Violence tragique et guerres antiques au miroir du théâtre et du cinéma (XVIIe-XXIe siècles)

sous la direction de
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Atlantide

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Avant-propos

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Si les modernes sont aussi émus par *Œdipe-Roi* que les contemporains de Sophocle,
cela vient non du contraste entre la destinée et la volonté humaine,
mais de la nature du matériel qui sert à illustrer ce modèle.
(Sigmund Freud, *L'Interprétation des rêves*, PUF, trad. 1967)

Comment, encore et malgré tout rester Européen-ne ? Comment, encore et malgré tout rester un-e Européen-ne se référant à l'Antiquité grecque et latine sans tomber dans une caricature identitaire civilisationnelle obsédée par les racines de Notre Grande Civilisation Gréco-Latine ? Puisque l'Antiquité, et en particulier les tragédies grecques, ne sont plus l'apanage de la seule Europe, comment, enfin, rester citoyen-ne du monde en résistant aux séparatismes de tout poil ?

D'abord en se parlant les uns aux autres, en se rendant visite, en partageant, simplement, ce qu'on fait... et, en l'espèce, en poursuivant, sérieusement, scientifiquement et avec enthousiasme, l'étude d'un champ qu'on appelait autrefois « la rémanence de l'Antiquité dans les arts » et qui souhaite faire le lien entre les textes antiques et leurs mises en scène contemporaines, ou non, au théâtre et au cinéma. Puis en créant un autre lien, cette fois entre Oxford et Nanterre, autrement dit entre une équipe de recherche consacrée à l'identification, l'analyse, l'interprétation des mises en scène des textes anciens toutes périodes confondues et tous médias confondus — l'APGRD (Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama) —, et une autre équipe de recherche, — HAR (Histoire des Arts et des Représentations) —, dont l'une des branches s'intéresse aux manifestations de l'Antiquité dans les arts, plus particulièrement théâtraux et cinématographiques. C'est un pari que nous avons pris, et tenu, depuis six ans maintenant, ensemble et grâce aux talents d'organisation de Tiphaine Karsenti et de Cécile Dudouyt.

Ainsi, une fois par an, depuis 2011, alternativement à Oxford et à Paris, nos équipes se retrouvent pour comparer leurs approches à partir d'une question. Comment figurer la choralité antique au théâtre aujourd'hui (2011) ? Comment apparaissent les violences et

les guerres antiques dans le théâtre et le cinéma (2012 et 2015, objet de cette publication) ? Comment se manifeste l'épique antique au théâtre aujourd'hui (2013) ? Comment les traductions-adaptations des textes anciens métamorphosent-elles la manière dont ces textes sont représentés sur scène et à l'écran (2014) ? Que faire, aujourd'hui, des notions de « canon » et de « répertoire » lorsqu'on s'interroge sur les mises en scène du théâtre antique au théâtre et au cinéma (2016) ?

Peu à peu, nous avons été rejoints par d'autres chercheurs venus de France ou du Royaume-Uni, mais aussi de Grèce ou du Portugal, d'Italie ou des États-Unis, et peu à peu nous nous sommes enrichis de leurs interventions et nous avons eu l'impression d'avancer sans contrainte, grâce à cette gratuité et à cet enthousiasme qui n'étaient soumis à aucune pression de publication ni de résultats institutionnels. Si bien que cette publication, librement décidée, vient très logiquement à sa maturité, aujourd'hui, non pour trouver sa place dans un hypothétique classement évaluateur, mais simplement pour exister et donner lieu à une série de débats sur ce qui nous importe ici : la réception des œuvres antiques d'abord dans le théâtre au travers des siècles et des cultures, ensuite au cinéma, enfin dans les arts vivants et plastiques. Car puisque la mythologie et l'histoire antiques n'en finissent pas d'être réinterprétées — c'est leur fonction, indéfiniment variable —, notre projet est d'analyser ces séries de détournements, d'interprétations contradictoires, d'adaptations *au présent*.

Peu importe donc que les personnages anciens soient les résultantes de rites oubliés, qu'ils aient eu une origine réelle, qu'ils aient été des personnes physiques vivant une histoire « vraie ». Ce qui compte, c'est qu'ils existent comme des objets mythiques, théâtraux, cinématographiques et littéraires, transcrits de différentes manières. « Toutes les versions appartiennent au mythe », comme le dit Lévi-Strauss (*Anthropologie structurale*, Plon, 1958, p. 242), qu'elles soient de Sophocle ou de Freud, de Corneille ou de T. S. Eliot, qu'elles soient représentées à la Schaubühne, à Stratford, à l'Odéon ou sur les écrans d'Hollywood. Il s'agit donc ici de comprendre comment les films, les performances théâtrales, les tableaux, mais aussi les essais et les romans s'interrogent, quelle que soit leur période, sur les questions esthétiques, historiques et anthropologiques telles qu'elles apparaissent dans les textes antiques, sur leur construction mythique et sur leur mise en place sociale.

Ainsi, les schémas dramaturgiques antiques, à proprement parler, nous intéressent. L'histoire, la mythologie antiques sont souvent des rêves terribles avec lesquels il est urgent de vivre, malgré tout ce qu'ils dévoilent – inceste, parricide, guerres, violences de toutes sortes, fautes qui remontent à la nuit des temps –, et ils nous signalent que ces rêves sont d'une tragique réalité. Œdipe, figure antique et moderne, transversale pour notre civilisation au point que nous ne doutons plus qu'elle exprime une vérité commune, hante encore nos consciences. Or cette construction exemplaire est l'histoire symbolique d'une crise constamment commentée qui débouche naturellement sur l'énigme du monde. Œdipe, comme d'autres personnages de la mythologie et de l'histoire antiques, est l'un des noyaux de la connaissance que nous pouvons avoir de nous-mêmes, et nous savons, à travers lui, que notre race humaine boite, comme celle des Labdacides.

Introduction[1]

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Que l'on partage ou non les thèses anthropologiques de René Girard sur le lien nécessaire entre mythe, violence, conflit[2], force est de constater la permanence des actes violents dans la mythologie grecque, et ce dès l'origine avec le meurtre primordial d'Ouranos par son fils Cronos. Des dissensions familiales individuelles à l'échelle collective des guerres, les trahisons et les crimes appellent la vengeance et le châtiment, dans un engrenage sans fin de la violence. Depuis le creuset des cycles épiques et de la lyrique chorale, le passage de cette vaste matière à la scène se fait en lien avec l'expérience du régime démocratique dans la cité athénienne et, comme l'ont montré notamment Jean-Pierre Vernant et Pierre Vidal-Naquet, l'idéologie civique et démocratique s'est présentée comme un rempart nécessaire contre cette logique du sang mythique, érigée en contre-modèle. Pour schématiser, au monde de violence et de guerre de l'épopée, dominé par des personnalités d'exception, elles-mêmes guidées par les dieux, la cité et, en son sein, la tragédie opposent un univers dans lequel l'homme possède une part de responsabilité, qui est au cœur du nouveau système juridique et politique.

Pourtant, cette mise en œuvre ne se fait pas sans ambiguïtés, et rien n'est plus équivoque que la tragédie, dont la logique en vient souvent à repousser à l'extrême la violence inhérente au mythe : Euripide innove en faisant de Médée une infanticide ; Sophocle sublime la quête identitaire de son Œdipe en lui faisant se crever les yeux, ce qui n'était pas le cas d'Euripide dans son propre traitement de l'épisode ; et si Oreste vengeait bien son père dans l'épopée, il n'en était pas pour autant matricide à date ancienne. Quant au conflit troyen, l'accent est désormais mis sur la folie d'Ajax, et sur les plaintes d'Hécube, dont le personnage souffrant pourrait incarner le genre lui-même. La société démocratique athénienne trouve ainsi dans le mythe et ses mises en forme un miroir, valorisant ou déformant, qui lui permet de construire son image, pour elle-même

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[1] Avec nos plus vifs remerciements à Cécile Dudouyt, qui a précieusement contribué à la conception de ce numéro.

[2] Voir *La Violence et le sacré*, Paris, Grasset, 1972. « Dans les mythes et les légendes d'où sont tirées la plupart des tragédies, la fraternité est presque toujours associée à la réciprocité de la vengeance. Un examen attentif révèle que le héros tragique par excellence n'est pas l'individu solitaire, l'Œdipe de Freud et de la *Poétique* d'Aristote, mais le couple des frères ennemis, Étéocle et Polynice, Hamlet et Claudius. » (René Girard, *Shakespeare. Les feux de l'envie*, Paris, Grasset, 1990, p. 334).

ou pour les autres, en jouant sur le double rapport de proximité et d'écart qui la lie à ce fonds commun.

Au fil du temps, l'écart temporel et culturel entre l'univers mythique et le présent historique s'est accru. Mais la sensation d'une intimité imaginaire entre ce patrimoine archaïque et la culture occidentale a perduré, ravivée et attisée par l'humanisme à partir du XVe siècle, puis entretenue par le néo-classicisme, notamment allemand, à l'articulation des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles. Qu'a-t-on fait, dans ce cadre, de la violence omniprésente dans le mythe ? Comment des sociétés chrétiennes et soucieuses de réguler les comportements sociaux ont-elles reçu et transformé cette anthropologie tragique ? Dans quelle mesure les ressources narratives offertes par la mythologie ont-elles pu servir, par ailleurs, à défendre des esthétiques opposées au classicisme ou au néo-classicisme, qui trouvaient précisément dans cet excès leur porte-voix ? Si les valeurs associées à l'antiquité ont pu servir de socle à des normes esthétiques, sociales et politiques, les récits mythiques portent également en germe des ferments de désordre. La légitimité attachée par la culture occidentale aux héritages gréco-romains a alors paradoxalement facilité la légitimation de nouvelles normes esthétiques, éventuellement sociales ou idéologiques.

La violence et la guerre, thèmes retenus pour ce numéro, nous invitent ainsi à réfléchir sur la relation de proximité-éloignement entretenue par la culture occidentale avec le patrimoine mythologique, pris entre les valeurs paradigmatiques associées à l'antiquité en général – sur les plans éthique, politique, esthétique –, et les possibilités transgressives portées par ses schèmes narratifs. Il nous invite aussi à interroger les contextes de création pour décrypter des phénomènes d'appropriation. Le détour par la référence antique, souvent indissociablement mythologique et littéraire, s'inscrit en effet dans une tradition longue de l'intertextualité, et plus largement des pratiques de réception occidentales, mais il procède aussi à chaque fois d'un geste singulier, inscrit dans un contexte historique ou une trajectoire artistique propres. Les guerres et les crises qui jalonnent les XXe et XXIe siècles, notamment, ont suscité de nombreuses analogies théâtrales avec la guerre de Troie, en particulier dans des mises en scène de tragédies grecques qui, explicitement ou non, font signe vers le présent de leur représentation. À travers la violence et la guerre, les contributions de ce numéro appréhendent donc la mythologie dans l'art théâtral ou cinématographique sous deux aspects complémentaires : sa dimension paroxystique dans l'expression et la représentation de la violence ; sa dimension archétypale qui la hisse au rang de paradigme. Ces deux traits, propres aux mythes en général, leur confèrent la capacité de médiatiser, à travers une mise en forme artistique et un détour analogique, les tensions à l'œuvre dans la société ou dans l'histoire. Prises entre universalité et singularité, ces représentations invitent le spectateur, selon l'accent qu'elles choisissent, à mettre à distance le présent pour mieux l'interroger et en saisir la violence, ou, à l'inverse, à gommer ses aspérités pour le hisser à la hauteur du mythe.

Sans chercher l'exhaustivité, ce volume parcourt les siècles, du XVIIe au XXIe, et les pays (France, Grèce, Allemagne, Italie, Portugal, États-Unis), en s'intéressant aux lectures, aux reprises, aux usages de ces motifs grecs antiques dans le théâtre occidental depuis la première modernité. Ce panorama met en évidence le fait que la violence est une construction culturelle, historique et sociale, qui définit des partages à forte implication politique. Les objets d'application de la violence, les seuils de tolérance de la violence, les modes de réaction à la violence ne sont pas les mêmes selon le lieu ou l'époque dans lesquels on se situe, mais ils varient aussi selon les sensibilités artistiques et idéologiques.

C'est ce que montrent en particulier trois articles du volume, ceux de Tiphaine Karsenti, Cristina de Simone et Lucie Thévenet. Le premier oppose deux catégories de traducteurs du théâtre grec au XVIIIe siècle autour de la question de savoir si la violence est un obstacle ou un aiguillon pour le plaisir du spectateur de théâtre. Le second rappelle comment dans sa *Penthésilée,* Heinrich von Kleist prend le contrepied de ses contemporains en faisant de l'irrationalité une valeur, même et surtout si elle s'exprime par la violence. Le troisième montre comment cette violence est poussée à la limite par Kleist, qui combine les sources en les inversant pour construire une Amazone anthropophage, dévorant de la chair crue. Or chez lui comme chez Bene, cette exacerbation transgressive fait signe vers un au-delà de la représentation, dans l'intime du cœur humain (chez Kleist) ou dans le néant métaphysique (chez Bene).

De façon récurrente, dans des périodes de constitution, de consolidation ou de renouvellement de l'identité française, le patrimoine antique a soutenu la construction d'une mythologie nationale : à la Renaissance puis à l'époque dite classique, les modèles grecs et romains ont servi à forger une littérature « noble », destinée à un public d'« honnêtes gens » ; après la guerre de 1870, la référence antique a nourri la représentation d'une France populaire et démocratique (Géraldine Prévot). Les tragédies grecques et romaines, en particulier, ont servi de modèle esthétique, puis de surface de projection des problématiques d'actualité, notamment dans les périodes de guerre, d'abord à travers des réécritures et adaptations, puis, dès la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle, dans les mises en scène des œuvres elles-mêmes. Dans la France des guerres de religion, par exemple, Robert Garnier réécrit *Les Troyennes* à partir d'Euripide et de Sénèque (1579). Plusieurs articles de ce numéro sont par ailleurs consacrés à l'analyse de mises en scène de *L'Orestie* (Sofia Frade), des *Perses* (Haritini Tsikoura, Claire Lechevalier) d'*Agamemnon* (Estelle Baudou), des *Troyennes* (Claire Lechevalier) et de *Ion* (Sofia Frade) aux XXe et XXIe siècles.

Il ne s'agit plus alors de lire la référence antique comme un modèle, mais bien de s'emparer de son pouvoir d'ambivalence intrinsèque, et de notre rapport ambigu à elle, pour interroger le temps présent, à travers des modalités qui vont de l'analogie avec les faits passés jusqu'à leur plus grand éloignement, la marque forte de leur irrémédiable différence (Estelle Baudou). C'est bien la fonction même de la tragédie qui se trouve ici à nouveau questionnée (Claire Lechevalier).

À l'époque contemporaine, une nouvelle ligne de fracture apparaît, que les contributions ici réunies font apparaître : celle qui sépare les pays européens, victimes de la crise économique, du leader du monde capitaliste. La représentation des guerres antiques – la guerre de Troie et les guerres médiques – est en effet mobilisée dans certains pays d'Europe pour interroger, sur un mode analogique, la situation de crise engendrée par l'économie libérale. Au Portugal (Sofia Frade), ou en Grèce (Haritini Tsikoura), des metteurs en scène contemporains se saisissent des tragédies antiques pour faire signe vers la situation présente, dénoncer les souffrances, peut-être suggérer d'autres partages du sensible. Avant eux, Pier Paolo Pasolini utilisait la référence à l'*Orestie* pour faire ressortir la dimension mythique de la guerre réelle au Biafra, la beauté des humbles, en qui il voyait le seul espoir de résistance contre la violence capitaliste (Anne-Violaine Houcke). À l'inverse, l'industrie hollywoodienne joue avec le motif analogique, en suggérant une référence à la guerre en Irak derrière sa représentation de la guerre de Troie dans *Troy*. Mais dans ce pays qui ne connaît pas la crise, l'analogie sert surtout à produire des effets

de connivence ou de réalisme. Le véritable objet du film, comme le montre Anne-Violaine Houcke, est la glorification du septième art comme nouvelle forme d'épopée, créateur de mythes contemporains. La mythologie et le théâtre grecs sont des références communes aux perdants et aux vainqueurs de la guerre économique contemporaine, mais là où certains inscrivent leur expérience dans le prolongement de la tragédie antique, d'autres s'autorisent à réécrire l'histoire et à rationaliser le mythe, dans un geste démiurgique attirant toute l'attention sur la puissance d'un art audiovisuel à l'ère médiatique, et d'une industrie florissante dans une culture mondialisée.

Si les réécritures, reprises, interprétations et lectures de la tragédie grecque sont constantes et nombreuses en Europe depuis la Renaissance, on observe donc un renouvellement incessant des formes, des usages et des questionnements qu'elle suscite. Dans le monde désenchanté qui est le nôtre, le recours à un espace-temps mythique suppose souvent un retour réflexif sur les formes artistiques elles-mêmes, sur la fonction qu'elles assignent à la fiction et au travail esthétique de la réalité. L'ancrage de ces œuvres dans une civilisation et une culture considérées comme originelles et fondatrices pour l'Europe contemporaine rend en outre ces œuvres signifiantes, au-delà même de leur contenu, dans le cadre d'une crise de la démocratie. Enfin, le lyrisme de la souffrance et les tensions de l'ambiguïté constitutifs des formes tragiques les dotent d'une capacité à exprimer, dans un dispositif indirect, les inquiétudes et les malaises d'une Europe en crise.

Partie 1

Le théâtre grec : un modèle ambigu

ANCIENT TRAGEDY VIOLENCE IN THE FRENCH TRANSLATIONS
OF GREEK TRAGEDIES (1692-1785)

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Résumé : La tragédie grecque représente pour les dramaturges français du XVIIIᵉ siècle une référence incontournable, dont l'autorité ne peut être remise en cause. Néanmoins ce théâtre se montre à bien des égards étranger à l'esthétique régulière construite à partir de la lecture d'Aristote. La question de la violence et de l'horreur, qu'ils distinguent, confronte en particulier les auteurs à un paradoxe : à la suite d'Horace, ils condamnent la représentation de l'horreur sur scène, mais certains constatent l'importance des effets violents dans le plaisir tragique procuré par le théâtre grec. Si les adaptateurs des pièces antiques peuvent contourner les difficultés en modifiant l'action dramatique, les traducteurs qui entreprennent alors de donner accès au texte grec original doivent prendre position dans des commentaires additionnels. Dans un contexte d'essoufflement du modèle classique, de découverte de Shakespeare et de promotion de la sensibilité, ces traductions et lectures du théâtre antique contribuent ainsi au renouvellement de la poétique en privilégiant l'intensité des émotions, par le biais des images scéniques et des effets paroxystiques.

Mots-clés : traduction, théâtre grec, violence, horreur, poétique classique, sensibilité, émotion, bienséance, plaisir tragique.

Abstract: For French playwrights in the eighteenth century, Greek Tragedy constitutes a key reference, one whose authority cannot be questioned. Nonetheless, this theatre proves to be in many respects a stranger to the aesthetics of regularity that developed from a reading of Aristotle. In particular, the question of violence and horror, between which these playwrights draw a distinction, confronts the authors with a paradox: following Horace, they condemn the representation of horror on stage, yet some of them point out the importance of violent effects in the tragic pleasure provided by Greek theatre. While the adapters of Ancient plays can get around difficulties by modifying the dramatic action, the translators who endeavor to give access to the original Greek texts must take up a stance in their additional commentaries. At a time when the classical model is flagging, French playwrights have discovered the talent of Shakespeare, and sensibility is increasingly favored, these translations and readings of Greek theatre contribute to the renewal of poetics in giving more importance to the intensity of emotions, aroused by stage images and paroxysmal effects.

Keywords: translation, Greek theatre, violence, horror, classical poetics, sensibility, emotion, bienséance, tragic pleasure.

Eighteenth century tragedy is often considered an inferior reiteration of the great classical tragedy, a dying form of an old genre that was soon to be replaced by drama. This teleological vision of the history of theatre has often been a barrier to clearly appreciating the complexity of the theoretical discussions regarding the form and function of tragedy before the French Revolution. These debates were indeed still lively after the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, especially among those who tried to defend the interest of ancient tragedy: the French translators of Greek theatre. Their editions of Greek plays included both the translations of the tragedies and commentaries on them. After Dacier published *Oedipus* and *Electra* by Sophocles in 1692, Pierre Brumoy ran his *Théâtre des Grecs* in 1730, for which a new edition was written and completed by Guillaume Dubois de Rochefort and François Jean Gabriel de La Porte Du Theil in 1785.

I will examine the reception of ancient tragedy violence in those texts and set out to understand whether the strangeness of the ancient practices allowed these thinkers to renew or to strengthen their conception of tragic theatre, and peculiarly their thoughts on the effects of tragedy.

All of these translators considered tragedy within the framework of the rules that had been established in the seventeenth century, among which the principle of '*vraisemblance*' was central. First, we will see that violence was supposed to be in contradiction with this precept. But then, we will show how the eighteenth century's translators of Greek plays were led to link violence with the efficiency of theatre, and renew the 'classical' model.

In tackling ancient tragedy and its violence, the theoreticians of the modern period were confronted with the limits of the classical conception of tragedy and paved the way to a different conceptualization of theatre, in which strong emotions would play a major role. In doing so, they echoed the experimentations carried out at the beginning of the century by Crébillon, who attempted to put horror on the stage.

VIOLENCE AND MORAL

'Decorum', or *bienséance*, was one of the chief rules of the classical canon, which itself had inherited it from Horace. And it is important not to forget that this principle was inseparably moral and dramatic. The moral balance between the characters represented and the supposed audience was an essential condition for guaranteeing the efficiency of tragedy. Thoughts on theatre focused on the idea that a play would only achieve its goal if the interest of the spectator were held. And the spectator's interest depended on how far the fiction matched his own representations of the world and of himself. Thus, the request for *bienséance* did not only aim to preserve the moral purity of theatre but was also considered a necessary condition to make the spectator believe or take interest in the fiction.

The issue that our corpus of translations had to deal with could then have been limited to this question: how does one tackle violence in a theatre of *bienséances*?

At first glance, it seems that, in a way, Greek tragedy triggered some kind of cultural shock in eighteenth century France, as Brumoy wrote: 'some fiction and certain old customs [are] too shocking for us'.

> [J]e n'ai pas cru qu'il fût possible de traduire tout au long la plupart des tragédies grecques. Et je doute qu'en ceci M. et Mme Dacier eussent tenu la parole qu'ils semblaient avoir donnée au public. Ils auraient été rebutés [...] par le préjugé invincible contre quelques fictions et certaines coutumes anciennes trop choquantes pour nous.[1]

We find this same reaction in all our authors, who each explain this shock by the relativity of cultures, like Father Rapin, who in 1674 explained that English people, because of their insularity, liked blood, whereas French people were more human and preferred love[2].

The situation was easier for the adapters of Greek tragedies, who quite freely changed some aspects of the play, or, as Rochefort said in the preface of his adaption of *Electra*, tried to 'accommodate [the action] to [their] theatre', because 'there are some sorts of particular conventions that [they] have to respect'[3]. This was notably the case for the ending of *Electra* by Sophocles, in which Agamemnon's grieving daughter encouraged her brother to hit their mother even harder. This passage was unanimously considered intolerable by French commentators and translators in the eighteenth century.

> Je suis persuadé que le sujet de cette pièce paraitra aujourd'hui trop horrible, et que l'on ne pourra souffrir un fils qui tue sa mère, et une fille qui exhorte son frère à ce meurtre.[4]
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> J'avoue cependant qu'il faudrait bien se garder de vouloir tout imiter dans le poète grec, et que le dénouement de l'Électre, quelque bien préparé et quelque théâtral qu'il soit, paraîtrait aujourd'hui trop horrible pour être souffert patiement sur notre théâtre.[5]

In Crébillon's *Electra* in 1708 for instance, Orestes kills her mother without realizing it and immediately regrets it. Rochefort, at the end of the century, had Clytemnestra move Orestes' hand and sword herself to her breast[6]. This kind of accommodation was unthinkable for the translators who claimed their transpositions were accurate.

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[1] Pierre Brumoy, *Le Théâtre des Grecs*, Paris, Rollin, 1730, « Discours sur le théâtre des Grecs », p. xxj.

[2] René Rapin, *Les Réflexions sur la poétique d'Aristote et sur les ouvrages des poètes anciens et modernes*, Paris, Muguet, 1674, II, 20, p. 183-184.

[3] « [O]n verra encore qu'en m'assujettissant scrupuleusement à la marche de Sophocle dans les quatre premiers actes, j'ai été obligé d'y incarner des rôles, pour préparer, pour conduire, pour motiver l'action autant que j'ai cru qu'elle devait l'être, en l'accommodant à notre théâtre. Il est des sortes de convenances particulières auxquelles nous sommes obligés de nous prêter. » Guillaume Dubois de Rochefort, *Électre, tragédie en cinq actes, imitée de Sophocle*, Paris, Michel Lambert et Baudouin, 1782, préface, p. xxij.

[4] André Dacier, *L'Œdipe et l'Électre de Sophocle, tragédies grecques, traduites en français avec des remarques*, Paris, Cl. Barbin, 1692, « Préface sur Électre ».

[5] Guillaume Dubois de Rochefort, *Électre*, *op. cit.*, préface.

[6] André Dacier had presented those two solutions as the only acceptable: « Si on mettait ce sujet sur le théâtre, il faudrait ou qu'Oreste tuât Clytemnestre sans la connaître, et qu'il la reconnût après, ou bien qu'elle s'enferrât elle-même en voulant secourir Egisthe, et c'est la méthode que tout poète doit suivre, quand il traitera de pareils sujets. », *L'Œdipe et l'Électre de Sophocle, op. cit.*, p. 498. And Pierre Brumoy, *Le Théâtre des Grecs, op. cit.*, p. 197: « On voudrait qu'Oreste fût vengé, mais par une autre main, ou s'il tue sa mère, qu'il le fît sans le savoir et malgré lui. »

Therefore, all of them added prefaces, notes or commentaries, exposing their opinions on the scenes composed by the author they were translating.

VIOLENCE AND EMOTION

Some violence, though, was accepted in tragedy, depending on its nature and on the way it was integrated into the drama.

The words 'violent' and 'violence' are rarely used in the texts that I have studied. 'Horrible', 'cruel' and 'atrocious' are much more frequent. When it is used, the adjective 'violent' qualifies feelings more than actions, according to its main meaning at that time[7]. Violence was seen as a psychological trait, a vice (impetuosity or anger), which for Dacier characterized both Oedipus and Electra[8]. For him, *Oedipus Tyrannos* was an allegorical play, condemning curiosity, pride, violence and anger[9]. Likewise, Rochefort designated Oedipus as a violent man:

> Œdipe était un de ces hommes violents, qui se révoltent contre les obstacles, qui s'abandonnent aisément aux plus injurieux soupçons, qui se précipitent en aveugles dans les dangers, et chez qui toutes les passions ont un degré de force que rien ne peut arrêter.[10]

The violence of Oedipus lies in his resistance to the truth and in the impetuosity of his passions.

In the eyes of the eighteenth century readers of ancient Greek plays, violence was thus first a subject for tragedy and one of the targets of its didactical function. By reasoning while watching the play, the audience was supposed to conclude that violence was dangerous.

But, as we know, the Aristotelian catharsis was not based solely on the intellectual reaction of the public but also on an emotional mechanism. Here is the first point of disagreement between our translators. All of them assigned the same goal to tragedy, i.e. to moderate the violence of passion in the spectator's soul.

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[7] Antoine Furetière, in his famous dictionary, defined « violent » as follows: « impétueux, véhément. », Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, seconde édition, 1707, t. 1, p. 154.

[8] André Dacier, *op. cit.*, « Remarques sur l'*Électre* », p. 234-235: « Sophocle oppose le caractère de Chrysothémis à celui d'Électre, c'est-à-dire un caractère de douceur, et de prudence, à un caractère de violence et d'emportement. [...] Chrysothémis reconnaît qu'il y a plus de justice, et plus de courage à pleurer Agamemnon, et à haïr ouvertement ses meurtriers, comme fait Électre, qu'à dissimuler ses sentiments ; mais il n'y a pas tant de prudence, et tout le monde ne peut pas pousser les vertus à cet excès en se dépouillant de l'amour propre qui nous est si naturel, et qui nous porte à travailler à notre conservation. Électre fait mieux, mais Chrystothémis ne fait pas mal. La Justice peut être accompagnée de prudence, et on peut s'accommoder au temps sans la violer ; cela convient même beaucoup mieux à une femme. ». « Électre rendrait son caractère moralement bon si elle suivait en quelque manière les avis de Chrysothémis ; car elle modèrerait ses emportements et ses violences », *ibid.*, p. 437.

[9] « Le but du poète est de faire voir que la curiosité, l'orgueil, la violence et l'emportement précipitent dans des malheurs inévitables les hommes qui ont d'ailleurs de fort bonnes qualités ; et voilà les passions qu'il veut que l'exemple d'Œdipe purge en nous. », André Dacier, *L'Œdipe et l'Électre de Sophocle, op. cit.*, Préface.

[10] Guillaume Dubois de Rochefort, *Électre, op. cit.*, p. xj.

Les péripatéticiens, persuadés qu'il n'y a que l'excès des passions qui soit vicieux, et que les passions sont utiles et même nécessaires, ont simplement voulu faire entendre *par purger les passions*, emporter l'excès par où elles pêchent et les réduire à une juste modération.[11]

Les tragédies grecques [...] ne devaient avoir d'autre objet que d'exciter la terreur et la pitié, dans la vue d'affaiblir ce que ces passions pouvaient avoir d'immodéré parmi ce peuple pour qui ces pièces étaient faites.[12]

La poésie procure deux avantages considérables à l'humanité, l'un d'adoucir les mœurs des hommes comme l'ont fait Orphée, Linus et Homère ; l'autre, de rendre leur sensibilité raisonnable et de la renfermer dans de justes bornes, comme l'ont pratiqué les poètes tragiques de la Grèce.[13]

But Dacier did not see the exact mechanism in exactly the same way as Brumoy or Rochefort. Indeed, Dacier rejected the exacerbation of passions on stage, whereas Brumoy and Rochefort could accept it on certain conditions.

In his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Dacier commented on chapter 15, establishing there a formula that he would use repeatedly in his commentaries on *Electra* two years later: 'Theatre is the enemy of atrocity'[14]. Contrary to Horace, he did not banish bloody or violent actions from the stage but only what he called 'atrocity'. Moreover, on several occasions in his commentaries, an action or a situation was depicted as 'too atrocious to be put before the eyes of the audience'[15], like the moment when, in Aeschylus' *Choephorae*, Clytemnestra beseeches her son not to kill her. More than the moral problem of matricide, the unbearable here is the emotional tension that this scene would produce if acted on the stage and not simply narrated. According to Furetière's dictionary, atrocious means '*outré, excessif, énorme*' (outrageous, excessive, enormous).[16] The excess that Dacier banished from the stage was thus the violence of a flood of emotions, transgressing the moral and social norms of behavior.

How could Dacier explain that tragedy tended to moderate violent passions, if he banished them from the stage? According to him, this catharsis was more an intellectual than emotional process. That is why atrocity could be forbidden on stage but could nevertheless be the aim of the play. For Dacier, catharsis worked with a double mechanism: one homeopathic and the other intellectual. The spectator should, on the one hand, feel compassion and fear, moderate emotions, when watching tragedy, which would prepare him to bear those passions more easily were he to be confronted with them in real life. And, on the other hand, the story of the tragedy would teach him that violent passions are dangerous.

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[11] André Dacier, *La Poétique d'Aristote traduite en français avec des remarques*, Paris, Cl. Barbin, 1692, « Remarques sur le chapitre VI », p. 78.

[12] Guillaume Dubois de Rochefort, *Électre, op. cit.*, p. 243.

[13] Pierre Brumoy, *Le Théâtre des Grecs, op. cit.*, p. liij.

[14] « Le théâtre est ennemi de l'atrocité », André Dacier, « Remarques sur l'*Électre* », *L'Œdipe et l'Électre de Sophocle, op. cit.*, p. 495 *sqq.* This expression was already used by Dacier in his translation of Aristotle's *Poétique, op. cit.*, « Remarques sur le chap. XV », p. 220.

[15] « Les deux défauts les plus considérables de la pièce d'Eschyle, c'est que la reconnaissance se fait dans le premier acte, et de la manière la plus grossière, et qu'on voit sur le théâtre, après la mort d'Egisthe, Clytemnestre qui prie son fils de ne pas la tuer. Cela est trop atroce pour le présenter aux yeux des spectateurs », André Dacier, *L'Œdipe et l'Électre de Sophocle, op. cit.*, « Préface sur l'*Électre* », p. 255.

[16] Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, seconde édition, 1707, t. 1, p. 154.

For Rochefort, though, the process was different. Electra was also characterized by her absence of control and moderation, but this acute sensitivity was not considered a character defect in itself:

> Que voit-on dans Électre ? une âme sensible et courageuse à l'excès. [...] les transports qu'elle fait paraître après avoir reconnu [Oreste] appartiennent bien moins aux intérêts de sa vengeance qu'aux plaisirs inexprimables de son excessive tendresse. [...] c'est une sensibilité extrême, qui ne connaît plus ni loi ni règle. [...] En vain, son frère lui recommande de se modérer.[17]
> What do we see in Electra? an excessively sensitive and courageous soul. [...] It is extreme sensitivity, which knows no laws nor rules. [...] Her brother urges her, in vain, to be more moderate.

For Rochefort, catharsis was only homeopathic, functioning like 'that enthusiastic music, that, accustoming the hearts to violent passions, weakened their dangers'[18]. Sensitivity was a positive aspect of the human being but had to be controlled to make society possible.

There is a chiasm both between Dacier and Rochefort's anthropological visions, and between their contrasting conceptions of the functions and mechanisms of theatre. Those differences follow of course the evolution of mentalities and esthetics across the eighteenth century.

On the one hand, we find a form of esthetics of moderation, based on an ethical and physical system of balance and harmony, which tears the individual away from his passions; on the other hand are thoughts on theatre as a social art, whose efficiency is founded on the sensitivity common to man.

The conception of Man and society changed between the end of the seventeenth century and the French Revolution, following the development of philosophy, from rationalism to sensualism; and the comprehension of the role of violent passions in theatre varied with these representations. But the model of the relationship between spectator and play remained unchanged: in accordance with the logic of *vraisemblance*, fiction acted on the stage had to correspond to the spectator's conceptions.

VIOLENCE AND PLEASURE

But what about the other kinds of violence, namely bloody actions, incest, parricide?

As we said earlier, horror was usually considered contradictory to *bienséance*: the shock felt by the audience was supposed to lead to a rejection of the fiction and prevent the play from having any effect. For Rochefort, the question is even purely esthetic. He believed that horror could simply stop any pathetic effect and block out emotion.

> Il faut, dit-il [Aristote], mettre une distinction entre l'horreur et la pitié. Amasis voyant un de ses fils conduit à la mort ne pleura point ; ce spectacle est un de ceux qui constitue l'horreur : mais, quand il vit le second de ses fils réduit à mendier sa vie, ce fut alors qu'il

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[17] Guillaume Dubois de Rochefort, *Électre*, *op. cit.*, p. vij.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 226.

versa des larmes, voilà la pitié. « Ainsi, l'horreur, poursuit Aristote, exclut ordinairement la pitié. » Pouvait-il donc, d'après ce principe, permettre dans la tragédie ce sentiment repoussant et exclusif, qui en détruisait tout le charme ? Aussi ne l'a-t-il pas fait. Aussi a-t-il eu soin de proscrire, dans l'art poétique, tout ce qui passe les justes bornes de la terreur et de la pitié.[19]

Horror has to be distinguished from compassion. Seeing one of his sons taken to death, Amasis didn't cry; this image can be associated with horror. But, when he saw his second son forced to beg for his living, then he shead tears: this is compassion. « Horror thus, Aristotle says further, usually rules out compassion. » Could he, then, in accordance with this principle, allow in tragedy this hideous and exclusive feeling, that destroyed all its charm?

The charm of tragedy, according to Rochefort, lies in its capacity to arouse emotion, especially compassion. And horror does not provoke tears, thereby preventing tragedy from offering any pleasure to the audience.

But, on the contrary, some dramatic thinkers of the eighteenth century considered that horror could also be a source of pleasure for the audience, by offering strong emotions. The moral or dramatic prohibition of horror competed, then, with the claim for pleasure in tragedy.

Following Boileau, Dacier insisted on the fact that bloody acts could delight the audience, provided they were narrated. Horror was only bearable on the condition that it was conveyed by imitation, i.e. art. But then, it was really interesting and valuable because it aroused overwhelming interest in the spectator. Commenting on the scene where Oedipus blinds himself, Dacier thus defended Sophocles rather than Corneille, who had withdrawn this scene from his version. Indeed, in Corneille's *Oedipus*, the king simply abdicated without doing any harm to himself. The playwright explained that he thought that the modern audience, especially the women, would not have been able to stand it. Dacier stressed the fact that, on the contrary, the narration of this horrible scene could excite curiosity and pleasure in the public:

> Je ne suis pas de son avis. Si ce prince se crevait les yeux sur le théâtre, il n'y a personne qui pût le voir ; mais tout le monde en écoute le récit avec avidité ; je puis dire même que naturellement on le souhaite, et que plus la chose est horrible plus on serait fâché de ne pas savoir de quelle manière tout s'est passé.[20]
>
> If this prince blinded himself on the stage, nobody would stand seeing it; but everybody listens eagerly to its narration. I can even say that naturally we wish it, and that the more horrible it is, the more we would regret not to know how it happened.

Far from condemning horror, Dacier considered thus its esthetical value. When well imitated, horror gives great pleasure to the audience; the problem is then to maintain an artistic medium between the spectator and the bloody event.

Furthermore, in considering this paradoxical pleasure of tragedy, the French theoreticians wondered whether the prohibition of horror, as required by the classical rules, was not in fact destroying the tragic effect. This idea first appeared in Father Rapin's *Thoughts about the Poetics of this Time and the Works by the Modern and Ancient Poets*

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[19] Guillaume Dubois de Rochefort, *Électre, op. cit.*, p. 213.

[20] André Dacier, *L'Œdipe et l'Électre de Sophocle, op. cit.*, « Remarques sur l'Œdipe », p. 230.

(1674). Defending ancient tragedies against modern plays, he regretted the intensity of the emotions triggered by the Greek playwrights:

> [L]es tragédies mêlées de galanteries ne font point ces impressions admirables sur les esprits que faisaient autrefois les tragédies de Sophocle et d'Euripide : car toutes les entrailles étaient émues par les grands objets de terreur et de pitié qu'ils proposaient.[21]
> The tragedies mixed with love don't provoke in the minds these admirable impressions that aroused in the past the tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides. All the insides were then moved by the great subjects of terror and compassion that they offered.

Fifty years later, Brumoy, in trying to prove the interest of Greek theatre for a modern audience, considered again the link between strong emotions and tragic pleasure. For him, tragic emotions were pure pleasure, in comparison with the same emotions in real life. Influenced by Plato's theory in the *Philebes*, Brumoy explained that painful emotions were always mixed with pleasure: the situation causing emotion is painful, but the emotion itself is a pleasure that eases the pain. When watching tragedy, one can feel the pleasure of emotion without being affected by the real situation. The stronger the emotion is, the greater the pleasure. The Greeks had this sense of great emotion and great pleasure which was essential to obtaining the tragic effect. The Moderns had lost it, and that is why their tragedies, mixed with love, were not as powerful as the ancient ones.

Beyond the capacity of violence to increase the spectator's interest, this representation of strong and terrifying emotions might thus even have been the essential basis of the tragic effect. By condemning violence, the Moderns risked losing the tragedy. This idea was given prominence by Brumoy, who, following Dubos, based his evaluation of a play's value on his own feelings while watching it. Commenting on the horrible matricide committed by Orestes, he developed a major paradox: horror, although unbearable for a modern audience, might be the necessary source of a real tragic experience[22].

> Mais ni tout son art [celui de Sophocle], ni l'énormité des crimes d'une mère, ni les mauvais traitements, ni la mort, ni même l'ordre absolu d'un Dieu, ne peuvent étouffer les cris de la nature dans des spectateurs qui ont de l'humanité. On voudrait qu'Oreste fût vengé, mais par une autre main, ou s'il tue sa mère, qu'il le fît sans le savoir et malgré lui. [...] C'est pourtant là le fondement du tragique étonnant qu'on voit régner dans les trois Électres. Comment accorder des sentiments si opposés dans le cœur des hommes ? [...] [Les Grecs] ont bien senti qu'ils ne pouvaient déguiser ce fait à des spectateurs instruits, ou que s'ils venaient à l'adoucir, cet assaisonnement ferait évanouir le tragique.[23]
> But neither all his art, nor the enormity of the crimes of a mother [...] can stifle the cries of nature in spectators who have humanity. One would have liked Orestes to get his revenge, but by another hand; or, if he kills his mother, for it to be done unconsciously, and in spite of himself. [...] This is nevertheless the basis of this amazing tragic effect reigning in the three Electras. How to tune such different feelings in the hearts of men? [...] [Greeks] have felt that they couldn't hide this fact from educated spectators, or that if they softened it, the tragic effect would vanish.

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[21] René Rapin, *Réflexions sur la poétique de ce temps, op. cit.*, p. 185.
[22] This idea had already been developed by Rapin at the end of the 17th century.
[23] Pierre Brumoy, *Le Théâtre des Grecs, op. cit.*, p. 197.

The spectators of this monstrous crime felt two contrasting feelings: the natural rejection of it and a stunning emotion, which constituted the particular pleasure of tragedy. Brumoy considered this tension, this contradiction the real root of catharsis, an esthetical catharsis that required strong and contrasting emotions.

Because of its purity, ancient violence presented the French partisans of ancient tragedy with a theoretical problem. Some kinds of violence could be the subject of tragedies, whose role was declared precisely to soften and moderate the violence of passion. But some scenes aroused horror rather than compassion and fear and so could produce an effect of astonishment that would momentarily stop any possibility of feeling or understanding among the spectators. By reconsidering this analysis, and thinking that horror did not stop emotion but rather strengthen it, Brumoy and his followers met some interrogations of their time. The utility and benefit of violence had indeed been discussed among the authors and specialists of theatre since the beginning of the eighteenth century. The experience of theater, especially the spectacular and often horrific drama implemented by the lyric stage from the end of the seventeenth century on[24], along with the promotion of sensibility and the discovery of Shakespeare in the 1730's had led some theoreticians and authors to highlight the emotional impact of violence on stage. Voltaire, notably, in his paradoxical *Éloge de Crébillon* (1762), had emphasized the esthetical interest of the famous ending scene of Crébillon's *Atreus*:

> Ce n'est donc point parce que la coupe pleine de sang est une chose horrible qu'on ne joue plus cette pièce, au contraire, cet excès de terreur frapperait beaucoup de spectateurs, et les remplirait de cette sombre et douloureuse attention qui fait le charme de la vraie tragédie.[25]
> It is not because the cup full of blood is something horrible that this play isn't performed anymore. On the contrary, this excessiv terror would strike a lot of spectators and fill them with this dark and painful attention, in which lies the charm of real tragedy.

For Voltaire, violence is an acute problem, one that French theatre must address should it want to measure up to Greek tragedies and Shakespearean drama. Those models are both flawed, but both of them contain priceless beauties that French plays lack. When terror reaches a climax without turning into sheer horror, it can set off actual tragic effects that 'bienséance' and 'vraisemblance' often prevent.

> Je suis bien loin de proposer que la scène devienne un lieu de carnage, comme elle l'est dans Shakespeare [...] ; mais j'ose croire qu'il y a des situations qui ne paraissent encore que dégoûtantes et horribles aux Français, et qui bien ménagées, représentées avec art, et surtout adoucies par le charme des beaux vers, pourraient nous faire une sorte de plaisir, dont nous ne nous doutons pas.[26]
> I am far from suggesting that theatre should become a place of carnage, as it is by Shakespeare [...]; but I dare to believe that some situations that seem merely repulsive and awful to French people, when well prepared, artistically represented, and above all softened

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[24] On the developpement of horrific effects on the lyric stage, see Nicholas Dion, *Entre les larmes et l'effroi. La tragédie classique française, 1677-1726*, Paris, Champion, 2012.

[25] Voltaire, *Éloge de Crébillon* [1762], in *Œuvres de Voltaire*, t. XL, Paris, Lefèvre, Firmin-Didot, Werdet et Lequien Fils, 1830, p. 473.

[26] Voltaire, *Brutus*, Discours sur la tragédie à Mylord Bolingbrooke [1730], in *Œuvres de Voltaire, op. cit.*, t. II, p. 357.

by the charm of beautiful verse, could bring us some sort of pleasure that we were not expecting.

The intensity of violence interests the playwright, even though he defends the classical rules and their promotion of moderation, because he relies upon his own experience as a reader or spectator: in London, he had been impressed by Caesar's murder performed on stage, a 'monstruous spectacle' that he preferred to the 'confidences of a cold love, or political reasonning'[27]. Even if Voltaire cares for 'bon goût' and respect for the politeness of French theatre, he is sensitive to the effectiveness of tragic performance and fluctuates between condemnation and praise of violence on stage. Whereas he defends the simplicity of classical tragedy, he has to admit that the audience likes the powerful and sometimes frightening impact of spectacular visual effects:

> Les hommes, en général, aiment le spectacle ; ils veulent qu'on parle à leurs yeux : le peuple se plaît à voir des cérémonies pompeuses, des objets extraordinaires, des orages, des armées rangées en bataille, des épées nues, des combats, des meurtres, du sang répandu ; et beaucoup de grands [...] sont peuple.[28]
> Men, in general, like spectacle; they want their eyes to be aimed: people like to see ceremonies full of pomp, extraordinary objects, storms, armies ready for battle, bare swords, fighting, murders, blood spread; and a lot of noble men [...] are people.

Voltaire's hesitations regarding Shakespeare's excesses are typical for the position of his contemporaries concerning violence on stage. In this context, Greek tragedies, because of their authority as first models for French modern theatre, constituted an even sharper goad to reconsider the place of bloody or terrifying actions in drama.

At the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the success of lyric tragedy on the Royal Academy of Music's stage, along with the loss of impetus of classical drama, spurred to rethink the impact of visual and emotional effects on the public. From the 1730's on, the discovery of Shakespearian drama in France contributed to sharpening these controversial issues. The first translators of Greek theatre in French – since the attempts of humanists in the sixteenth century – participated this debate in grasping the violence of the ancient drama. Greek tragedy, because it represented both a model and a strangeness for French theoreticians and readers, allowed them to think out of the usual and regular framework of classical theory. The commentaries accompanying the translations became then a critical laboratory, where a renewed esthetic conception, based on contemporary theatrical experiences, could emerge. As a pioneer, Brumoy aimed to bring ancient theatre out of the pedagogical and erudite circles, to rebuild a lost theatrical experience for a modern audience. After him, Rochefort and La Porte du Theil, who completed his great monument, *Le Théâtre des Grecs*, with translations of Sophocles and Aeschylus, didn't give the same importance to feelings: as members of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, they defended a more philological approach. Their differences illustrate the paradoxical role of Greek tragedy in classical France: supposed

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[27] Voltaire, Observations sur le *Jules César* de Shakespeare, after the translation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* [1764]: « J'avoue qu'en tout j'aimais mieux encore ce monstrueux spectacle que de longues confidences d'un froid amour, ou des raisonnements de politique encore plus froids », in *Œuvres de Voltaire, op. cit.*, t. VII, p. 547.
[28] *Ibid.*

model of the Aristotelian theory, it actually proved to lead some of its readers on the way of a non-Aristotelian theatre, where pictures and violent emotions would dominate.

THE SO-CALLED 'VOGUE' FOR OUTDOOR THEATRE
AROUND THE TIME OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR:
MEANINGS AND POLITICAL AMBIGUITIES
OF THE REFERENCE TO GREEK THEATRE

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Résumé : Cette étude part d'un double constat, d'une part, celui d'une rémanence conséquente de la référence au théâtre grec à la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle, à travers ce qu'on a appelé la « vogue » des théâtres en plein air ; d'autre part, celui d'une double dimension, esthétique et politique, perceptible dans cette référence, puisque revenir au théâtre grec passe également alors, semble-t-il, pour une tentative de retour à l'assemblée démocratique. Dans ce cadre-là, le théâtre antique d'Orange fait figure de paradigme, depuis la représentation d'*Œdipe-Roi*, interprété par Mounet-Sully en 1888, et qui reste dans les mémoires comme une représentation charnière. Mais la fascination pour le « dehors », qui s'exprime dans les premières décennies du siècle, n'est pas dénuée d'ambiguïté et de paradoxes. Cette vogue du plein air prend place dans une période politique marquée, sur le plan théorique, par les débats entre cosmopolites et nationalistes, par le développement de l'idéologie maurrassienne, et sur le plan historique par le souvenir de la défaite de 1870, par l'affaire Dreyfus, et par la rupture constituée par la Première Guerre mondiale. Il s'agit donc ici d'étudier les échos entre les évolutions politiques de l'époque (notamment autour de la question du nationalisme) et ce phénomène théâtral du plein air, à partir, notamment, des discours relayés par la presse de l'époque. La « renaissance » d'Orange présente en effet des contours idéologiques marqués : la rhétorique de la nature, l'exaltation de l'esthétique classique contre les attaques de la modernité, et enfin la volonté perceptible de construire, sur la scène d'Orange, *via* un retour aux origines pour partie fantasmé, une forme d'épopée nationale, en sont les principaux traits. À une époque où l'équilibre entre « nationalisme républicain » et « nationalisme des nationalistes » est en train de se repenser, le mot de Louis XIV pour désigner Orange semble résonner tout particulièrement : en désignant le mur de scène comme « la plus belle muraille de [son] royaume », le monarque nous invite à comprendre les guerres (idéologiques, historiques, esthétiques) que ce lieu a pu cristalliser.

Mots-clés : Gabriel Boissy, Grèce antique, mythe, nationalisme, Orange, Première guerre mondiale, théâtre en plein air, théâtre grec, tragédie.

Abstract: *This study takes two facts as a starting point: on the one hand, the persistent reference to Greek theatre at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, especially through what will shortly be called a 'vogue' for outdoor theatres; and on the other hand, the both political and aesthetic dimension of this reference. Indeed, Greek theatre seems to be understood as a model of a democratic assembly, which some therefore are trying to rebuild. In this understanding, the antique theatre of Orange can be seen as a paradigm, mostly since the performance of Mounet-Sully playing Œdipus in* Oedipus the King *in 1888, which is remembered as a turning point. But this fascination with the 'outside' is not deprived of certain ambiguities and paradoxes. The period we are studying is politically marked by the development of conservative ideologies, personified most notably by Charles Maurras but also noticeable in all the debates between different understandings and experiences of nationalism. On an historical level, the period is also marked by the memory of the 1870 defeat, the Dreyfus 'Affaire' and the breaking point constituted by the 1st World War. Therefore, this study will try to show how the political evolutions of the time, mostly through the question of nationalism, echo this phenomenon of outdoor theatre. We will rely mainly on press clippings for this study, in order to reveal the type of discourse surrounding the phenomenon. The 'renaissance' of Orange has a solid ideological foundation: its main characteristics are the rhetoric of nature, the exaltation of classicism against modernity, understood as an attack, and, lastly, the will to stage in Orange, through a return to origins which is partly a fantasy, a 'national epic'. At a time when the balance between different kinds of nationalism is being reconsidered, the words of Louis XIV are particularly meaningful: he said once that the outside wall of the Orange theatre was 'the most beautiful rampart in his kingdom'. Saying this, he induces us to understand the wars (ideological, historical and aesthetical) which have sprung up about this place.*

Keywords: *Ancient Greece, First World War, Gabriel Boissy, Greek theatre, myth, nationalism, outdoor theatre, Orange, tragedy.*

T his study takes two facts as a starting point: on the one hand, the persistent reference to Greek theatre at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, especially through what will later be called a 'vogue' for outdoor theatre; and on the other hand, the political and aesthetic dimension of this reference. Indeed, Greek theatre seems to be understood as a model of a democratic assembly, which some therefore try to rebuild. In this understanding, the antique theatre of Orange can be seen as a *paradigm*, mostly since the performance of Mounet-Sully as Œdipus in *Oedipus the King* in 1888, which is still remembered as a key moment. In 1869 already, Alphonse Bernard, Anthony Réal and Félix Ripert, all members of the artistic movement called the "Félibrige" tried to promote the Occitan culture and organised the "Fêtes romaines", later called the "Chorégies" in 1902, thus named after the reference to the choir of the greek tragedy. But this fascination for the 'outside' is not deprived of certain ambiguities and paradoxes. First of all, the theatre performances given in Orange illustrate both a will of decentralisation (the '*Comédie-Française*' accepts to "lend" some of its shows) and an attempt to promote local authors. We must keep in mind, though, that the '*Comédie-Française*" and the '*Opéra de Paris*' hold a monopoly on the productions in the antique theatre until the second world war. The period we are studying is politically marked by the development of conservative ideologies, personified most notably by Charles Maurras but also noticeable in all the debates between different understandings and experiences of nationalism. On a historical level, the period is also marked by the memory of the 1870 defeat, the Dreyfus 'Affaire' and the breaking point constituted by the First World War.

This breaking point is crucial to this study: when I was going through the collection regarding outdoor theatre in the National French Library[1] and reading the press of the time, I noticed a change, between before the First World War and after, in the references to Greek theatre. While, before the war, Greek theatre was seen as a necessary myth to unite the national community, after the war, the current history seemed too significant to have to refer to a fantasy of the past.

We will try to highlight the social and political evolutions implied by this change. We will focus mostly on the rhetoric that surrounds this phenomenon of outdoor theatre, especially in the contemporary press and in the book written by Gabriel Boissy, *The Dramaturgy of Orange*, particularly since he wrote the foreword on the front line during the First World War[2].

First of all, we will describe quickly this 'renaissance' of the antique theatre of Orange (since it is the word used in the press clippings, and it is not meaningless), then we will try to figure out the ideology surrounding these experiences and, above all, how the First World War caused a profound change in the reference to ancient Greece.

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[1] See Rondel collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Arts du Spectacle, microfilm files Rf 81108 to Rf 81149, which compiles several press clippings about outdoor theatre. [Recueil factice d'études générales concernant le théâtre de plein air]. Unless otherwise specified, the quotations are coming from these files.

[2] We have made the choice, throughout the article, to keep the quotations in French, since the words and lexical choices are really important in a study focused on ideological and political backgrounds. From time to time, we will translate some parts into English, for general understanding.

‘WHEN EUROPE WAKES UP FROM BARBARISM, HER FIRST CRY IS TO GREECE[3]’:
THE ‘RENAISSANCE’ OF ORANGE

During the period of time we are focusing on, it was quite common to speak about the ‘renaissance’ of Orange: this dates back approximately to the play *Oedipus the King* in 1888, with Mounet Sully playing Oedipus. It is not the first time plays were being held again in the antique theatre, but this particular play was to be remembered as a key moment, a revival of what would soon be called the ‘vogue’ for outdoor theatre. Not long after the French defeat of 1870, and before the First World War put an end to the shows in Orange, the period was deeply marked by wars (past and to come) and political tensions. The use of the word ‘renaissance’ is not neutral at all: it is a way to provide continuity between ancient Greece and France at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first criteria seems to be the number of spectators, seen as a resemblance with ancient Greece : the theatre of Orange can accommodate around 9000 people. The analysis of the archival collection dedicated to outdoor theatre in the French National Library attests to the importance of this phenomenon and its large coverage by the press of the time, mostly from 1902. Two examples can illustrate this:

> Ailleurs encore, on organise une semblable fête dramatique ; voilà la preuve que cette mode nouvelle a pris, et que la vogue ira bientôt à ces représentations en plein air, à ces théâtres à ciel ouvert. Il faut voir dans ce goût nouveau l’effet de plusieurs influences heureuses. Le succès qu’ont remporté les hardies représentations d’Orange et de Nîmes ont fait comprendre quel intérêt offraient de tels spectacles, ont fait sentir tous les agréments des théâtres établis selon la conception antique. Et puis nous prenons chaque jour une plus fervente envie de vivre au jour, à la lumière, un plus vif désir de jouir de l’espace et de la mouvante beauté de la nature[4].

What is important here is the focus on the ‘antique conception’ and the lexical choices, which are quite lyrical and embody a wish to celebrate the reunion with the beauty of ancient Greece. A few years later, in 1910, Maurice Magre, a writer, poet and playwright, goes further:

> Un grand mouvement artistique commence et grandit en province. Paris considère encore ces manifestations comme des tentatives, une forme de théâtre « à côté », une manière de curiosité d’art. Il n’en est rien. Nous assistons à une renaissance de la tragédie, à un renouvellement de notre forme dramatique. Des essais, d’abord confus, puis plus précis, qu’a donnés le théâtre en plein air, un genre nouveau est en train de sortir, ou plutôt de renaître de ses cendres, un genre qui unira trois arts, danse, poésie, musique[5].

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[3] François-René Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem,* Paris, Gallimard, « Folio Classique », 2005 [1826, première version définitive], p. 219. Extanded quotation : « Quand l’Europe se réveille de la barbarie, son premier cri est pour Athènes : « Qu’est-elle devenue ? » demande-t-on de toutes parts. Et quand on apprend que ses ruines existent encore, on y court, comme si l’on avait retrouvé les cendres d’une mère. »

[4] The BnF microfilm indicates as a source the journal *Le Gaulois*, 23 juin 1904, but the consultation of the original clipping does not permit to confirm it. (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81108-81149).

[5] Maurice Magre, « L’Union des trois arts », 1910, the BnF microfilm does not indicate a newspaper title (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81108-81149).

Two things must be noted here: the 'renaissance[6]' is specified as an aesthetic one ('a renewal of our dramatic form'); the difference specified between Paris and provincial life is quite interesting because the pejorative tone associated with Paris reveals the will to praise the beauty of nature, as opposed to the dissolute Parisian lifestyle. By doing this, Maurice Magre, who was a strong advocate of a national reunion, focused on the need to reenact a national epic, and Orange seemed to be the perfect venue for it.

If we try to sum up, two levels can be highlighted. On the social level, the word 'renaissance' is a way to provide continuity between ancient Greece and France. The search for a return to nature in an increasingly industrialized and urbanized society is combined with profound renewals in the ways of thinking about the body[7] and all this can take political aspects: this 'fervent wish to live outdoors' which the *Gaulois* newspaper spoke about comprises ideological assumptions, which can be either modernist or conservative. On an aesthetic level, then, the 'renaissance' is quite paradoxical: in fact, the 'renewal' was not quite a modern one. The aim was to recall antique tragedy via a national reference to the Renaissance of the XVIᵉ century and to make it a synonym of modernity, which is not without contradiction. Outdoor theatre in Orange was seen as a way of making antique tragedy modern. To sum up this idea, Michel Autrand evokes an 'unpowerful wish of renewal[8]'. The outdoor theatre, or more precisely the outdoor theatre in Orange, is mostly seen as a way to adapt the classic form to the modern times.

FIRST HYPOTHESIS: REFERENCE TO ANCIENT GREECE, A WAY TO REBUILD A CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY?

First of all, we have to remind ourselves of the political and social French context: as a lot of historians have shown, it was this period which saw the birth of a new social body soon to be called the '*masses*'. And the republican government tries to set up a '*vivre ensemble*', literally a 'living together', by encouraging cultural events outside of Paris and trying to build a 'proximity democracy'. For the theatre, leaving Paris — even briefly — was not at all meaningless, and its significance was all the greater when it was the troupe of the '*Comédie Française*' going to Orange: such a move is understood as the circulation of a national identity. The big political question of the moment seemed to be, as quoted by historians specialised in this period:

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[6] It may be relevant to note the choice of the term 'Renaissance': it refers both to the European Renaissance of the XVIᵉ century and to the German conception of the greek tragedy. If this last reference tends to be hidden because of the growing opposition between France and Germany at the beginning of the century, it is still perceptible, mainly in the research for a total work of art echoing the German romantic 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. The antique theatre of Orange is constantly praised as a perfect place to gather music, dance and theatre in the same work of art. It is noticeably paradoxical that the research for the renewal of a national French myth can also be based, even implicitly, on a German reference.

[7] We may think to the publication, in 1936, of the *Journal de Psychologie* by Marcel Mauss, which constitutes a deep change in the way to consider the body and its social dimension.

[8] Michel Autrand, « Le théâtre du XXᵉ siècle et l'Antiquité », in *Tradition classique et modernité, Actes du 12ᵉ colloque de la Villa Kérylos à Beaulieu-sur-Mer, Cahiers de la Villa Kérylos*, 13, Paris, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, 2002, p. 193-204.

> Comment faire participer pleinement les masses impatientes, désormais mobilisables sous des bannières jusqu'alors inconnues, au jeu de la démocratie inscrit dans le cadre républicain[9] ?

Outdoor theatre seems to be an answer, among others. The renaissance of antique classical tragedy appears as a possibility to create a 'democratic game'; even more, the very *nature* of tragedy is supposedly to be performed in front of a large audience. In August 1905, an article in the magazine *Lectures pour tous* acknowledges this fact:

> La tragédie antique, en effet, composée pour toute une cité, n'est vraiment à sa place que dans ces vastes espaces où elle peut faire vibrer l'âme d'une foule immense[10].

This 'large crowd' is supposed to overlap the whole city, and we can already understand the democratic ambitions of outdoor theatre in Orange. That is why it is interesting to focus for a moment on the lexical choices made in different press clippings of the time, as they reveal the different meanings of the rhetoric of 'living together', which the outdoor-theatre policy tries to implement.

First, the term '*foule*' in French, approximately '*crowd*' in English, has an aesthetic connotation in French. The great and open space of the antique theatre should, in this conception, be conducive to the gathering of an harmonious crowd. In the continuity of the Baudelairian imaginary, but for the rural environment, this 'crowd' would be a sign of modernity, but a healthy and united one, as opposed to the dissolute urban crowd.

Then, the term '*peuple*' in French is also used, mostly by Gabriel Boissy, author of *The Dramaturgy of Orange*. One example of 1907 is very indicative of the democratic ambitions that outdoor theatre, in some people's minds, should have :

> Cet accroissement est dû aux avantages multiples que ces spectacles offrent non seulement à ce que l'on appelle le public, qui est familier des théâtres, mais surtout au peuple, qui ne va au théâtre que dans des conditions spéciales. Ces conditions, le peuple les rencontre rarement et ce sont précisément celles qui caractérisent le théâtre de plein-air[11].

Coming from Gabriel Boissy, a known nationalist writer close to Charles Maurras, the use of the term 'people' is a way to underline the democratic, but also the nationalist, ambitions of outdoor theatre in Orange.

Finally, the term 'nation' is not often used; in its place, we find the humbler word 'city', which is a direct reference to the Greek period. Joseph Péladan, a French writer known for his tendency to occultism, in an article entitled 'Oxygen and Theatre' in 1905, writes in such terms:

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[9] Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (dir.), *Histoire culturelle de la France*, Tome 4, *Le temps des masses. Le vingtième siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 1998, p. 52.
[10] « Le théâtre dans les ruines antiques », *Lectures pour tous*, n. 11, août 1905 (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81110).
[11] Gabriel Boissy, « Les spectacles de plein air et le peuple », *Mercure de France*, 1er novembre 1907 (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81120).

> [L]a clameur prend l'envergure antique d'une cité entière, criant et gesticulant son enthousiasme ; ce n'est plus un public, c'est un peuple, (...)[12].

The association of the terms 'people' and 'city' suggests the dream of a popular assembly and, above all, of a communion of bodies, which echoes the conception of the nation which is theorized at the time. We may recall here the historian Michel Winock, when he says, in his book on nationalism[13], that one thing is common to all kinds of nationalism at this time, and it is their anti-individualism.

What is at stake in outdoor theatre in Orange is, indeed, a conception of the audience as a metaphor of the nation, and the reference to ancient Greece serves as a model. It is actually a complex one, and there is a large part of fantasy in it. But this model is not used in the same manner before and after the First World War. Our second hypothesis is that a change occurs, mostly because the need for a myth is not so acute when history, *via* the war, is so significant. The building of a 'living together', after the war, may rely more on the current history than on a mythical past one.

SECOND HYPOTHESIS: THE WAR AS A BREAKING POINT IN THE WAY TO REFER TO ANCIENT GREECE

Before the war

Before the war, in the different press clippings at our disposal, the Greek reference is both very common and very fantasized. The Greek fantasy appears in two ways, either political or aesthetic, which both echo the concerns of the time: first, by urging for a 'popular' theatre (what Greek theatre is supposed to have been), and, secondly, by encouraging a parallel between theatre and religion, as far as the 'communion' of an assembly is concerned.

The 'popular' question becomes central at the time, and Greek theatre appears as a sort of solution. Maurice Magre refers to Greek theatre in such terms:

> Dans l'antiquité et au Moyen-Âge, le théâtre avait un caractère populaire et religieux. C'était une sorte de festival, une solennité à laquelle on se préparait longtemps avant au foyer, qui demeurait ensuite longtemps dans le souvenir. Toutes les classes aimaient les mêmes spectacles, qui étaient écrits pour les simples comme pour les esprits cultivés. Que nous sommes loin de ce temps ! Nous n'avons plus de représentations populaires[14].

Here, Greek theatre is a way to theorize the beginning of 'popular theatre' which will develop afterwards, but it is also a way to bemoan the disappearance of a united nation.

Secondly, the parallel between theatre and religion is also very remarkable in the rhetoric used in the press, but it is interesting to notice that the idea of theatre as a

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[12] Joseph Péladan, « Théâtre et oxygène », 1905, no newspaper title mentioned. (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81142).

[13] Throughout this article, we rely on the categories described by Michel Winock in his book on nationalism : he makes a difference between « opened nationalism » and « closed nationalism». See Michel Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme et fascisme en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1990.

[14] Maurice Magre, « L'union des trois arts », 1910, *op. cit.*

modern religion is what remains after the war, even though the reference to ancient Greece has almost disappeared. But before the war, most of the accounts we read are tinged with a form of mysticism, which reveals the part of fantasy lying in the reference to Greece. And first of all, it is illustrated by the dream of a large crowd united in an almost religious communion. The words of Alfred Mortier speak for themselves:

> [...] Quiconque n'a pas assisté à certains de ces spectacles, quiconque n'a pas communié dans le silence ardent de dix mille spectateurs suspendus à la véhémence des passions éternelles qui conduisent l'humanité depuis son berceau, celui-là n'aura pas connu la puissance mystique de l'art, n'aura pas entrevu le lien qui unit la Poésie à la Religion comme aux temps primitifs, et n'aura jamais accédé à ces hauteurs magnifiques où l'émotion d'art rejoint la Prière[15].

Those words, written by a journalist and playwright, describe the symbolic value attributed to the outdoor theatre of Orange: the large meeting permitted by the outdoor place is seen as the ideal venue for the nation to reunite itself and become a 'people'.

These two points (the desire for a popular theatre and the religious model) are the basis of a paradoxical aesthetic position regarding outdoor theatre in Orange: the idea was to build in Orange a resistance to a modernity seen as decadent but still to claim a 'renewal' of the dramatic form, based on a return to Greece. The same contradiction appears in the political rhetoric of Charles Maurras, leader of a strong right-wing nationalism and who wrote on outdoor theatre in Orange: he is known for having based his nationalism on an instrumentalisation of Greek Antiquity while presenting it as a way for the nation to rebuild itself; he sees in Orange an aesthetic metaphor of this process.

After the war

After the war, another nationalism (a 'republican' one, as the historian Michel Winock would say[16]) rises and dominates, directly and, in a way, 'naturally', and it seems that the reference to Antiquity is not needed as much as before.

The reading of the journalism concerning the antique theatre after the war is quite enlightening: since the war is a recent and real historical experience, there is no need to refer to ancient Greece to build a form of 'national epic'. Gabriel Boissy was a major advocate of the outdoor theatre in Orange, and in the foreword of his *Dramaturgy of Orange* (which was written during the war on the front line), he clarifies the transition between a mythical tragedy and a historical one:

> Par delà le plaisir et les insouciances partout répandus, ce rappel à la nature tragique des êtres et des choses n'était pas sans soulever de fines railleries. Hélas! Il fallait une autre tragédie et d'autre sang que celui du Bouc dionysiaque pour purger les délires et les erreurs[17] !...

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[15] Alfred Mortier, « Théâtres en plein air », *Comoedia*, 19 août 1922.

[16] Michel Winock, *op. cit.*

[17] Gabriel Boissy, *De Sophocle à Mistral*, Aix en Provence, Société de la revue Le Feu, 1920, introduction, p. XII. L'ouvrage rassemble plusieurs essais : *Introduction à la connaissance de la Méditerrannée, la Dramaturgie d'Orange*, et *Recherches pour une esthétique française*.

The first world war is indeed understood as a break in the need (and possibility) to refer to ancient Greece. Boissy goes on in his foreword:

> Aujourd'hui, — et depuis combien de mois !... la bataille a passé des jardins de l'intelligence dans les boues infernales de notre sol : Poésie et réalité, dirait, de son haut, le satanique Gœthe. Les combats ont succédé aux disputes et notre fierté sera d'avoir participé aux uns, comme aux autres[18].

Boissy opposes 'the gardens of intelligence' (supposedly outdoor theatre) to the 'hellish sludge', as well as poetry to reality. When he says that the 'battles' have succeeded the 'quarrels', he sums up, in a way, the evolution of the reference to ancient Greece: whereas, before the war, Greece was needed to unify the nation and to give it a 'national epic', after the war, history itself seems to play this role. As Gabriel Boissy reveals it, the 'tragedy' has become a real one and the aesthetic debates have turned into actual battles. By using the word 'fierté' (*pride*) for both, Gabriel Boissy tends to put them on the same level, or more precisely, to declare the latter a consequence of the former.

In the end, this change also has aesthetic consequences: after the war, there will be doubts about the theatrical choices of Orange. Lugné-Poe, for example, calls for a true modernity: the point is not to imitate ancient Greece any more, but to create a genuine French and European modernity. In 1922, he spoke quite radically about Orange:

> La vérité est qu'il ne faut pas s'alarmer de ces spectacles donnés dans les ruines. C'est un cap à dépasser, une époque ; ils appellent cela spectacles d'art, mais personne ne s'y trompe ici et ne prend au sérieux des vessies pour des lanternes magiques[19].

The chosen words are enlightening: there is, here, an acknowledgement of the 'mythical', fantasized part of these shows. But later, he also specifies:

> Vienne ici le créateur, l'arrangeur, l'auteur, nous aurons la plus merveilleuse renaissance d'art théâtral que nous puissions souhaiter [...][20].

It seems that, after the war, the sense given to 'modernity' has evolved: it has become a need to establish a new way to write and perform theatre, not specifically continuing ancient Greece but precisely in accordance with the current history.

CONCLUSION

At a time when the balance between 'republican nationalism' and the 'nationalism of the nationalists' (if we keep in mind the categories settled by Michel Winock) is being reconsidered, the words of Louis XIV on Orange are particularly meaningful: he said that Orange was « the most beautiful wall of his kingdom ». Saying this, he induces us to

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[18] Gabriel Boissy, *op. cit.*, p. XVI.
[19] Lugné-Poe, « Les théâtres de plein air de Provence », *La Semaine théâtrale,* 1922 (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81108-81149).
[20] *Ibid.*

understand the wars (ideological, historical, aesthetical) which have sprung up about this place. That is what we tried to do here, and a lot remains to be done concerning the devices of the shows (audiences, stage, actors, chosen texts…). In any case, we tried to describe a 'social discourse', some words that can not exactly be attributed to a specific person but that reveal the social and political tensions of a time. In this frame, we can finally say that the reference to ancient Greece has been paradoxical, sometimes manipulated, but studying these evolution helps to understand how myth and history can fight and mix up. Later, some other outdoor experiences, those of Jacques Prévert and his activist 'October group' for example, will borrow ideas from Greek theatre but for a completely different purpose, actually much more literally 'popular'.

Partie 2

La violence contemporaine en question

AESCHYLUS'S *PERSIANS*
TO DENOUNCE MODERN GREEK POLITICS

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Résumé : En 2014, Nikaiti Kontouri et Tilemachos Moudatsakis, deux metteurs en scène ayant un parcours et une approche du théâtre relativement hétérogènes, ont choisi de monter *Les Perses* afin de se servir des questions conventionnelles de l'arrogance et de la mauvaise gestion du pouvoir de la tragédie antique pour dénoncer la situation politique et financière extrêmement complexe en Grèce contemporaine, tout en soulevant, à travers la forme théâtrale, des questions sociales qui peuvent dériver de cette situation.

Mots-clés : *Perses*, Nikaiti Kontouri, Tilemachos Moudatsakis, politique, Grèce moderne, *hybris*, critique sociale.

Abstract: *In 2014, Nikaiti Kontouri and Tilemachos Moudatsakis, two directors with a relatively heterogeneous background and approach to theatre, chose to stage* The Persians *to delve into the play's otherwise conventional issues of arrogance and mishandling of power to indirectly comment on modern Greece's actual extremely controversial political and financial situation, while subtly glancing through their staging at social issues that may derive from it.*

Keywords: The Persians, *Nikaiti Kontouri, Tilemachos Moudatsakis, politics, modern Greece,* hubris, *social issues, performance.*

T he most notable performances of *The Persians* in modern Greece have taken place in times of war or political crisis: Spyros Evaggelatos' in 1978 (National Theatre of Northern Greece - NTNG, Epidaurus Theatre), was staged after the establishment of the democracy following the 'Regime of the Colonels' (1967-1974); Karolos Koun's in 1988 (Herodus Atticus Theatre), followed the prevention of war between Greece and Turkey in 1987, and Lefteris Vogiatzis' in 1999 (National Theatre), was performed during the Kosovo War[1]. In 2014, two directors with a relatively heterogeneous background and approach to theatre Nikaiti Kontouri[2] and Tilemachos Moudatsakis[3] staged *The Persians* again, indirectly linking the play to the current financial and by extension political crisis in Greece. Through their stage design options they reopen the play's otherwise conventional subject of arrogance and mishandling of power while they incite pondering on social issues which may derive from the government's politics.

TWO DIFFERENT SETTINGS

Nikaiti Kontouri closed the Athens and Epidaurus Festival 2014 with *The Persians* in the ancient open theatre of Epidaurus, under the aegis of the NTNG (National Theatre of Northern Greece). She opted for a classic staging in a thrifty production, to emphasize the play's anti-war message, with clear, clean lines and numerous references to modern Greece's suffering due to government politics, which resulted to photographic scenes seasoned with astute staging twists, such as dividing the chorus in two. The primary chorus consisted of fourteen men, the Elders, as in Aeschylus' play and the secondary consisted of three women, the Brides of Sorrow[4], possibly attendants to the queen. However, the media most discussed the assignment of Atossa's role to a male actor and Xerxes appearing naked on stage[5].

Giorgos Patsas[6] created the set using simple geometrical lines by placing a sloping diamond shaped platform in the centre of the orchestra, an allusion to Greece's important geographic position as the bridge between East and West. The four white ribbons attached to its top angle, connected it with the lighting trees left and right of the circular area between the seats and the stage (κοίλον) further reinforcing this idea. A wooden canopy placed on the top angle of the platform would reveal an elevating device

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[1] See Giorgos Ganitis, *Οι οιμωγές, οι γόοι και οι χοές των* Περσών, [*The cries, tears and libations of* The Persians, 28/7/14], theatrical review, [online] Available at http://www.k-tipos.gr [last viewed 6/1/2017].

[2] Nikaiti Kontouri is a former actress and now director, collaborator of the National Theatre of Northern Greece (NTNG) since 2001 and teacher of Drama and Stage Directing in Drama schools.

[3] Tilemachos Moudatsakis is the founder of the Vivi company, director and professor of Theatrical Theory and Practice at the University of Crete.

[4] As mentioned on the play's programme [online]. Available at http://www.ntng.gr [last viewed 24/9/2014].

[5] See newspaper titles, NTNG archives [online]. Available at http://www.ntng.gr.

[6] Giorgos Patsas is a set and costume designer, official collaborator of the NTNG and the Athens and Epidaurus Festival, with distinctions such as the silver medal in the Prague Quadrennial (1995 and 2003) and the first prize of the Union of Greek Critics for Drama and Music for the costumes of Theo Angelopoulos' *Eternity and a Day* (1998).

– on which Darius' ghost rising from the dead would walk –, a direct reference to the ancient Greek practice of the *ekkyklema*. Parts of the floor in the forestage would also reveal traps such as a rectangular one from which Xerxes enters the stage splashing water as a child as he gets out reminding us the king's young age. Lefteris Pavlopoulos' lighting design was conceived in cold hues. The alternation between complete darkness and dim lighting onto and around the stage darkened even more the already gloomy atmosphere of the tragic play, as in the case of the chorus' entrance: only the cold light of the neon tubes they held shed some light, thus foretelling the bad news and increasing the tension.

The costume designer Giannis Medjikof opted for a simple, classic black and white contrast and avoided placing the performance in a specific time frame by conceiving neutral creations which either referred to classical staging conventions or to war. More in particular, he dressed the male members of the chorus with black blazers over long black skirts to bring the performance to our time, while reminding us of ancient Greek tunics. The Brides of Sorrow used white transparent veils over their white blazers and linen dresses to cover their heads and emphasise on the absence of individuality in times of war. Atossa's full-length long sleeved tunic was completed with an ornate, ivory white gown which hinted at Asian dresses and a red veil (the only coloured garment in the performance) to symbolise royalty. The Messenger was half naked, wearing black, discoloured, mudded army trousers, his body tainted with blood and mud as if he was returning from the Vietnam War, strongly reminding us of the soldiers from Coppola's film *Apocalypse now* (1979). Darius rose from the dead in a gold sequined cloak topped with a headdress which were fixed on a stand leaving him with a long white tunic suggesting the Iranian traditional garments when he moved forward. On the one hand this little ruse suggests the obvious, that there are no kings in the underworld, but on the other hand it reminds us of Darius' origins, a country surrounded by war. The costume designer's (and the director's) bold choice to present Xerxes naked on stage, his body dirty and blood stained, with only his empty quiver and a rug covering at times his genitals strongly impressed the audience and the critics as an image of the fallen, defeated king[7]. Both the Messenger and Xerxes were covered in mud from head to toe to emphasize their struggle to return home from the battlefield.

Numerous props completed astutely the set design and contributed to the gloomy ambiance of the play by adding references to war and tyranny. For example, upon entering onto the stage the chorus of Elders was holding white neon tubes wrapped in white veils. As they walked forward in the dark from the background towards the raised platform to finally stand around it, we are under the impression that the lost souls of the Persian army were slowly returning home. Later they would plant aggressively daggers at the borders of the platform to express anger and the urgency to punish those responsible for their loss. The Brides of Sorrow entered onto the stage bringing with them a powerful yet inauspicious symbol of power: three stuffed black eagles with spread wings, fixed on metallic sticks, alluding to the emblem of the Persian and Byzantine empires in the past and of America today. They placed the eagles on three sides of the platform (right and left front sides and upper left side), thereby giving us the impression that they were flying,

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[7] The critic Aggela Mantziou mentions: "G. Kolovos' impressive Xerxes [...] demonstrated the weak side of a demystified nudity", in *Αισχύλου Πέρσες από το ΚΘΒΕ,* [Aeschylus' *Persians* by the NTNG, 1st review, 19/7/14], theatrical review [online]. Available at http://culture.thessaloniki-portal.gr. [last viewed 15/1/2017]. Our translation.

overseeing the performance, perhaps an allusion to the (video) surveillance every citizen is subjected to nowadays. The Brides of Sorrow were also writing with charcoal the names of the fallen soldiers on the platform while reciting, suggesting how the destructive fire turns everything to coal. The barefoot chorus would progressively wipe the names out with their footsteps perhaps to imply how quickly and easily people can forget and be prone to the same mistakes.

Finally, Kostas Gerardos' kinesiological concept consisted of a combination of improvisation and detailed choreography that resulted in slow elaborate movements with ritualistic precision achieving a collective motion, while maintaining the individuality of each member and rendering the anger and the sorrow of the Elders towards the tragedy that struck their country. The eerie soundtrack composed by Sophia Kamagianni is mainly a combination of percussions and metallic sounds which contributed to the imposing, sometimes disturbing ambiance and created a feeling of uneasiness, while Theodoris Papadimitriou played live cello giving a sad connotation and rhythm to the Aeschylean verse.

The Vivi company (Crete) presented *The Persians* in the theatre Alkmini in Athens in winter 2014, after its success in July 2014 in the Albatros theatre in Avignon's Festival Off (with French subtitles), under the direction of its founder Tilemachos Moudatsakis. Since performance and text are the main preoccupation for Vivi, Moudatsakis opted for a minimalistic approach that is already obvious in the choice of rather small venues (45 places theatres in both Athens and Avignon). Although he maintained the characters of the play, he limited the chorus to one person, who would be joined during the choral parts by the performers whose characters were not part of the action.

He also opted for a minimal, practically empty stage: there is no setting but for the black wooden floor and heavy black drapery in the background. Kostis Christidis and Charis Sepentzis designed the few props which 'decorate' the stage. They mainly used allegories, such as huge blood stained ropes to symbolize the loss of the Persian fleet and lives; military boots gilded with golden coins to symbolise the extreme opulence of the Persian kingdom; big, dice-like cubes to allude to the minimal chances the Persians had of escaping their fate; two decorated wooden boards to suggest both the doors to Darius' tomb and his coffin; helmets fixed on modern rifles to refer to the war; wooden triangles which in the geometric era were a direct reference to a sitting or a praying person symbolising the prayers for the safe return of the Persians. Finally, the performers themselves would act as scenic objects when necessary, as in the case of Atossa's throne: one of the performers adopted a sitting position to suggest an armchair and wore red gloves on his fisted hands to allude to the arms of the royal seat. Atossa would literally sit on his lap, placing her hands on the gloved hands as if seated on a throne which emphasised the body's importance in the performance. The lighting design was subtle and unsophisticated, rather dark, with brief intervals of warm hues, mainly yellow and orange and numerous 'fade-to-blacks' which marked the transition from one episode to the other. Maria Symeon and Vassilis Panopoulos composed a musical partition with repetitive metal sounds and ritualistic Doric austerity, which did not lack melodic parts, and reminded us of Greek folklore songs. Moudatsakis also designed the minimalist costumes as symbols which helped the text become image and left the body exposed to

render more obvious the physical effort[8]. Therefore, the male performers/actors and Atossa were dressed in black jeans and T-shirts, with the exceptions of the Messenger who wore a sleeveless military jacket adorned with medals to allude to his soldier status and Xerxes who wore colourful embroidered jeans and a silk scarf decorated with numerous small pendants to symbolise his status as king of Persia. He would end up practically naked but for a small undergarment covering his genital parts.

TEXT, TRANSLATION AND ACTING

With regard to the text, Kontouri did not interfere with Panos Moullas'[9] translation of the ancient text as she asserted that the text would 'speak' directly to the heart of the audience which would make the connection with contemporary Greek reality[10]. For her the challenge lay in transferring and linking the "deeply political, religious text"[11] – in the sense that people at the time believed in divine justice – to the present. Therefore, her dramaturgical analysis focused on the thorough study of the ancient text in order to stage in the simplest way its conventional meanings and hidden messages[12]. On the other hand, Moudatsakis viewed *The Persians* as a means to remind the public of the three main Greek linguistic civilisations: ancient, byzantine (medieval) and modern/contemporary. Being an expert linguist and a scholar, he translated the text himself and composed an innovative 'partition' of speech, inspired by the Greek civilisation, literature, language and syntax – while keeping extracts of the original text in it, such as the paean "Ὦ παῖδες Ἑλλήνων, ἴτε […] νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών"[13] – in an effort to balance the power of the text and the power of its performance by communicating the former through the later.

Although Kontouri gave the actors instructions as to what she expected from them, she also gave them the liberty to decide themselves how to stage their role. Therefore, the individuality of each part is evident while they form a coherent group. However, Kontouri's main focus was the chorus whose parts are recited and not sung so as to make them clearer for the audience and to confirm the director's statement that the Aeschylean word was of great importance. She asked its members to deliver the text without showing emotion or colouring their voices, to move as one and be faithful to Kamagianni's soundtrack so as to express the anger, and the devastation of the people. She instructed them to progressively show how their pain turns first into fear and then into horror, as they slowly realise the destruction of the Persian Empire and the fall of their king. As a result, the verses recited by the Brides of Sorrow become more powerful and their impact on the audience is doubled. On the one hand the Persian women/mothers/wives are implicated to the plot and on the other hand women in a general sense are linked to war as its indirect victims. Contrary to Kontouri, Moudatsakis chose by means of an open audition five young actors to form the cast of *The Persians*, for both the main characters

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[8] Interview given for the Greek antenna *Street Radio* on nov 24th, 2014.

[9] Panos Moullas (1935-2010) was a scholar and a philologist, Professor of Modern Greek at the Universities of Nanterre and La Sorbonne. His translation of the *Persians* was published in 2010, ed. Stigmi.

[10] Press conference [online]. Available at https://www.youtube.com [last viewed 23/1/2017].

[11] Interview in *Aggelioforos*, 13th may 2014. Source: archives of the NTNG.

[12] Press conference [online]. Available at https://www.youtube.com [last viewed 12/1/2017].

[13] Aeschylus, *Πέρσαι* [*Persians*], Athens, Zitros, 2007, v. 401-404.

and the chorus, as he wanted to teach them his method from the beginning. He believes that older, accomplished actors would not be as receptive to his teaching, since their acting is mature and their art has already been mastered. Accordingly, the actors work as a whole throughout the entire performance, all the while maintaining their own singularity. As Yannis Askaroglou (Darius) clarified in an interview (for the Greek antenna Street Radio on Nov 24th, 2014), the performers were not dancers to begin with; they discovered the physical requirements of the method during the first studio rehearsals. Each rehearsal lasted five hours: two hours were dedicated to physical exercise *per se* to warm up the body and three hours to the actual repetition: the text, the movements and a combination of the two. This gradually turned into improvisation based on impulses and reactions to the text which, consequently, led to the final movements. Askaroglou explains:

> Our work was based on reflexes and the emotions produced by each moment. The moves were not shown to us, but 'corrected' on us. Since each body has a different way to express itself, each movement had to be made our own, adapted to our perception of it and to our physical abilities. This demanded a great deal of physical effort. Our aim wasn't to narrate the story with our movements, it wasn't a mime. We aimed at creating symbols that refer to an idea or a feeling or a point in the action. We had to transmit the density of the text with our body and through our experience and that is why it was so difficult and so demanding – physically[14].

Agisilaos Alexiou (the Messenger) adds: "Corporality is what characterises this interpretation and the tragic elements of the text are put in evidence through formations, clean strong lines and symbolisms[15]".

Indeed, the most important element for Moudatsakis is the actor's body. In his approach he uses its infinite ability of expression through physical effort and, by extension, through suffering. Moudatsakis introduces a new method of performing ancient drama, which received a UNESCO award in 2014. The starting points for his method (as he states in his interview for *MC News*[16]) are the philosophy of Heraclitus and the ideas of Dionisius the Areopagite, as well as Antonin Artaud's *Théâtre de la cruauté*. His technique focuses on the combination of physical effort and concentration, in order to gather and pull energy from the environment, then store it inside oneself, until diffusing it again on stage during the performance. Critics mentioned the method has a 'post-tragic style[17]', and Petros Anastasiadis, professor of Philosophy at the University of Crete, suggested that the performance contradicts in a way the Aristotelian definition of tragedy as 'μίμησις πράξεως' (an imitation of an action)[18] since the director's aim is to convey the tragic element by means of physical effort and not acting *per se*. The body's

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[14] Extract of the interview given for the Greek antenna *Street Radio* on nov 24th, 2014. Our translation.

[15] A.P., Οι Πέρσες *στην Αβινιόν* [*The Persians* in Avignon, 21/7/2014], [online] Available at http://www.enet.gr [last viewed 17/9/2015]. Our translation.

[16] Maria Chatzinikolaou, *Τηλέμαχος Μουδατσάκις: Η καλλιτεχνική δημιουργία χρειάζεται μεγάλες ελευθερίες* [Tilemachos Moudatsakis: artistic creation needs freedom, 3/11/14], interview, [online]. Available at http://www.mcnews.gr [last viewed 19/9/2015].

[17] Katerina Mylona, *Το βραβείο στους* Πέρσες *από την UNESCO*, [The UNESCO prize to *The Persians*, 10/1/15], interview, [online]. Available at http://www.patris.gr [last viewed 15/9/2015].

[18] Aristotle, *Poetics*, VI.30.

energy is diffused in space producing numerous symbols and images, which create harmonic sequences; these sequences are again combined with the physical effort of the actor, and so on. The actor's/performer's body imprints the codification of the roles hence defining the different characters of the play. This goal is achieved, through structural moves performed with mathematical-geometrical precision inspired mainly by the paintings of the Greek geometrical era, the red figure vases and the Parthenon reliefs. That physical effort, the principle of pain and suffering of the body, is the means to transmit theatrical poetry.

So, Anastasiadis' point that such an approach to text and performance invalidates the Aristotelian definition of tragedy as "the imitation of an action"[19] is confirmed by the fact that actors basically compose and decompose meanings, symbols and situations to perform an interpretation of the historical facts within the fictional environment of *The Persians'* plot, thus proving that the density, rhythm and power of the text can be transmitted by the corporality of the tragedy, the body movements and the complex acrobatic formations. The concentration that the performance demands and the energy drain are considerable and that is what transforms the tragic text into physical pain. The poetic rhythm is then diffused in space, while speech transmits the contents of a linguistic signified in association to the multiple signifiers. And, since the play is the product of a theatrical transcription, we could possibly call it a 'scenic text'.

A STATEMENT FOR TODAY'S CRISIS

Despite the considerable differences in their technical and dramaturgical approach, the same concerns motivated both Kontouri and Moudatsakis to stage this play: Greece's current political and financial situation, due to the government's mishandling and abuse of power to serve individual interests. Accordingly, they chose to stage *The Persians* as a statement in times of extreme political complexity when many citizens in contemporary Greece still consider every day as a lost battle against politics and government interests. As the Persians, the Greeks not long ago placed their confidence in their rulers only to be confronted with the disastrous outcome of the government's arbitrary decisions, broken promises of welfare and true democracy, poor judgement and numerous compromises. When talking about his approach to Xerxes' part and the way he conceived it, Kolovos (NTNG) admits being inspired by the current political situation:

> I was looking for clues as to my approach to the king with the 'superego'. And then I opened the window and saw that our society is full of destroyed kings who with their ungainly actions ruined their country, without taking responsibility for their criminal negligence that led us where we are now [...]. That great play is modern, it screams to us to wake up and to realise that our rulers are arrogant and addicted to power and that we need not allow them to be so[20].

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[19] Aristotle, *Poetics*, VI.30.

[20] Vasilis Bouziotis, *Γιώργος Κολοβός: "Όπου και να γυρίσεις πια, βλέπεις ένα Ξέρξη...λέρα"*, [Giorgos Kolovos: "Wherever you look, you see Xerxes...and filth", 13/8/2014], interview [online]. Available at http://www.ntng.gr [last viewed 19/9/2015]. Our translation.

So both directors insist in their interviews on the point that the play is a warning against hubris and arrogance. Our contemporary Lord David Owen defines the Hubris Syndrome as "including a narcissistic propensity to see the world as an arena to exercise power and seek glory[21]", which he considers as a characteristic of contemporary heads of State[22]. Kolovos comments on hubris:

> The [*Persians'*] message to the audience is that the millennia may pass but Hubris still exists. Passions, ambition, vanity, are issues that people had to address and resolve throughout their lifetime either then or now. *The Persians* show how power can become an instrument of destruction in the wrong hands; that not many things have changed [...] since Aeschylus' time and that our decisions still and always will have consequences[23].

Therefore, in both directors' view, the play is not a modern nationalist manifesto that lifts the spirits (the paean of the Greeks always gets strong applause from the audience) but an admonition and a warning against lack of respect and common sense. They believe that with what many will view as the same foolishness as Xerxes, the Greek government overestimated its power but had to ply (three times – by the time this article is being written) to the EU's decisions and ultimatums, putting the people in an extremely difficult situation. For them, *The Persians* are about taking responsibility. Nevertheless, Akis Sakellariou (Atossa-NTNG) points out that:

> [...] citizens are to blame too, myself included. [...] What we need to do is learn from our mistakes and swallow our pride. We are a nation that cannot take responsibility. We cannot complain about the people we voted for. We have to assume our choices. [...][24].

Kolovos (Xerxes-NTNG) generalises:

> Modern man is a lot like Xerxes. Not only the Greeks. We generally tend to avoid our responsibilities as individual members of our society and hide behind the whole. Similarly, when the time comes to face our part of responsibility in the disaster we put the blame on the group but exclude ourselves from it [...][25].

Surely during the last few years Greece is going through one of the biggest social and political crises in its history which often leads citizens/artists/journalists in addressing any other issue, no matter how important it may be, as a mere distraction. Therefore, although essential international issues such as the war in Syria or the immigration problem (equally important for the Greek reality) reach the news' brief titles, general

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[21] See Lord David Owen, *Hubris syndrome: Diminished empathy and unbridled intuition* [online]. Available at http://www.lorddavidowen.co.uk [last viewed 5/10/2015].

[22] Lord David Owen, *Ασθενείς ηγέτες στην εξουσία*, Athens, Kastaniotis, 2008 (English title: *In Sickness and In Power: Illness in Heads of Government During the Last 100 Years*, London, Methuen Publishing Ltd, 2011).

[23] Interview in *City magazine*, 31st July 2014. Source: archives of the NTNG. Our translation.

[24] Elsa Spuridopoulou, *Άκης Σακελλαρίου: "Η αλαζονεία της εξουσίας έγινε αλαζονεία της οικονομίας"*, [Akis Sakellariou: "The arrogance of Power has become arrogance of Economy", 20/7/2014], interview, [online]. Available at http://www.ntng.gr [last viewed on 01/10/2015]. Our translation.

[25] Giorgos Papanikolaou, *Ο Γιώργος Κολοβός στο My Salonica*, [Giorgos Kolovos speaks to *My Salonika*, 30/7/2014], interview, [online]. Available at http://mysalonika.gr [last viewed 19/9/2015]. Our translation.

attention is focused on politics and the financial situation. Social issues being also neglected, Kontouri and Moudatsakis subtly point us towards them through their staging options. One of them is the use of nudity to emphasise loss and suffering and Vivi's technique focuses precisely on the body - as conveyor of theatrical poetry. Xerxes tears his clothes and ends up practically naked on stage so that the audience can witness his physical pain as he sweats and pants heavily from the effort required to perform his complex acrobatic moves while reciting the Aeschylean verses. This physical pain alludes to the suffering of contemporary Greek citizens whose sorrow and restlessness for the loss of their comfortable way of life could be gradually transformed into emotional and perhaps also physical pain. Similarly, in the NTNG performance, when the news of the destruction come, the Persian Elders literally rip their clothes in despair and stay half naked on stage, whilst later Xerxes appears completely naked to suggest the loss of the Persian army. But Kontouri's bold move is also an advice: it implies that one must be free of all 'conventions' in order to start over. Xerxes is revealing himself physically but, more importantly, emotionally. The fallen king stands naked – but for the quiver that covers his genitals – before the chorus as someone who regrets his mistakes and assumes his responsibility. Thus, in both cases, Xerxes' nakedness combined with his mourning confirms his repenting and his 'decision' to reinvent himself as a ruler, wiser from his experience.

However, only at the NTNG performance is Atossa present at the final scene and lets Xerxes go through his trial in silence, confirming his change by covering him with her veil in a tender, motherly action that raises further questions. Atossa's last action is a surprising innovation made by Kontouri and one of the rare times in both performances that her 'female' features occur. If we associate this adaptation with the addition of the Brides of Sorrow and the assignment of Atossa's part to a male actor, the question of gender is quickly raised[26]. On one hand the secondary chorus is a reference to the first-wave feminism's struggle for women to have a public voice[27]. On the other hand, Kontouri's approach to Atossa combined with Moudatsakis' choice to not insist on her motherly features and to present a vigorous, harsh and imposing queen allude to the recurrent anti-feminist view that a woman must have male 'characteristics' to rule. What is certain is that both directors see male and female features in Atossa – a bisexuality. Kontouri explains that "Atossa is a woman and a mother-queen but at the same time a ruler in the absence of her son-king"[28], so her bisexuality is more psychological than physical since it is due to social conventions. Although entrusting the role to a man could imply Atossa's physical bisexuality (!), it chiefly suggests a certain indifference towards the choice of sexual identity: one does not need to define his/her gender to be a good ruler. Furthermore, Judith Butler[29] promotes the idea of 'gender' being equivalent to 'role' and theatre is a place where 'gender' can literally become a 'role'. In other words, to

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[26] Being it impossible to elaborate on gender theories due to the article's limited space see, Elsa Dorlin, *Sexe, genre et sexualités*, Paris, PUF, 2008; Isabelle Clair, *Sociologie du genre*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2012; and Françoise Héritier, *Masculin/Féminin, Tome 1. La pensée de la différence*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2007.

[27] The first-wave feminism focused mainly on women's right to vote. See June Hannam, *Feminism*, London, Routledge, 2014.

[28] Ileana Dimadi, *Μοιάζουμε κι εμείς με τους ηττημένους Πέρσες*, [We look like the defeated Persians ourselves, 14/8/2014], theatrical review, [online] Available at http://www.athinorama.gr [last viewed 24/09/2014]. Our translation.

[29] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York, Routledge, 1990.

paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir[30], Atossa is born a woman, but she becomes a man to rule.

In the final analysis, the differences between the two performances' visual and practical approach are evident. Kontouri opted for a classical approach by staging the play in the ancient theatre of Epidaurus, while Moudatsakis eliminated all elements of grandeur by choosing a small venue. Set, costumes and props served to impress the Epidaurian audience, whereas they were mere symbols and innuendos in the case of Vivi. Kontouri used the modern Greek text which easily came across to the audience, whilst Moudatsakis' translation contained elaborate literary elements, thus appealing to a more informed audience. The stage directions were limited to instructions, thus allowing the experienced actors of the NTNG to develop their characters according to their own perception of the part, while the young actors of Vivi were taught a new performing method. Moreover, Kontouri used two choruses by introducing the Brides of Sorrow, focusing on the choral parts, whereas Moudatsakis limited the chorus to one person. Last but not least, the power, emotion and tragic element of the NTNG performance were the result of the speech and recitation of the Aeschylean verses, whereas in Vivi's case they resulted from corporal effort and physical pain.

But, despite their formal and dramaturgical dissimilarities, it seems that both performances served the same purpose; both directors used this anti-war play to make a comment on the actual controversial political situation in Greece and the problems that the citizens are facing. Furthermore, they insist in all their interviews, on the importance of the Aeschylean message about hubris and arrogance and used the text to facilitate its communication to the audience, which easily identified the allusion to the current events. But although the directors did not stray from the conventional message of the play, we perceive an either conscious or unconscious attempt to also bring up through their staging options contemporary social issues such as gender, loss and suffering. These issues can indirectly and, by extension, by themselves, become bearers of political connotations, raise further socio-political questions and encourage pondering on them more thoroughly.

Atlantidɛ

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[30] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe, Tome 1. Les faits et les mythes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986.

ANCIENT DRAMA AND CONTEMPORARY WARS:
THE CITY LAID WASTE?

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Résumé : Si la représentation de la guerre dans la tragédie antique peut aussi intéresser la scène contemporaine, c'est en raison de la spécificité de sa dimension dramaturgique. Nous voudrions réfléchir à la possibilité pour la dramaturgie de la tragédie antique de nous aider à représenter/penser/ressentir la complexité et le caractère déroutant voire monstrueux des guerres contemporaines, et ce quelle que soit la séparation affirmée par Aristote entre tragédie et monstruosité. En quoi le théâtre contemporain peut-il chercher dans le théâtre antique une possibilité de toucher/transformer, lorsqu'il s'agit de la représentation de la guerre, individu et communauté ? Pour éviter l'émiettement des exemples, nous nous intéressons ici à trois mises en scène, celle des *Troyennes* par George Tabori à Brême en 1976, celles des *Troyennes* encore par Matthias Langhoff à Rennes en 1998 et celle des *Perses* par Dimitri Gotscheff à Berlin en 2006.

Mots-clés : tragédie grecque, *Perses*, *Troyennes*, scène contemporaine, guerre, Allemagne.

Abstract: If the representation of war in ancient tragedy may be of some relevance to the contemporary stage, it is because of the specificity of its dramatic dimension. We would like to reflect on the possibility for the dramaturgy of ancient tragedy to help us represent/envisage/feel the complexity and the disturbing, or even monstrous nature of contemporary wars, notwithstanding the separation, spelled by Aristotle, between tragedy and monstrosity. In what ways can contemporary drama seek, in ancient drama, a possibility of touching/transforming the individual and the community, when representing war? To avoid too many examples we will deal with three productions: The Trojan Women, *by George Tabori in Bremen in 1976,* The Trojan Women again, *by Matthias Langhoff in Rennes in 1998, and* The Persians, *by Dimitri Gotscheff in Berlin in 2006.*

Keywords: greek tragedy, Persians, Trojan women, *contemporary drama, war, Germany.*

How, and in what ways can ancient drama help to envisage and comprehend contemporary wars? At first sight the question may seem paradoxical. Undoubtedly, war is the prime material of ancient drama, and more precisely of Greek tragedy - which will be our concern here – regardless of the subject: victors and vanquished (*The Persians*), the problems of leadership (*Iphigenia in Aulis*), of the people (*The Trojan Women*), of strategy in the present (*Philoctetes*), of its repercussions on future generations (*Andromache*). But the distance which separates us from them often triggers a reaction of suspicion regarding the temptation of representing them on the contemporary stage: "What do these plays mean today?" (« Was sollen uns diese Stücke heute ? »)[1], « Why play *Antigone* ? » (« Warum *Antigone* heute spielen ? »)[2], « What can the Greeks tell us? »[3], « Is Greek tragedy over? »[4], as if it were necessary, over and over, to justify staging them, returning or resorting to a type of drama whose role as a model or place in scholarly heritage are undisputed but whose permanence or recurrence are considered problematic, if not contradictory.

Regarding this suspicion, two attitudes have long prevailed. Either ancient drama is considered as unrelated to our present world because it deals with remote wars, with a culture and dramaturgy that are now extinct: in that case the production will be organized in a museographical perspective, taking the spectator for a voyage in time and history, perhaps trying to retrieve a long lost origin, whose renascence could yet regenerate the seemingly moribund modern stage. Or else, ancient tragedy may be viewed as extolling universal, eternal values, and thus be staged in a humanist perspective, still valid in the modern world.

What we shall deal with now is the type of interpretation that prevails today[5], the idea that if the representation of war in ancient tragedy may be of some relevance to the contemporary stage, it is because of the specificity of its dramatic dimension. We shall reflect on the possibility for the dramaturgy of ancient tragedy to help us represent/envisage/feel the complexity and the disturbing or even monstrous nature of contemporary wars, notwithstanding the separation, spelled by Aristotle, between tragedy and monstrosity. In what ways can contemporary drama seek, in ancient drama, a possibility of touching/transforming the individual and the community, when representing war? Our purpose here is not to deal with the possibility of representing ancient tragedy (whether textually or scenically) - a question that has haunted the problematics of reception - but with its function. And our intention is not to provide answers, but to raise questions and to open new paths of reflection.

To avoid too many examples we shall deal with three productions: *The Trojan Women*, by George Tabori in Bremen in 1976, *The Trojan Women* again, by Matthias Langhoff in Rennes in 1998, and *The Persians*, by Dimitri Gotscheff in Berlin in 2006. These

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[1] Gerd Jäger, « *Elektra* von Sophokles », *Theater heute*, février 1975, p. 13.

[2] Gerhard Jörder, « Abenteuer in Theben », *Theater heute*, juillet 1988, p. 44.

[3] Debate organized by *Libération*, 19-07-1989.

[4] Évelyne Ertel, *Théâtre/Public*, n° 100, 1991, p. 74-83 (transcript of the symposium held at the Théâtre des Amandiers in Nanterre, December 1989 : « La tragédie grecque et la scène actuelle »).

[5] See Freddy Decreus, « Le bruit court que nous n'en avons pas fini avec les Grecs », in *Tragédie grecque. Défi de la scène contemporaine, Études théâtrales*, 21, Georges Banu (ed.), Louvain-la-Neuve, 2001, p. 13-28 ; Matthias Dreyer and Erika Fischer-Lichte (ed.), *Antike Tragödie heute : Vorträge und Materialen zum Antikenprojekt des Deutschen Theaters*, Deutsches Theater Berlin, 2007.

productions have one thing in common, in spite of the differences between the plays: they are set in once powerful cities, now devastated (*eremos*, the Greek text says, repeatedly), and their object is the figures and the words of the victims, even though the term victimization cannot be applied to any character. Broadly speaking, they make it possible to take into account what may constitute, according to David Lescot, the specificity of a dramaturgy of modern warfare, paradoxically at work in Greek tragedy: based on the articulation between heroic individuals and collective identity, on the mixture of the epic (the heroic material, the inserted narrative) and the dramatic, on the juxtaposition of present and memory, with no determining authority to dictate an explicit meaning, Greek tragedy may offer an example of what could be, in David Lescot's words, « the collective agent of a new type of conflict » within a representation of war as « an instrument of interpretation and comprehension of historical becoming »[6]. In so far as these two plays increase the otherness due to the distance between them and ourselves by an internal offcentring due to fiction (the Greek spectators were incited to experience the plight of the Persians or the Trojan women while testing the value of their political model, or even the outrageousness, the absurdity of the violence inflicted on them), the contemporary production of each of the plays incites, on the one hand, to dismiss the relation to ancient heritage as part of the continuity of dominant western culture, on the other, to question any Manichean and definitive historic and geopolitical vision.

Finally all three productions were designed by German stage directors. *The Persians*, as well as *The Trojan Women*, are ubiquitous on the other side of the Rhine, repeatedly used from a Brechtian viewpoint to represent the complexity of the fractures in German history, its violence and anguish. Without bowing to biographical criticism, let us mention that a good many producers claim a personal traumatic memory of the omnipresence of war: George Tabori's father died in Auschwitz, Matthias Langhoff's went to Zurich as an exile to escape the Nazi regime, and Hansgünther Heyme's (another figure of the reception of ancient tragedy) died on the Russian front[7]; the picture of the destruction of Dresden is omnipresent in the latter's work, as in Durs Grünbein's or Volker Braun's, who were born there. From one generation to the next, from Braun or Müller to Grünbein, the obsession of fracture and destruction is conveyed, as of an apocalyptic landscape of ruins where survivors are seen wandering.

In 1976, George Tabori gave a performance of *The Trojan Women* in Bremen, which caused a resounding scandal. The work of Tabori (1914-2007), a dramatist of Hungarian origin, is haunted by the trauma of the Shoah (his father was sent to a concentration camp, his mother managed to escape), which pervades all his work, and particularly *The Cannibals*, performed in 1968. The idea then was to question the very possibility of a pathetic vision, to hamper any form of compassion that theatrical staging might arouse towards the « victims », through constant recourse to irony, farce or grotesque. Back in the FRG to produce the play after years of exile in the USA, he pursued his research on the representation of relations of dominance and decided in 1976 to produce Matthias Braun's adaptation of Euripides' play, much shortened for the occasion and envisaged

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[6] David Lescot, *Dramaturgie de la guerre*, Circé, Penser le théâtre, 2001, p. 32 and 35.
[7] About Hansgünther Heyme, see Günther Erken, *Hansgünther Heyme*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989 and Hellmut Flashar, *Inszenierung der Antike. Das griechische Drama auf der Bühne der Neuzeit*, Munich, C.-H. Beck, 2009.

through the Sartrian prism (Sartre's adaptation of *The Trojan Women*, written in 1964, has enjoyed great success in Germany to this day). As Rolf Michaelis, a critic for *Theater heute*, reported, the play caused a scandal and a good many spectators left the theatre[8]. At the beginning of the performance Tabori had deleted the prologue, uttered by Athena and Poseidon in Euripides (thus suppressing any reference to a divine intent, leaving men with their own violence). He had replaced it with a mute scene in which the Trojan women, bereft of their children, waited in the attitude of slaves, their clothes in tatters, while blood flowed continuously on the stage. Then they threw their clothes and shoes onto the middle of the stage, thus becoming, in their nudity and in their silence, universal figures of political submission. To quote Rolf Michaelis:

[...] See the Russian women, dragged away by the Germans as foreign workers; see the Vietnamese women, torn away from their country by American helicopters; see the women of Algeria, of Angola, raped, tortured, murdered [...][9].

Thus the production mingles a universal conception of History and a reference to the specificity of the Shoah (with the still recent image of the victims' dehumanization in the extermination process), within a general process that plays on historical reference and identification, and at the same time on what might be called Brechtian effects of distanciation. By means of recomposing the text, Tabori makes us witness the death of Astyanax, represented on stage with surgical as well as ceremonial gestures by characters that have been likened to Shakespearean clowns or Kafkaian clerks. This scene, unexpected since it does not exist in Euripides' tragedy, is disturbing, according to Rolf Michaelis, becoming all the more unbearable when the perpetrators carefully wash their hands after the murder, making it appear almost clean and decent. The play ends on Hecuba's long complaint, which steeps the tragedy into the present of the performance and makes the spectator experience Euripides' tragedy not as coming from a remote Antiquity, but as linked to the still domineering power of war: Hecuba evokes another woman, also a victim of the Greeks, who lost four children in the war. She concludes her speech – and the play – with these words: « This woman, I understand her », adding, after a long pause: « now » [10].

Thus Tabori tries, through an aesthetics of shock and surprise, to make the spectator experience the violence suffered by the characters of the tragedy (and beyond them by the victims of totalitarian powers) by means of a reshaping of the Greek tragedy, onto which elements of terror are, so to speak, grafted. Monstrousness, rejected by Aristotle, is displayed here, as if to show the horror that Greek tragedy was traditionally not supposed to show. Aristotle's « compassion » or « pity » is also revisited: refusing any representation of an ideal Greece inherited from Winckelmann's aesthetics, but also any possibility of « enjoying tears » (which could explain that so many of the spectators walked away), or even of aesthetic pleasure (in spite of the distanciation process), Tabori propounds an experience of atrocity which puts to trial the individual and the community, far from any idea of tragic beauty, in a cathartic process of warning which mixes terror and compassion, even if it eventually erases all the moral ambiguities of the play.

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[8] Rolf Michaelis, « Theater gegen Gewalt-Gewalt gegen Theater », *Theater heute*, juin 1976, p. 33.

[9] « [...] dies sind die russischen Frauen, die von den Deutschen als Fremd arbeiterinnen verschleppt werden, dies sind die vietnamesischen Frauen, die mit amerikanischen Hubschraubern ausgeflogen werden, dies sind die Frauen Algeriens, Angolas, geschändet, gefoltert, getötet [...] », *ibid.*, p. 33.

[10] « Die Frau versteh ich...jetzt », *ibid.*

This difficulty raised by Tabori's performance, and by his temptation - through the specificity of ancient dramaturgy and through the possibilities of present day associations offered by *The Trojan Women* - to make the spectator experience the trauma of war in a (hopefully) radical way, therefore leading, perhaps, to a metamorphosis, may be exposed as such in another production of the same play. Matthias Langhoff created *The Trojan Women (Femmes de Troie)* in a French version by Laurence Calame[11] at the Théâtre national de Bretagne on 13 January 1998 (the play was also performed in Nanterre from 27 February to 28 March of the same year). In 1998, Matthias Langhoff had already produced several Greek tragedies (including *Seven against Thebes*, *Prometheus*, *Medea*, *Oedipus, the Bacchae*). *Femmes de Troie* is the third part of a trilogy conceived by the director on the subject of war (the first two plays were Müller's *Philoctète*, staged in 1994[12] and *L'Île du Salut*, based on Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*, staged in 1996). What Langhoff is interested in is precisely the relation between war and politics, but also the representation of life as impregnated by war, a life that is never far from war. *The Trojan Women* was chosen, in part, because it permitted to « let the victims speak... the women that are never heard ». According to Langhoff, what makes Euripides modern is the fact that « he was among the first to speak of war crimes »[13].

The production stages a post-apocalyptic universe, mingling an evocation of the ruins of Dresden and Berlin in 1945 with the collapse of an amphitheatre, filling the scenic space. At the beginning of the play, the stage is covered with smoke and violently lit. It is invaded by prostitutes brought by the Greeks, characters added to the prologue as so many victims of dominance. Wearing orthopedic prostheses and straightjackets, they participate in a universe of dehumanization, reinforced by the presence of warriors sporting « Mad Max costumes », as Alain Dreyfus wrote in *Libération*[14]. Then, the set rotating, enter the chorus of Trojan women, with ill-assorted costumes that could evoke the history of Greece as well as that of the Balkans and, in the background, the war in Yugoslavia. Langhoff thus opposes two groups of women whom at the same time he invites to bring together as victims of the same dominance. Through a scenography that shatters the separation between stage and audience thanks to a set of gangways, through the emotion caused by the songs, he mingles strangeness and closeness in a disaster whose a-temporal character seems to transcend historical differences, making the spectator feel the violence and absurdity of all wars.

This performance also triggered violent and contradictory reactions. Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux considers it a failure because, in spite of Langhoff's proclaimed intention of making the theatre a place of interest for the complexity of « real man », the production « progressively locks [the spectator] in a state of confusion » of feelings and

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[11] See *Femmes de Troie ou Camp de femmes I, Troie*, Prologue, d'après Euripide, in *Théâtre(s) en Bretagne*, n° 13-14, PUR, Rennes, 2002, p. 133-143.

[12] See « Intermède et matériaux dramaturgiques », Matthias Langhoff and Laurence Calame, in Heiner Müller, *Philoctète 1958-1964*, translation by François Rey, Toulouse, Ombres/Théâtre national de Bretagne, 1994. About the function of plaint in ancient tragedy, see Nicole Loraux, *La Voix endeuillée. Essai sur la tragédie grecque*, Paris, Gallimard, 1999.

[13] Programme, quoted by Constantina Foskolou, *Matthias Langhoff et la tragédie grecque : mises en scène et réceptions (Les Bacchantes et Femmes de Troie)*, DEA, Paris III, IET, 1999, p. 64.

[14] Alain Dreyfus, « À Rennes, Matthias Langhoff revisite *Les Troyennes* d'Euripide. Portrait de femmes avec ruines », *Libération*, 26 janvier 1998.

thought, where only is heard « the long complaint of the victims », in an immediacy close to a documentary[15]. According to her, Langhoff was lured into a Nietzschean-like conception, in which tragedy, dissolved into the non-verbal and the non-differenciated, is brought back to the immaturity of childhood. Yet, if one takes a look at the pictures of the event[16] and considers Langhoff's history, particularly in relation with Greek tragedy, one may perhaps offer a different interpretation: while recognizing the relevance of Greek tragedy to present a questioning of contemporary wars, Langhoff, following the example of a post-Brechtian Heiner Müller, also shows, perhaps, his own doubts as to the efficiency of such a process. If the amphitheatre crumbles down, if the vision, blurred by smoke, can no longer be clear, if words become fragmented and disintegrate (in an aesthetics reminiscent of the production of *The Bacchae* that Langhoff had given one year before), this may also be a representation of a « devastated » landscape which could be that of Troy (*eremos*, mentioned repeatedly in Euripides), as well as the « waste land » evoked by T.S. Eliot, or the contemporary world. The performance thus becomes the sign of the impossibility for contemporary drama to recover the unity and cohesion of a theatre whose strong bond with citizenship is also evoked. In the programme for the performance, Langhoff writes:

It is difficult because the audience must be one that feel the same urgent need to clarify their own problems and that go to the theatre for this purpose. The audience could then follow the same process as the Trojan women[17].

Langhoff thus highlights the inadequacy between a type of drama that claims political responsibility and a society that is not willing to endorse it. Only the performances offered to the unemployed in the town of Rennes achieved this goal, according to him, the women in the audience being able to establish a link between the fate of the Trojan women and their own situation. So it is only through an extremely tight process of identification (here, the feminine gender, the situation of collective precariousness and exclusion, or even political submissiveness) that Greek tragedy could still have political efficiency, and the staging itself may be seen as anticipating this difficulty, which perhaps existed in Euripides' play itself. The post-apocalyptic universe, reinforced by the image of *Angelus Novus*, borrowed from Paul Klee *via* Walter Benjamin (quoted by Langhoff in the programme), should then be interpreted in the fiction and outside of it, not so much as a return to the immaturity of childhood, but as a leap forward into the catastrophic drama of mankind, reduced to fear and lament, far from any possibility of thinking.

Therefore, Langhoff's production perhaps introduces doubt, whereas Tabori expressed confidence in the possibility of finding in Greek dramaturgy the stuff (even artificially recreated) of what might be considered a contemporary catharsis. Yet one can see how, through the production of Greek tragedies linked to war, they both problematize the conception of History and the interrogation on the possibility of finding a cathartic effect in contemporary drama: on the one hand, Tabori believes in the efficiency of actualization, in a conception of History where the same schemes keep recurring, and in the capacity of drama to make the individual and the community react; on the other, Langhoff doubts that there is any possibility of re-creation or identification within a

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[15] Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux, « Les ruines de la tragédie », in *Théâtre(s) en Bretagne*, n°1, PUR, Rennes, février 1999, p. 23 et 24.

[16] They are available on the site of the Théâtre National de Bretagne : http://www.t-n-b.fr.

[17] Programme of *Femmes de Troie*, Théâtre national de Bretagne, Rennes, *op. cit*.

decomposing City, in a conception of History as progressing toward (or radically devastated by) catastrophe and de-humanization.

It is also from this dual viewpoint that Dimitri Gotscheff envisaged Aeschylus' *The Persians* in 2006. As Euripides did later in *The Trojan Women*, Aeschylus displays the victims' point of view. But this time, since the action takes place only in the Persians' camp, he forces the Greek spectators not just to « sympathize » with the sorrow of those whom the Greek army has defeated, but also to experience being thrown off-centre, invited as they are to try to understand the workings of a political model which is alien to them, and therefore to reflect on their own model. It is this very experience of being thrown off-centre, and its possible consequences, that Dimitri Gotscheff is mainly interested in. To produce the play, he turned to a translation by Heiner Müller, with whom he had often worked and for whom he had been, like Matthias Langhoff, a sort of ambassador on the European stage. He had also produced several ancient plays, translated or rewritten (*Philoctetes* [1983 and 2005], but also *The Trojan Women* [1988] or *Oedipus Rex* [1988 and 2009], more recently *Prometheus* [2010], Brecht's *Antigone* [2011] or *Medeamaterial* [2011]). Müller's text introduces a form of opaqueness which is sometimes non-existent in the Greek text. Its purpose is to make the spectator feel a sort of oddness that increases the experience of otherness required by fiction itself. What Müller is interested in, even though his translation was published in 1991, the year of the Gulf War, is not the potential topicality of *The Persians*, but the experience of a close contact with the Greek original which is at the same time given as remote, or even almost inaccessible[18].

In an empty space (scenography is by Mark Lammert), which is necessary, Gotscheff explains, if one is to experience utter, fundamental solitude (he evokes Giacometti's walking man[19]), the actors articulate the words with particular clarity, « like meteorites [...] that have just exploded » »[20]: the ancient text, thus proffered, crashes into the present. The costumes, modern but a-temporal (simple black gowns for women; black trousers and increasingly tattered white shirts for men) prevent any historical projection. At the same time, through the distanciated formalism of a particularly stark production, Gotscheff wants to make the spectator feel that *continuum* between victors and vanquished that Heiner Müller mentioned about the play. Like Tabori and Langhoff he adds a prologue

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[18] « The original gesture does not disappear in the information on the content. It makes it opaque and, for superficial readers, nearly inaccessible. [...] The opaqueness highlights the gap between Aeschylus and us. In the distance appears the *continuum* of human existence and in the *continuum* the difference » (« Der Gestus des Originals verschwindet nicht in der Information über den Inhalt. Das macht sie dunkel und für flüchtige Leser schwer zugänglich. [...] Die Dunkelheit erhellt den Abstand zwischen Aischylos und uns. In der Distanz scheint das Kontinuum menschlicher Existenz auf und im Kontinuum die Differenz », Heiner Müller, *Die Perser* von Aischylos, in *Werke*, 7, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004, p. 721).

[19] Dimitri Gotscheff, *Überseefilm*, Deutsches Theater Berlin, 2007 (http://www.ueberseefilm.de).

[20] « [...] The words fall like meteorites from the depths of time and explode in the instant. Fragments of signification with sharp angles move freely across the recesses of the spectator's brain, made sinuous by the lights. At the same time Bendokat is like a machine ejecting words with mechanical precision, Zilcher a woman tearing words off her body » (« [...]. Die Worte fallen wie Meteoriten aus der Zeit und schlagen im Augenblick ein. Die scharfkantigen Bedeutungsbruchstücke durchfahren ungebremst die von der Aufklärung ondulierten Hirnwindungen der Zuschauer. Bendokat ist dabei eine Maschine, die die Worte mit mechanischer Präzision abschickt, Zilcher ein Weib, das sich die Worte aus dem Leib reißt », Ulrich Seidler, « Bei den Untergängen », *Berliner Zeitung*, 09.10.2006 ; URL : https://www.deutschestheater.de).

(in a perspective which appears inherited from Brecht's *Antigone*'s model). It is a wordless prologue, in which two actors fight for a territory bounded by a gigantic rotating wall, the only item on the stage. Aggressiveness increases little by little, until the opening of the play itself, in which formal distance permits to mingle Greeks and Persians in the present of the performance[21]. The two actors (Samuel Finzi and Wolfram Koch) jointly play the part of the messenger, then that of the ghost of Darius and of Xerxes, as if to suggest that war turns everyone into a defeated person, transfixed by the same suffering, on either side of the border and of the generations. At the same time, as Mark Lammert himself explains, the wall is also part of Germany's recent history, a symbol of a succession of fractures and reunions[22]. Through the disappearance of historical or national landmarks, the relation between winners and losers appears, in Müller's words, as a *continuum*, or, to quote Matthias Dreyer, as « a constellation of power, in the society, moving across history »[23].

Very far from any process of actualization, or from any catastrophist vision of History, very far also from any aesthetics of complaint or process of terror, Gotscheff finds in the « empty space » of the stage the possibility for drama to re-invent, after the catastrophe, an historical space in which, uncertain and undetermined, the present can manifest itself as radically alien to itself and perchance become, for the spectator, the site of an experience of movement, through off-centring and changing landmarks.

At the close of this too brief survey, we can distinguish an historical trajectory which is linked to the history of contemporary drama and to the ideological and aesthetic challenges that nourished it in succession (Brecht and Müller especially). But at the same time various possibilities of recourse to Greek tragedy are suggested: one is to emphasize the repetitive, cyclical nature of wars, as if to denounce any illusion of progress; another is to attempt to revive the experience of their horror, by revisiting pity and terror; or to direct attention, through the representation of the distance separating us from the ancient text and stage, to the position and possibilities of our present, whose urgency and singularity are to be felt.

Atlantide

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[21] See Matthias Dreyer, « Fremde Zeit. Aufführungen der *Perser* und die historische Distanz im Theater der Gegenwart », *Antike Tragödie heute*, *op. cit.*, p. 162-163 and *Theater der Zäsur, Antike Tragödie im Theater seit den 1960er Jahren*, Paderborn, Wilhelm Fink, 2014, p. 279 *sq.*

[22] « As in the case of *Germania 3*, I had seen the play, here the elaboration of the play, building itself. The temporal distance with the experience of this birth of the Müller version of 1991, a jewel of the Fall of the wall, has put the wall into space », « Notes : bleu de Paris- sur le jaune/d'après l'antique/carte blanche », *Théâtre public*, n° 206, octobre-décembre 2012, p. 80.

[23] See Matthias Dreyer, « Fremde Zeit. Aufführungen der *Perser* und die historische Distanz im Theater der Gegenwart », *op. cit.*, p. 164.

WAR, REVOLUTION AND DRAMA:
STAGING GREEK TRAGEDY IN CONTEMPORARY PORTUGAL

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Résumé : Cet article propose un aperçu de la manière dont les tragédies grecques sont mises en scène au Portugal au début du 21ème siècle. En partant de deux représentations particulières: *l'Orestie* (2012) et *Ion* (2014), il s'agira d'interroger la manière dont les significations politiques d'origine sont transformées pour faire sens face à un public contemporain, et de mettre en lumière certains des enjeux de ces représentations.

Mots-clés : tragédie grecque, Portugal, 21ème siècle, mise en scène, *Orestie*, *Ion*

Abstract: This paper offers an overview of how ancient Greek tragedies are being performed in Portugal in the beginning of the 21st century. Taking two particular performances in consideration: Oresteia (2012) and Ion (2014), it will look into how the original political meanings are transformed to make sense to a contemporary audience as well as to highlight some of the challenges presented in these performances.

Keywords: greek Tragedy, Portugal, 21st century , performance, Oresteia, Ion

Height{H}ow does one stage an ancient tragedy to a contemporary audience? The choices are almost endless, and each one of them brings a series of challenges: from meaning to aesthetics or even performative aspects. What if this performance were to have a strong political meaning? Does one build on the play itself, on its original political setting or does one bring the play to a new context?

The relationship between politics and Greek tragedy is not a new one. In fact it was fundamental already in the original performances of Greek plays. The adaptation of Greek plays to contexts contemporary to the audiences has a large history throughout most western countries and has been the subject of a series of studies[1]. In the Portuguese context, however, there is need for some relevant studies on how politics and the performance of ancient tragedy have interacted during the last decades[2]. Nonetheless, in the last couple of years (2012-14) there have been at least two major performances of classical texts with an important political overtone: *The Oresteia*, by Teatro de Braga in 2012-13, and the *Ion*, by Teatro da Cornucópia in 2014. This paper will focus on these two plays, both having the particularity of trying to bring the ancient plays into the political context of the performance while retaining a huge connection with tradition. Given the lack of broader studies on the questions of performance of classical texts in Portugal, this is no more than a small attempt to give a general picture of the mainstream approach to stage Greek tragedies in the last few years, taking into account some of the specific challenges in question.

Adding to the questions of when, how and why to stage a Greek play, one has to ask the question of which text to stage. Here, too, the options are multiple: a translation as close as possible to the original text, a translation closer to the audience, a prose

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[1] The Politics in Greek Tragedy have been the subject of too many titles to list here. For a theoretical approach see: Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*, vol. 7, New York, Harvester Press, 1981; Suzanne Saïd, "Tragedy and politics", in Deborah Boedeker and Kurt A. Raaflaub (eds.), *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-century Athens*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 275-295; J. Peter Euben, *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, California, University of California Press, 1986; for an introduction with bibliography see David M. Carter, *The Politics of Greek Tragedy*, Exeter, Exeter University Press, 2007; for connections with the city state see Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-state*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995; Christopher Pelling, *Greek Tragedy and the Historian*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997; Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne (eds.), *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

On the politics of modern performances, see for example Sylvie Humbert-Mougin, *Dionysos revisité : les tragiques grecs en France de Leconte de Lisle à Claudel*, Paris, Belin, 2003; Edith Hall, Oliver Taplin and Fiona Macintosh, *Medea in Performance, 1500-2000*, Oxford, Legenda, 2000; Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh and Amanda Wrigley, *Dionysus since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004; Claire Lechevalier, *L'invention d'une origine. Traduire Eschyle en France, de Lefranc de Pompignan à Mazon : le* Prométhée enchaîné, vol. 65, Paris, Honoré Champion.

[2] There is a fair number of studies on this matter on individual plays, namely Carlos Morais' studies on Portuguese adaptations of *Antigona* (see, for example, Carlos Morais, "A *Antígona* de António Sérgio: 'um estudo social em forma dialogada'", in Carlos Morais (coord.), *Máscaras Portuguesas de Antígona*, Aveiro, Universidade de Aveiro, 2001, p. 13-38; Carlos Morais, "A *Antígona* de António Pedro: liberdades de uma glosa", in Aurora López and Andrés Pociña (eds.), *Comedias, Tragedias y Leyendas Grecorromanas en el Teatro de siglo XX*, Granada, Universidade de Granada, 2009, p. 427-439) but there is a lack of larger spectrum studies.

translation, a poetic translation, an adaptation, a new text that modernises the meaning of the play, to name a few. The question of the translation is a complicated one and has long divided the traditional classicists, known as philologists (which by itself gives a hint as to on which side of this spectrum they tend to be), and the artists connected to the performance itself or even known writers[3]. These questions live along with the more theoretical topics on whether the translation should domesticate the text or make it foreign for the audience[4]. Classicists tend to tame and domesticate the original text, while other authors might go in different directions; however, as Taplin points out, this does not need to define the relationship between philologists and the translation of Greek tragedies:

> This brings me to the point when I can challenge the notion, which is quite widespread among those interested in translation from Greek and Latin, that knowledge of the original language is somehow bound to lead to respectable domestication. Hand-in-hand with this is the supposition that tame translation is the province of scholars, while literary daring and inventiveness is the province of artists or amateurs who are not hampered by a knowledge of the original.[5]

If this is the situation case with the English translations, the Portuguese case is even more specific and difficult: there is a huge and problematic lack of translations. As Luis Miguel Cintra, a well-renowned director and actor in Portugal, has stated recently:

> These days people stage the plays they can - the ones they can and they know of. There are almost no plays published in Portuguese translated from other languages. People don't know French anymore, so the French plays are disregarded. The English they know, learned in school, is not enough for Shakespeare, for example. It is very hard. There is a huge restriction in choosing the texts.[6]

And this is not a problem specific only to the classical texts, where there is a noticeable lack of suitable translations. Even if the situation has improved in recent years, some ancient plays still do not have a modern translation in European Portuguese, and only a few have more than one translation available. For the two cases I want to study here, there is but one translation of the text, both around 20 years old and both made by

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[3] Taplin, *op. cit.*, p. 239: "Classicists like their translations to be describable as, for example, close, accurate, plain, consistent. These epithets would fit all four of the current major series of translations: Loeb, Penguin, Worlds Classics, and Everyman. Many of the surviving tragedies have, in fact, been retranslated for these series recently; and it is very telling that all four translate into prose. All have been too cautious to risk or to defy the accusations and denigrations that literary or poetic versions almost invariably attract from classicists: distortion, taking liberties, self-indulgence, and so forth. Poetic effusions may be tolerated, or even admired, if they are the creations of fringe-figure geniuses, like Ezra Pound, or poets who know no Greek, such as Christopher Logue; but those who know the languages well are expected to play safe."

[4] On the discussion of these topics, see Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, New York, Routledge, 2008; for a discussion on how these concepts apply to Greek tragedy, see Oliver Taplin, "The Harrison Version:' So long ago that it's become a song?", in Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall and Oliver Taplin (eds.), Agamemnon *in Performance 458 BC to AD 2004,* 2005, p. 239-245.

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 245.

[6] Luís Miguel Cintra, *Luís Miguel Cintra: cinco conversas em Almada*, Almada, Teatro de Almada, 2015, p.74-75.

philologists, thinking first and foremost for an academic public, which was necessary given the lack of any other translation but which nevertheless poses some challenges upon staging.

With this in mind, I would like to focus on the performance decisions made for *Oresteia*, presented by the director Rui Madeira from Teatro de Braga. First performed in Braga and developed as part of the commemorations of Braga 2012 - European Youth Capital, it was then staged in other cities around the country. The translation of the *Oresteia* is a prose translation[7], very close to the Greek text. The decision of the director was to follow the text line by line on all the three plays.

The presentation of the plays follow very strong political lines. There is a text handed out to the audience before the play begins; the title of the text is *Oresteia the Tragedy of Europe. In Search of a Political Theatre*. This text starts with the affirmation: "with the *Oresteia* we want to focus on contemporaneity, on us". From this introduction it is clear what is expected of this performance: to engage the public, to use the original myth to make the audience think about their present. The edginess, at least for the Portuguese context, of the tone of the introductory text created a mood of protest, indignation and non-conformity with the reality. This is a performance that wants the audience to think about protest.

The first two plays pretty much follow the text without much adaptation. There is an introduction of a multimedia display during Agamemnon. The choice of wardrobe follows contemporary lines, except for the chorus in *Agamemnon*, which is wrapped in the banners that were spread before the beginning of the play, in "stylised peplos". The political references were not very strong in the first two plays, and I would like to focus mainly in the last play of the trilogy.

There were breaks between the plays, and after the break between *Choephorae* and *Eumenides* the public was conducted back to the stage: for *Eumenides*, the audience sits on chairs arranged on the stage. The chairs are in five or six rows and there are some televisions in front of the audience playing huge eyes intended to make the audience feel watched. So, in this last play there is an inversion; the audience is now on stage; they are not spectators anymore; in fact, there is someone looking at them, with big strange eyes. The stage is closed so the audience does not see the theatre seats, which they would assume to be empty. Orestes comes onto stage with the awful Erinyes following him and the play begins. When the place of action changes from Delphi to Athens, things start to get quite political. In fact, even if we look at the original play, it is here that things start to get political.

The original myth of Orestes has nothing to do with Athens or Athena: originally Orestes' guilt problem was solved in Delphi. As far as I know, there have not been many stagings of this play where the Eumenides have kept their original political strength. The change in setting had a very strong political impact on the first staging of this play[8]. The

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[7] Manuel de Oliveira Pulquério, *Ésquilo, Oresteia:* Agamémnon, Coéforas, Euménides, Coimbra, Edições 70, 1992.

[8] See, for example, Christian Meier, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; Kenneth J. Dover, "The Political Aspect of Aeschylus's *Eumenides*", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 77, issue 2, 1957, p. 230-237; Lindsay G. H. Hall, "Ephialtes, the Areopagus and the Thirty", *The Classical Quarterly* (New Series), vol. 40, n° 2, 1990, p. 319-328; J. L. Marr, "Ephialtes the Moderate?",

problems created by the trilogy will be solved not in Argos, where they belonged in the first place, nor in Delphi, where Orestes goes in search for purification, but in the Areopagus, which had been reformed a couple of years before the play was staged for the first time. This change in myth underlines not only the role Athens wanted to play in terms of purification and the guardianship of civilisation, but also the importance and relevance of the Athenian juridical system. We know for a fact that, around this time, Athens was trying to export their juridical system, and we know that the Athenian courts were open to rule on external matters even if they had nothing whatsoever to do with Athens.[9]

Going back to this performance, when the play goes to Athens, the curtains of the stage are opened and the audience can finally see the seating area. Here they find the banners that greeted them at the beginning, as well as some of the actors watching the play. Athena comes in and her cape is nothing other than the blue flag of Europe with its twelve stars. The great decision maker, the ruler of this new court, is Europe herself. Here is where the play gains its most interesting political references, though the director's choices do not make it clear if he fully understood them. In the original play the decision whether Orestes is guilty or not is taken by a jury of Athenian citizens. The finale of the play can, however, be read in two ways: the first is quite clear in saying that any problem can be solved in Athens, even problems which, outside of Athens, seem unsolvable, such as the endless cycle of blood and revenge. Justice in Athens, then, can overcome any problem; indeed, the play is normally read as putting on stage the old gods and the new gods, and showing the new gods winning and creating a modern and prosperous city. Even though Athena leads the court, the citizens have the right to make the decision. And this brings us back to the theme of the play: the tragedy of Europe.

The play means to send a clear message that Europe is in trouble if she does not listen to her citizens, and, with the audience as citizens in the centre of the stage, that we are the decision-makers, we have to make ourselves heard. And from the introductory text we see there is a clear opposition between Northern and South Europe: we in the south — that is, Portugal, the Greeks and possibly Italy or Spain — should just do something about European politics. As the play ends, the actors sitting in the audience area get up and applaud the audience in a moment where everything in the theatre is reversed, where the actors are the audience and the audience are the actors, and the performance concludes with both actors and audience singing the "Grândola, Vila Morena", a song that is the anthem of the Portuguese revolution. The political intent of the performance is perfectly clear. However, the strongest political elements of the play are all built around the text and not within it: the banners, the idea of bringing the audience onto the stage, the European flag as part of the wardrobe, the final song — nothing changes the action; there are no new characters; there is no change in the plot; and there is not a line changed from the translation.

Greece and Rome (Second Series), vol. 40, n° 1, 1993, p. 11-19; Alan H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus:* Eumenides, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

[9] Around the same time, we also see references to the courts in decrees pertaining to Athens' allies in the *archê*. The Phaselis (IG I^3 10), Miletos (IG i^2 22) and Chalcis (IG i^2 39) decrees assign certain cases for the allies to Athenian jurisdiction. Athens was exporting her judicial system just as they exported their democracy. For a full discussion of the Athenian Imperial Jurisdiction, see Russell Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire,* New York, Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 220-233.

The second play was performed in a very peculiar context: upon the 40th anniversary of the Portuguese revolution, in 2014. During the night of 25 April 1974, a dictatorship of more than 40 years was (finally) overthrown by military forces; forty years later and the ideology and vocabulary of the revolution are still very relevant in Portugal and very much used in Portuguese political discourse, even if sometimes without much substance. Forty years is of course an important anniversary. Yet this anniversary occurs during a particularly difficult moment in the history of Portugal. The economic crisis and subsequent political, social and cultural crises seemed to cast a dark shadow in this commemorations.

The programme included a long list of events, one of which was a play at the municipal theatre of Lisbon: Teatro S. Luiz. This play was commissioned by the Teatro da Cornucópia and directed by Luis Miguel Cintra. It is worth noting that, in terms of professional theatre, and disregarding amateur and university theatre, Cornucopia is the Portuguese theatre with the greatest number of performances of classical texts in the last 40 years. So, this company shows a particular interest in reworking classical texts. The commission did not include any specifications on which play or even the theme of the play, as long as it could be part of the commemorations.

According to the director of the theatre, Luis Miguel Cintra, this situation was not only uncommon but somewhat problematic:

> It was not our decision [to make this play]. I did not want to make a performance about the 25th of April. It's way too serious and important for us to enjoy doing it outside of our theatre, the house we have been defending for the last 40 years. And there isn't a dramatic text on the subject in which I could recognise myself. I did not want a party, I did not want a celebration; I wanted, if I could, to maybe give people something to think about.[10]

There is clearly a climate of discomfort about this play. This climate is not indifferent to the crisis, to the problems that Portuguese democracy is struggling with nor to the extensive budget cuts into culture, namely theatres.

The Cornucópia decided to go with a performance of an ancient Greek play by Euripides — *Ion*. Euripides had never been played before by the company, though they have Aristophanes and Sophocles in their list of performances. The reason seemed quite good: *Ion* is a play about democracy, or even better, the problems of democracy. As the director states "do we accept the democratic life with all its difficulties and shortcomings lying about the bad ways in which it works, or should we reject it and search for another path? The dilemma is very interesting and is very contemporary"[11]. To choose one of the most Athenian plays to talk about democracy seemed very interesting. How do you turn a political play that talked to a 5th-century-BC democratic Athenian audience into a political play that talks to a 21st century Portuguese democratic audience? The approach seemed critical, innovative and quite fresh.

The director's intentions were clear: this was not a celebration; this was a reflection on democracy, on contemporary democracy. The idea was to create, and I quote, "not a direct correspondence with the inspiring text but a parallel hypothesis between mythology

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[10] Luis Miguel Cintra in O *Público* (24/04/2014).

[11] From presentation of the play available at http://www.teatro-cornucopia.pt

and contemporaneity in a time of reflection on the effects of April"[12]. I would like to underline the idea that what we have here, in the words of the director, is an original text being used as inspiration and then a parallel narrative being created between the text and the audience's reality.

I quote again, "In this case, we wanted to do something different: we did not want something that would talk about the 25th of April but about what we have lived in these 40 years since then. And what we have lived is a deception of the hope my generation had in the ways of making politics"[13].

Even the poster was quite refreshing: it showed a Greek chorus dressed in a business suit; this was Greece in new, modern robes; this was Euripides for the contemporary audience. Yet the main themes of the revolution were present: the idea of democracy, liberty, how these values are perpetuated, how they are passed on to the new generation — this is what Ion is about. The space was very meaningful: the theatre was mere metres from the ancient political police headquarters. One of the only places where the revolution claimed the lives of four young men.

Once again the director decided to stage the play based on the only translation available in European Portuguese[14]. There are a few relevant aspects to the performance. The stage curtain is substituted by an enormous flag of the Portuguese republic. The play begins and ends with different songs by, again, Zeca Afonso, one of the biggest icons of the revolution and the author of "Grândola, Vila Morena".

As the play is staged, between the stage and the audience is a desk, upon which are books and a small statue of the Portuguese republic, and at which sits the director throughout the play. This desk is one of the spaces where the tragedy and the present connect; it is outside of the stage and the director does not perform any part of the play, yet he will at some moments, when the play pauses, come forward and recite quotes from certain texts: quotes from Pasolini's letter to Gennariello — a text that, according to the director, has the objective of "bringing Gennariello out of modernity into a project of preserving an imaginary autenticity of the People, these are letters against the corruption of time."[15] — and a poem by Sophia de Mello Breyner.

The decision of the director was to cut the chorus but maintain the text and to have it read out loud, from the Portuguese edition, by an actor. Other than that, all of the director's choices are very traditional. The play is set in Delphi, and the scenery includes a tripod to represent the sanctuary. The wardrobe is very traditional, with the actors dressed in what represents ancient clothing, with the exception of Ion who, at some point, wears the military uniform of the dictatorship and the revolution. The play is represented in a very hieratic form, with minimal movement and gestures by the actors.

It is amazing to see how all the new elements are built, once more, around the play: outside the stage or before or after the text. What is around the play makes us think of modernity (but is that not already a necessity when you attend a play in a modern building, when people ask you to turn off your mobiles etc?). The only two elements that are somewhat innovative in the play are the figurine of Ion and the chorus. The chorus is always a problem in contemporary performance, but the choice here is to keep the text

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[12] Luis Miguel Cintra in *O Público* (24/04/2014).
[13] From presentation of the play available at http://www.teatro-cornucopia.pt
[14] Frederico Lourenço, *Eurípides. Íon*, Lisboa, Colibri, 1994.
[15] From presentation of the play available at http://www.teatro-cornucopia.pt

and turn it into a poem of sorts, read aloud, not enacted, not part of the play. I will not dwell here on the discussion about the importance of Euripides' choruses for the action of his plays[16]. The chorus is fundamental in order to resituate this play, originally set in Delphi, in Athens; this is a fundamental Athenian element. Yet choosing to keep the text and read it as it is to a modern audience is to break any kind of relationship with the audience, to make the play even more foreign and alien than ancient plays are already to a contemporary Portuguese audience.

It is interesting to note that the play was very well received. It is also important to note that these performances, being quite different from each other, represent a certain attitude towards the performance of classical texts in the last few years in Portugal. With the exception of some smaller, local and sometimes even amateur performances, decisions relating to the performance of Greek tragedy in established theatres is very conservative. In some way, both of these plays represent some edging, as they try to bring the ancient text into a new context and make it say new things to a new audience. Yet, as we have seen from these examples, all the new meaning is conveyed through elements built around the play, and, more importantly, through new meanings built around the text. Somehow the text, in its traditional, philological translations, is seen as immutable, sacred, something to be followed line by line. And from this often, even if not always, follow staging choices that tend to be very conservative, from the stage props to wardrobes to the line of performance itself. The movements are curbed; the voices are projected and recitative; the time is almost always a clear distant past, a past that, to have meaning to a contemporary audience, needs a full set of small additions strategically placed around the permanent and immutable text. Some, if not most, of these choices may come from a lack of options in terms of translation. As we have seen, there is no variety of texts available. When there is but one version of a text, it is hard to change this, to see the translation as a choice other than an inevitability. When there is but one choice, it is hard to see it as a choice at all: the lack of variety makes it very hard to understand that a translation is not set in stone, that no translation is ever the perfect version of the original text, that the translation itself is made of a series of choices to tame the text, to bring it closer to our reality or to make it more foreign, choices on whether to prioritise meaning or sound, semantics or rhythm, images or words, emotions or logic etc. When the reality of translation is such, it makes it hard for the public to realise that the choices of the translator, great as they might be for a specific objective, are not the only ones available. Maybe the rigidity we often see in many performances of classical drama in Portugal, a rigidity that most of the public expects and enjoys, springs from a strong rigidity in translation. Maybe the problem is not that the philologists keep being philologists, but that not many outsiders have come to challenge them in their set ways.

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[16] Besides the two monumental volumes by Martin Hose, *Studien zum Chor bei Euripides*, Zwei Bde, Stuttgart, Teubner, 1990, see Carlo Prato, "Il coro di Euripide: funzione e struttura", *Dioniso*, n° 55, 1985, p. 147-155; Donald J. Mastronarde, "Knowledge and Authority in the Choral Voice of Euripidean Tragedy", *Syllecta Classica*, vol. 10(1), 1999, p. 87-104; Sofia Frade, "Lirismo a metro ou nova estética euripidiana? As Odes Corais de Fenícias", in Maria Cristina Pimentel and Paulo F. Alberto, *Vir bonus peritissimus aeque: Estudos de homenagem a Arnaldo do Espírito Santo*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Clássicos, 2013, p. 111-122.

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Atlantide

Partie 3

Logiques de l'analogie

TO TELL THE TROJAN WAR TODAY:
CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCES OF *AGAMEMNON*

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Résumé : Cet article compare la réception de la guerre de Troie dans plusieurs mises en scène contemporaines de l'*Agamemnon* d'Eschyle. En s'appuyant sur l'opposition traditionnelle du mythe et de l'Histoire, nous proposons une analyse de la représentation de la guerre dans ces spectacles. Pour faire référence à la guerre, les metteurs en scène s'appuient principalement sur des processus d'analogie, dont l'analyse et la catégorisation contribuent à définir les différents usages que le théâtre contemporain fait du mythe.

Mots-clés : mythe, guerre, *Agamemnon* d'Eschyle, mise en scène de tragédie grecque, Peter Stein, Ariane Mnouchkine, Olivier Py, Katie Mitchell, Peter Hall.

Abstract: This paper compares the reception of the Trojan War in several contemporary performances of Agamemnon *by Aeschylus. Using the traditional opposition between myth and history, I propose an analysis of the depiction of the war in these productions. The stage directors are principally relying on analogical processes to create an idea of the war, allowing this paper to contribute to highlight how contemporary theatre deals with ancient myths.*

Keywords: Myth, War, Aeschylus' Agamemnon, *Greek tragedy in performance, Peter Stein, Ariane Mnouchkine, Olivier Py, Katie Mitchell, Peter Hall.*

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* begins with the announcement of Greek victory. Consequently, the whole action takes place after the Trojan War and the conflict itself is already a memory. As expected, there are epic narratives about the war that has just ended by those who have come back from the battlefield: the messenger (v. 551-593) and then, Agamemnon (v. 810-854) both evoke the war in poetic and non-personal ways. However, before that, there are narratives by Clytemnestra (v. 320-350) and the chorus (first *stasimon*), which are prophetic narratives since they occur before anyone has come back from Troy. These two kinds of epic narratives underline the specificity of the ancient concept of memory: in Ancient Greece, memories belonged to poets and oracles[1]. It is interesting to note that ancient poets – tragic and epic – who used to tell the myths, were also considered as some kind of diviner. No one could deny that, in the text of *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus and particularly in the epic narratives, the Trojan War is told as a myth in poetic and prophetic ways. We are very far from the contemporary concept of memory: today, memory and particularly the memory of war is about history. So, the reception of the Trojan War in modern-day performances of *The Oresteia* necessarily deals with the traditional opposition between myth and history.

This opposition becomes very obvious on stage because it is not only a matter of telling the Trojan War, but of showing it as well. As a matter of fact, theatre cannot avoid concrete and visual elements evoking the war: the directors have to think about the costumes of the messenger and Agamemnon arriving from the battlefield, the chariot of the Greek chief along with other elements such as weapons and soldiers. These elements appear generally on stage in a system of references that creates an analogy between the Trojan War and another war – be that war real or fictive. Nowadays, could we avoid historical references when we are staging war memories? What becomes myth for a contemporary audience when there are props and costumes evoking certain historical events? What kind of analogy is able to give the idea of a mythical war to a contemporary audience?

Here I propose a comparison of several famous contemporary performances of *Agamemnon* in Western Europe from the 1980s until the end of the first decade of the 21st century. I focus on the narratives about the Trojan War and also on the concrete and visual elements evoking the war in the whole performance. How do the different processes of analogy used on stage work? What idea of the war are directors able to give to the audience? How do they concretely create an idea of war? Firstly, we will focus on the performances in which the Trojan War is shown as a specific historical event. Then we will study the productions that create an ahistorical context conducive to telling a myth. Finally, we will try to develop a third way, where the process of analogy escapes the traditional opposition between myth and history to describe the war as a present possibility.

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[1] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs : études de psychologie historique* [Librairie François Maspero, 1965], Paris, La Découverte/Poche, 1996, p. 109 et 112.

HISTORICAL ANALOGY – TO TELL THE TROJAN WAR AS A HISTORICAL EVENT

This first section deals with a performance in which the visual elements create a historical analogy. The Trojan War is shown as a specific historical event: the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001). How does this kind of analogy work? What do the narratives telling the myth become?

Katie Mitchell, The Oresteia, *Royal National Theatre, London, First part: 24/09/1999; Second part: 18/11/1999*

Staged by Katie Mitchell, the *Oresteia* is nor ritualistic nor grandiose. The use of digital technologies (live video and projections of archival images) creates a link with modern history and present times. In this sober bi-frontal performance, the spectators are strongly intellectually involved: the characters, starring at the public at the beginning and at the end of the performance, seem to ask them answers about the contemporary world.

Here, the chorus of *Agamemnon* consists of old men in wheelchairs. They are often described, because of their costumes, as veterans of the Second World War[2]. As a consequence, Agamemnon (Michael Gould), who belongs to the next generation, looks like a European general from the end of the 20th century[3]. Moreover, his return is celebrated with Balkan songs setting the action in the context of the Yugoslav Wars. Of course, there is no historical authenticity and the visual elements – the costumes and props[4] – are just reminding the audience of those wars. The system of references plays with the audience's idea of these wars and creates a clear analogy between the Trojan War and the Yugoslav Wars. As a matter of fact, the Kosovo War had just ended in 1999 when Katie Mitchell staged the *Oresteia*, and as such the audience had many historical facts and images in their mind.

The process of analogy relies here on a logical and chronological conception of history: history seems to be a series of causes and consequences, hence why the Yugoslav Wars appear in this play as an indirect and delayed consequence of the Second World War. Even if the Trojan War is staged in analogy with a contemporary war, we can still name it a historical analogy because it treats immediate history[5]. The analogy leads us to consider history as an active process in the present time and presupposes the timelessness of Greek tragedy. The myth becomes a pretext or even rather a preferred way to speak about immediate history on stage.

The contemporary war is evoked through historical visual elements and we could ask how this would fit with the narratives of the Aeschylean text that describe the war as a myth in a very poetic way. In other words, is the myth transformed by the historical

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[2] See a complete description in Erica Kylander-Clark, "*The Oresteia* by Aeschylus; Ted Hughes", *Theatre Journal*, vol. 52, n° 4, december 2000, p. 561-563.

[3] The rehearsal notes, searchable in the RTN archive, include details about the costumes. The one of the messenger is described as "vaguely late 20th century".

[4] Vicki Mortimer was the designer of the production.

[5] There is a strong will to understand the present time as in the studies of "immediate history" carried out by historians. See for example: Patrick Garcia, « Essor et enjeux de l'histoire du temps présent au CNRS », *La Revue pour l'histoire du CNRS*, n° 9, november 2003, http://histoire-cnrs.revues.org/562 [08/26/2015, 10:24:15].

analogy? Could the historical elements be seen as mythical? In Katie Mitchell's *Oresteia*, there are video projections during the four narratives[6]. The images are mainly archival, showing the wars of the 20th century, but sometimes they are live close-ups of the speaker shot by another actor. The effect of alienation is at work here: myth and history are put side by side in order to relativize each other. On the one hand, the projected images of historical wars (that is to say the images of reality) remind the audience that the myth told on stage is only a fiction. On the other hand, paradoxically, the performance offers a new view on historical events: the montage of images and the epic narratives seem to transform the historical events into a mythical fiction. Consequently, the myth becomes a way not only to perform but also to question history and contemporary wars.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Katie Mitchell uses live video because this fits very well with the process of analogy at work in her production. Indeed, using live video in theatre transforms the relationship of the audience with time. The digital turns the medium of video into something immediate. Whereas in the case of a film we can oppose the moment when it was filmed in the past and the present moment when the audience sees the images, when a live video is filmed on stage the audience simultaneously sees the filmed images projected onto the set as they are filmed. The past is included in the present time of the performance. This immediate medium is the metaphor of the use of Greek tragedy in the performance: the ancient myth is shown as a contemporary event. The historical analogy, because it refers to contemporary wars, as we have already said, suggests paradoxically the timelessness of ancient theatre and myth.

AHISTORICAL ANALOGY – TO TELL THE TROJAN WAR AS A MYTH

Our example of historical analogy makes reference to a contemporary war. There are of course other performances where the visual elements showing the Trojan War are inspired from older wars that the audience has not directly experienced even through media coverage. However, in those cases, the analogy does not set the action in a specific historical context: the historical references are not precise enough to create an analogy between the Trojan War and the precise historical event. The analogy becomes ahistorical. Is it enough to show and to tell the Trojan War as a myth? Is an ahistorical context a mythical one?

Peter Hall, The Oresteia, *Royal National Theatre, London, 20/11/1981*

Many analyses have been written about this ritualistic and masked performance with an all-male cast[7]. We will focus here on the visual elements used to give the audience an idea of the Trojan War. The messenger, topped with a laurel wreath, wears a brown and humble tunic dress. Agamemnon comes back from Troy sporting a big bronze helmet, armour with geometric patterns over black clothes and a long red stole. Moreover, a shining sword is attached to his waist. A few soldiers with helmets, bronze shields and

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[6] The video designer was Chris Pleydell.
[7] See for example: R. B. Parker, "The National Theatre's *Oresteia*, 1981-82", in Martin Cropp, Elaine Fantham, S.E. Scully, *Greek Tragedy and Its Legacy: Essays presented to D.J. Conacher*, Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 1986, p. 337-357.

spears are dragging his chariot and Cassandra's cage on stage. Everything tells us that we are in Ancient Greece. The Trojan War is shown as an ancient Greek war. However, even if Peter Hall creates an aesthetic inspired from archaeological elements, there is no precise analogy with any ancient historical war and no desire to speak about Ancient Greece's history. However, we could say that these elements evoke the idea that the audience already has of war in Ancient Greece. Indeed, this idea comes from history books but also from some knowledge of ancient myths and from peplums, novels, or paintings, amongst other sources. This idea is ahistorical and manages to fuse myth and history. For the general audience, there is no difference between Agamemnon and an Athenian warrior of the Peloponnesian war[8]. In other words, the analogy relies on an ahistorical inter-subjective idea of war in Ancient Greece. According to ethno-sociological approaches, this idea has all the qualities required to turn itself into a myth[9] and theatre seems to manage this transformation. Therefore, there is an analogy between the myth of the Trojan War and another myth made of distorted elements taken from ancient history and myths, that is to say the modern myth of war in Ancient Greece.

This fusion of myth and history is part of a larger process here: the (re)construction of ancient Greek tragedy that is not exactly a historical and archaeological reconstruction. I borrow the term of construction from psychoanalytic vocabulary. Sigmund Freud described an inter-subjective process implying that all memories are incomplete[10]. The constructions are created by the analyst and validated – or not – by the patient in order to fill the blanks. However the constructions do not have to be true to the past reality but to the idea the patient has of this past reality. This is exactly what Peter Hall was doing: he wanted to reconstruct the experience of Ancient Athenian theatre. He had looked at the remains of Greek tragedy and created what is missing. That is what he did for example with the chorus: he found a way to stage a group moving in a harmonious manner and speaking collectively to a musical rhythm. In doing this, he abides by the general idea of an ancient chorus that of ritualistic masked actors in long dresses. The same process was at work with the visual elements evoking the Trojan War. Finally, the production proposes a construction of the war in Ancient Greece and to be true to the idea that its audience has already about it: as explained above, the construction needs to be part mythical and part historical. It is interesting to note that this fusion of myth and history that theatre manages to achieve is needed for this process of (re)construction.

Olivier Py, L'Orestie, *Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe, Paris, 15/05/2008*

Olivier Py deals with the *Oresteia* as a great and spectacular opera: the acting is lyrical and the chorus sings in an operatic way with a string quartet[11]. As Peter Hall, he creates

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[8] This is not so far from the ancient Greek conception of the relationship between epic myths and history.

[9] The ethno-sociological approach considers the myth as some paradoxical sociological phenomenon: it is a narrative received and accepted as true by all the members of the group but completely ahistorical and mostly improbable for any foreign observer. For a precise definition, see: Pierre Smith, « La nature des mythes », in Edgar Morin et Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini, *L'unité de l'homme : invariants biologiques et universaux culturels*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1974, p. 715-729.

[10] Sigmund Freud, *L'analyse finie et l'analyse infinie*, suivi de *Constructions dans l'analyse*, translation by Janine Altounian, Pierre Cotet and Jean Laplanche, Paris, PUF, 2012, p. 51.

[11] Stéphane Leach wrote the music. Damien Bigourdan, Christophe Le Hazif, Mary Saint-Palais and Sandrine Sutter sang the chorus parts with the Quatuor Léonis.

an ahistorical setting. But the analogy is larger here: we are not in Ancient Greece anymore but in Western Europe. If there is a (re)construction at work here, it is not about the historical form of Greek tragedy but rather about its supposed ritualistic and transcendental strength[12]. The performance does not particularly focus on the war but evokes it inevitably throughout visual elements[13] that all remind us of a historical war in Western Europe. The costume of the messenger could be the uniform of a soldier during the First World War and Agamemnon (Philippe Girard) looks like a Nazi general from the Second World War. However, in both cases the costume does not fit exactly with any historical uniform. Moreover, a DS-Citroën car, which was the official car of the General de Gaulle when he was the President of the French Republic, replaces the chariot of Agamemnon. There is of course a play on the word "DS" (*déesse* meaning goddess in French) and also a reference to Roland Barthes[14], but the interesting point here is that this car contributes to make the analogy ahistorical. The anachronistic and imprecise system of references suggests the idea of war in Western Europe to the modern audience. As in Peter Hall's production, theatre creates a myth from an ahistorical and inter-subjective idea of war composed of historical elements. However, here the analogy does not need a fusion of myth and history, rather it results in a sublimation of history into myth. Indeed, Olivier Py also integrates ancient elements: for example, Agamemnon wears a laurel wreath instead of war medals. In other words, the idea of war in Western Europe staged by Olivier Py as a myth includes war in Ancient Greece. The process of analogy underlines that *The Oresteia* is staged in a humanistic perspective: the Trojan War is a pretext to sublimate European history into a mythical (and maybe artificial) cultural unity. Greek tragedy is idealised here, taken as the best support to celebrate a common humanistic culture – paradoxically specifically linked to Western European history.

Ariane Mnouchkine, Les Atrides, *La Cartoucherie, Paris, 1990-1992 (*Agamemnon*'s opening venue: 24/11/1990)[15]*

Ariane Mnouchkine additionally generated an ahistorical context for the war when she staged *Les Atrides* (*Iphigenia at Aulis* followed by *The Oresteia*) but the action is no longer set in Europe and the analogy is even larger and less precise. In this production, Ariane Mnouchkine develops her interest for Asiatic theatrical forms without setting the action in Asia. Indeed, we are in an undefined world since the aesthetic mixes many exotic references. Whereas the dance is inspired from Indian Kathakali, the colours of the props

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[12] Olivier Py says that he wants to re-create the ritualistic strength and the transcendence of ancient theatre. *Pièce (dé)montée* n° 45, SCEREN-CRDP, 2008, « Annexe 1 : Entretien avec le metteur en scène : Olivier Py », p. 28, http://crdp.ac-paris.fr, [19/08/2015, 17:13:15].

[13] Pierre-André Weitz designed the costumes, the set and the make-up.

[14] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1957, p. 169-171.

[15] About this performance, see: Béatrice Picon-Vallin, « Une œuvre d'art commune, rencontre avec le Théâtre du Soleil », (entretien avec Ariane Mnouchkine, Jean-Jacques Lemêtre, Catherine Schaub, Guy-Claude François, Simon Abkarian), *Théâtre/Public*, n° 124-125, juillet-octobre 1995, p. 74-83; Évelyne Ertel, « *Les Atrides* au Théâtre du Soleil, chercher l'étranger le plus proche possible », *Études Théâtrales*, n° 21, (« Tragédie grecque. Défi de la scène contemporaine », dir. Georges Banu), 2001, p. 95-102; Pierre Judet de La Combe, « Ariane Mnouchkine and the French Agamemnon », Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall, Oliver Taplin, *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to AD 2004*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 273-289.

and costumes[16] are partly taken from Minoan paintings and the make-up[17] and dresses remind those of Noh and Kathakali actors. The historical references are so distorted and disparate that they are not easily recognisable. However several elements of the performance remind Asiatic wars with no time or space unity.

Firstly, the costumes of the messenger and Agamemnon recall Japanese Samurais. Furthermore, we can analyse the chorus of *Agamemnon* as a group of former warriors. Before entering the space where the performance takes place, the spectator has to go through some excavations where the statues are nor Greek nor Chinese but remind necessarily the terracotta warriors discovered in the tomb of Emperor Qin Shi Huang.[18] The sculptures designed by Erhard Stiefel are just like the members of the chorus in *Agamemnon*. With their big and heavy red skirts, they are not dressed to go to war; yet, we could say that they act as former warriors. Their dance[19] looks like a very well organised military parade and they welcome Agamemnon (Simon Abkarian) with a cry that sounds as a war cry. Then, the coryphaeus (Catherine Schaub) guides the dance with very little cries: this technique is taken from Kathakali, an art partly inspired from martial arts. The behaviour of the chorus fits well with the occidental fantasised idea of ancient Asian people seen as a warrior people. The process of analogy seems to play here on our occidental clichés about war in Asia. In this case, the analogy would rely once again on an inter-subjective and ahistorical idea of war that theatre turns into myth.

The process of analogy here underlines that Greek tragedy is shown to the contemporary audience as an exotic and foreign thing. Ariane Mnouchkine wanted the audience to experience the mystery of Greek tragedy and this is probably demonstrated by the use of Asiatic theatre's codes. As a result, even if the performance cannot avoid making any references, it gets rid of history[20]. The general Western audience does not know much about the history of Asia; that is why the performance could play on the idea of war in a fantasised Ancient Asia. Moreover all the direct references to Ancient Greek history are thus avoided. There is finally an assimilation of history by the myth created in the theatre.

In these three examples, the process of analogy permits the telling and the portrayal of the Trojan War as a myth on stage. The analogy is ahistorical because it never refers to a specific historical event. However, it is strongly cultural since it relies on the idea that the audience has of the war in a specific cultural area (Ancient Greece, Western Europe, Asia). It is interesting to note that these three performances all use a very stylised aesthetic with a strong codification of acting: Peter Hall chose the masks, Olivier Py opted for the declamation and Ariane Mnouchkine picked the dance. These aesthetic choices fit very well with the epic narratives of the play that describe the Trojan War in a poetic way. In

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[16] Nathalie Thomas and Marie-Hélène Bouvet designed the costumes using the ideas of the actors.

[17] The make-up designer was Catherine Schaub.

[18] About the reference to Orient in general and to the terracotta warriors in particular, see: Françoise Quillet, *L'Orient au Théâttre du Soleil,* Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999, p. 97.

[19] The chorus didn't sing but it danced on music by Jean-Jacques Lemêtre. A coryphaeus said the all *stasima*.

[20] This is not far from the Nietzschean criticism of our modern relationship to history here. See the second *Untimely Meditation*: Friedrich Nietzsche, « De l'utilité et des inconvénients de l'histoire pour la vie » [1874], *Considérations inactuelles I et II,* edition by G. Colli and M. Montinari, translation by Pierre Rusch, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 91-169.

other words, the aesthetic choices are strongly linked with the processes of analogy and the relationships between myth and history chosen by each stage director.

NO ANALOGY – TO TELL THE TROJAN WAR AS A PRESENT POSSIBILITY

The ahistorical analogy can be even larger if the director tries to suggest the idea of war in general. In this case, we could say that there is no analogy anymore and the relationship of myth and history is totally shaken. What do the epic narratives telling the Trojan War as a myth become? Are the visual elements showing the war on stage avoiding historical references?

Peter Stein, Antikenprojekt II: Die Orestie des Aischylos, *Schaubühne, Berlin, 18/10/1980*[21]

In this performance the set[22] (a long and narrow stage surmounted by a big dark wall) evokes the space of Greek theatre. The chorus stays at the same level as the spectators, sometimes in the middle of them, sometimes around a big wooden table. As in Ancient Greece, the chorus establishes a link with the public and remains all the time at the centre of the performance. Despite these choices, the costumes[23] are mainly contemporary: the member of the chorus, for example, wear black suits, black hats and carry a stick. However, the Trojan War is evoked nor as an ancient war nor as a specific war of the twentieth century.

Indeed, the chariot and the costume of Agamemnon are clearly not those of contemporary soldiers. Agamemnon wears a white shirt and black trousers but carries a big sword in his back. Peter Stein's production portrays a general idea of war: it is not set to any specific context. Yet, the general idea of war shown on stage cannot be totally out of touch with the context of reception and that is why we can spot references to ancient and modern worlds[24]. However we could say that this performance does not rely on any preconceived idea of war: owing to the common experience of the performance, the audience progressively and simultaneously constructs an inter-subjective ahistorical idea of the war and its corresponding myth in its ethno-sociological sense.

On the other hand, Peter Stein has found a way to transform the epic narratives. The repartition of the lines between the members of the chorus, the translation and the acting create an aesthetic that gives the impression of a quotidian dialogue. This performance tells the myth as a theatrical reality as if the audience should consider all the issues of the myth as present possibilities. Consequently, Peter Stein reveals the spectator anguish of a war in the "here and now". It is well known that the German director knew Jean-Pierre

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[21] About this production, see: Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Thinking about the Origins of Theatre in the 1970s", in Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall, Oliver Taplin, *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to AD 2004,* Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 344-350.

[22] Karl-Ernst Herrmann designed the set.

[23] Moidele Bickel designed the costumes.

[24] Anton Bierl for example underlines the neutrality and the timelessness of the performance but adds that the references remain mainly modern. Anton Bierl, "The Chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in Modern Stage Productions: Towards the 'Performative Turn'", in Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall, Oliver Taplin, *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to AD 2004*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 291.

Vernant's work[25] and it is not surprising that he proposes a structuralist reception of the Greek tragedy at the crossroads of myth and history. In this production, the approach of the Trojan War is both anthropological and psychoanalytical.

Katie Mitchell, Women of Troy, *Royal National Theatre, London, 21/11/2007*

The last example is not a performance of *Agamemnon* but of *Women of Troy* by Euripides. It is significant because it proposes another way to show war as a present possibility.

Women of Troy is the third Greek tragedy staged by Katie Michell at the Royal National Theatre dealing with the Trojan War (after *The Oresteia* in 1999 and *Iphigenia at Aulis* in 2004). In this play, the war is not a memory as it is in *The Oresteia:* Troy has only just fallen. We are on the threshold of the conflict allowing for a greater opportunity to present war as a psychological crisis. However this example is interesting in comparison because Katie Mitchell has also found a way to avoid any analogy. She no longer needs historical references since the scene is set in 2050 in an empty warehouse belonging to the dock of a ruined city[26]. We could potentially speak of a futuristic analogy. However, this future is too close to play with a fantasised idea of war in future and Katie Mitchell is not interested in science fiction[27]: the electronic gates and the sad concrete walls remind the industrial buildings we can see today; the costumes are banally modern (elegant evening dresses for the chorus and black coats for the Greeks)[28]; and the dances of the chorus seem to be couple-dances of the 1940's in slow motion[29]. It is impossible to date those elements[30]. There is no analogy here: this is possibly our world in a few years' time. Moreover, there is no alienation effect as in *The Oresteia* and the acting is more psychological. Even the aesthetic dances of the chorus in slow motion during the *stasima* could be interpreted as a metaphor of the internal state of the characters[31]. It is possible to argue that this performance shows a psychoanalytical idea of war. So, as in Peter Stein's production, the war is told as an immediate possibility and reveals the spectator's fear of it.

When Menelas comes in to speak to the Trojan women, before anything else, he takes his phone and only says "here, now". This moment, which is of course not in Euripides' text, seems to seal the fate of the women and encapsulates the threatening "here and

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[25] The dramaturgic material, kept in the archive of the Schaubühne at the ADK in Berlin, quote Jean-Pierre Vernant's book several times. Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne I*, Paris, Editions François Maspero, « Textes à l'appui », 1972.

[26] The set designer was Bunny Christie.

[27] The rehearsal notes, searchable in the RTN archive in London, include details about the original chronology of the events from the birth of Priam in 1994 and the end of the Trojan War in 2050.

[28] The costume designer was Vicki Mortimer.

[29] Leslie Struan directed the movements ant choreography.

[30] Several critics confirm that. "It's as if the women of Weimar had been relocated in an Iraqi house of horrors." Benedict Naghtingale, "Too heavy on the aesthetics, too light on howls of anguish", *The Times*, 30th of november 2007. See also: John Peter, "The Women of Troy", *The Sunday Times*, 9th of december 2007.

[31] In the rehearsal notes kept in the archive of the RNT, we can read that the moments in slow motion should mime "the decline of moral order" in order to find the truth of the internal experience.

now" of the war performed in this production. Greek tragedy is neither historical, nor timeless: its issues become immediate, "here and now".

In Peter Stein's *Oresteia* as in Katie Mitchell's *Women of Troy*, the performance tells and shows the threat of war in general. It is possible to say that because Katie Mitchell sets the action in the close future, she manages to renew the performance of the anthropological and psychoanalytical fear of the war. Yet she has also renewed the performance of ancient myth: the myth is not a pretext anymore to speak by analogy about history or about a contemporary idea of something. The myth is immediate, included in the present time of the performance because, paradoxically, the action is set in the close future.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to contrast once again and more conceptually the analogical approaches and the non-analogical approaches I have described[32] trying to widen our analysis to famous scientific approaches of Ancient Greece. The different processes of analogy reveal a desire to interpret and understand not only the Trojan War but also Greek tragedy. This could be named a hermeneutical approach. This calls Jean Bollack's conception of philology as a critical hermeneutic. In contrast to this, the non-analogical approach could be named a heuristic approach since it relies on the progressive invention of an idea of war. This is more fitting to Jean-Pierre Vernant anthropological approach of Greek tragedy in particular, and of history in general.

The opposition between myth and history is valuable to understand the reception of the Trojan War in contemporary performances. As we can see, it is very difficult to avoid any historical references when theatre speaks about war. Indeed, even *Les Atrides* by Ariane Mnouchkine, *Die Orestie* by Peter Stein and Katie Mitchell's *Women of Troy* cannot totally avoid them. Conversely, and despite the historical references, the myth of Trojan War is an excellent way to tell or create a contemporary myth. In all the processes of analogy that have been described the historical elements seem to inspire and call for a contemporary myth. With the historical analogy, theatre turns an event of contemporary history into a myth giving the audience a critical perspective on it. With the ahistorical analogy, a general idea or a *cliché* is transformed into myth by the performance in the hope of finding the right way to stage Greek tragedy today. When there is no analogy at all, the performance does not create another myth but performing the ancient one renews it and makes it exist in the actuality of the performance.

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[32] I am grateful here to Christian Biet for his constructive response to this paper at the 2015 APGRD/HAR conference.

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FILMIC ANALOGIES:

THE TROJAN WAR IN THE PRESENT

Notes toward an African Oresteia (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1969), *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004)

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Résumé : La comparaison, *a priori* insensée, entre le *Carnet de notes pour une Orestie africaine* de Pasolini (1969) et *Troie* de Wolfgang Petersen (2004), permet de dégager l'idéologie sous-jacente à chacune des deux poétiques mises en œuvre : deux poétiques du rapport entre l'antique et le présent, entre l'Histoire et le mythe et, ce faisant, deux conceptions du cinéma et de son rapport au monde. Chez Pasolini, l'analogie explicite entre la guerre de Troie et la guerre du Biafra, contemporaine du film, est à la fois un moment du discours analogique politique qui structure tout le film – et qui fait du Tiers monde le lieu d'une résistance espérée et vue comme encore possible à l'homologation néocapitaliste – et l'expression de la capacité du cinéma à se mettre au service du réel, à mettre au jour le mythe qui loge encore au creux de la réalité, dans les corps des humbles notamment, et à fictionner à partir de là. Dans *Troie*, l'analogie lâche entre la guerre de Troie et la guerre en Irak, également contemporaine du film, contribuerait plutôt à l'historicisation et à la rationalisation de l'épisode antique, autorisant alors un déplacement du mythe vers le cinéma : non plus le cinéma comme outil archéologique permettant de mettre au jour (l'invention archéologique) la dimension mythique du réel, mais le cinéma comme créateur (autre sens de l'invention), pourvoyeur de mythes, à commencer par les stars.

Mots-clés : cinéma, antiquité-contemporain, analogie, invention, star, mythe.

Abstract: The comparison, a priori senseless, between Pasolini's Notes Toward an African Oresteia *(1969) and Wolfgang Petersen's* Troy *(2004) allows us to identify the ideology that underlies each of the two poetics implemented in these films: two conceptions of the relationship between the Antiquity and the present, between History and myth, and two very different understandings of what cinema is and how it relates to the world. In Pasolini's film, the explicit analogy between the Trojan War and the Biafran War is simultaneously a moment of the political analogical discourse structuring the whole movie – seeing the Third World as a place of resistance, seen as still possible, to neocapitalistic "homologation" – and the expression of the capacity of the cinematic medium to put itself in the service of the reality, in so far as it can bring to light the myth*

still present in the reality, in the bodies of the humbles in particular, and to fictionalize from there. In Troy, *the rather loose analogy between the Trojan War and the War in Iraq contributes to the historicization and rationalization of the ancient episode, authorizing a shift from the ancient myth to a new cinematic myth. In this process, the cinema is no longer an archaeological tool allowing to "invent" (to discover and bring to light) the mythical dimension of reality: it creates and supplies myths, beginning with the stars.*

Keywords: *cinema, antiquity-contemporaneity, analogy, invention, star, myth.*

At first glance, comparing Pasolini's *African Oresteia* and Petersen's *Troy* may seem senseless and arbitrary, as these films have *a priori* nothing in common. Originally shot for Italian television, the first is, as its complete title indicates, a series of cinematic notes ("appunti"), filmed in preparation for a filmic adaptation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in Africa. The theme of the "notes for a film to be made" is actually a fiction, a poetic delusion. The only movie ever envisaged is precisely the one that we have before our eyes: an open form exposed to the unexpected, a hybrid object hesitating between being a documentary of contemporary Africa and an adaptation of an ancient tragedy, a 'collage' of location scouting and casting, archive images and research of solutions for the adaptation of the ancient text. On the other side, we have a Hollywood blockbuster, a classical epic, solidly tied up and effective, with its stars and its bigger-than-life sets rebuilt in Malta or computer-generated. Nevertheless, I think that comparing the Trojan War according to Pasolini and the Trojan War according to Petersen/Hollywood could help us to highlight what each movie finds in Antiquity, and what it has to tell us about cinema and the way it relates to the world.

THE TWO FILMS' OPENINGS: ESTABLISHING THE FILM'S POETICS

Let us compare the opening scenes of Pier Pasolini's *Notes Toward an African Oresteia* and Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* before devoting more time to each film.

Notes Toward an African Oresteia

At the very beginning of the film, Pasolini superimposes (1) an atlas open to a map of Africa, (2) Aeschylus' book placed *on* the atlas *in view* of the map of Africa and, above, (3) the credits, indicating "a film written and directed by Pasolini". This palimpsest puts several elements into play: 1) myth and history – the myth of *Orestes* and the history of Africa, because, in 1969, this atlas can only refer to the western conception of Africa's borders and to the continent's recent decolonization; 2) distant times and spaces — ancient Greece and contemporary Africa converge; 3) different media — literature and cinema; 4) I would add – but time does not permit its proper development – a fourth element at stake: the contrast between the *authors* – Aeschylus and Pasolini – and how one of the implicit challenges of the film is the question of *translation,* since the book

placed on the atlas is none other but *The Oresteia*, translated by Pasolini himself in 1959, to this day a translation of reference in Italy.

Troy

The film begins, too, with an "old fashioned" map that anachronistically situates the names of the ancient cities that geographically situate the story to follow (Troy and the Greek city-state coalitions) inside the contours of contemporary Greece. A time indicator superimposed on the map situates the story very precisely in History: in 1200 BCE, i.e. the period archaeologists associate with the Trojan War. On this map, the boxes parade by, which indicates notably that Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, forcibly created an alliance of Greek city-states whose most powerful rival is Troy. It is important to keep in mind that the war in Iraq began simultaneously with the film's production and that the promotional discourse maintained the analogy between the Trojan War and the Iraq War, and the parallel between Agamemnon and George W. Bush[1]. But, as opposed to Pasolini's film, the analogy with the present is not explicit in the film: it situates itself in peripheral discourses and in the spectator's capacity, or willingness, to unmask the film's rather loose parallels to the present. Nevertheless, in reality, the film explicitly poses the question of the relationship between the past and the present, but from the standpoint of History shifting to myth: immediately following this map, before the beginning of the actual story, this voice-over is heard, bringing prologue to a close: "Men are haunted by the vastness of eternity. And so we ask ourselves: will our actions echo across the centuries? Will strangers hear our names, long after we're gone, and wonder who we were, how bravely we fought, how fiercely we loved?"

These two openings establish two poetics of the relationship between antiquity and the present, between history and myth. In so doing, they propose two conceptions of cinema. In each case, the recourse – or the return – to antiquity serves to say something about the medium.

THE *AFRICAN ORESTEIA*: MYTH "INVENTED" BY THE CINEMA

The analogy between the Trojan and the Biafran War

It is important to recall that Pasolini's first encounter with *The Iliad*, as he recounted in 1946, was the problem of Achilles' shield, which is described in the epic's eighteenth book. So it is, he says, that as an adolescent beginning to paint, he glimpsed the problem of the relationship between reality and representation[2]. And yet *African Oresteia* is precisely the film where he stages, meta-cinematically, the question of *reality and its representation*, and the passage on the Trojan War is, in this respect, extremely significant. As a matter of fact, after several location scouting and casting sequences, Pasolini says, "It's time to start telling our story". He then films what could be the guardian charged by

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[1] Gaël Grobety, *Guerre de Troie, guerres des cultures et guerres du Golfe : les usages de l'*Iliade *dans la culture écrite américaine contemporaine*, coll. « Echo », n° 11, Bern, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien, Peter Lang, 2014.

[2] Nico Naldini, *Pasolini, Biographie*, translated by René de Ceccatty, Paris, Gallimard, 1991, p. 21-23.

Clytemnestra to watch for the return of Agamemnon, and on these images reads the corresponding abstract of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Immediately following, he chooses to represent "a possible flashback on the Greek army under the walls of Troy and on the Trojan War" with archival images of Biafra, inscribing the myth told by Aeschylus in History.

Why the Biafran War? Because the Nigerian civil war was a current event, during the film's production. The war began in 1967 and ended in early 1970. Furthermore, the war's large international media coverage brought to the western world's attention the problems confronting the developing world, especially after decolonization. In fact, in 1965, Pasolini wrote in his "Dialogs with Readers" column in the Italian Communist Party's weekly, *Vie nuove* ["New Roads"], that one of the aspects of the new world order is the imperative that the Communists take into account the fact that the Third World, with all of its humanitarian problems, also contains all of the hopes of the young, recently decolonized countries. The question, for Pasolini, is: which paths will the African nations take? He hopes for a modernity, and modernization, where the past and its traditions are not forgotten, unlike in the west's "neocapitalist homologation ["*omologazione*"]", to employ his language. And, indeed, for him, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is the bias by which he tackles and stages this question, since the story of Orestes is the story of the transition from an archaic society to a modern, democratic society, symbolized by the transformation of the Furies in Eumenides and Athena's establishment of the first human tribunal to judge Orestes guilty of matricide. Thus, although Pasolini does not really express interest in the geopolitical context of the Trojan and the Biafran Wars in the film, the analogy works also on a political level: both wars embody two outbursts of violence, symptoms of two archaic societies, two explosions of violence whose first victims are the humble, the faceless. After the violence, a new historical period, marked by the advent of democracy, emerges, or could emerge, integrating the past within the present.

Therefore, representing the myth with archival images of Biafra, Pasolini shifts from Myth to History and explicitly makes a film about contemporary events. But in the same time that he shows the contemporary Biafran history, he dialectically re-inscribes History in a metahistorical – therefore mythical – time, in a passage worth quoting:

> But this war shouldn't be taken as a particular war, that is, the Biafran War, but as an abstract one. Its images are metaphorical images of what could be the actualization of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans. Of course, as I have repeated it many times, the main protagonist of my film, of which these are just notes, should be the people. Therefore, during this war, the humble soldiers who are injured, mangled, killed. [...] Nothing is more remote from these images than our common idea of Greek classicism. Nevertheless, pain, death, mourning, tragedy, are eternal and absolute elements which can very well connect these ardent and very actual images with the fantastic images of the ancient Greek tragedy.

What we have here is a declaration of poetics. The analogy between Biafra and Troy, between the present and the past, is nothing less than rhetoric. For Pasolini, who follows the historian of religions Mircea Eliade, reality is mythical, and myth is metahistoric. Therefore images of the present relate us to other times, and, more than that, can be images of other times, of the past. That is why his conception of the "metaphor" is at the center of his poetics.

The metaphor: filming the persistence of the past in the present

In his *What is the Contemporary?*, Giorgio Agamben writes that the true contemporary is he who adheres to his time "through a disjunction and an anachronism". A little later he writes: "the key to the modern is hidden in the immemorial and the prehistoric. [That is why] the entry point to the present necessarily takes the form of an archaeology[3]." In order to understand the functioning of Pasolini's anachronism – and the archaeology he applies – I would like to devote more attention to the word "metaphor", used when he says that the images of Biafra are not the images of a specific war, but are, instead, abstract images, the metaphor that updates the Trojan War. This reflection brings me back to my original point – the relationship between reality and representation – while at the same time illuminating the relationship Pasolini saw between myth and history. In a letter written to his friend Franco Farolfi, in August 1945, Pasolini used the term "metaphor" in relation to language, returning explicitly to the word's etymology. Pasolini sought to unmask the materiality inscribed within the words that naturally links them to reality (then contradicting the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign) :

> The words, my dear Franco, [...] are a color and a sound, a material fact, they are the ring that us connect to other unknowable forms, the metaphor, *metapherô*, that leads us beyond, that is, outside of ourselves: into the gentle world[4].

Words are metaphors. The speaker is carried (*pherô*) by the words that he pronounces beyond himself (*meta*), toward the world. In another text from the same period, Pasolini writes that "words are natural metaphors. They 'carry beyond'." Words carry us toward reality, because they *contain* reality. We could say that, if we give attention to them, words take us inside them, into the memory they contain. They take us toward the original and physical link that did exist between the word and the thing it designates. That is why they carry us "beyond", toward reality[5]. Thus, the images-metaphors from the Biafran War are images that carry us beyond the original temporality and historicity of this War. They take us toward the myth that this historical reality contains. The images of the Biafran war can take us to the mythic reality of Troy, just as the words naturally carry us, materially, toward the real world. Even more naturally than words, which always conserve an element of arbitrariness, cinema expresses reality, with reality itself. Pasolini embraced cinema precisely because he sought a medium capable of expressing reality *with* reality. The question of the representation of the past then arises, explicitly in these terms, regarding his film *Medea*, which he also directed in 1969, the same year as *African Oresteia:*

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[3] Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, translated by David Kishik and Stefan Padatella, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 41 and p. 51.[4] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Correspondance générale* (1940-1975), translated by René de Ceccatty, Paris, Gallimard, 1991, p. 146.

[4] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Correspondance générale* (1940-1975), translated by René de Ceccatty, Paris, Gallimard, 1991, p. 146.

[5] Pasolini might be influenced by the philosophy of language of Giambattista Vico.

[B]y its nature, cinema cannot represent the past. Cinema represents reality through reality [...] Thus, in my historical films, I never had the ambition of representing *a time that no longer exists*. If I attempted to do that, I did it by analogy, that is to say, in representing a modern time in some way analogous to the past. There are still places in the Third World with human sacrifices, where one can witness the human tragedy in the impossibility of adapting to the modern world: that is the persistence of the past in the present that can be objectively represented[6].

And we could add the persistence of myth in History, in the present. It is necessary to understand that the images of Biafra are metaphors because they take us beyond, toward a mythical reality that they contain. One could say that, for Pasolini, the metaphor is a connection or relationship and not just of comparison but also of integration. Later in the text on *Medea*, he writes that the present is "the figural integration [integrazione figurale] of the past[7]". As I said, for Pasolini, influenced among others by Mircea Eliade, reality is mythical, it contains the myth, it is informed by the myth. This is how he expresses it, during the course of the film, while filming popular faces:

[B]y their realism, these people carry in themselves this mythical and sacred moment that makes them say phrases, for example: [Follows a long quote from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, starting with: "God, if that is truly your name and you accept that I invoke you I weighed everything: it is not just you who can truly free me from the nightmare that afflicts my heart."]

Here we have the idea of a mythical speech, a *muthos*, which naturally arises from these bodies and is literally expressed by bodies. These popular bodies still contain in themselves this mythical tale, contrary to western bodies, already "homogenized" [or "homologated"], which no longer contain any memory of the past. Pasolini shifts, thus, to Africa because, there, the myth still has play, is still read in History and in the bodies – and especially in popular bodies. It is only there that cinema can still film the past, not only to record it but also to cinematically invent it, in the archaeological sense of the word "invention": to discover, to bring to light – to cinematically express the contemporaneity of the past.

TROY: MYTH CREATED BY THE CINEMA

The analogy with the War in Iraq

Troy also raises the question of myth and history. And it resolves, in a very different manner, the question of a *cinematic* mythical invention. The map upon which the film opens is the sign of its historicizing approach to the Trojan War, which is staged as a historical fact. The film's promotional material, such as it is visible in the DVD's bonus

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6 Pier Paolo Pasolini, « Il sentimento della storia », *Cinema nuovo*, XIX, n° 205, maggio-giugno 1970, republished in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, t. II, Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (ed.), Milano, Mondadori, 1999, p. 2818-2820.

7 The word « figurale » certainly refers to Erich Auerbach's notion of *Figura*.

content, emphasizes historic Troy, by frequently harkening back to the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, or by insisting on the participation of the historical consultant Lesley Fitton[8]. As Jonathan Burgess highlighted, the allusions to the war in Iraq served to confirm the plausibility of this portrait of Bronze Age imperialism[9]. Indeed, the pretext of Helen's abduction, cited by Agamemnon, in order to force the Greek city-states into an imperialistic war against Troy – a pretext clearly emphasized by Achilles and Hector – can only conjure up the Bush Administration's claim to the presence of weapons of mass destruction as a pretext to wage war in Iraq. Achilles warns Patroclus, who is eager for battle: "Don't waste your time following some fool's orders." Ultimately, the film combats every reason for going to war; and the only entirely positive character is Hector, who will only fight, out of patriotism, to defend his own country. To his brother, Paris, who claims to be ready to fight and die for Helen, he responds: "Have you ever fought? I have seen men die, and there is nothing glorious, nothing poetic [in that]." This touches upon one of the film's contradictions: the pacifist discourse is undermined by the unsurprising epic spectacle – glorious and poetic of course – of war.

This contradiction is intimately connected to the character Achilles. His primary motivation, repeated numerous times, is the desire for glory – *kleos* – achieved on the battlefield. And this glory/*kleos* justifies the shift from History to myth, that is to say, the shift from the geographical map at the very beginning of the film to a positive response to the voiced over question following this map: "Will our actions echo across the centuries? Will strangers hear our names, long after we're gone?" Clearly, the question is a rhetorical, even performative, declaration, to which the film itself is a positive response. By that, the film thus offers itself, at the outset, as a mythopoetic medium, a sort of modern *aoidos* proposing a new performance and thus a reinvention of the myth of Troy. The voice-over returns at the film's end. We learn only then that it is the voice of Ulysses, who has just laid coins over the eyes of a dead Achilles to pay the ferryman Charon to take him to Hades:

> If they ever tell my story, let them say I walked with giants. Men rise and fall like the winter weed, but these names will never die. Let them say I lived in the time of Hector, tamer of horses; let them say I lived in the time of Achilles.

Thus, the staging of the Trojan War is framed at the film's beginning and end by a voice-over, which inscribes the story, and the History of the war, in the long term of *muthos*, which traverses the centuries.

Rationalization and cinematic myth

Even within the film, however, there is a constant process of rationalization at work, from the first appearance of Achilles, played by Brad Pitt. A boy seeks him out in his tent in order to battle the giant and asks: "Are the stories about you true? [...] They say you can't be killed." Achilles responds: "Then I wouldn't bother with a shield, would I?" Thus, the film stages the legend in order to immediately question it with the voice of

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[8] DVD Warner Bros, Collector, 2004.

[9] Jonathan Burgess, "Achille's Heel: The historicism of the Film *Troy*", in Kostas Myrsiades, *Reading Homer*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009, p. 163-185.

Achilles. The continuation of the exchange is interesting. The boy persists: "The Thessalonian you'll fight is the biggest man I've ever seen. I wouldn't want to fight him." To which Achilles responds: "That's why no one will remember your name." Several elements are at work here: 1) An underlying philosophical statement, according to which the man is and merits something by his actions (one is not born, one becomes, mythical). In a certain way, the Greek *agôn* is here permeated by the ideological vein of the "self-made man". 2) But it is also a cinematic challenge: while questioning the legend, the film has the possibility of re-creating it. And its legend will inseparably associate Achilles with Brad Pitt: Achilles will become, or will again become, immortal in the skin of Brad Pitt. Cinema celebrates itself and celebrates its capacity to create myths, among them, its stars.

The episode concerning Achilles' heel is significant[10]. At the end of the film, Achilles returns to Troy to save Briseis with whom he has fallen hopelessly in love, Hollywood style, and is killed by Paris' arrows. The first hits his heel, the crucial moment emphasized by Briseis's scream of anticipation when Paris pulls the bowstring taut; the music reaches its crescendo the moment the arrow pierces his heel. There is one close-up on Brad Pitt's face, gasping for breath, followed by a detail shot on the heel pierced by the arrow. The myth of Achilles is entirely on display, in this single flaw in his invincibility, and the film deploys all of its cinematic weapons to stage it. But the veracity of the myth is immediately put into question. The first arrow does not kill him. In fact, according to the film, Paris unleashes three more arrows to his chest. In a final heroic gesture, Achilles rips out the three arrows. When the Greeks find him dead, only one arrow remains – in his heel. Thus, the process of creating the myth is staged. History shifts to myth, on two levels. First, it is the error of the appreciation of the historical fact that opens the road to mythifying. At the same moment as the event, the Greeks naively misinterpret what is before their eyes. But, second, the myth is legitimized by the extraordinary heroism of Achilles, who earns his mythic status over the course of the film, and who, certainly, seems to consciously contribute to the formation of his own myth by staging his death with a single arrow. Likewise, during his first encounter with Hector, he refused to fight him because there were no spectators[11].

Achilles is not alone, of course, in creating his own myth. The star, Brad Pitt, never completely loses himself in the role. There are certain moments where Pitt strays, slipping out of character, exposing his own skin. The analogy, if there is one, lays between the hero and the star: Achilles is obsessed with his name – and its place in History or legend. And the film forges the association between the name of Achilles and that of Brad Pitt.

AS A CONCLUSION: WHO'S "MYTHIC"? THE HUMBLE *VS* THE STARS

Troy thus implements a historical rationalization (eviction of the gods, Achilles himself negating the legend of his immortality, filmic rationalization of the myth of Achilles' heel), allowing a cinematic mythologizing, serving the *persona* of Brad Pitt, obviously merged with Achilles. This is a poetics of "invention" very different from Pasolini's

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[10] See Kim Shahabudin, "From Greek Myth to Hollywood Story", in Martin Winkler (ed.), *Troy: From Homer's Iliad to Hollywood Epic*, Malden, Blackwell, 2007.

[11] "Why kill you now, prince of Troy, with no one here to see you fall?"

African Oresteia: the myth is no longer to be found within the people but in these exceptional beings, the ancient heroes and the contemporary stars. Indeed, Pasolini's conception of reality led him to seek (to "invent", in the archaeological sense of discovering and bringing something to the light[12]) in the faces and popular bodies of the still "ancient", not yet "homologated" African people, the myth they still contain. He builds with these historical and present, real and mythical faces and bodies (those of the Africans at the end of the sixties) the figures of the ancient warriors: Agamemnon as well as the humble victims of the struggles. On the contrary, *Troy*'s objective is to recreate the myth through spectacular cinematic means, to closely associate it with its stars. The film thus expunges the popular. Beyond the major roles, played by famous actors, we *see* no one, despite the several mentions of soldiers or people dying unjustly in war. In reality, there are only masses of people — computer-generated figures — flooding long shots. The film extras are virtually invisible. In an article entitled "People Exposed, People as Extras," Georges Didi-Huberman recalls the ordinariness of film extras: men without features, whom, I quote, "have a face, a body, their own gestures, but the staging requires them to be faceless, bodiless, gestureless."[13] And he recalls that in French slang, the word for "extra" — "figurant" — like the word "stiff" in English, designates anonymous cadavers stacked in the morgue, awaiting identification. The anonymous, those "without identity," they are at the morgue. Or in the netherworld. Or drowned in the indistinct mass of faceless soldiers: in this nothingness that Achilles flees by looking for glory, the *kleos*, and the access to a mythical status. Nothingness also haunts the movie stars. But nothingness is the common lot of the humble, of the anonymous faces, of the battalions, whom Pasolini films in close-up to make them enter the field of representations, from which they are most of the time excluded. The two films implement, therefore, two different poetics, which are also two different, possibly antagonistic, manners in which to deal with reality.

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[12] Roland Barthes, about the concept of « invention » in ancient rhetoric, writes: "Invention is less an invention (of arguments) than a discovery: everything is already there, it just needs to be found: the notion refers more to an extraction than a creation." (Roland Barthes, « L'ancienne rhétorique », *Communications*, 1970, vol. 16, n° 1, p. 172-223.)

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Aτlantidε

Partie 4

Aux limites du tragique

THE OBSCENITY OF VIOLENCE, THE OBSCENITY OF THEATRE.
THE DRAMATURGY OF CARMELO BENE'S LAST
PERFORMANCE DISCONCERTMENT

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Résumé : Cet article porte sur la dramaturgie du dernier spectacle (2000) de Carmelo Bene, *L'In-vulnerabilità d'Achille. Impossibile suite tra Ilio e Sciro. Spettacolo-sconcerto in un momento* (*L'In-vulnérabilité d'Achille. Suite impossible entre Ilion et Skyros. Spectacle-concert en un moment*), qui explore le thème de la violence et de l'obscénité à travers plusieurs versions du mythe d'Achille traitant particulièrement de la conduite amoureuse du plus grand héros de l'*Iliade*. À travers cette thématique, Carmelo Bene met en question, pour la dernière fois, le phénomène théâtral lui-même.

Mots-clés : Carmelo Bene, Achille, *Penthésilée* de Kleist, représentation/irreprésentabilité, réécriture dramaturgique.

Abstract: *This paper is on the dramaturgy of Carmelo Bene's last performance (2000),* L'In-vulnerabilità d'Achille. Impossibile suite tra Ilio e Sciro. Spettacolo-sconcerto in un momento *(Achilles' In-vulnerability. Impossible suite between Ilio and Sciro. Performance-disconcertment in one moment), which explores the theme of violence and obscenity through many versions of the Achille's myth regarding especially the love behaviour of the greatest warrior of Iliad. Through this theme, Carmelo Bene questions, for the last time, theatre itself.*

Keywords: *Carmelo Bene, Achilles, Kleist'Penthesilea, representation/unpresentability, dramaturgical rewriting.*

A major figure in contemporary theatre, Carmelo Bene shook Italian stages from the 1960s to 2002, when he died. Bene was more than a traditional actor: totally independent, he always remained the director and dramatist of his own performances and wrote extensively about his art and philosophical vision[1].

Carmelo Bene conceived staging as a critical essay and variation of the text. For Bene, the stage had to be an "operating theatre". Deleuze speaks about him as a "theatre operator" ("*opérateur du théâtre*"[2]) so as to highlight the continuous process of experimentation and dismantling, or dissection, in Bene's work. From his very first performance, he fought against representational theatre, and in particular against the representation of the self. His artistic quest was built on the dichotomy between Representation and the unrepresentable. Regarding this, if Representation belongs to the domain of illusion and to the domain of a regulated shape, then the unrepresentable would be the domain of what cannot be captured in any shape or form, of what is unspeakable. His intellectual references were philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Bergson and Deleuze, among others. Since childhood, Bene had also been passionate about opera as well as the popular tradition of biographical writing on mystics and saints. Thus, on the one hand, his work consisted in breaking down traditional theatre and its coherent, logical system of dialogue, characters, action and plot, whilst, on the other hand, his art sought the paradox of the convocation of absence. In other terms, his research sought to bring sensation, the invisible and evocation to the stage, rather than illustration. More generally, his theatre sought vision—not vision as an image, but, borrowing from the mystical imaginary, vision as the revelation of what is normally hidden. According to this point of view, theatre is the no-place, the nowhere, in which what is on stage is not there. As Bene repeated, theatre is like the ascent of Mount Carmel by Juan de la Cruz, who climbs and climbs, and, finally, at the top of the hill, he finds nothing—the nothingness of a vision, not the nothingness of nihilism.

By playing on words in a Lacanian way, Bene affirms that theatre is *obscene, "osceno"*[3]. He separates the prefix *ob* from the rest of the word, making an etymological figure with the word for stage, "*scena*[4]", in order to indicate what is off stage, or better and closer to the etymological meaning of *ob*, what is against the stage, and so what cannot be on stage.

Thus, in Bene's theatre, there is no representation. This is not because of any morality, self-censorship or a desire to be "poetic" (his theatre is not symbolic); the reason is philosophical: this theatre does not show because it is impossible to show nothingness, in the same way as it is impossible to show air. We could say that for Bene the stage is like a balloon that we must pierce in order to feel just for a fleeting moment the passage and movement of the air. The nothingness does not show itself because it exceeds, it goes beyond—because it is obscene.

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[1] Carmelo Bene's texts are collected in one volume: Carmelo Bene, *Opere*, Milano, Classici Bompiani, 2002.

[2] Gilles Deleuze, « Un manifeste de moins », in Carmelo Bene, Gilles Deleuze, *Superpositions*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1979.

[3] Carmelo Bene, « Autografia di un ritratto », *Opere, op. cit.*, p. XI.

[4] In Italian the word "*scena*" has two meanings: "scene" and "stage".

In order to achieve a theatre beyond representation, Carmelo Bene has made orality the main axis of his work[5]. Pioneer of an experimental use of sound technology in theatre since the 1970s (after his experience of filmmaker[6] and influenced by electronic music), he made the action of saying a process which recreates the text pronounced in the present by focusing on the materiality of voice and language. If at the beginning of his research his theatrical work consisted in exploring great classic drama plays, especially Shakespeare, with several actors on the stage who performed their replies as a sum of monologues or as solos in an opera, from 1980 Carmelo Bene made mainly what he called « spectacles-concerts », in which he was most often standing alone in front of the public, reading poetic texts with great sound amplification, as a sort of great singer, bard or priest.

According to Bene, text is but the trace of orality, his dead remains. To restore the "live" dimension of what is written, the actor has to forget the significance and let his attention go exclusively on the sound of what he interprets. However, this focus on sound materiality does not mean that Bene leaves out dramaturgic reflection. On the contrary, all his productions and poetic performances are based on an extensive literary study of the textual material, as will be seen with the example of his last scenic work.

For his last performance, on 24th November 2000, at the Argentina Theatre in Rome, Bene took three texts: the unfinished epic poem *Achilleid*, by Statius, *Penthesilea*, the play by Kleist, and the episodes about Achilles from Homer's *Iliad*[7]. The texts were freely rewritten and woven together — *digested*, as Bene might say — but the main dramaturgical place is given to Kleist's play.

The title of this performance is *Achilles' Invulnerability. The impossible suite between Ilio and Sciro, performance-disconcertment in one moment (In-vulnerabilità d'Achille. Impossibile suite tra Ilio e Sciro, spettacolo-sconcerto in un momento)*. The first word, invulnerability, highlights the condition of Achilles, whose whole body is immortal, invulnerable, except for his heel. But I would like to dwell briefly on the second part of the title: the suite, which in music signifies "collection of movements, of structured pieces" or "a piece modelled out of many parts", is impossible, probably because many versions of the Achille's myth have been put together without being compatible: from a logical point of view, they exclude each other. And this is very telling of the way Carmelo Bene *déjoue*, foils the plot or narration, by going beyond a linear logic, in successive stages, to reach a condition in which many time periods coexist, but also in which the subject evaporates and many doubles emerge instead. We can read the expression "in one moment" in the same way: the successive stages of a suite are thwarted by the fact that everything seems to happen in *one* single moment. Lastly but not least, the Italian word *sconcerto*, which I have translated as disconcertment, can be interpreted in two ways: if we follow the first, we can read the first letter "*s*" as a privative s in front of concert—the concert is there to be dismantled (dismembered...). The second interpretation would be to take the full word, *sconcerto*,

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[5] I've developed this aspect in: Cristina De Simone, « Ventriloquies », Cristina De Simone, Christian Biet, (dir.), *D'Après Carmelo Bene*, *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, n° 263, juillet-septembre 2014.

[6] Carmelo Bene has done some experimental films from 1967 to 1973 : *Barocco leccese* (1967), *Hermitage* (1968), *Nostra Signora dei Turchi* (1968), *Capricci* (1969), *Don Giovanni* (1970), *Salomé* (1972), *Un Amleto di meno* (1973).

[7] In 1997, Carmelo Bene made a film of this spectacle for the public Italian television (RAI): *In-vulnerabilità d'Achille (tra Sciro e Ilio)*. This film is available on youtube : https://www.youtube.com

which in Italian means "disconcertment, disorientation, stupor"; thus, we have at the same time, in this single word, the idea of both a dismantled concert and the image of a state of stupor.

And the stupor comes in the middle of Kleist's play *Penthesilea*. In love with her adversary, in an Amazon society which is founded on the prohibition of falling in love with the desired or captured prey[8] , Penthesilea's whole being is struck by an overwhelming fury which exceeds her, a fury in which opposites—love and hate, life and death—merge and implode.

In a spasm and a paroxysm beyond all measure, Penthesilea ends up tearing Achilles apart, ripping his body into pieces: she is no longer a woman but a bitch surrounded by dogs. In this way, she kills Achilles beyond death, because she has not only murdered his soul but also eliminated his body by devouring it; as a result, the memorial ceremony, the rite of burial, the representation of distress, is impossible. In this act, Penthesilea's fury exceeds her: she is mad, unaware, not conscious of what she has done. When she goes back to her encampment, met with the horror and the disconcertment of her fellows, she is like a sleepwalker. Her eyes staring into emptiness, she is expressionless, oblivious: *stupid, stupefied*. Her awakening is terrible: the thought of the accomplished act annihilates her, and kills her like a poison with an instant, fatal effect.

In Kleist's text, the horror of this unimaginable, unperformable act corresponds to a kind of "deferred" playwriting, which is driven by witnesses' reports given at the same time or after the events described. Throughout the play, messengers testify to the events they have seen, or they refer to them with teichoscopy. The crucial moment when Penthesilea rushes at Achilles in blind rage with her elephants and ferocious dogs is told first in real time; then, it is narrated by the Amazon Meroé, torn between her duty to inform and the shock, accompanied by the risk of falling into the unspeakable, into aphasia.

With this process, Kleist follows the style of ancient Greek tragedy[9]. Regarding the story of Penthesilea and Achilles, Kleist reverses the post-Homeric version: in the tradition represented by Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*, it is Achilles who kills Penthesilea. Moreover, Achilles falls in love with the Amazon at the very moment she expires; he is wounded by her eyes as she is passing away. In love with her, Achilles possesses her near-dead body. So, with this episode of necrophilia, we have once again a profanation of the body, and in reversing the terms of the story, Kleist transposes and develops the inhuman side of the posthomeric version. Finally, for Penthesilea's dispossession caused by her cannibal fury, he derives inspiration from three plays by Euripides: *Medea*, *Bacchantes* and *Hippolytus*[10].

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[8] It is interesting to note that Roland Barthes, in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* talks about the obscenity of love in the context of modern opinion, in which sentimentality is discredited and felt by the subject as a transgression. (Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1977, p. 208).

[9] In connection to this theme of unperformability, it is relevant to recall the voluntarily utopian stage direction of Kleist's text, which is impossible to conform to, especially when Penthesilea is present on stage with all her animals and preparing herself for battle.

[10] In *Hippolytus*, the body of Hippolytus is not eaten, but it is horrifically tormented: this atrocious episode reminds of the one in the *Iliad* in which Achilles, impious, beyond measure, drags and rips apart Hector's dead body, which he has tied to his chariot.

Hence, unlike his contemporaries, Goethe, Schiller and Winckelmann, Kleist does not take classical myths as figures of order, which protect against chaos. In the classical repertoire, he chooses to work on irrationality as a force reacting against a rational and unfair power. More precisely, rationality is here considered as an oppressive power.

The *Achilleid* by Statius does not mention Achilles's love for Penthesilea, but tells how Achilles, when he was a young boy, was hidden by his mother Thetis on the Scyros island in order to protect him from the Greeks, who were going to fight against Troy. So, Achilles's mother dresses her son up as a young girl and entrusts him to the king, a father who only has adolescent daughters. Thetis introduces her son Achilles as his sister, who, because of the emulation with her strong brother, now behaves as if she/he was an Amazon: thus, she/he needs to be reeducated by being in the company of girls of "her" age. But Achilles, in the meanwhile, has fallen in love with Deidamia, the king's eldest daughter. When they dance and play together, he gazes lovingly at her and holds her a little bit too tightly, she who is unaware of the fact that her new friend is in fact a boy. In the end, Achilles rapes her. Thus, in this version, there is, on the one hand, the theme of disguise travesty and of sexual ambiguity which this episode plays on, an ambiguity that makes Achilles the feminine double of himself; and, on the other hand, the plot gives rise to the brutality with which this love is declared, in a context of innocence and children's games, like a dirty obscene stain on a white sheet.

If we go back briefly to Kleist, Penthesilea and Achilles stand in front of one another like each other's double: both powerful and proud, neither wants to be subjected to the other, except when it is too late, after a series of misunderstandings (which recalls Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*). Moreover, the cannibal act annihilates—in the most extreme way—the distinction between an I and a You. In this connection, it is interesting to remember how the life of Kleist ended. Kleist fell in love with a woman who agreed to commit suicide with him. Her name was Adolphine Vogel: Heinrich von Kleist renamed her Henriette, and Heinrichand Henriette took their own lives by shooting themselves on lake Wannsee.

Therefore, these three texts chosen by Bene are deeply linked to each other, with the themes of extreme love, violence, the idea of feminine/masculine doubles strongly expressed through disguise travesty and rape in Statius, necrophilious love in Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*, cannibalism and suicide in *Penthesilea* and impious rage in *Iliad.*

If we consider now Bene's *performance-disconcert*, the actor is alone on the stage, surrounded by white lace, white ribbons and white clothes, as if he were in the room of a young princess. On his right, there is an open book; on his left, there are some articulated dummies and puppets, some lying twisted, crumpled on the floor[11]. Bene disassembles and reassembles the limbs of his monstrous puppets. The stage looks like a camp after an explosion, contrasting sharply with the immaculate white fabrics and the lace-covered cradle. Therefore, it looks as if it is Achilles who tears the body of Penthesilea to pieces. But at the same time, this act also reminds us of the text by Statius: Achilles raping Deidamia. In any case, from the point of view of a simple description, what the spectator sees is a serious-looking man playing absentmindedly with a puppet, as if he were doing the act unconsciously and as if he were beside himself.

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[11] Since *Pinocchio* (1961) and *Richard III* (1977), Carmelo Bene's theatre is rich in its use of masks, puppets and prosthesis, which participates in the deconstruction of acting dramatic characters.

These puppets and dummies with oniric postures remind of the *Doll* by Hans Bellmer, the surrealist artist, a friend of Bataille's and reader of Sade. One of the first and main inspirations for young Bellmer was an exchange of letters between Kokoschka and a puppeteer, Hermine Moss, whom he asked to build a life-sized puppet. Kokoschka is also the author of a collection of drawings based on Penthesilea.

According to Hans Bellmer, there is continuity between the inside and the outside of a being. Because of this continuity, there is a direct connection between, for example, a toothache and the reflex to clutch the painful area and dig one's nails into the skin: by creating this new pain, we divert and free ourselves of the original pain. "*L'expression*", writes Bellmer in his *Anatomy of the physical unconscious*, "*avec ce qu'elle comporte de plaisir, est une douleur déplacée, elle est une délivrance*[12]". The labyrinth-like bodies of his puppets are used to trace the paths which carry external expression from the inside and vice versa.

> Si l'on pouvait dire que la main crispée s'oppose à la dent, on est porté maintenant à dire que l'image de la dent se déplace sur la main, l'image du sexe sur l'aisselle, celle de la jambe sur le bras, celle du nez sur le talon. Main et dent, aisselle et sexe, talon et nez, bref : excitation virtuelle et excitation réelle se confondent en se superposant[13].

The body is, for Bellmer, like a sentence, which needs to be broken up, disarticulated, in order to reassemble its real contents through a series of never-ending anagrams. There is not only a connection between the inside and the outside, but also reversibility—a reversibility which concerns every pair of opposites and which is, for Bellmer, how language originated[14].

> Les langues primitives s'expriment à ce point de vue-là comme le rêve ; elles n'ont au début qu'un mot pour les deux points opposés d'une série de qualités ou d'actions (fort-faible, proche-lointain, lié-séparé). Les termes spéciaux pour désigner les contraires n'apparaissent que tard, par légère modification du terme primitif. Au même sujet, Freud rappelle l'existence des mots de la même signification, dont la suite des caractères a été renversée : pot-Topf, Ziege-Geis[15].

In this connection, this recalls Penthesilea, in Kleist's play, who confuses *Küsse* (kisses) with *Bisse* (bites): *So war es ein Versehen. Küsse, Bisse / Das reimt sich, und wer recht von Herzen liebt, /Kann schon das Eine für Andre greifen.* ("So it was a mistake. Kiss and bite, / They rhyme, for one who truly loves / With all her heart can easily mistake them.")

According to Bellmer, we can find this reversibility also in the love relationship, which for him is a process of splitting and doubling:

> Il est certain qu'on ne se demandait pas assez sérieusement, jusqu'à présent, dans quelle mesure l'image de la femme désirée serait prédéterminée par l'image de l'homme qui désire, donc en dernier lieu par une série de projections du phallus, qui iraient

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[12] Hans Bellmer, *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, Paris, Éditions Allia, p. 10.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[14] « *Le goût de la réversibilité qui est à l'origine des mots.* », ibid., p. 19.

[15] *Ibid.*

progressivement du détail de la femme vers son ensemble, de façon que le doigt de la femme, la main, le bras, la jambe ne soient le sexe de l'homme[16].

From this point of view, the game plays an important role: thanks to games, it is possible to discover new combinations, which reveal unexpected interrelations between the inside and its expression. Surrealism gave great importance to games and the imagination, which are linked. Parallel to this, in surrealism we also find a rehabilitation of violence as the expression and the mystery of the subconscious. Violence is eroticized — with the major example of Georges Bataille — and Sade becomes an author of reference.

La curiosité de l'homme de vouloir voir et de faire scandaleusement voir l'intérieur, cet intérieur qui restera toujours caché, deviné, derrière les couches successives de la construction humaine et ses dernières inconnues[17].

To resume the main points: Bene's dramaturgy convokes the question of the reversibility of opposites, which concerns the I and You (cannibalism, necrophilia), life and death, the inner-self and the outer-self, the inside and the outside (which implies the fact of *seeing what is impossible to see*). A reversibility which is explored through games, violent games which might remind us of a little girl taking her puppet to pieces, only to find the nothing inside.

Going back to Bene's performance, we find once again this confusion between life and death, and between subjects: the game with the puppet is, in a way, necrophilious (this action of dissembling and reassembling limbs) and evokes a real violence: the violence of disarticulation. Moreover, we do not know who is talking (Achilles? Penthesilea? A mad man?), nor when, where, or why. We do not know from which point of view and from which point of hearing Bene speaks, not least because his voice is constantly deferred due to microphones which work on different sounds and different tones.

In this performance, we find the presence of silence. The silence is heavily loaded because Bene, and the spectator through him, are listening to it. As Piergiorgio Giacchè says, in this performance the spectator listens to a listening[18]. The action of saying turns into the action of listening. And through this strange silence, it is as if we were listening to the arrival, or the return, of something imminent. In connection with this, it is interesting to look at the double definition of "horror" in psychology: horror can be induced by the violent rejection of the consequences of a catastrophe; or it can be provoked by the presentiment of an untimely or imminent death. This silence participates in producing a state of horror as presentiment. The words that Bene says, the sentences—which often go unfinished—seem to come and go from this heavily charged silence and seem to disappear into it, without discontinuity. Regarding the sound, the spectator can hear sudden tearing noises, which flash on and off like sonorous phantoms, abruptly imminent and present, and at the same time already gone.

Thus, everything happens in a virtual way, or better, "elsewhere", and we have the impression that this performance reveals the presence of an absence. In this way,

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[16] Hans Bellmer, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

[18] Piergiorgio Giacché, *Carmelo Bene. Antropologia di una macchina attoriale*, Milano, Studi Bombiani, 2007, p. 195.

obscenity plays with mystery and enchantment, and becomes ob-scene, ob-stage. In this respect, we can remember that *obscenus* signifies above all something fatal, and, moreover, that the name Penthesilea means "compelling men to mourn". But ob-scenity also plays with a fundamental lack of memory: Bene seems to interrupt himself and to mix one story with another, because of an oversight. And one of the last sentences of this performance is precisely: "I have a pain, as it were a pain which, once woke up, we have forgotten."

Kleist's reflection on Friedrich's painting "The Monk By the Sea" in his essay "Sentiments Before Friedriech's Seascape" may be an important key to understand both Kleist's and Bene's operation. Friedrich's painting represents a capuchin-friar standing in front of the sea. The figure is tiny compared with the sea-sky, and hence sea seems to be the main subject of the composition. Kleist talks about the great sensation of being in front of the sea, a sensation in which the "I" gets lost in the feeling of both plenitude and nostalgia. Friedrich represents this sensation by the small size of the capuchin compared with the immensity of the sea. But, at the same time, according to Kleist, it is precisely *because* the situation is represented that it stops the spectator from getting lost in the feeling of *Sehnsucht*. The presence of the capuchin prevents the spectator from forgetting the "I". That is why representation might be avoided, in order, we could say, to have the sea directly: for this purpose, the context of the beach and the presence of the capuchin, and perhaps also the frame of the painting, must disappear.

In Kleist, as in Bene, the concept of what exceeds and what is invisible is explored through the theme of extreme violence, and vice versa. From this point of view, the theme of extreme violence reveals the impossibility of representation. Both Kleist and Bene chose not to represent this extraordinary violence in order to fully convey all its power.

Thus, for his last performance, which is representative of his in-depth dramaturgic research, Bene explores the multiple ties between different versions of the Achille's myth and in particular their rewriting by Kleist through the terrible love story with Penthesilea. In doing so, he composes an intersection between theatrical and philosophical research and the chosen themes: dis-concertment overtakes disconcertment; representation is dismantled by stupor; violence here is like a tear in the invisible, a laceration in what is forgotten, in what is unspeakable.

Atlantide

KLEIST'S *PENTHESILEA:*
A WARRIOR CAUGHT UP BY TRAGEDY

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Résumé : Dans sa *Penthésilée*, Kleist transpose la guerrière éponyme, ancrée dans la tradition épique, sur la scène théâtrale et réécrit son destin en puisant dans les tragédies d'Euripide et de Sophocle. Le modèle des *Bacchantes* est bien connu : il permet de faire de Penthésilée la victime d'une folie envoyée par les dieux qui lui fait tuer son bien-aimé Achille, selon un déroulement qui calque le meurtre de Penthée par sa mère Agavé, mais encore faut-il comprendre que Kleist se fait plus plus tragique et plus dionysiaque qu'Euripide lui-même, en faisant expérimenter à Penthésilée le rite de l'ômophagie au moment clé où elle dévore la chair crue d'Achille, geste jamais explicite chez les bacchantes du substrat euripidéen. Quant à la fin de l'héroïne, c'est sur le modèle de celle de l'Ajax sophocléen qu'elle se construit : le guerrier épique archétypal, condamné au suicide dans le monde tragique, se révèle un modèle parfait pour la Penthésilée kleistienne, que l'amour jette dans une crise identitaire similaire, culminant dans le retour à soi après la scène de folie ; mais là encore c'est sur le mode du dépassement que tout se joue, puisque Penthésilée va mourir sans arme véritable d'un poignard métaphoriquement formé par ses propres sentiments. Kleist parvient ainsi à rendre sensible la violence extrême grâce au jeu de reprise qui lui fait outrepasser ses modèles et repousser les limites de la représentation.

Mots-clés : Kleist, *Penthésilée*, tragédie, Euripide, *Bacchantes*, *Ajax*, Sophocle, violence, anthropophagie, ômophagie, crise de folie, identité, suicide.

Abstract: *In his Penthesilea, Kleist translates the eponymic warrior, rooted in the epic tradition, to theatrical stage, and rewrites her destiny by drawing elements from Euripides' and Sophocles' tragedies. The* Bacchae's *pattern is well known : it allows to make Penthesilea the victim of a madness sent by the gods, which makes her kill her beloved Achilles, in the same way that Agave kills her own son Pentheus, but it must be underlined that Kleist becomes more tragic and more dionysiac than Euripides himself by making Penthesilea experiment the* ômophagia's *ritual at the very moment when she devours Achilles' raw flesh, a gesture that is never explicit in the* Bacchae. *As to the heroin's end, it is built on the model of Sophoclean Ajax: the archetypal epic warrior, condemned to suicide in the tragic world, reveals itself to be a perfect model for the Kleistian Penthesilea, who is thrown by love in a similar identity crisis that culminates in the return to*

consciousness after the madness scene ; but here too, it is based on the pattern of excess, because Penthesilea is going to die without a real weapon, by using a metaphorical dagger made of her own feelings. Kleist achieves thus to make extreme violence clear to our eyes thanks to a type of references that goes over his models and places further the boundaries of representation.

Keywords: *Kleist,* Penthesilea, *tragedy, Euripides,* Bacchae, Ajax, *Sophocle, violence, anthropophagy, ômophagia, madness crisis, identity, suicide.*

K leist's *Penthesilea* is an interesting counterpoint to the theme of war on stage, precisely because of its paradoxical treatment of it: even if its argument is the Trojan war, its characters two of the most archetypal warriors, Achilles 'the best of the Achaeans', and Penthesilea, queen of the warlike people of the Amazons, even if, in this play, war should be everywhere, it is nowhere to be really found.

Another approach, better connected to literary genres, could also contend that this epic subject is in fact becoming a tragic one, thanks to the stage effect and to the choices made by Kleist himself in his rewritings of former tragedies. The reference to Euripides' *Bacchae* is obvious, with an insane Penthesilea killing Achilles in the same manner and with the same details as Agave kills Pentheus, but it seems that Penthesilea could be compared not only to Agave, but also to the other characters that experiment a crisis of madness in surviving Greek tragedy, i.e. to Euripidean Hercules and mostly to his model, the Sophoclean Ajax, both in the eponymous plays, these examples completing each other to reconstruct an entire pattern, closely related to the question of personal identity, and more precisely of their affirmation or negation of identity[1].

AN EPIC IDENTITY UNDERMINED BY LOVE

An Epic Character

In Antiquity, Penthesilea is a well-known character, whose fame has increased with the post-Iliad epics, even if she is not mentioned in the *Iliad*[2], and we find traces of her in more recent texts, which are always citations of or allusions to epic material.

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[1] On the analogies between the case of the Kleistian Penthesilea and the general patterns of tragic madness and identity, see my chapter « Soi-même en héros », in Lucie Thévenet, *Le Personnage, du mythe au théâtre*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2009, more precisely « La folie divine comme révélateur identitaire » p. 183-210, and « « Le héros d'avant – Ajax et Héraklès » p. 211-227.

[2] She is present in the iconography during the 6-5th c. BC, mostly on vases: for example the Exekias' amphora from the British Museum (London B210), black-figure style, from Athens, found in Vulci 540-530 BC, with names on it to identify the characters; or the Munich cup (Munich 2688), red-figure style, Vulci, 470-460 BC, by the so-called Penthesilea painter, but with no names on it.

The most ancient reference is to be found in an abstract of Proclus' *Chresthomathy* by Photius, some kind of literature handbook[3], mentioning a lost epic, the *Ethiopid* by Arctinos from Miletus (7th century BC), one of these epics telling what happens after the *Iliad*, which comprises the whole ending of the Trojan war. The *Ethiopid* begins with the arrival of Memnon, surrounded by an Ethiopian army, and draws the main lines of the story of Penthesilea, apart from her portrait as a blazing warrior queen: she is killed during a battle by the most famous of the Achaeans, Achilles, and at the very moment of her expiring, he falls in love with her.

Almost ten centuries later, Quintus Smyrnaeus told the same story in his *Posthomerica*, a surviving text. The first of the fourteen books recounts the arrival of Penthesilea surrounded by twelve warriors, as she joins the Trojans and promises to kill Achilles. At the end of the ultimate fight between them, Achilles removes her helmet and, struck by her beauty, regrets not having made her his wife. This is love at first and last sight[4]; if love reaches the battlefield and the warriors, it is impossible love, and it can only last a second, unlike the duels and battles.

In other spheres, we can also read a beautiful portrait in the *Eneid* (I, l. 490-493), in fact a painting that Aeneas is looking at in the temple of Juno in Carthago, in which Penthesilea is the archetype of the female warrior, which will be developed in Later Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Mentioned afterwards by Dante, and seen in Hell by the poet and Virgil with another female warrior, Camille from the *Eneid*, one of her 'avatars', her figure will continue to haunt epic texts behind the face of Clorinda in Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

What about Kleist ?

We must skip a few centuries and read the version of the story offered by Kleist, which is really unusual and striking in comparison with the former versions. First of all, Kleist reintroduces the moment of the duel between the two warriors, but he reverses the roles of the main tradition and has Penthesilea kill Achilles. It seems that he has found this variation of the myth in the dictionary of mythology mostly used at the time in Germany, the *Gründliches mythologisches Lexicon* by Benjamin Hederich[5], which is in fact similar to the ancient compilations such as the *Chrestomathia*, or the *Bibliotheca*. In the end of the « Penthesilea » article, the author mentions the alternative killing of Achilles by

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[3] This version is also mentioned in the summary of Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 5, 1: « εἶθ' ὕστερον θνήσκει ὑπὸ Ἀχιλλέως, ὅστις μετὰ θάνατον ἐρασθεὶς τῆς Ἀμαζόνος κτείνει Θερσίτην λοιδοροῦντα αὐτόν. – afterwards, she dies from the hand of Achilles, who, fallen in love with her after her death, kills Thersites who laughed at him. »

[4] Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica*, I, l. 654-674.

[5] First edition in 1724, likely read in Leipzig reedition of 1770 (and now available online: http://woerterbuchnetz.de/Hederich/), according to various editions of the play: Helmut Sembdner, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, Carl Hansen Verlag, München, 1961, p. 933, refers to Hederich's *Lexicon* in the 1770's edition, articles « Amazonen », « Penthesilea », « Pentheus », and to the *Bacchae* and the *Iliad*. See also Hans Rudolf Barth, *Heinrich von Kleist Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 2, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, Frankfurt, 1987, chapter « Quellen », p. 685-693, which mentions this *Lexicon* (« Penthesilea » and « Pentheus » articles), and Ovid (*Met.* III, l. 206-225 for the death of Actaeon) but no tragedy ; Günter Blamberger, *Heinrich von Kleist. Biographie*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2011, p. 326-328, for Hederich and *Bacchae*.

Penthesilea, and refers to a late source, Ptolemaeus Hephaestion[6]. This lost book is alluded to again by Photius in his *Bibliotheca*, which summarizes in the same way that possible end[7], giving a good example of the characteristic logic of reduplication of mythical episodes: « The sixth book (of Ptolemaeus Chennus, also known as Hephaestion) countains the following episode: Achilles, killed by Penthesilea, is resurrected on his mother Thetis' demand, and comes back in Hades after having killed Penthesilea ».

If this article and this obscure version of the myth may have given the idea of the role inversion in the duel, Kleist himself has decided to enhance the character of the Amazonian queen, and maybe therefore to develop the motif of love by transforming a univocal love at first and last sight, into a shared, reciprocal passion, which rises and develops all along the play. The moment of death is all the more pathetic for the spectators[8]. This importance given to love feelings will in fact invade the battlefield, the warriors, the context and the story itself, by placing love at the centre of the war for the Amazons, and presenting love relations as a war for this bellicose race.

A Warrior without a Camp

First of all, if the play starts like in the *Posthomerica*, with the arrival of the Amazons in the battlefield, it begins also with something extremely astonishing: the opening dialogue between Antilochus and Ulysses reveals that there is a terrible fight going on between the Amazons and the Greek army, but without any clear reason. As he says it himself: « Beim Jupiter ! Sie wissen nicht warum ? – By Jove! They do not know why? » (sc. 1, l. 5)[9]. And when Antilochus asks a few lines later: « Was wollen diese Amazonen uns ? - What do the Amazons want from us ? » (l. 12), there is no answer to be given.

In terms of theatrical technique, all these moments are narratives of what has happened in other places: scenes in the battlefield, an incredible chariot race in the steep hills, with an accident which reminds us of that of Hippolytus in Euripides' play. But Kleist uses also another technique which allows him to broaden the limited dimensions of the stage without relinquishing dramatic present and scenic time: the direct observation and narration made by a character from a hill on stage, dramatized by the system of questions asked by the non-viewing others. It offers a kind of variation on the narrative technique, like a live narrative, sometimes intensified by the use of two viewing

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[6] « So erzählen auch wiederum andere, sie habe den Achilles erst selbst erleget, es sey aber solcher aufder Thetis, seiner Mutter, Bitten, wieder lebendig geworden, und habe sodann erst die Penthesilea wieder hingerichtet – Others also tell that she first killed Achilles herself, that he was brought back to life by demand of Thetis, his mother, and then executed Penthesilea in return », Hederich's *Lexicon, op. cit.*, p. 330.

[7] Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 190, 151b29-32: « Τὸ δὲ ς' βιβλίον κεφάλαια περιέχει τάδε, ὡς Ἀχιλλεὺς ὑπὸ Πενθεσιλείας ἀναιρεθείς, δεηθείσης αὐτοῦ τῆς μητρὸς Θέτιδος, ἀναβιοῖ καὶ ἀνελὼν Πενθεσίλειαν εἰς Ἅιδου πάλιν ὑποστρέφει ».

[8] This pattern was developed by Torquato Tasso, in his *Jerusalem Deliverered*, canto 12, with the passion of Tancred for Clorinda, born the moment he sees her in the battlefield, with one huge difference: Kleist presents us with a shared feeling, whereas Clorinda only has feelings for Tancred at the very moment of her death, as he baptizes her.

[9] All traductions of Kleist, Greek plays and other sources, are mine, except when mentioned otherwise.

and describing characters, who complement each other - a new kind of *teichoscopia*, which enhances the epic dimension of the play[10].

As Ulysses concludes in the same scene: « Sie muß zu Einer der Partei'n sich schlagen - She must take sides to fight » (l. 48). Of course, but not for Penthesilea, for this logic is far too rational for her, and there is another way out of the traditional dichotomy of war: fighting both camps, and becoming a third one. Kleist is thereby portraying the queen of the Amazons as an ultimate warrior, an excessive warrior who is at war with everybody, but this attitude could also be read as a gender war, a war of women against men.

Gender war and love story

This is an important track to explore in this play, since this war episode is in fact read by Kleist as a love story between Penthesilea and Achilles, the two best warriors in the battlefield. We should specify here that in the Middle Ages, Penthesilea is also in love, but with Hector, a more civilized and virtuous model of warrior and man, like in the *Roman de Troie*, by Benoît de Sainte-Maure; it offers a signifying counterpoint to the Penthesilea/Achilles couple, which unites two characters far from this moderation: the lion-hearted (θυμο-λέοντα) Achilles, whose rage opens the *Iliad*, and the *furens* Penthesilea, as Virgil called her (or *ferox*, in Propertius[11]) - both described by Kleist as mad and insane throughout the play. This feeling is shared in the same metaphorical manner: love is a fight, and fighting the loved one is a proof of love, particularly for these two hyperbolic warriors.

In fact, as Penthesilea later explains, this is really a war between genders, but its purpose is not to kill all men, but for each female warrior to defeat and capture the male warrior she will marry during the wedding celebration of the war's brides, « the brides of Mars ». Love is a conquest, Amor is a soldier, and the Amazons embody the metaphor of *militia amoris* sung by Ovid, but they also reverse the roles traditionally assigned to genders: the female is now the conqueror, and the male the conquered one.

Love as Defeat and Loss of Identity

What is striking to someone interested in the questions of self enunciation is that the various confrontations with Achilles, and with love in general, lead Penthesilea to solemn affirmations of her identity as a queen and warrior, as if she were conscious of a deep danger for herself, and this will be a crucial element in the subsequent episode of madness.

First, Penthesilea falls in love at the very moment she sees Achilles: her face turning entirely red during an interview, she suddenly interrupts Ulysses with a formal affirmation of her identity as a warrior, as he himself relates:

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[10] Cf. the chapter about *narratio* and hypotyposis by Gabriele Bradstetter, *Interpretationen Kleists Dramen*, Reclam, Stuttgard, 1997, p. 78-95.

[11] Vergilius, *Eneid*, I, 491; Propertius, III, 11, l. 14-17.

> *sie sei*
> *Penthesilea, kehrt sie sich zu mir,*
> *Der Amazonen Königin, und werde*
> *Aus Köchern mir die Antwort übersenden !*

> she is
> Penthesilea, she said turning towards me,
> the queen of Amazons, and it is
> from her quiver that she will send me an answer ! (sc. 1, l. 99-102)

This type of declaration is one of the main tracks to be followed throughout the play to explore the question of the heroine's identity, and the gap between her heroic-epic and tragic dimensions.

The situation gets more complex scene 14 when, after a duel during which Penthesilea has fallen from her horse in scene 8, Achilles gets rid of his armour and weapons, and presents himself deceitfully as the defeated one. The long scene 15 is a beautiful love duet between Penthesilea, who thinks she has conquered Achilles as the Amazon tradition requires, and the willing prisoner. And then, when she is persuaded she is the victorious, and he, her prisoner and captive, she gives then another solemn and significant proclamation of her identity:

> *Ich bin die Königin der Amazonen,*
> *Er nennt sich Marserzeugt, mein Völkerstamm,*
> *Otrere war die große Mütte mir,*
> *Und mich begrüßt das Volk : Penthesilea*

> I am the queen of the Amazons,
> they call themselves born from Mars, my people,
> Otrere was my famous mother,
> and this people greet me with that name: Penthesilea. (sc. 15, l. 1824-1827)

« Penthesilea », repeats and confirms Achilles, but this pause is interrupted by the course of the war, and the troops of both parts are now coming closer, with the revelation of the truth: *she* is the loser, a revelation that must deeply attack this identity she has claimed for herself.

We can measure the emotion that overwhelms her by quoting her former declarations about Achilles in scene 5, when she claimed: « Ich will zu meiner Füße Staub ihn sehen - I want to see him in the dust at my feet », because he has disturbed her pride as a warrior. Then, she continues to mention her identity, but now in the interrogative form, in a sort of self-exhortation, as she asks:

> *Ist das die Siegerinn, die schreckliche,*
> *Der Amazonen stolze Königin,*
> *Die seines Busens erzne Rüstung mir,*
> *Wenn sich mein Fuß ihm naht, zurückespiegelt?*

> Is it the victor, the terrible,
> the proud queen of the Amazons,

> that the mirror of his brazen armour,
> when my foot approaches him, reflects back to me ? (sc. 5, l. 642-645)

« Mich, *mich* die Überwundene, Besiegte ? - (...) Me, me, the conquered one? the defeated one? » she continues to ask (l. 650), before concluding that she must « overcome him, or live no more – ihn (...) überwinden, oder leben nicht ! » (l. 655). In these lines, she really questions her own identity when in love, as if the feelings were attacking it, changing it, with the risk of destroying it, in the same way as the Euripidean Herakles in the eponymous play feels that his heroic identity is threatened and literally negated if he does not go to rescue his children captured by Eurystheus: « οὐκ ἄρ' Ἡρακλῆς / ὁ καλλίνικος ὡς πάροιθε λέξομαι – I will not be called Herakles / the one with beautiful victories, as previously » (l. 581-582).

Afterwards, Achilles challenges Penthesilea to another duel to offer her the victory she needs to accept their union; he goes almost unarmed, and confident with the fact that she will not harm him, just as in their former confrontations; Penthesilea, believing that she has been lured and that « Der mich zu schwach weiß, sich mit ihm zu messen, / Der ruft zum Kampf mich, Prothoe, ins Feld ? - The one who knows I'm too weak to measure myself against him, calls me to struggle in the battlefield, Prothoe? » (sc. 20, l. 2384-2385), is overcome by a fighting rage, a real crisis of madness. She goes after him fiercely, chases him, and bites him to death, devouring him with her dogs. The inversion thus takes place at all levels: Penthesilea kills Achilles instead of the opposite in the most common myth; the strange real fight of love turns into a fight to real death.

THE TRAGIC LOSS OF EPIC IDENTITY

Tragic Madness

What has happened? What can explain such a reversal? At the level of literary genre, we can say that at this point of the play, Penthesilea is caught up by tragedy, and more precisely by tragic figures, by the characters who have made the experience of madness on stage before her in Greek tragedies. In fact, a comparative reading of the madness of Euripides' Agave and Herakles, and of Sophocles' Ajax may explain her attitude, as puzzling as it seems for the spectators and for the other characters, when she is called « diese rätselhafte Sphinx – this mysterious sphinx » at the beginning of the play by Antilochus (sc. 1, l. 207).

Penthesilea has already been called mad since the beginning of the play, but her madness reaches its climax here, and she really experiences a « Verstandes Sonnenfinsternis – an eclipse of reason », as Prothoe says (l. 2902). The different phases are exactly the same as for Agave in the *Bacchae*, as many scholars have noted[12],

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[12] Apart from the notes in the text editions quoted above note 5, see also Günter Blamberger, *Heinrich von Kleist. Biographie*, p. 328-329; Doris Claudia Borelbach, *Mythos-Rezeption in Heinrich von Kleists Dramen*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 1996, chapter II, « Penthesilea », p. 53-110 in general, and p. 74-95 about *Bacchae* and Dionysos more specifically, but without close references to the text of Euripides' play: the link to Dionysos seems to be the main subject; she quotes Bernhardt Böschenstein, « *Die Bakchen* des Euripides in der Umgestaltung Hölderlins und Kleists », in Stanley A. Corngold (ed.), *Aspekte der Goethezeit*,

sometimes explaining that after having read the « Penthesilea » article in Hederich's *Lexicon*, he continued on the same column, and read the « Pentheus » one[13]. Kleist refers to certain details with an accurate precision, and the *Bacchae* can truly be called an hypotext of *Penthesilea*, as Jean-Marie Valentin does[14]: the narrative of Achilles' hunting and how he takes refuge on top of a pine-tree is a quotation from the second narrative in *Bacchae*; the moment of self-presentation of the victim, who tries to be recognized by his hunter is exactly similar; and so are the steps of the long scene of Agave's recovery, with a strange and frightening euphoric phase, before the lucid horror.

But a close comparison of the two plays shows that Kleist has chosen to radicalise the Euripidean framework and the dionysiac context much more than appears at first reading.

More Tragic and more Dionysiac than Euripides

Euripides had reached a sort of tragic climax with the *sparagmos* of Pentheus, the ritual dismemberment – usually one of animals but here of a human body – a climax which is also one of tragedy as a genre, at the end of its great period of production, which now tears dead body into pieces and experiences its own end. Kleist goes further, by focusing on another dionysiac rite, only alluded to in the *Bacchae* – the *ômophagia*, the act of eating

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Göttingen, 1977; see also Jochen Schmidt, *Heinrich von Kleist. Studien zu seiner poetischen Verfahrensweise*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1974, p. 236-239, in his chapter « Entscheidende Wirkung des Euripides auf die *Penthesilea*. Kleist und Euripides », p. 234-241; *Heinrich von Kleist. Die Dramen und Erzählungen in ihrer Epoche*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 2003, p. 111-113.

Another important reference is the Euripidean *Hippolytus*, for the general pattern, the context of the hunt, and the link to the goddess Artemis, according to Jochen Schmidt, *Studien*, p. 235-236; these points concern both main characters, and we could add that the motif of the dislocated body of the young and beautiful hero echoes the death and character of Achilles. The influence of the Euripidean play is also to be found through Seneca's *Phaedra*, as Helen Slaney reminds us, in « Schlegel, Shelley and the 'Death'of Seneca », *Brill's Companion to Roman Tragedy*, edited by George W. M. Harrison, Leiden/Boston, 2015, p. 311-329: as she says p. 319: Achilles, like Hippolytus, is an « ideal of masculine beauty, pursued by a powerful queen driven mad by an inner conflict between desire and duty », and the atmosphere of Kleist's play is even more Senecan than Euripidean.

[13] Herman Salinger, in his article « Heinrich von Kleist's *Penthesilea*: Amazon or Bluestoking », *Comparative Drama*, vol. 1, n° 1 (spring 1967), p. 49-55, specifies p. 53-54 that in the edition of 1770, the article on Penthesilea goes from column 1939 to half of column 1940, and that we find on the other half of 1940 the article about Pentheus, and the end on the next page on column 1941; he refers to 'Quellen' notes on the edition by Helmut Sembdner, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, I, p. 933, where the indication of the columns is nowhere to be found, but is included in the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag edition, *Heinrich von Kleist. Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 2, by Hans Rudolf Barth, p. 688-689, even if not analyzed.

[14] Jean-Marie Valentin, « Ὀρειβασία, σπαραγμός, ὠμοφαγία. Kleist, *Penthésilée* et le retour du dionysiaque euripidien » (*sic*), *Études germaniques*, janvier-mars 2012, n° 1, p. 7-42: « Il reste que *Penthésilée* s'édifie, dans ses scènes les plus cruelles et les plus denses, sur un véritable hypotexte, les *Bacchantes*. Parler simplement de rencontre comme on l'a souvent fait, est de peu de profit. L'idée de « remodelage » introduite par W. Müller-Seidel (dans l'ignorance de la filiation philologique) traduit mieux en revanche la réalité », p. 24 - 'hypotext' as defined by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1982, p. 11-12; in note, he calls « Umformung » the notion of 'remodelage', which is present as a verb (« um sie umzuformen ») in W. Müller-Seidel's text, at the end of p. 145, but on a broader subject than only Euripides (Walter Müller-Seidel, « *Penthesilea* im Kontext der deutschen Klassik », in Walter Hinderer, *Kleists Dramen. Neue Interpretation*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1981, p. 144-171.

raw meat. Indeed, there is only allusion to it in the *Bacchae*, in the epod of the beautiful *parodos*, an hymn to bacchic joy, with the famous line 139: « ἀγρεύων / αἷμα τραγοκτόνον, ὠμοφάγον χάριν – *hunting / the blood of the killed goat, joy of* ômophagia – *of eating raw meat!* ». But the allusion here is to animal flesh.

In fact, the first narrative of the third episode is more subtle when the messenger describes the Theban bacchants on the Citheron, and the ritual *oreibasia*, the wild run to the mountain, during which they tear into pieces cows and bulls. The only possible allusion to *ômophagia* is the moment of rest after the run during which:

> Πάλιν δ' ἐχώρουν ὅθεν ἐκίνησαν πόδα
> κρήνας ἐπ' αὐτὰς ἃς ἀνῆκ' αὐταῖς θεός,
> νίψαντο δ' αἷμα, σταγόνα δ' ἐκ παρηίδων
> γλώσσῃ δράκοντες ἐξεφαίδρυνον χροός.

> **They came back to the place from where they had moved their feet,**
> **to the same sources as the god had brought them to,**
> **they washed the blood, and what dripped from their cheeks,**
> **the snakes licked it to make their skin bright.** (l. 765-768)

Blood drips on cheeks, but there is nothing more precise in Euripides' words[15].

Certain scholars also see in the quick mention of the abduction of children[16] another possible allusion, not to animal *ômophagia*, but to human. Would Euripides in the same narrative, at the beginning of the play, already exceed those implied limits? Animal *ômophagia* is clearly underlined in the play, what of the human one? Jean-Marie Valentin asserts that « la dévoration de l'homme n'y a en revanche pas lieu – devoring man however does not occur »[17], but could such devoration really happen? He quotes the horrified reaction of the chorus to Agave's invitation to share the feast banquet (l. 1096); this reference mostly shows that human manducation is felt as repulsive, and could not have occurred[18].

Euripides has drawn a parallel between animal and human victims in the hands of the bacchants and it may have been a track to follow further, from hands to teeth. If the ritual *sparagmos* can shift from animal to human, what of *ômophagia*? It must be the same, and a bacchant must be able to devour raw human flesh, and not only that of animal. Again we must stress that this movement is almost hidden in Euripides' text, but this is no longer the case in Kleist' play.

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[15] Contrary to J.-M. Valentin's affirmation that *ômophagia* is « largement présente dans le premier récit du messager - widespread in the first messenger's narrative », *art. cit.*, p. 28.

[16] *Bacchae*, l. 754: « ἥρπαζον μὲν ἐκ δόμων τέκνα – they snatched children from the houses ». In his commentary of this line (*Bacchae*, Oxford, 1960), E. R. Dodds mentions vases with scenes of baby-stealing ; about the British Museum pyxis by the Meidias painter (E 775), he concludes « perhaps she is going to eat him, as the daughters of Mynias in their madness ate the child Hippasos ».

[17] J.-M. Valentin, *art. cit.*, p. 28.

[18] According to Monique Halm-Tisserand, « Le *sparagmos*, un rite de magie fécondante », *Kernos*, 17, 2004, p. 119-142, the *ômophagia* is not a ritual reality, and she shows that the most important part of bacchic rituals was in fact to throw the animals' disembered parts, a ritual gesture in order to fertilize and regenerate the earth.

Euripides invites us to imagine a human *ômophagy*, a form of *homo-phagy* as specific anthrophagy, which must now be divided into cooked meat and raw meat anthropophagy. This is an extreme case, from the anthropological point of view, and even if in the most terrible Greek myths, Tantalus, Atreus, Philomela and Procne have served human meat as part of their revenge, it was cooked, not raw. An example of the victim's devoration out of pure and bestial determination, is nowhere to be found, even in Seneca. Kleist, for his part, depicts with his Penthesilea the portrait of an extreme bacchant, an adept of dionysiac madness that pushes back the boundaries much further than does Agave, and Euripides behind her.

Penthesilea is led not only to kill Achilles but also to bite and devour him like a dog. And we must reinvestigate here another mythical figure, that of Actaeon, the very cousin of Pentheus, a real hunter who dies torn to pieces by his dogs after having been turned into a stag by the hunteress-goddess Artemis, a goddess he has accidentally seen bathing[19]. His death is alluded to by Cadmos in the first episode as a warning to Pentheus[20], but which death is the most horrible, to be torn to pieces by one's own mother and aunts, or to be devoured by one's own dogs? Once again, Kleist goes further in his rewriting, by combining the two examples, and carrying them further: hunting dogs and bacchant hunteress are now united into a single executioner, who tastes the flesh of his victim, like a new kind of much more savage Artemis.

Loss of the Heroic Self

What can happen after such a crime? Kleist does not end his play just after, but he cannot follow further the example of Euripides after the long and moving scene of Agave's recovery, because the *Bacchae* does not really have a proper end: the last part of the play is mutilated, and even if it were not, Pentheus' death is seen as sufficient punishment for Agave, and the problem of self identity after the crime is not explained in details by Euripides. In fact, he has already dealt with it in his *Herakles*, which is on this point a close rewriting of Sophocles' *Ajax*[21], and this is precisely the logic we can find in the end of Kleist's *Penthesilea*, and a more accurate one due to the heroic and warrior identity of these two characters, much closer to the Amazonian queen at the Trojan siege than to the Theban princess Agave. In fact, Penthesilea is closer to a Sophoclean character as described by B.M.W. Knox in *The Heroic Temper*, than to a Euripidean one: they are all central characters, with a dominant presence in the economy of the play, and a firm determination not to betray the ideal vision of their own nature[22].

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[19] The Actaeon-myth is quoted as a significant source in the Ovidian version, by Hans Rudolf Barth, in the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag edition, p. 689; Jochen Schmidt, *Studien*, p. 238; Doris Claudia Borelbach, *Mythos-Rezeption*, p. 79, and p. 83, among others; the reference is obvious.

[20] *Bacchae*, l. 337-340.

[21] On the comparison between the two plays, see also in particular Jacqueline de Romilly, « Le refus du suicide dans l'*Héraklès* d'Euripide », *Archaiognosia*, 1, 1980, p. 1-10 (also published in *Tragédies grecques au fil des ans*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1995, p. 159-169), and Shirley A. Barlow, « Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Herakles* », *Ramus*, 10, 1981, p. 111-128.

[22] Bernard M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper. Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964, and also the application of these patterns to Euripides' Medea in « The Medea of Euripides », *Yale Classical Studies*, 25, 1977, p. 193-225.

Herakles and Ajax are both emblematic heroes, facing an dishonorable act they have committed during a temporary madness sent by the gods, killing children and wife for the first, and failing to kill the Achaean leaders and slaughtering animals instead for the second. As for Agave, his madness is followed by a moment of recovery, a return to sanity which is a return to self-consciousness[23], the next step being the actual recognition of the close relative or animal substitute, now dead, in a peculiar kind of recognition scene: the identification that operates now is that of a dead body. But the consequences of this step are really different for the men and warrior, even if one is a father, than for the woman and mother: the full understanding of the actions done unconsciously lead the men heroes to a deep identity crisis, a non-recognition of self, expressed in phrases like « it's not me who did this – *I* did not do it », as if the moment of non-recognition was duplicating and reversing itself.

The eclipse of consciousness paradoxically triggers an retrospective awareness, as if the consciousness was moving from one moment in time to another, and this temporal movement leads to a temporal reading of personal identity, now divided into two parts: a before and an after, a figure of the past, even recent, and a figure of the present, which is in fact a sort of negation of the first one, a figure that will no longer be the self in the present, a figure that can be called « the hero as he was before ». As Ajax complains to the streams of the Scamander river:

> οὐκέτ' ἄνδρα μὴ τόνδ' ἴδητ', ἔπος
> ἐξερέω μέγ', οἷον οὔ τινα Τροία
> στρατοῦ δέρχθη χθονὸς μολόντ' ἀπὸ
> Ἑλλανίδος· τανῦν δ' ἄτιμος
> ὧδε πρόκειται.

> *You will no longer see this man I am,*
> *such a hero that Troy – if I may use big words –*
> *has never seen his equal coming with the army from the Greek*
> *land. For now, dishonoured,*
> *he lies down this way, as dead. (l. 419-427)*

The first words he uttered on stage were an address to the chorus, a form of self-portrait in interrogative form, a portrait of himself as a hero, which is now being questioned, before it is negated (l. 364-366). The heroic self is now a past one, and will never be present again. The previous heroic identity becomes irrelevant in the present, after its dishonourable actions, and it seems that the self itself is now lost.

More Tragic and less Epic than Sophocles

This is where a comparative reading makes it possible to reconstruct Penthesilea's itinerary, further than Agave's track. Ajax is a warrior, at the Trojan war, and he commits suicide because he cannot live with the burden of a totally unheroic act: having failed in

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[23] In French the expression « revenir *à soi* » (« coming back to oneself ») is quite significant for « to come round ».

killing his enemies, and having made himself a fool by slaughtering animals instead[24]. He is also an epic warrior, who does not find his place in the new world of tragedy, « a hero whose epic song has become impossible »[25], and his sword can be seen as the symbol of his rigidity, of an impossible adaptation to new values and to the new genre of tragedy[26].

Penthesilea, also a warrior in the Trojan war, is facing with similar contradictions, but her problem is no longer an attempt against her heroic and warrior self, as it could have been in the beginning before falling in love, as when she claims she cannot be an Amazon Queen if she is defeated by a man. Her problem is now that of a lover: she has killed her betrothed, and outrageously mutilated his body as only an animal can have done, two actions that are separated in her own words at the stage of recovery. There is in this part of the play a duplication of recognition, because Penthesilea separates the act of killing, which she herself admits she could have done, from the act of mutilation, which even for her remains unthinkable, and therefore damaging (sc. 24).

The animalization of characters is constant in epic poetry, and so it is in Kleist' writing, where it is not only a manner of making the story epic, but also a driving force for action: Achilles is a prey hunted by Penthesilea, but as mentioned before, the huntress has become part of the pack of the dogs, and devours her prey like Actaeon's dogs devour their master. And we could also read an echo to the animals killed by Ajax, when Achilles is seen as an animal prey, and reverse the reading to see Penthesilea becoming an animal when biting Achilles, a substitution that leads her to the worst of actions, and to death. The animal reference is in the two plays a symbol of the deep meaning of the action, and its fateful consequences.

After this terrible act, and after having recognized that *she* has done it, she abdicates her identity as queen and warrior: first, just before she emerges from the mist of unconsciousness, she drops her bow, a gesture which rouses fear amongst her companions, and just after the recognition, she says:

> – *Ich will dir sagen, Prothoe,*
> *Ich sage vom Gesetz der Fraun mich los,*
> *Und folge diesem Jüngling hier.*
>
> I am telling you, Prothoe,
> I say that I am abandoning the law of women
> and following that young man here. (sc. 24, l. 3011-3013)

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[24] With the famous theme of the enemies' laughter, see Dominique Arnould, *Le rire et les larmes dans la littérature grecque*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1990, in the chapter « Γελῶσι δ᾽ἐχθροί dans la tragédie », p. 36-42; Carles Miralles, « Le rire chez Sophocle », p. 407-424, in *Le rire des Grecs. Anthropologie du rire en Grèce ancienne*, M.-L. Desclos (ed.), Editions Jérôme Millon, Grenoble, 2000.

[25] See David Bouvier, *Le sceptre et la lyre. L'Iliade ou les héros de la mémoire*, Editions Jérôme Millon, Grenoble, 2002, chapter « La tragédie ou la poésie privée de sa fonction épique », p. 128, and also on the making of the Sophoclean Ajax figure after various epic sources, François Jouan, « *Ajax*, d'Homère à Sophocle », *L'Information littéraire*, 2, 1987, p. 67-73.

[26] Charles Segal, « Visual Symbolism and Visual Effect in Sophocles », *Classical World*, 74, 1981, p. 125-142 (published in French as « Symbolisme visuel et effets visuels chez Sophocle », *La Musique du sphinx*, Paris, La Découverte, 1987, p. 79-106).

Then, when Prothoe wants to take her dagger, she gives it willingly and her arrows with it: she abandons her weapons; a few lines later, she is dead, « *Sie fällt und stirbt - she falls down and dies* », as the stage direction concludes.

If in tragedy suicide is generally reserved for women[27], one must not forget that the essence of Penthesilea is that of a warrior and therefore a male essence, and her gesture is therefore closer to Ajax' or to Herakles' willing-death. And in the same situation, Agave, a woman, does not kill herself, because she is not experimenting the same loss of identity.

Nevertheless, Penthesilea's death is a strange one. Whereas Ajax symbolically employs Hector's famous sword, the young woman has already abandoned her dagger, as previously mentioned, and Kleist goes here further than any ancient writer would have gone: he stages a weaponless suicide, making us understand that an Amazon without her bow and dagger, who says that she has abandoned the law of women, is already dead.

In the text, there is indeed a weapon, but a metaphorical one, for she says that she is going deep into her breast, as into a mine, and digging for a destructive feeling, cold as a mineral. She purifies it in the fire of misery, to make it strong as steel, she waters it with the corrosive poison of remorse, she places it on the anvil of hope, and sharpens it, to make it into a dagger, and with this dagger she reaches her heart (sc. 24, l. 3025-3034). In this play, metaphors become true: love is a war, a lover can devour his loved-one, a confusion between words can lead to death[28], and one can die of a feeling, sharp as a knife in the heart[29], one can commit suicide using one's mind as a weapon.

CONCLUSION

Kleist thus experiments the power of words, and elaborates a play in tension between epic and tragic, where both genres are taken to their extremes.

Epic is the main framework: Kleist stages two hyperbolic warriors, the « best of the Achaeans » and the leading queen of a warlike nation, but chooses to reverse their roles and to develop the love episode between them, transforming the battlefield of enemies into a battlefield of lovers, at the level of sexual gender, men against women, the Amazons chasing both Trojans and Achaeans. Nevertheless, Kleist does not avoid epic poetry, thanks to the narratives and *teichoscopiae* describing war, but also, more subtly, thanks to the epic animal metaphors applied to characters, tragically brought to the level of reality and made true with Achilles' terrible death.

Then the rules of theatre and tragedy catch up with the characters in the play: Achilles dies like a new Pentheus, with a body not torn to pieces, which has been considered as the climax of the tragic genre, but mutilated by human and animal teeth, a manner of dying that never occurs in Greek tragedy, which extends the boundaries of the genre. Penthesilea, his murderer, and a new Agave, dies in fact as a new Ajax, but after getting rid of her emblematic weapons, and without a real weapon, whereas Ajax committed

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[27] Antigone, Phaidra, Dejanira, Eurydice, Jocasta... see Nicole Loraux, *Façons tragiques de tuer une femme*, Hachette, Paris, 1985.

[28] The famous confusion between "Küsse" and "Bisse".

[29] The heroin reminds here of another famous female character in German drama: Hugo von Hofmannstahl's Elektra who, one century later, dances herself to death after the revenge she was keeping herself alive is achieved.

suicide epically, with his famous sword. Just as Ajax understands the full meaning of his name when he laments and shouts an *"Aiai"* close to *Aias* (*Ajax*, l. 430-431), just as Tiresias unsuccessfully wishes that Pentheus does not bring *penthos* – πένθος, the mourning, the grief hidden in its name, on his family (*Bacchae*, l. 367), similarly Penthesilea must fulfill the deep meaning of her name also linked to *penthos*, and die tragically like the other Greek characters before her.

If Kleist' plays have been seen as reactions against the idealised vision of Ancient Greece which had been conveyed by Schlegel, Goethe and Schiller[30], with Sophocles as a supreme classical dramatist against a too dionysiac Euripides, the example of Penthesilea shows that there is in fact a subtle combination of Greek tragic sources, and a great misreading of Sophocles' plays by German philhellenism, which Kleist has contributed to amend[31].

Ατlantidε

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[30] We are schematizing, following Walter Müller-Seidel, « *Penthesilea* im Kontext der deutschen Klassik », p. 144-145; Jochen Schmidt, *Die Dramen und Erzählungen in ihrer Epoche*, p. 107-110; Doris Claudia Borelbach, *Mythos-Rezeption*, « das Skandalon der *Penthesilea* », p. 95-110; Helen Slaney, « Schlegel, Shelley and the 'Death' of Seneca », p. 312-318.

[31] Another example is the correspondence between Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Kleist's *Robert Guiscard*, with among others the terrible motif of the plague, which is neither pure nor classical.
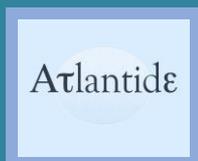
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