a. « Εὐτραφής, παρῆλιξ καὶ ὡραῖα εὐρωπαϊκὰ ἐνδύματα ἐνδεδυμένος ὁ Αβακουμ εἰσέρχεται ἐντὸς τοῦ θαλάμου, ἀποθέτει τὸν πῖλον του καὶ περιπατεῖ ἐν αὐτῷ τρίβων τὰς χεῖρας καὶ κράζων » (Partie I, scène 1) (Corpulent, d'âge mûr et vêtu de beaux habits européens, Avakoum entre dans la chambre, dépose son chapeau et s'y promène en se frottant les mains et en criant), b. « ὁ μὲν Ἀπέργης κάθηται σιωπηλὸς ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐδάφους καὶ εἰς τὴν γωνίαν τοῦ θαλάμου, ὁ δὲ Μάρκος εἰσερχόμενος καὶ μὴ βλέπων αὐτόν, περιτρέχει ὡς δαιμονισμένος τὸν θάλαμον » (Partie III, scène 1) (Apergis est assis en silence par terre, dans un coin de la chambre, tandis que Markos, entrant et ne le voyant pas, parcourt la pièce en courant comme un possédé), etc.

20 « Petrakis : Mais pourquoi détestes-tu donc tant, maître, les femmes ? — Avakoum : Oh ! le pourquoi se dissimule, enveloppé de honte. — Petrakis : Eh bien, mets-le à nu. — Avakoum : Ah !... C'est une honte ; ne vois-tu pas combien de gens nous regardent, hommes et femmes ? — Petrakis : Mais le pourquoi, le

La scène se déroule dans un espace clos, la maison d'Apergis, et ne justifie pas la présence d'autres personnages sur scène ; c'est donc bien aux spectateurs qu'Avakoum fait référence lorsqu'il parle des hommes et des femmes qui les regardent, et il s'agit là du seul passage de la pièce où Zanos rompt la convention théâtrale, prouvant une fois de plus sa maîtrise dramaturgique.

Épilogue

Bien qu'elle ait changé de titre et de contenu, et malgré sa théâtralité, *Η κόρη του Απέργη* [La Fille d'Apergis] ne semble pas avoir été portée à la scène, puisque, à ce jour du moins, aucune représentation de la pièce n'a été retrouvée. Ce fait laisse penser que les réserves formulées dans le rapport du comité du Concours Voutsinaios n'étaient pas sans fondement, qu'il existait des craintes que la représentation de la comédie ne heurte une partie du public ou l'Église Catholique, ou encore que Zanos lui-même n'ait finalement pas soutenu la mise en scène de cet essai de jeunesse, dans la mesure où il prit soin de poursuivre son œuvre dramaturgique en présentant, en peu de temps, de nouvelles pièces qui gagnèrent la faveur des cercles intellectuels et du public.

Il n'en demeure pas moins que cette pièce présente de nombreux éléments dramaturgiques positifs, qu'elle est plaisante à lire malgré la difficulté de sa langue, qu'elle possède des qualités théâtrales marquées qui la rendent jouable encore aujourd'hui, et qu'elle rassemble les sources principales auxquelles l'auteur puise ses thèmes, sources auxquelles il revient plus tard dans d'autres de ses pièces. Restent enfin intemporelles les idées qui y sont mises en avant et qui portent sur le rejet de tout conservatisme en matière d'éducation des jeunes, sur le droit à la liberté individuelle et sur le respect de la nature humaine. Car, comme le note Panayotis Zanos dans sa note liminaire à l'édition de la comédie : « οὐδεὶς τὴν φύσιν ν' ἀνατρέψῃ δύναται, ἡ δὲ μὲ μέτρον ἀγωγή καρποὺς ὡραίους φέρει » (« nul ne peut renverser la nature, mais une éducation mesurée en tire de beaux fruits »), une réflexion qui conserve toute sa pertinence à travers les époques.

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pauvre, n'est ni masculin, pour que les femmes rougissent si tu le mets à nu, ni féminin, pour que les hommes grognent en toussotant, mais un simple, très simple neutre. — Allons, mets-le à nu maintenant, maître, ce n'est pas une honte de présenter un neutre nu. — Avakoum : Écoute donc... — Mais non, non ! j\Je ne le dis pas ! Mieux vaut me taire, de peur qu'un procureur à la mine austère ne m'accuse d'immoralité et que j'apprenne à ne plus dire les choses cachées. »

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THEATRICAL ADAPTATIONS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY PROSE NARRATIVES: **A COMPARISON OF NOVELS BY DOSTOEVSKY AND PAPADIAMANTIS**

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Abstract: This paper examines theatrical adaptations of nineteenth-century novels through a comparative study of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Alexandros Papadiamantis's *The Merchants of Nations*. Although these novels differ in historical context, narrative mode, and social milieu, they nevertheless converge in their ethical orientation, emphasizing moral vulnerability, human suffering, and confrontation within complex social worlds. The formal, thematic, and ethical characteristics of these novels render them appropriate for exploring the theatrical adaptation of prose narrative. The focus of this research is placed on the adjustment in theatrical adaptation of main narrative components such as focalization, dialogue, character development, and progression of events. Particular significance is placed on the reinterpretation of narrative ethics and internal moral consciousness through theatrical techniques, enactment, spatial configuration, and reception. Through analysis of representative stage adaptations of these novels, the study presents adaptation as a process of dramaturgical reinterpretation, in which narrative structures, ethical decision-making, and the subjective experiences of characters are realized in theatrical performance. Drawing on adaptation theory and reception theory, the paper suggests that theatrical adaptation constitutes a creative and interpretive process, influenced both by the formal conventions of theatre and by historically situated contexts of reception.

Keywords: theatrical adaptation, theatrical reception, nineteenth-century literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, Alexandros Papadiamantis, *The Merchants of Nations*.

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Introduction

The study of nineteenth-century ethical literature has received scholarly attention due to its complex moral inquiry, psychological depth, and enduring social relevance (Bakhtin, 1984; Beaton, 1996; Vitti, 2003). Among the most influential authors of this period are Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) and Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851–1911), whose works exemplify distinct narrative strategies and ethical frameworks (Beaton, 1996; Mousmoutis, 2011; Vitti, 2003). Dostoevsky's enduring influence on nineteenth-century literature is well documented, with his works translated into numerous languages and recognized as among the most significant of the period. His writings exemplify psychological depth, polyphonic narrative structures, and ethical complexity within Russian literature (Bakhtin, 1984; Frank, 2010). Within modern Greek literature, Papadiamantis occupies an important placement. Among the nineteenth-century Greek authors, he was immensely important for the development of modern Greek prose. His prose encompasses social and political tensions of his era and contributes significantly to the transition toward Greek literary modernity. He gradually expanded both his

thematic scope and narrative technique and brought such quality to his work which established him as the protagonist of this prose (Mousmoutis, 2011) and distinguished him for his unparalleled expressive art (Papadiamantis, 2019, p. 13). The distinctive narrative strategies and enduring cultural effect of these authors make their works useful for comparative textual and performative analysis. This study examines how these narrative strategies are rendered in theatrical adaptation and how performance and reception influence contemporary audiences' ethical perception.

For the purposes of this paper, the selection of specific novels enables a detailed examination of how ethical concerns are constructed narratively and subsequently reinterpreted in performance. This study concentrates on *The Idiot* (1869) by Dostoevsky and *The Merchants of Nations* (1882) by Papadiamantis. These novels have been chosen for their ethical and narrative complexity, which render them particularly useful for comparative literary and theatrical exploration. Both novels build morally nuanced societies through interior focalization, complicated characterization, and historically situated conflict, providing a framework for analyzing the reconstitution of narrative ethics and reception in theatrical performance. The examined novels explore extensively ethical dilemmas, moral ambivalence, and the consequences of responsibility, while they express these through distinct narrative strategies. *The Idiot* emphasizes interiority, moral ambiguity, and psychological complexity, presenting characters whose ethical conflicts evolve through intense contemplation and dialogic interaction. By contrast, *The Merchants of Nations* develops a more structured and historically situated narrative framework that examines ethical responsibility and the moral consequences of social action. While both works situate individual responsibility within broader societal contexts, Dostoevsky highlights the interior moral struggle of the individual, whereas Papadiamantis emphasizes the communal and historical frameworks through which ethical responsibility develops and is enacted.

The Idiot assumes a prominent role in Dostoevsky's oeuvre and constitutes one of his "grandest and most challenging creations" (Dostoyevsky, 2010, p. v), as well as one of his most intellectually daring and innovative novels. Its enduring significance lies in its refusal to rely on reductive moral dichotomies or conventional notions of romantic love. Instead, the novel offers probing explorations of an "intractable philosophical conundrum" (Dostoevsky, 2010, p. v), psychological complexity, ethical contradiction, and the instability of moral judgment. Although written in the nineteenth century, *The Idiot* explores ideas about uncertainty, morality, and freedom that later became important themes of existential philosophy and modern literature.

The Merchants of Nations remains one of Papadiamantis's least examined prose works and may be considered a historical source and a distinctive literary reinterpretation of historical material (Diamantis, 2015, pp. 28–33).

One of the most important objectives of this paper is the examination of the interaction between narrative form and ethical representation in nineteenth-century literature and its stage adaptations. By focusing on Russian and Greek literary traditions, the study contextualizes Dostoevsky's and Papadiamantis's works within a comparative ethical and performative framework. It seeks to explore how narrative techniques such as focalization, polyphony, and linear narration, as well as compositional strategies such as structural organization, affect theatrical adaptation, particularly in the staging of moral tension, communal judgment, and individual responsibility. The research is further designed to examine how diverse theatrical traditions manage the challenges of adapting narrative interiority and collective ethical perspectives to the stage. Hence, emphasis is placed on temporal organization, thematic patterning, and variations in focalization, as these elements influence audience reception and the staging of ethical dilemmas.

This study hypothesizes that theatrical adaptations function as mechanisms for ethical interpretation as they reinterpret ethical significance according to historical, cultural, and performative contexts. Theatrical adaptations of *The Idiot* highlight psychological interiority and ethical uncertainty through polyphonic and dialogic confrontation, while theatrical adaptations of *The Merchants of Nations* emphasize collective responsibility and social consequence within an organised ensemble framework structured by psychological, social, and cultural tensions.

Research Methods

This paper applies literary, adaptation, and reception analyses to examine how prose narratives construct ethical meaning and how their structural ethical frameworks are reinterpreted in theatrical performance.

The literary dimension of the methodology applicable in this paper concentrates on thematic patterns, narrative structure, and ethical representation. Within the literary analysis, thematic analysis identifies ethical concerns such as moral responsibility, compassion, justice, and social corruption, whereas narratological analysis explains how narrative structures facilitate their reinterpretation in theatrical performance. The narratological analysis draws on Gérard Genette's theory of narrative discourse (1980, 1988) and Mieke Bal's narratological framework (2009), and examines narrative order, duration, frequency, and focalization. More particularly, emphasis is placed on interior focalization, polyphonic organization, episodic structuring, and overall narrative

organization, as these narrative elements influence the dynamics of ethical conflict and determine the subsequent analysis of ethical representation.

Another important component of the methodology of this paper is the adaptation analysis, which examines how narrative strategies and ethical structures are reconstituted in theatrical performance. Influenced by the theoretical frameworks of Linda Hutcheon, who conceives adaptation as an interpretive and culturally situated practice (Hutcheon, 2013), and Katja Krebs (2014), adaptation is presented as a process of dramaturgical restructuring and performative transformation. Dramaturgical analysis, as an integral part of the adaptation methodology, facilitates the examination of how literary elements are transformed on stage through the examination of scene selection and condensation, dialogue restructuring, the use of soliloquy and ensemble narration, and the reorganization of narrative temporality. Particular emphasis is placed on the staging of interiority, as narrative focalization is reconfigured from textual conveyance to enacted performance and psychological complexity is externalized through vocal delivery, physical expression, spatial composition, lighting, and symbolic scenography. The transformation of narrative voice into performative presence is treated as a central adaptive process, with ethical enactment in performance explored through temporal modulation, dialogic interaction, spatial dynamics, and ensemble coordination, rendering moral conflict experientially perceptible. Theatre is thus treated not only as a mode of narrative adaptation but as a culturally situated context in which ethical meaning is dynamically reinterpreted.

The reception analysis in this study emphasizes how readers and spectators interpret and respond to narrative and performative ethical constructs. Reception is treated as a process analysed through narratology, performance theory, and performative practice, and includes the interaction of readers with the novels and the interpretations of spectators of stage adaptations. Drawing on reception theory (Iser, 1978; Jauss, 1982), the analysis considers how ethical meaning is constructed through the interplay of textual structure, dramaturgical interpretation, and audience response. Ethical meaning is not determined within the text but develops through audience involvement, informed by historically and culturally situated interpretive frameworks. Critical reviews and documented interpretations are examined within ideological, social, and theatrical contexts. The analysis also evaluates how dramaturgical strategies, such as modulations in focalization and ensemble performance, influence ethical interpretation.

The application of literary, adaptation, and reception analyses applied in this study establishes a cohesive methodological framework for examining nineteenth-century ethical fiction. This framework enables a systematic exploration of how these narratives are reinterpreted and realized in contemporary performance

contexts. Furthermore, such a framework ensures analytical precision and interpretive subtlety. Thus, the methodology highlights the dynamic interplay between textual construction, adaptive transformation, and audience reception as a mutually reinforcing process.

Results

The literary analysis applied in this study establishes that both novels construct ethically complex social worlds structured mainly by political and social upheaval. This analysis proceeds by examining the setting and historical circumstances that inform the social and ethical structures of each work and considers the plot so as to situate important events and conflicts. The analysis then explores the main thematic concerns and the narrative structures through which these themes are presented. The literary analysis assesses how ethical meaning is constructed and communicated within each novel.

Historical circumstances further intensify both novels' ethical atmosphere. In *The Idiot*, Russian aristocratic society is presented with its injustices, ethical uncertainties, and ideological developments, including nihilistic and materialist contemplations (Dostoevsky, 2010, pp. xii–xiii). Even though appreciative of Western art and literature, Dostoevsky was nevertheless critical of the rationalism and progressiveness of the West. Social concerns are thus expressed as an eagerness for moral renewal but also reveal the inability of society to allow for unconditional goodness (Dostoevsky, 2010, p. xiii). In *The Merchants of Nations*, Western literature exerts a discernible influence, as European adventure novels translated by Papadiamantis appear to have affected this novel's narrative mode, particularly in its synthesis of historical material with appropriated genre conventions (Vardoulakis, 2009, p. 1091). Papadiamantis uses the historical setting as a platform for commenting on social and political conditions, placing an emphasis on the period of Venetian rule and highlighting the greed and cruelty of Venetian merchants. Similarly to Dostoevsky, Papadiamantis uses historical context to critique the ethical consequences of Western materialism. This stance is mainly the result of his defence of the Orthodox East against the legacy of Frankish domination. The antagonist Markos Sanoutos is based on the historical personality Marco I Sanudo, who established Venetian rule in Naxos in 1207 after the Fourth Crusade, and founded the Duchy of the Archipelago. Through this historical parallel, Papadiamantis critiques the mercantile ethos of the Western Crusaders and Venetian power in the thirteenth century. Set in the Mediterranean during this period, the narrative develops within a historical and intercultural context in which Venetian and Aegean political dynamics are significant.

The plot in *The Merchants of Nations* is connected to three main characters who, in the later development of the story, are found in different circumstances (Vardoulakis, 2009, p. 1091). Markos Sanoutos, a Venetian nobleman, is rescued from pirates and offered hospitality by Ioannis Mouchras, the Prince of Naxos. Mouchras is a symbolic protagonist rather than a direct representation of a specific historical personality. While Sanoutos represents the merchants of nations (the Latins), Mouchras represents the traditional Byzantine cultural values of hospitality and honour, he represents the vulnerability of the declining Byzantine Empire, noble and principled, yet unable to defend against the aggressive, mercantile expansion of the West. Augousta, Mouchras's wife is seduced by Sanoutos who betrays Mouchras. Further on in the narrative, Augousta has abandoned Sanoutos and retreated to a monastery on Patmos and Mouchras, concealing his identity under the name Vendikis, seeks revenge. The narrative culminates when Sanoutos, leading a Venetian fleet, besieges the castle of Naxos, during which Augousta perishes (Vardoulakis, 2009, p. 1091).

Thematically, as detected in *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky questions the possibility of absolute goodness within a morally conflicted society, depicting contrasting tensions such as those between innocence and corruption, faith and rational doubt, and redemptive and destructive love. The novel reveals the socio-political transformations of mid-nineteenth-century Russia as it illustrates the erosion of aristocratic authority, the expansion of capitalist relations, and the ideological instability produced by secularization and Westernization. Money functions not only as a narrative device but as a destabilizing moral force, as inheritances, financial dependency, and excessive generosity repeatedly challenge ethical limits and social hierarchies. Political power is enacted through reputation, social behaviour, and psychological domination rather than formal institutions. Dostoevsky's critique of capital punishment connects moral inquiry directly to state authority. Modernity appears as a condition of nihilism, social fragmentation, and economic instrumentalization that renders ethical responsibility urgent (Bakhtin, 1984; Dostoevsky, 2010; Frank, 2010).

While Dostoevsky situates ethical conflict within the tensions of individual consciousness and a rapidly transforming society, Papadiamantis addresses similar concerns through a historically contextualized and communally oriented ethical framework. In *The Merchants of Nations*, the detected themes include communal endurance, faith, and moral responsibility within contexts of social injustice and displacement. Through the historical reconstruction of Venetian expansion, Papadiamantis provides a critique of political domination and economic exploitation. Political authority is further criticized through the depiction of the genealogy of politics and through the reference to the bonds forged by politicians

"for the peoples in the deep darkness of their eternal workshop." By juxtaposing past and present, Papadiamantis transforms historical narration into an ethical critique, presenting political and economic domination as a recurring structural condition (Beaton, 1996; Vitti, 2003; Diamantis, 2015).

A comparative analysis further reveals how these thematic concerns are manifested through contrasting character configurations in both novels. A contrast between innocence and moral darkness is represented in *The Idiot* by Prince Lev Myshkin and Parfyon Semyonovich Rogozhin, and in *The Merchants of Nations* by Prince Ioannis Mouchras and Markos Sanoutos, respectively.

The protagonist of *The Idiot*, Myshkin, is conceived by Dostoevsky as an "absolutely beautiful man," yet perceived by society as an "idiot," a term that indicates both his social exclusion and moral innocence. Myshkin, a compassionate young man, returns to St Petersburg after treatment in a Swiss sanatorium for epilepsy. His innocence and moral purity distinguish him from the society he encounters. This innocence is antithetical to the destructive obsession and moral darkness exhibited by characters such as Rogozhin. The opposition between innocence and moral darkness generates the novel's main dramatic tension and determines the progression of the plot. The arenas of this conflict are the social spaces of Russian aristocratic life, including drawing rooms, family gatherings, and parties (Dostoevsky, 2010, p. viii). These spaces function as representations of a society in moral crisis, where interactions become the stage for ethical examination.

The opposition between innocence and corruption is further nuanced in *The Merchants of Nations* through Mouchras's response to moral transgression, as his forgiveness of Augousta reflects the recognition of inherent goodness despite human fallibility. His reaction, characterized by compassion and ethical restraint, is similar to Myshkin's capacity for unconditional understanding, thereby reinforcing the thematic exploration of moral innocence challenged by corruption.

A prevalent theme in *The Idiot* is the awareness of mortality. Reference is made to death and capital punishment, highlighting existential anxiety as a structuring concern (Dostoevsky, 2010, p. ix). Another theme in the novel is the fragility of life, often expressed through illness. Myshkin's epilepsy, in particular, renders him physically vulnerable while also providing him with instances of acute awareness and sensitivity (Dostoevsky, 2010, p. x). Illness serves as a narrative device connecting suffering, compassion, and expanded consciousness. Myshkin's kindness and generosity derive partly from this awareness of human suffering, as well as from a profound loneliness and desire for human connection (Dostoevsky, 2010, p. xi). Similarly, Papadiamantis depicts a society permeated by decay and mortality, highlighting the fragility of communal life and the ethical consequences of social and political corruption. Whereas Dostoevsky concentrates on individual

vulnerability through Myshkin's illness and moral sensitivity, Papadiamantis extends the theme of mortality to the societal and historical level, revealing that the inevitability of decay influences both individual and collective ethical responsibility.

The examination of narrative structure in these novels reveals how narratological strategies organize and convey the representation of ethical concerns. Formally, *The Idiot* develops polyphonically through dialogic interaction, dynamic focalization, and psychological interiority. As Bakhtin argues, Dostoevsky's fiction presents "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights" (1984, pp. 6–7). The narrative's digressions, indirect discourse, and unstable transitions between narratorial discourse and character dialogue destabilize interpretive certainty (Dostoevsky, 2010, pp. xiv–xv). Instability in narratorial authority and in the interplay between narratorial discourse and character dialogue weaken narrational control, reinforcing ethical indeterminacy. Myshkin's dialogues with Rogozhin, Nastasya Filippovna Barashkova, Lukyan Timofeevich Lebedev, and Ippolit Terentyev depict this indeterminacy.

Drawing on Genette's theory of narrative discourse (1980, 1988), *The Idiot* reveals instability in narrative order, duration, and frequency. Although the novel appears broadly chronological, it repeatedly uses analepsis through indirect discourse and retrospective narration, disrupting temporal linearity and complicating ethical evaluation. Narrative duration fluctuates between scenic representation, particularly in extended social interactions, and expanded discursive passages in which philosophical contemplation suspends plot progression. Such temporal interventions intensify ethical tension by slowing decisive moments and emphasizing ethical uncertainty. The recurrence patterns of narrative events intensify interpretive complexity. Ethical dilemmas, including inheritance and social humiliation, recur throughout varying focalizations, highlighting moral consequences rather than providing narrative resolution. Focalization remains dynamic and resists consolidation into a singular ethical authority.

The Merchants of Nations uses omniscient narration, linear progression, and structured causal development, producing a stable narratorial framework. Ethical meaning is situated within collective historical experience, as individual destinies are placed within communal and economic structures. This combination of narrative techniques emphasizes diachronic consequence and social responsibility, situating ethical evaluation within communal conventions rather than dispersed interior consciousness, thus establishing a coherent historical framework distinct from Dostoevsky's polyphonic indeterminacy (Bal, 2009; Beaton, 1996; Genette, 1980, 1988; Vitti, 2003).

The thirteenth-century Mediterranean setting, of *The Merchants of Nations*, emphasizes historical decline and transformation, while the episodic yet linear

structure cultivates a socially performative ethical orientation. Narrative order privileges linearity, reinforcing historical determinacy and communal continuity. Summary and descriptive exposition dominate over psychological depth, situating moral reflection within collective temporality. Recurring patterns of economic exploitation and moral failure emphasize structural rather than psychological concerns.

Dostoevsky destabilizes narrative authority through polyphonic multiplicity, whereas Papadiamantis constructs historically situated ethical coherence. In both cases, narrative structure is congruent with ethical conditions, enabling sustained moral involvement.

External focalization is congruent with communal conventions instead of dispersed interior consciousness, further reinforcing this coherent historical framework (Genette, 1980, 1988; Bal, 2009). In *The Merchants of Nations*, focalization, though collectively oriented, highlights communal ethical concerns, social interdependence, and historical consequence (Beaton, 1996; Vitti, 2003).

Interior focalization structures ethical perception. In *The Idiot*, it involves the reader in the protagonist's moral and psychological deliberations, highlighting tensions between innocence, social corruption, and moral responsibility (Bakhtin, 1984; Frank, 2010).

On stage, these focalization strategies are realized through soliloquy, dialogue, scene composition, and the spatial arrangement of actors, rendering both interior and external focalization as theatrically performed ethical experience. In *The Idiot*, interior focalization configures audience perception of character motivation, moral conflict, and social ambiguity, emphasizing the reception of individual ethical dilemmas. In *The Merchants of Nations*, external focalization structures perception of communal action, social consequence, and historical order, highlighting the reception of collective ethical frameworks (Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014).

As established, narratological techniques not only organize narrative structure but also influence the expression of ethical meaning.

Dostoevsky prioritizes Orthodox Christian faith as the interpretive framework for ethics, asserting a preference to "stay with Christ and not with the truth" (Dostoyevsky, 1914, p. 71), thus indicating commitment to faith over rational certainty. *The Idiot*, one of Dostoevsky's most personal works, draws on his ethical convictions and experiences, including epilepsy and a mock execution, and examines suffering, compassion, and ethical idealism based on faith in modern society, thus assessing the viability of Christian love in an ethically conflicted Russia (Frank, 2010).

Similarly, in *The Merchants of Nations*, Papadiamantis presents ethical convictions based on Orthodox Christian faith. His reverence for Christ, his

detailed depiction of nature and his careful representation of Greek customs express a moral and artistic orientation based on humility, reverence, and cultural continuity (Papadiamantis, 1982). His ethical stance emphasizes compassion, empathy, and purposeful action, avoiding ridicule in favor of correction, healing, and salvation, within a framework of forgiveness and spiritual responsibility (Koustenis, 2001).

Dostoevsky and Papadiamantis develop ethical inquiry within a common theological orientation, realized through distinct narrative modes of representation. Dostoevsky examines moral conflict through dialogic exploration rather than explicit authorial dominance. Compassion appears fragile and ethical judgment unstable. Economic exchange affects emotional and social relations, revealing the connection between money and ethical decay. Papadiamantis reflects the ethos of Christian Orthodoxy, emphasizing communal humility and endurance. The theological orientations of these authors function as narrative ethical paradigms rather than biographical determinants.

In contrast to Dostoevsky's emphasis on psychological and existential conflict, Papadiamantis situates ethical exploration within communal frameworks, where individual actions affect familial and economic relations, highlighting collective responsibility. His historical representation further critiques power, economic exploitation, and domination, particularly in Greek and Latin relations (Diamantis, 2015).

Within this comparative ethical structure, romantic love functions in both novels as a structural catalyst, highlighting moral instability, social and economic pressures, and ideological tensions. Ethical inquiry is inextricably connected with historically constituted social conflict, situating individual responsibility within broader societal dynamics.

The novels offer distinct yet convergent reactions to modernity. Dostoevsky highlights psychological disintegration, while Papadiamantis emphasizes social and economic differentiation and the weakening of communal cohesion (Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014).

The stage adaptations of *The Idiot* and *The Merchants of Nations* exemplify how distinct narrative structures and ethical orientations are transformed through performance. In *The Idiot*, variable focalization and dialogic interaction emphasize interior ethical tension and instability, whereas in *The Merchants of Nations*, a more organised narrative framework combining narration, dialogue, and psychological reflection, situates ethical meaning within social and historical contexts. These structures are theatrically adapted through dramaturgical processes such as condensation, scene reorganization, and an increased emphasis on dialogue and physical performance. Consequently, the interpretation of

responsibility, intention, and consequence is reconfigured in performance, with *The Idiot* facilitating individualized ethical involvement and *The Merchants of Nations* promoting collective ethical experience (Phelan, 2007; Rabinowitz, 1998; Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014).

The 2007 stage adaptation of *The Idiot*, directed by Stathis Livathinos, based on a dramatization by Savvas Kyriakidis and on Aris Alexandrou's translation, and staged at the National Theatre of Greece, Experimental Stage, exemplifies the dramaturgical reconfiguration of Dostoevsky's polyphonic narrative into performance. The production emphasizes character speech, reconfiguring narratorial mediation, and renders ethical tensions through direct interaction. Myshkin's sincerity is performed through extended dialogue and minimal staging. Characters convey their subjective experiences directly, producing a form of staged polyphony that reinforces the instability of discursive authority and intensifies ethical indeterminacy (Livathinos, 2007; Papagiorgis, 1990).

Within the production programme, Papagiorgis's commentary interprets the characters as individuals whose truth is revealed rather than concealed, thus reinforcing the production's emphasis on directness and disclosure. Rather than eliminating interiority, this disclosure is achieved through its externalisation in dialogue, where ethical ambiguity remains active within speech itself (Livathinos, 2007).

Papagiorgis argues that *The Idiot* diverges from Dostoevsky's earlier narrative framework by configuring a protagonist whose thought is externalised in speech, diminishing narrated interiority and producing a dramaturgically oriented structure. Dialogue becomes the main means of ethical expression, with truth expressed through language rather than through narrative interiority, thus sustaining ethical ambiguity within interaction and increasing the novel's theatrical adaptability (Papagiorgis, 1990).

Furthermore, the production integrates narration, excerpts, and dialogic scenes, reinforcing the novel's theatricality and polyphonic structure. This staging creates a contrast between narrative passages and dramatic scenes, thus structuring the performance through a dynamic interplay of narration and dramatic interaction. This juxtaposition contributes to the reinterpretation of *The Idiot*'s ethical complexity on stage and highlights the actor's role in revealing latent dimensions of the characters.

The 2011 stage adaptation, *Merchants of Nations*, directed by Thodoris Abazis and staged by the ΟΠΕΡΑ Theatre Company, presented at the Onassis Stegi, restructures this prose into an intermedial, collectively structured musical theatre performance (Onassis Cultural Centre, 2011). The production integrates dramatized narration, live music, and digital media to transform prose narration into performative experience.

Through selective condensation and reorganization, the production highlights ethical tensions structured by interpersonal conflict, social and economic power (Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014). Digital media interact with Papadiamantis's linguistic idiom through an intermedial strategy that reconfigures narrative expression through technological development, generating a distinctive form of musical theatre in which contemporary media and the original musical composition construct a dynamic stage environment (Onassis Cultural Centre, 2011). Ensemble staging redistributes narrative authority from an omniscient narrator to a collective performative framework, reinforcing the communal dimension of the novel's ethical framework (Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014). Music and visual composition further organise the stage space, transforming historical material into a lived perceptual experience (Onassis Cultural Centre, 2011).

These stage adaptations of *The Idiot* and *The Merchants of Nations* show how distinct novelistic structures inform different dramaturgical strategies. Dostoevsky's novel is staged through the externalization of interiority and dialogic confrontation, whereas Papadiamantis's novel is realized through ensemble performance and spatial organisation. In both cases, adaptation reconfigures focalization and ethical emphasis, orienting spectators toward individualized or collective ethical experiences (Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014).

Within this comparative framework, the musical dimension, composed by Thodoris Abazis in both productions, functions as a supporting dramaturgical element in *The Idiot* and acquires a structurally significant role in *The Merchants of Nations*, where it contributes to the organisation of narration and collective performance.

In the adaptation of *The Idiot*, interiority is externalized through spatial isolation, selective lighting, and vocal intensity, rendering Myshkin's deliberations perceptible. Ensemble interaction spatializes social pressure, dramatizing tensions between innocence and corruption (Bakhtin, 1984; Krebs, 2014). In the adaptation of *The Merchants of Nations*, collective staging is emphasized through structured ensemble movement, ensemble vocal performance, and symbolic scenography, highlighting communal interdependence (Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014).

Performance transforms literary ethical inquiry into a shared experience (Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014). The adaptation of *The Idiot* highlights individual ethical conflict and ontological vulnerability, whereas the adaptation of *The Merchants of Nations* emphasizes communal responsibility and systemic injustice.

Reception studies indicate that interpretation is affected by historical and cultural context. Interpretations of Dostoevsky's novels, for example, have been influenced by evolving ideological frameworks throughout different phases of Russian history (Frank, 2010), whereas Greek scholarship has examined

Papadiamantis's literary production through national, religious, social and cultural perspectives (Mackridge, 2009). Reception theory further emphasizes that meaning is constructed through the interaction between text and audience, as readers' "horizon of expectations" is formed by specific conventions (Jauss, 1982). The reading process also involves the active participation of the reader in actualising the text, as meaning is constructed through the interpretation of textual indeterminacies (Iser, 1978).

Critical interpretations of the 2007 production of *The Idiot*, directed by Livathinos, emphasized the maintenance of psychological nuance and ethical ambiguity through carefully constructed dramaturgical strategies. The production was further distinguished for its combination of narrative passages from the novel, discontinuous dialogue, and staged narration, a combination that transforms the novel's psychological interiority into theatrical form and maintains narratological complexity (Livathinos, 2007).

By contrast, critical reception of the 2011 adaptation of *The Merchants of Nations*, directed by Abazis, emphasized its choral dynamism, musicality, and multimodal composition. As indicated in the production programme, the integration of live music, performance, and new media is presented as extending the boundaries of theatrical form, as actors and musicians collectively sustain narration while interacting with Papadiamantis's linguistic idiom (Onassis Cultural Centre, 2011).

Critical interpretations indicate that the theatrical adaptations of *The Idiot* and *The Merchants of Nations* construct distinct horizons of expectation for spectators (Jauss, 1982) and necessitate spectators' active participation in the construction of meaning (Iser, 1978). These interpretations therefore reveal how adaptive strategies reconfigure the perceived ethical concerns of each novel within their respective narrative organisation (Hutcheon, 2013; Krebs, 2014).

Conclusions

The comparison of the examined theatrical adaptations of *The Idiot* and *The Merchants of Nations* reveals the interrelation of narrative structure, ethical inquiry, and theatricality. Through theatrical adaptation, narrative meaning is transformed from literary narration into performative representation, as ethical tensions are conveyed through monologue, dialogue, staging, and spatial organisation.

Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* presents a polyphonic narrative structure in which independent and often conflicting perspectives produce ethical meaning through interaction. In theatrical adaptation, this plurality of perspectives is rendered through intense dialogue, discontinuous interaction, monologic interventions,

and dynamic stage interplay that externalise psychological and ethical conflict. The transition from literary structure to performance therefore emphasizes confrontation, emotional instability, and the interaction of competing perspectives.

In comparison, Papadiamantis's *The Merchants of Nations* presents a more organised polyphonic structure that combines dialogue and psychological introspection within a historically and culturally nuanced framework. In theatrical adaptation, these elements are transformed into performative arrangements that emphasize dialogic interaction, collective staging, and emotional communication, while conveying the novel's ethical and psychological complexity through dialogue, ensemble performance, and selective monologic presentation.

Theatrical adaptation thus functions as a process of dramaturgical transformation in which literary structures are reconfigured through performance. The reception of these stage realisations, as evidenced in critical and interpretative responses to each performance, further indicates that the transition from literary narrative to theatrical performance transforms ethical experience differently in each stage adaptation. In the reception of the stage adaptation of *The Idiot*, a highly diverse and conflictual interpretative framework is observed, whereas in the reception of the stage adaptation of *The Merchants of Nations*, a more organised yet complex structure of ethical interpretation, influenced by psychological, social, and cultural tensions, is discerned.

In conclusion, theatrical adaptation sustains the contemporary relevance of nineteenth-century fiction by reconfiguring ethical experience through distinct dramaturgical strategies of polyphonic confrontation and intermedial ensemble performance.

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LABORATORY OF ANCIENT DRAMA AND THEATRE RESEARCH: **ANCIENT DRAMA TRANSLATIONS—FROM THE STAGE TO THE PAGE**

Aeschylus (2024) *Oresteia*. Translated by G. Sotiriadis. Transcription, editing, and introduction by A. Mavroleon. Athens: Kapa Publishing. 112 pp. ISBN 978-960-628-346-8.

Euripides (2024) *Orestes*. Translated by G. Sevastikoglou. Transcription, editing, and introduction by K. Ziropoulou. Athens: Kapa Publishing. 112 pp. ISBN 978-960-628-345-1.

Euripides (2025) *Trojan Women*. Translated by K. Kolotas. Transcription, editing, and introduction by K. Arvaniti. Athens: Kapa Publishing. 96 pp. ISBN 978-960-628-410-6.

Aristophanes (2025) *Ecclesiazusae & Ecclesiazouses*. Translated by S.A. Evangelatos. Editing and introduction by K. Diamantakou. Athens: Kapa Publishing. 236 pp. ISBN 978-960-628-424-3.

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Abstract: A book review of four editions of ancient drama translations, produced within the framework of the Laboratory of Ancient Drama and Theatre Research (L.AND.THE.RE.) at the Department of Theatre Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA).

Keywords: Aeschylus' *Oresteia,* Euripides' *Orestes*, Euripides' *Trojan Women,* Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* & *Ecclesiazouses*.

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Over the two-year period 2024–2025, the reading public was presented with a fourfold 'gift': Modern Greek renderings of ancient plays which, despite having fueled significant theatrical performances during the 20th century, had until recently remained unpublished. Thanks to the research activity of the **Laboratory of Ancient Drama and Theatre Research** (L.AND.THE.RE., Department of Theatre Studies, NKUA: https://ancientdramalab-en.theatre.uoa.gr/, email: ancientdramalab@theatre.uoa.gr) and its director, Professor Kaiti Diamantakou, this material—invaluable to the theatrical, academic, and broader theatre-loving community—has been brought to light. These editions are further enhanced by the exceptional editing support of distinguished Greek theatre researchers and the high-quality publication standards of Kapa Publishing House, in collaboration with the Lab. The four editions, presented below in chronological order of publication, are as follows:

I. Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Translated by Georgios Sotiriadis. Transcription, editing, and introduction by Anna Mavroleon. Kapa Publishing, 2024.

The publication of this translation was decisively supported by Anna Mavroleon, Associate Professor at the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Peloponnese. In her insightful Introduction ("An Ancient Greek, a German, and a 'Mixed' *Oresteia*: The Adventure of a Manuscript"), she provides comprehensive details regarding the 1903 production of Aeschylus' trilogy at the Royal Theatre of Greece. This version used Georgios Sotiriadis' translation in a "mixed" language (Demotic with elements of mild *katharevousa*). This specific translation followed Raul Schlenther's German adaptation, which had premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna in 1900 under the direction of Fritz Krastel. Further illuminating information about this production is drawn from Helmut Flashar's

study *Antiquity on Stage*. The introductory text also informs us that Sotiriadis' translation was never published and survived in a single manuscript held at the Library of the Hellenic Center of Theatrical Research—Theatre Museum. This manuscript was likely used in a post-1903 production of the trilogy by Marika Kotopouli's troupe. The 1903 production, directed by Thomas Economou based on Sotiriadis' translation, became synonymous with the condemnation of the Demotic (or "hairy") Greek language and the infamous "Oresteiaka" riots. During these events, Professor Georgios Mistriotis and many students reacted with fury against the Royal Theatre and the production's contributors.

The editor provides meticulous details, backed by authoritative sources, regarding the figures and circumstances of that era, as well as data on the transcription of the original manuscript by actor V. Argyropoulos. This well-documented introduction offers numerous other historically useful details about the translation and the performance that provoked the hostility of Professor Mistriotis and other scholarly spectators of the time. Excerpts from contemporary newspapers such as *Asty*, *Astrapi*, *Kairoi*, and *Proia* further illuminate the atmosphere of the period.

The Introduction is followed by an insightful "Note on the Editing of the Manuscript" and photographs featuring the first page of the manuscript, Marika Kotopouli reciting Kostis Palamas' "Hail to Tragedy" before the opening of *Oresteia*, the 1903 program, and the list of characters. The volume concludes with the transcribed translation of *Oresteia* in three acts.

II. Euripides' *Orestes*. Translated by Giorgos Sevastikoglou. Transcription, editing, and introduction by Konstantina Ziropoulou. Kapa Publishing, 2024.

Giorgos Sevastikoglou's translation of Euripides' *Orestes* was completed in 1982, when the play was staged under his own direction by the National Theatre of Greece. The production premiered at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus to critical acclaim and was revived over the following two summers (1983 and 1984). In her enlightening Introduction ("Giorgos Sevastikoglou's Translation/Adaptation of *Orestes* (1982): A Journey from Paris to the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus"), editor Konstantina Ziropoulou, Associate Professor at the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Patras, analyzes the translator's realistic and anthropocentric approach to ancient tragedy—an approach that successfully engages with contemporary socio-political developments. A polyglot with extensive experience gained through his work with Karolos Koun's Art Theatre (*Theatro Technis*), Sevastikoglou produced a translation in a language that is "flexible and vibrant", as Ziropoulou notes.

The translation of *Orestes* is Sevastikoglou's only intralingual translation (from Ancient to Modern Greek), characterized by a theatrical discourse that is: "liberated […] prose-like in the Episodes, aiming for a kind of equivalence with the original, while translating the Choral odes into much more rhythmic and, occasionally, metrical verses" (p. 12). The message highlighted through the Euripidean myth—focusing on the struggle of youth rising up against injustice—deeply resonated with the audience. This was largely due to Sevastikoglou's targeted translation of specific words and verses; for instance, the adjective *kakiste* (vile one) addressed by Orestes to Menelaus is rendered as: "Coward, craven, scoundrel, deserter!"—a sequence of synonyms of increasing intensity regarding the implied injustice, which speaks to young people through their own linguistic code. Ziropoulou also discusses several other features of the translation/adaptation, such as cuts and interventions (e.g., the shortening of the Chorus's text and its division into small groups), while providing extensive data on the production's innovative aesthetic elements (costumes, music, etc.). Konstantina Ziropoulou's Introduction includes well-chosen excerpts from theatrical reviews of the production (pp. 26–29), as well as visual material from the performance. The information she provides is crucial for understanding both the translational and the theatrical event. Unlike the "mixed" language of the *Oresteia* mentioned above, Sevastikoglou's translation remains very close to our modern linguistic sensibilities; thus, the emotional guidance (*psych-agogy*) and communal participation (*methexis*) are immediate, drawn from the polysemous discourse of Euripides' tragedy. The Introduction concludes with detailed notes on the editing process, followed by the complete text of the translation/adaptation of *Orestes*.

III. Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Translated by Kostis Kolotas. Transcription, editing, and introduction by Katerina Arvaniti, Kapa Publishing, 2025.

The "dynamic" translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, as characterized by the volume's editor, Katerina Arvaniti, Professor at the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Patras, was first utilized by the Cyprus Theatre Organisation (THOC) in 1982. Directed by Nikos Charalambous, the production was presented that same year at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus, leaving a distinct mark with its themes of displacement and the "Chorus of the Dead" ghosts. The comprehensive Introduction, titled "The Dynamic Theatricality of Kolotas' *Trojan Women*: 1982 (Cyprus Theatre Organisation) – 2017 (Attis Theatre)", provides extensive information on this translation, which was staged again in 2017, directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos. Notably, Despina Bebedeli performed the pivotal role of Hecuba in both productions. The Introduction highlights Kostis Kolotas' prolific translation work, largely developed through his

collaborations with directors, primarily within the Cyprus Theatre Organisation. Arvaniti notes that Kolotas' translations strictly adhere to specific principles for understanding ancient drama, focusing on the successful transposition of the ancient text into the terms of modern theatricality.

By situating Kolotas' work within the broader landscape of *Trojan Women* translations in both katharevousa and Demotic (pp. 11–15), Arvaniti uses illustrative examples to showcase its virtues. She identifies linguistic correspondences with the original text where necessary and points out verses containing elements of Greek folk song (the decapentasyllabic meter, folk expressions, repetitions, and compound adjectives that enhance theatricality) or idiomatic endings from the Cypriot dialect. The analysis emphasizes phrasing variations designed to bolster the text's theatricality, as well as verbal phrases that enhance the orality and accessibility of the stage discourse. The transcription of Kolotas' translation was based on a typescript of his, for which Arvaniti provides additional details. Following the rich introductory material, the editorial notes, and the photographic documentation, the volume presents the translation of *Trojan Women* in 1,831 Modern Greek verses (compared to 1,332 in the original).

IV. Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* & *Ecclesiazouses*. Translated by Spyros A. Evangelatos. Editing and introduction by Katy Diamantakou, Kapa Publishing, 2025.

We conclude with the fourth book in this series, which moves us from ancient Tragedy to ancient Comedy—from Aeschylus and Euripides to Aristophanes. Following the editions of *Oresteia*, *Orestes*, and *Trojan Women*, his volume presents two distinct translations of Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen* (*Ecclesiazusae*). Left to us by their creator, Spyros Evangelatos, with a gap of nearly thirty years between them, these versions provide a vital case study for theatrical intralingual translation. Both translations possess distinct artistic, historical, and cultural value, marking two different linguistic, social, and theatrical eras: a journey from Aristophanes' initial establishment (following his introduction to the Epidaurus Festival in 1957) to his definitive status and great polyphony during the *Metapolitefsi* (the period after the fall of the Greek junta). The value of these two translations is further magnified by the fact that the translator—who also directed both versions in two different productions of the same play—was the great man of the theatre, Spyros Evangelatos. A true *homo universalis*, he served the arts in numerous capacities: as a director, playwright, translator, scholar, and professor at the Department of Theatre Studies (NKUA), which he co-founded with Walter Puchner. For his multifaceted contribution, he was honored by numerous institutions and the Academy of Athens, where he served as a regular member, Vice-President, and President.

In her extensive Introduction ("*Ecclesiazusae* 1969 and 1998: Two Facets of the Same Work and the Same Translator-Director"), Kaiti Diamantakou, Professor at the Department of Theatre Studies (NKUA), provides details on both the first 1969 typescript and the second 1998 translation, the transcription of which was based on the program of the corresponding production by the iconic "Amphi-Theatre". The Introduction offers additional information on the creator and, crucially, on the convergences and divergences of the two translations (and their respective performances). These insights testify to the rigorous translational work of S.A. Evangelatos and the meticulous critical analysis of the editor. Diamantakou presents comparative translational samples from both versions of the *Assemblywomen*, which convincingly capture two different eras: the first, overshadowed by dictatorship and censorship, and the second, politically liberated after the restoration of democracy and linguistically emancipated following the official establishment of the Demotic language in 1976.

As with the previous editions, this volume includes analytical notes on the editing process and linguistic choices made during transcription, along with photographic material useful for surveying the aesthetics of both productions. The second part of the book presents Aristophanes' comedy in both of Spyros Evangelatos' translations.

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In the **Introductory Note** that precedes each of the four editions, the project's scientific coordinator, Kaiti Diamantakou, emphasizes the importance of publishing Modern Greek translations of ancient drama which—despite having served as the basis for landmark productions on the Greek stage—remained unpublished after the performances concluded. This is primary material of great significance: "for the history of Greek theatre and Greek society, and for the history and theory of theatrical performance and translation", as the author aptly points out. Indeed, this is an exceptional piece of research that has already yielded rich results and promises to produce even more in the near future, by salvaging and highlighting translations that are significant in their own right, as well as crucial for understanding the theatrical and social context in which they functioned. The fourfold editorial result is excellent, and the cultural impact of the entire project is vast. Congratulations are due to everyone involved bringing this vital and original material out of archival obscurity and offering it to the wider public.

Glyfada, January 2026

*****At the time this article was submitted, the fifth edition—which was produced within the same research framework as above—had not yet been published. This is the edition of the translation of Sophocles'* Oedipus at Colonus by *Angelos Terzakis, with an extensive introduction by MA theatrologist, director, translator, and member of the Laboratory of Ancient Drama and Theatre Research, Alexander Cohen (Kapa Publishing House, Athens 2026). In addition, following the submission of this article, another highly significant—this time digital—tool for Theatre Studies, Classical Studies, Classical Reception Studies, and Translation Studies was offered to the general public by the same Laboratory:* ***The Database of Modern Greek Translations of Ancient Drama "Proteus"****, which provides valuable editorial and performance data on the broad field of Modern Greek translations of Ancient Drama and their performances in Greece. The Database is accessible at: http://proteus.translations.theatre.uoa.gr/HEURIST/heurist/?db=Proteus_21&website=7620&lang=EL&pageid=7674*"

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A production of tragedy is never only an interpretation of antiquity. It is also an intervention in the present.

The essays collected in *Greek and European Theatre: A Comparative Dimension* approach this complex fields through comparison. Here, comparison is treated as a critical method for examining relations: relations between texts and performances, antiquity and modernity, source cultures and receiving cultures, local theatrical practices and transnational networks. The comparative perspective makes visible the processes through which theatre travels, changes form, acquires new meanings, and intervenes in different cultural and political environments. […] Comparison itself must consequently be understood as a situated practice. The act of comparing is never innocent. It selects objects, establishes criteria, and produces relations of proximity or distance. […] The contributions to this volume collectively demonstrate that Greek and European theatre are best understood not as separate traditions brought together retrospectively, but as fields constituted through encounter. […] The comparative dimension of the volume is therefore more than an organising theme. It is an invitation to reconsider how theatrical history is written. Rather than tracing stable genealogies, the essays investigate movement and mediation. Rather than treating reception as secondary to creation, they reveal reception as a creative practice in its own right. Rather than opposing antiquity and modernity, they examine the processes through which each is constituted in relation to the other. And rather than invoking Europe as a unified cultural space, they explore the differences, inequalities, and crossings through which European theatre has taken shape. […]

The dialogue between ancient and modern theatre developed throughout the volume likewise resists a simple chronological opposition. Antiquity and modernity do not exist as isolated historical moments. Modern theatre repeatedly constructs its own version of the ancient, while contemporary readings alter the questions scholars and practitioners bring to Greek drama. The ancient text becomes modern through performance and interpretation; the modern stage, conversely, defines itself through selective engagements with antiquity. The relationship is reciprocal, though not equal. Ancient drama carries the authority of canonisation, but modern theatrical practice has the power to expose, revise, parody, reject, or redistribute that authority.

ANDREAS MARKANTONATOS

With contributions by: Theodosis N. Pelegrinis, Andreas Markantonatos, Despina Kosmopoulou, Asterios Peltekis, Varvara Georgopoulou, Anna Mavroleon, Constantina Ziropoulou, Alexia Altouva, Penelope Frangakis, Christina Argyropoulou.

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