

KATERINA ARVANITI

“ATTRACTIVE PERFORMANCES”: SOME INTERESTING PRODUCTIONS OF SOPHOCLES’ *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS*, *OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*, *ANTIGONE AND ELECTRA**

Contemporary productions of ancient Greek drama dominate the interests of 20th and 21st century directors. Many theatre writers draw their subjects from tragic texts mainly because of the adaptability of the tragic myth. Sophocles’ surviving tragedies form an important part of the history of the performances of tragic plays.¹ At the same time, contemporary dramaturgy seeks its own identity through the myths of the Sophoclean tragedy. *Antigone* (1922) and *La machine infernale* (1932) by Cocteau, *Oedipe* (1931) by Gide, and *Antigone* by Anouilh (1944) for example, are concerned with the interwar years.

However, Camus, Brecht and Heiner Müller try to assign the meaning of ‘tragic’ according to sociopolitical data of their age through Sophocles’ surviving plays. Nevertheless, dramatic texts that use tragic myth as a background to new work, rather than as an adaptation of Sophocles will not form a part of this paper which will concentrate on the stage productions of Sophocles’ tragedies that deal with the myth of the Labdakids and *Electra*. The decision is due to restrictions on the length of the paper and because of the systematic revival of the aforementioned plays during the 20th and 21st centuries. It is self-evident that the choices and the evaluations made on particular productions are dependent, amongst other things, on the subjectivity of the author. This is more obvious as we approach recent decades. Needless to say, the well documented productions receive a more detailed analysis. Despite all methodological and practical problems mentioned above, the historical evaluation of the performances of particular plays presents us with the opportunity to understand better (not only quantitatively but also qualitatively) the representation of ancient Greek tragedy in contemporary years. Furthermore, we are presented with useful and stimulating examples of productions that develop the performative techniques adopted for the tragic plays.

A very important issue which is considered in relation to the productions discussed is that of ‘authenticity’: is the performance close to the tragic text and to the conditions of the first representation or not? Is the myth of the dramatic play transferred to a contemporary

* The present article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Symposium «Sophocles 2500 Years: Modern Approaches» organized by the Hellenic Centre of the International Theatre Institute in Athens, July 4th 2004. Some important productions performed since as well as the bibliography published since (especially the very recent, revised edition of the very important book of Helmut Flashar) are included. For this revised version, I would like to thank my colleague Stavros Tsitsiridis who read the text and made enlightening observations. I also thank Prof. M. J. Walton

who commented upon the text and made helpful suggestions.

¹ See the general presentation on the subject by F. Macintosh, «Tragedy in Performance: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Productions», in P. E. Easterling (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 284-322. See also H. P. Foley: «Modern Performance and Adaptation of Greek Tragedy», *Transaction of the American Philological Association* 129 (1999), pp. 1-12.

cultural and socio-political background? The problem has been addressed by Oliver Taplin in the following words: "Authenticity or freedom? To attempt as close as possible a reproduction of the original performance, or to give uninhibited rein to a modern reframing?"² The choice for many of the Greek directors in general is determined by their belief that tragedy belongs to their own cultural inheritance and thus they feel it is their duty to revive the plays according to the demands of the Greek tradition. The rest of the directors approach Greek tragedies as universal plays that deal with contemporary concerns in a way that touches contemporary audiences.

The history of the revival of Sophocles' tragedies is based on the interpretative process adopted by the director who either attempts to "revive" the play or to approach it "critically". Any reference of the kind is accompanied by our conviction that there is not only one kind of representation or one kind of intervention. At the same time, the main directorial approach will be analyzed – political, feminist etc. – so as the mainstream of approaches in the performances of Sophocles' plays will be revealed.

Any reference to the production of Sophocles' plays should take its start from the performance of *Oedipus Rex* which inaugurated the Teatro Olimpico in Vincenza (1st of March 1585) and became a turning point in the history of the revivals of ancient Greek tragedy. The play was translated in "lingua volgare" by Orsatto Giustiniani and the music of choral odes was written by Andrea Gabrieli.³ The play was directed by the well-known director, Angelo Ingegneri.⁴ There is a detailed description of the performance thanks to Filippo Pigafetta's notes. From the notes we assume that the direction could not possibly be characterized as an archaeological representation of the play because of the emphasis given to the visual aspect, especially the royal wealth (This can be partly connected to the reference – as it was then believed – of Aristotle's *Poetics* to the *mimesis* of "important" people): Oedipus had a retinue of 28 archers, servants and courtiers. Jocasta had an entourage of 25 nurse-maids, ladies in waiting and maidservants while Creon too, had 6 attendants. The costumes were very impressive while splendour and luxury were predominant (for example, in v. 4, where a reference is made to the fragrant incense that floods the city, the theatre was sprinkled with perfume); the performance was introduced by the sound of trumpets and drums and the explosion of fireworks. According to the critics, the performance was characterized by the accuracy of its directorial approach.⁵ According to Pierre Vidal-Naquet,⁶ the performance was characterized as political because of the political evidence accompanying it (Teatro Olimpico was built by the "Olympic Academy" at the expense of the academics and all of those they wanted to

² O. Taplin: *Greek Tragedy in Action*, Routledge: London 1978, pp. 172-3.

³ The texts written by Giustiniani and Gabrieli have been published exemplarily by L. Schrade, *La Représentation d'Edipo Tiranno au Teatro Olimpico (Vincence 1585)*, Paris 1960.

⁴ Ingegneri was the author of the first book on directing a play in modern times (*Modo di Rappresentare le Favole Sceniche*, 1598), in which he refers only to examples taken from *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

⁵ For the production see H. Flashar: *Inszenierung der Antike. Das griechische Drama auf der Bühne von der*

frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart, 2nd ed., revised and expanded, Beck: Munich, 2009, 25-32. See, also R. Beaucham: «Europe», in J. M. Walton's *Living Greek Theatre*, Greenwood Press: New York 1987, pp. 298-9, and W. Puchner: «The Influence of Ancient Greek Drama in Europe from the Renaissance to the Early Twentieth Century», in *Greek Classical Theatre, Its Influence in Europe*, (Cultural Centre of the Municipality of Athens) Athens 1993, p. 56.

⁶ P. Vidal-Naquet: «Oedipus in Vincenza and in Paris: Two Turning Points in the History of Oedipus», in J.-P. Vernant – P. Vidal-Naquet: *Myth and Tragedy in An-*

obtain equality before the law) and because of the translation which does not neglect – on the contrary, sometimes it stresses – the dimension of *polis*.⁷

Oedipus Tyrannus as a play is performed very often not only because of its established interpretation through Aristotle's *Poetics* (its plot was considered paradigmatic by Aristotle: 14.1453^b6-7), but also because of the political 'dimension' of the original, apparent in the nineteenth-century productions of the play as well.⁸ Moreover, Sigmund Freud's 'Oedipus complex' influenced the frequency of the performances of the play. The next production of the play which marked the history of its performances has been influenced by the 'Oedipus complex' as well.⁹ It is Max Reinhardt's *Oedipus Rex*, translated by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1910-1912).

Reinhardt's *Oedipus Rex* was first performed at the open space of Musikfesthalle in Munich, transferring the following month to the Zirkus Schumann in Berlin. It was considered phenomenally successful and greatly influenced the performance of Attic tragedy as whole during the 20th century. The production went on tour throughout Europe and Russia. Reinhardt's approach was characterized by the crowd-scenes and his emphasis on the visual elements of performance. The moral and religious implications of the original were not stressed. On the contrary, Hofmannsthal's translation focused on the drama of the individual. He explored Oedipus' psychology and examined his reaction to suffering and guilt. On the other hand, the Chorus was individualized. Choral parts were divided among various speakers and were delivered in a rhetorical way. The result was more in the mode of an elevated neo-romantic psychodrama, and the whole approach was reminiscent of Freud's psychoanalytical model.

Reinhardt's direction of the play was not characterized by faithfulness to the original mainly due to his emphasis on spectacular visual effects. The most obvious example occurs prior to the announcement of Jocasta's death. Reinhardt in his *Regiebuch* describes a spectacular occasion according to which noises and cries come from the palace; torchbearers race onto the stage; breathless whispers are heard starting with the word [...]. Then, a servant above on the steps delivers the whole sentence: "the queen is dead", and collapses.¹⁰ Reinhardt adds new scenes to Sophocles' play although he intended to enliven the play for a modern audience. The same held true for the massive crowd – 500 or 600 people – which was placed on a wide corridor through the auditorium. Crowd scenes were a spectacular addition. Their movements were rhythmical and orchestrated.

cient Greece, Engl. transl., New York 1988, pp. 361-80.

⁷ In 1994 Theodoros Terzopoulos staged Sophocles' *Antigone* at Teatro Olimpico in Vincenza in Italian – apart from the choral odes which were mainly delivered in ancient Greek – with Italian and Greek cast. (The play was performed again in 1995 at the festival of Epidavros. In 1996 the production was performed in Japan, Korea and China). The minimal set of the production sharply contrasted with the luxury of the 1585 production of *Oedipus Rex*. See also, Marianne McDonald: «Theodoros Terzopoulos, a Director for the Ages: Theatre of the Body, Mind and Memory» in *Reise mit Dionysos. Das Theater des Theodoros Terzopoulos*, Herausgegeben von Frank M. Raddatz, Theat-

er der Zeit, 2007, pp. 21-4.

⁸ See the very recent book by Fiona Macintosh: *Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus*, Cambridge University Press 2009.

⁹ See H. Flashar, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

¹⁰ R. Matejka: *Max Reinhardt's Antiken-Inszenierungen*, (unpublished doctoral thesis) Vienna 1969, pp. 67-8. For Reinhardt's theatre directions see also the main work of H. Huesmann: *Welttheater Reinhardt. Bauten, Spielstätten, Inszenierungen*, Munich 1983. For his relationship with antiquity, see H. Kindermann: «Max Reinhardt und die Welt der Antike», *Dioniso* 45 (1974) pp. 442-59. Reinhardt's theatre directions present the additional interest of being analysed in detail in

Reinhardt's production of *Oedipus Rex* influenced the first professional Greek approaches to the same play. Photos Politis directed the play, for the first time, in 1919 in an indoor theatre, Olympia, using his own, faithful translation which has closely affected the choices of all Greek National Theatre's directors since 1982.¹¹ He returned to the same play in 1933 as director in charge of the National Theatre.¹² Politis approached the play through his analytical notes (located in the Theatre Museum in Athens) according to the practice followed by Reinhardt. He attempted spectacular performances by using crowd scenes. He also used scenery with similar stairs, palace columns and altars. But, unlike Reinhardt, he insisted on the priority of the speech to the spectacle and gave emphasis to formal diction. Politis treated choruses as the characters of the plays. Alexis Minotis, based on the tradition established by Photos Politis and by Dimitris Rondiris, directed the play in realistic mode in 1951 for the ancient theatre of Delphi. He also played the main part. According to Georgousopoulos, Minotis' *Oedipus* was "a realistic interpretation of consequence; his hero had all the historical substance established by Politis and his theatrical treatment of the play began from the rhythmical tradition of Rondiris, yet avoiding the latter's obsession with rhythm in the chorus pieces."¹³ He repeated the production several times after 1966.

A very important open-air production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* was performed at Park Sanssouci in Potsdam in 1994 under the title *Friedrich der Große und Oedipus Rex*. The production was based on Walter Jens's idea (Walter Jens translated *Oedipus Tyrannus* as well as adding the necessary dialogue): As the courtiers of Potsdam together with Friedrich and Voltaire were sitting for dinner, the famous theatrical group of Conrad Eckhof passed by. Friedrich ordered them to give a performance of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in which he intended to play the role of Teiresias. The play was performed on a staircase with some columns surrounding. The parallel drawn between Oedipus and Friedrich gave Jens the opportunity to comment on the relationship between King and philosopher, spirit and political power, lord and poet.¹⁴

An interesting production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* was directed by Mario Martone in 2000 in Rome for Teatro Argentino based on the translation of G. Paduano. The production made an explicit allusion to the Mafia and to Sicilian *omertà*. The theatre audience participated in the plot as its members respected 'the law of silence': nobody knew anything about Laios! At the same time the chorus members, consisting of Neapolitans, Romans, and foreigners found by the director in the streets of Rome, were sitting in the auditorium and singing to the rhythm of North-African and Indian songs.¹⁵

During the last decades of the 20th century the Oedipus myth was approached in productions which included either *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* in a single performance or the two plays and *Antigone* in the form of a trilogy. This is possibly viewed as an effort of redefinition of the dramatic material in order to be more accessible to a modern audience. *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* draw from different components of the myth and

his *Regiebücher* (in «Max Reinhardt-Forschungs-und Gedenkstätte» of Salzburg).

¹¹ Karolos Koun also used the translation of Photos Politis in his 1969 Art Theatre production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* for Theatre of Herodes Atticus.

¹² Aimilios Veakis held the role of Oedipus in both productions.

¹³ K. Georgousopoulos: «The Interpretation of An-

cient Drama in Greece, during the Twentieth Century» in *Greek Classical Theatre, Its Influence in Europe*, (Cultural Centre of the Municipality of Athens) Athens 1993, p. 110.

¹⁴ See Flashar, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 292. Very interesting was also the production of *Oedipus at Colonus* directed by Martone in 2004 in Rome for the experimental group Teatro Roma.

some thirty years are interposed between them. Such resolutions constitute a readjustment of the myth to contemporary data. Even if the purpose of the director is to inform his/her audience of the development of the story or even if he/she intends to concentrate on the complex relationships of the dramatic persons, the truth is that such a treatment moves away from any intention of the dramatic writer. The first production of the so-called *Theban Trilogy*, presented in 1867 at Vienna's Burgtheater by the renowned Meiningen troupe. The plays were adapted and directed by Adolf Wilbrandt. The director focused upon psychology and character.

In 1992, the Royal Shakespeare Company presented Adrian Noble's version of Sophocles' *Oedipus Plays* under the name *The Thebans* (*Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*) at the Barbican Theatre in a new translation by Timberlake Wertenbaker. The translation was close to the original but in prose. The performance of the three plays lasted for 6 hours. The translation was characterized on the one hand as "direct",¹⁶ and on the other "so plain as to be almost colourless".¹⁷ The production's virtue depends on the presentation of the chorus of 15 persons and to its special function because of the costumes the chorus members wore and of the gestures and movements they performed. Men and women in patently false beards and straw-hats in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* recalled African nobles participating in a ritual. The influence of Commedia dell' arte was apparent in the masks and smocks – all puffed cheeks and pot bellies – of the Athenians at Colonus. Hovering helium balloons embodied the inflated gods and as they descended over the heads of the front-stalls signified their growing or their declining influence to the protagonists.

Adrian Noble's *The Thebans* was a comment on humanity and gods, anarchy and order. Both Oedipus' (Gerard Murphy) partial insistence on discovering the truth and Creon's (John Shrapnel) defiance of natural law constituted a threat to the society. The production of the three plays brought out the belief in human responsibility and fear of civic decay. The director's emphasis was on *Oedipus at Colonus*, a work that combined "lyric beauty, Beckettian pessimism [...] with an astonishing pre-Christian transfiguration".¹⁸ The theatrical rendering of Adrian Noble respected the poetical and structural characteristics of all three plays. But, at the same time, there was a tendency of modernization in presenting the three tragedies in succession. In addition, Noble's approach formed a new inter-cultural code which takes into account all the subsequent theatrical traditions.

In the summer of 1996, Sir Peter Hall opened his Greek National Theatre production of *The Oedipus Plays*, based on Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, at Epidavros. The production was based on stylistic elements which marked the director's approach to the plays from a formal, ritualistic perspective, stressing perhaps the unfamiliarity of a modern audience with ancient Greek drama. The hallmark of his attempt was the use of masks, followed by formal, ceremonial diction and a language of bodily movements.¹⁹ The director

¹⁶ M. Billington: «The Thebans», *Guardian* 12.9.1992.

¹⁷ K. Milne: «Hail the well-drilled Chorus», *Daily Telegraph* 13.9.1992.

¹⁸ M. Billington, *Guardian* 12.9.1992.

¹⁹ According to G. Brown: «Hall's passion for masked theatre stems from a belief in the potency of the mask which allows the actor to experience emotions 'much

more animalistic and enormous than you can easily express with a naked face. If you scream with a naked face, the response of an audience is to recoil, but if you tell them about a scream through a mask, it's the Munch painting, isn't it? Silent and frozen and absolutely horrifying. It has a form like a mask.'» (*The Independent* 14.8.1996).

attempted an archaeological reproduction of the plays (in the manner of his earlier production of the *Oresteia*). But this purpose was not achieved because he used *Oedipus at Colonus* as a short epilogue to the first play, deprived of any meaning of its own. The major cuts of *Oedipus at Colonus* “turned it into an economical second act to the much more conventionally engaging, action packed *Oedipus Tyrannus*”.²⁰ That treatment resulted in “a constant stream of entrances and exits in which the actors seemed, for the most part, insufficiently invested”.²¹

The *Oedipus Plays* were translated by Ranjit Bolt in rhyming couplets for the episodes and a more varied rhyme scheme for the choruses. However, Bolt’s translation “is sometimes uneasily colloquial, coming into its own in the much less familiar second play, [...], which has an almost Chekhovian intimacy after the Lear-grandeur of the first tragedy.”²² The formal character of the production was strengthened by the way the actors and actresses were involved in conversation keeping their bodies and heads facing front even when addressing one another. The impression of a remote ritual, strange to our culture was evident in the setting of the first play. The designer, Dionysis Fotopoulos, created the atmosphere of a plague-ridden city through the animal skeletons scattered on the stage, the mummy-like figures and the dim light escaping from the smoky tubs that ringed the orchestra. The masked faces and the long dresses completed the picture of a foreign tale enacted in front of a contemporary audience. Therefore, Hall’s production of the *Oedipus plays* was characterized by a formal, ritualistic approach governed by an exaggeration of style. His insistence on form has turned *Oedipus Tyrannus* into a remote, foreign tale and *Oedipus at Colonus* into a short epilogue to the first play.

The Greek parallel came years later in the summer of 2008 (Epidavros, 8th and 9th of August) with the Greek National Theatre’s production of the two *Oedipus Plays* directed by Roula Pateraki in a new translation, close to the original text,²³ compiled by her and Yiannis Lignadis. Pateraki gave emphasis to ceremonial diction which characterized the articulation of speech by actors and chorus alike. The verbal formality opposed the contemporary look of the actors’ and actresses’ costumes (designed by Aggelos Mendis) as well as the modern appearance of Michael Marmarinos in the role of Oedipus and Mania Papademitriou in the role of Jocasta. The performance of the two plays was marked by a peculiar inversion of the chronological order as *Oedipus Tyrannus* followed the stage realization of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Accordingly, Oedipus was presented as a victim of his fate and of the curse which ran in his family as the end is followed by the beginning, giving the impression that the same will happen again. Moreover, the inversion goes back to the 5th century conditions of tragic performances as the principle of the “known end” shifts the spectators’ attention from the outcome of the plot to the handling of the myth by the dramatic writer and director.

Oedipus at Colonus as a play is not frequently produced on stage in Europe and elsewhere.²⁴ Lee Breuer’s production of *The Gospel at Colonus* was a notable exception. The play opened up in Broadway in 1988 in a translation by Robert Fitzgerald.²⁵ The myth was

²⁰ M. Beard: «Faster, Louder, Stranger», *Times Literary Supplement* 27.10.1996.

²¹ S. Goetsch, *Didaskalia* 3.3, Winter 1996.

²² S. Morley: «Triumph out of Tragedy», *The Spectator* 7.9.1996.

²³ See V. Aggelikopoulos, *H Kathimerini* 7.8.2008. See also K. Georgousopoulos, «Meres radiophonou tou

‘50», *Ta Nea* 16.8.2008.

²⁴ Michael Walton provided me with the information that in 1959 he directed the play in the grounds of St Andrews Castle.

²⁵ The production is approached in length by S. Patsalidis in his book: *En(taseis) kai (dia)staseis*, [*In(tensities) and Ex(tensions)*], Athens 1997, pp. 381-4.

transferred to a black church. It is a post-modern adaptation in which the original's dramatic structure was transferred in a modern and familiar environment and was transcribed in order to express the interests of a particular modern society or of a racial group. The black church's mass and the music of the gospels were in the centre of the ancient myth's new interpretation. Lee Breuer interviewed by Savvas Patsalidis said:

It was not my purpose either to penetrate into the ancient Greek morals or to show to Greek directors things they know better than me. I used the play of Sophocles as a starting-point in order to develop the African elements of Christianity. [...] I chose ancient Greek theatre because I believed and I still believe that its religious coiling does not differ from the contemporary rituals.²⁶

The main role of the priest-narrator is played by Morgan Freeman who has the role of Oedipus as well. The other characters are all singers. Spectators participate in the way of the African church repeating "amen" and "hallelujah".

The revival of national, cultural inheritance and the formation of a scenic tradition characterize Alexis Minotis' approach to *Oedipus at Colonus*. From 1955 to 1986 Minotis directed and undertook the leading role of Oedipus ten times for the Epidavros festival. The director in all his approaches chose the translations of the well known poet Yiannis Gryparis whose versions monopolized the festival of Epidavros, because of their closeness to the original. Minotis as actor and director approached Oedipus with austerity and realism. In that way he stressed the theology and the religious centre of the play. According to the critic Yiannis Varveris, Minotis rendered the spiritual and theological meaning of the original text.²⁷ The director contributed to the establishment of National Theatre's tradition, according to which the plays of Athenian dramaturgy should be approached with respect to the text and to the conditions of the original performance.

Sophocles' *Antigone* as a dramatic text has been adapted many times by contemporary directors in order to express modern socio-political concerns. However, the stage approach of the play in Greece has been determined by the National Theatre's tradition: formal, bombastic diction, modeled gestures, archaic costumes and emphasis on the role of the chorus. Moreover, the text of the play is taught at schools and thus, the faithful approach to the original is an additional requirement. The restrictions of the tradition do not easily allow the modernized directorial approach as the brief reference to the history of the approaches by the directors of the National Theatre will indicate.

The first Greek National Theatre production of *Antigone* was performed at the Theatre of Herodes Atticus in September 1940. The play was directed by Takis Mouzenidis in the translation of Yiannis Gryparis. The director's approach however, was reproved by some critics because of its "innovative" character: the appearance of Antigone on stage with her hands fastened. The next step in the history of the play's revival was realized in 1956 at Epidavros. *Antigone* was directed by Alexis Minotis in Gryparis' translation. The performance's great success is attributed to the first appearance of Anna Synodinou in the main role (she undertook the same role many times during her career). Minotis approached the play realistically and

See also U. Müller: «'My Fair Oedipus'. Translatio und Re-Sakralisierung antiker Mythen», *Wort und Musik* 7 (1990), pp. 415-36.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 344.

²⁷ Y. Varveris: «Minotis epei Colono», *I krisi tou theatrou, B'* (1984-9), Estia: Athens 1991, p. 129.

the whole performance was characterized by unity of style. The same translation by Gryparis was used in 1969 production of the play by the director, Labros Kostopoulos. Formality and repetition of former practices describe best his approach. In 1974 Alexis Solomos directed a simple, dispassionate *Antigone* and Anna Synodinou had the leading role. The director repeated his production in 1992, using again Gryparis' translation but with Maria Skountzou as Antigone. The production was considered "identical to the 1974's".²⁸ The common element of the above approaches is Yiannis Gryparis' translation although it was considered by some critics as "stiff" from 1956. Manolis Skouloudis pointed out that the main problem of *Antigone* of 1956 was "its rough, verbose, stiff and tortuous translation by the unforgettable poet of *Scarabs and Terracottes*."²⁹

The next two productions of *Antigone* discussed here are more innovative with regard to the translation used and to the stage design. The first was directed in 1984 by Yiorgos Remoundos in a translation compiled by K.Ch. Myres. Maria Skountzou had the leading role. Remoundos' attempt was far removed from the National Theatre tradition. He used costumes of the 19th century (designed by Yiorgos Patsas). He also used elements of Aristophanic comedy, especially in his treatment of the chorus whose members walked restlessly, tripped up one the other, greeted and sung. The last one was translated and directed in 1995 by Minos Volanakis for the National Theatre with Kariofyllia Karambeti in the leading role. The translation was close to the original but the setting, designed by the director himself (in collaboration with Nikos Kasapakis) was Roman, especially the palace. Most impressive was the idea of presenting on stage the underworld through the effigies of the dead. One important element of the production was the interpretation of the role of Teiresias by a female actress Nelli Angelidou. She managed to impersonate the figure "who carries the burden and the depth of time as he comes to deliver his horrifying prophecy to Creon [...]".³⁰

Lefteris Voyatzis' 1992 approach of *Antigone* at his theatre, Theatre of Cycladon Street, is a marked interpretation because it derived from a project which started two years earlier with the young actor-students of his workshop.³¹ The performance was structured around the nine actors of the chorus who sat around a table. Each one left the group in order to assume a distinctive role and returned to it when her or his part was over. In a distinctive moment of the performance, when Creon announces his decisions, the other members of the Chorus hold masks in front of their faces in order to mark the formality of the occasion. The innocence and simplicity, apparent in the costumes of the young actors as well, characterized the whole of the production which was presented as a "chamber tragedy" following the principles of poetic realism.³² The director returned to *Antigone* in 2006 when he directed the play for the National Theatre.³³ In an interview to Myrto Loverdou Voyatzis has admitted that his

²⁸ Y. Varveris, *Kathimerini* 9.8.1992.

²⁹ M. Skouloudis: «Sophocles' *Antigone*», *I Ora* 3.7.1956.

³⁰ E. Varopoulou: «Entrapped to the Festival's Reasoning», *Nees Epoches* 20.8.1995.

³¹ The director said in his interview to Sophia Adamidou that he chose young actors because he wanted to experiment and «the older actors (and actresses) are not willing to work experimentally», *Tachydromos*

13.5.1992.

³² See G. Banu: «The *Antigone* in Cyclades Street», *Art Press* (January, 1993).

³³ It was performed at the ancient theatre of Epidavros the 4th and 5th of August 2006 and the 30th of June and 1st of July 2007. For a critical evaluation of the production see e.g. V. Aggelikopoulos, *Ta Nea* 8.8.2006, K. Georgousopoulos, *Ta Nea* 14.8.2006, and V. Georgakopoulou, *Eleftherotypia* 7.8.2006.

new *Antigone* is "a sequel of the tragedy he directed for a closed theatre space studio" years ago.³⁴ And in fact freshness and simplicity characterized his new approach apparent in his adolescent, impetuous and at the same time insecure *Antigone* of Amalia Moutousi. The production singles out for its artistic scenery designed by Chloe Obolenski,³⁵ and for the formal, clear-cut delivery of speech by Chorus members and by the director himself in the role of Creon. The element that impressed the spectators more was the interpretation of the role of mute Eurydice by a male actor.³⁶

Sophocles' *Electra* as a play-text provides the opportunity of modern directorial approaches that express contemporary socio-political concerns through the relocation of dramatic time to a contemporary environment. Thus, the play acquires unquestionable value through the years. An example of that kind is the three different directorial renderings of the play by Antoine Vitez in translations of his own (1966, 1971, 1986). In all three productions political allusions emerge. According to the director "during the rehearsals of the 1966's *Electra*", Algeria occupied his thought:

Behind his second *Electra* (1971) there was a relationship, real but secret, with Greece of the dictatorship, through Yiannis Ritsos' poems that bracketed Sophocles' text. The third *Electra* is not less political than the others [...] because it takes into account the civil war in Greece, the Greek children who went to the exile following their parents – mainly to Soviet Union – and who, when they returned [...] found their country deformed [...].³⁷

In the 1966 production the actors' and actresses' costumes and the simple stage design did not transfer the action of the play to a contemporary environment. The action took place in classical antiquity. The 1971 production was characterized by the plain scenery, but the references to Ritsos' poems pointed towards Greece. The 1986 production though was relocated to a post-war Greek port. The scenery of the play coincided with "the kitchen of the family of the Atreids". The change of the dramatic time and place affected Sophocles' text although Vitez had declared that "as a translator, he has tried to remain faithful to the text; as a director he does not allow himself to intervene to the original body of the text – even in 1971 when he embodies in his production Ritsos' poems, he does it without cutting/transposing/adapting even one verse by Sophocles".³⁸

The placing of *Electra*'s myth in a psychiatric clinic characterizes the approach of Tanshi Suzuki in his *Electra* which was first performed in Delphi, 1995. The heroine and the rest of the characters are inmates of the Institution. *Electra*'s thought is dominated by the fantasy of taking revenge on her mother whom she holds responsible for all her miseries. The director uses the means and the expertise of Japanese theatre in order to render *Electra*'s fantasies. In the present treatment, the psychological components of the modernized myth are stressed. He uses the theatrical codes of Kabuki and No tradition.

³⁴ *To Vima* 30.7.2006.

³⁵ The orchestra was covered by yellow dead wood of summer and ears of corn.

³⁶ Moreover, the roles of Teiresias and of the two Messengers were played by women.

³⁷ S. Haviaras: *Sophocles' Electra by Antoine Vitez* Uni-

versity Studio Press: Thessaloniki 1992, pp. 15-6.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 113. For Vitez's *Electra* see also A. Neuschäfer: «Antoine Vitez: The Script and the Spoken Word: Intercultural Dialogue in the Theatre», in Pavis (ed.): *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Routledge: London 1996, pp. 131-9.

The modernized treatment of the myth prevails in the production of Sophocles' *Electra* by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Fiona Shaw realized Sophocles' heroine under the direction of Deborah Warner. Fiona Shaw contributed more to the play's outstanding success. The production was first performed in December 15th of 1988 at the Pit in the Barbican Centre. It was revived at the Riverside Studios in December 1991-January 1992 and in North Ireland. Fiona Shaw realized a heroine excessively dominated by the passion of revenge against her mother and Aegisthus. She looked like a vengeful fury: her mourning black dress was torn into rags which revealed her bare flesh with the scratch-marks from her self-mutilating anger. Her hair chopped to the roots and her blazing eyes revealed a drained person who was unable to stand on stage without her roughly curved walking stick. The state of her inhuman rage forbids any emotion to surface "[e]ven when she at long last recognises Orestes, there in no sweetness, no light; only an outburst of jiggling and jabbering as wild as her wails when she thought him dead and streaked her face with his ashes".³⁹ Deborah Warner's approach and Fiona Shaw's realization of the role of *Electra* constituted a feminist approach to Sophocles' play based on the heroine's unconventional, irreconcilable and independent nature. *Electra's* feminist interpretation resulted in an unfavourable treatment of Clytemnestra who was presented with the characteristics and the weakness of the traditionally attractive female beauty.

A strict textual fidelity characterized the deliverance of speech by the actors and the actresses of Greek National Theatre's production of Sophocles' *Electra* for the festival of Epidavros (10th and 11th of August) 2007, directed by Peter Stein. The director based his approach on Minos Volanakis' translation of the play as it was "remade" by Petros Markaris and finalized to a stage text version by Stein himself and his actors. The strength of the production lied with the choice of Stefania Goulioti in the main role who managed to individualize her performance through constant motion (the smart choreography was by Lia Tsolaki). She crawled, run and stalked the stage with a hand broom, never allowing her ferocity to diminish.⁴⁰ Stefania Goulioti's realistic approach to the role contrasted with the representation of the Chorus of the play. The young women of the Chorus, dressed in white, had a breezy manner, very different from the mood in which *Electra* lived. They gave the impression of contemporary women witnessing the events of a distant story. And although Gouliotis' *Electra* could parallel Fiona Shaw's realization of the role, the lightness of the Chorus prevented any association.

The dramatic and theatrical qualities of the play have contributed to the interest of Greek directors. Their approaches move from the simple "revival" of Sophocles' spirit to the post-modern interpretation of the myth. The festival of Epidavros was inaugurated in 1938 with Sophocles' *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rondiris and with Katina Paxinou in the central role. Most of the approaches to the play in and out of the National Theatre are characterized by "transference" from the original conditions. Young directors experiment with the play in their effort to get rid of the restrictions of the tradition. Two important Greek approaches of *Electra* will integrate this discussion.

³⁹ B. Nightingale, «A Relentless Seeker after Truth», *Times* 9.12.1991.

⁴⁰ The critics were impressed by Gouliotis' performance. For the critical reception of the play, see, e.g. K. Georgousopoulos, *Ta Nea* 20.8.2007, Y. Sariyian-

nis, *Ta Nea* 18.8.2007, V. Aggelikopoulos, *H Kathimerini* 14.8.2007, A. Karali, *To Ethnos* 13.8.2007, I. Kleftoyanni, *H Eleftherotypia* 13.8.2007, Gr. Ioannidis, *H Eleftherotypia* 13.8.2007.

In August 1984, Karolos Koun and his Theatron Technis (Art-Theatre) produced Sophocles' *Electra* in Epidavros. The text of the production was translated from the original by Yiorgos Chimonas. Karolos Koun's main line of interpretation dealt with the inevitability of the law of retribution and revenge, and his production was built around this concept. For the same reason he chose to stress the dark sides of the law by emphasizing the condition of mourning in which *Electra* (Reni Pittaki) resided. It was an archaic, mournful production designed to convey the atmosphere of lamentation apparent in the simple but dream-like scenery and costumes of the play (designed by Dionysis Fotopoulos). Koun neither moralized in his presentation of the heroine by supporting her cause as her just duty to her dead father, nor did he approach her as a rebel who has the strength to oppose a society hostile to her gender. His reading of the Sophoclean play favoured Clytemnestra for mother and daughter were both presented as victims of the law of retribution. Karolos Koun had a clear and consistent view of the original.

In August 1998 an "alternative" approach to *Electra* was presented in Epidavros by the pilot group "Diplos Eros" (Double Love). The play was directed by Michael Marmarinos and his approach fired intense discussion and dispute over the "limits" in interpreting tragedy. The translation by Minos Volanakis, according to Kostas Georgousopoulos, was faithful to the meaning of the original but not to its style, which it betrayed.⁴¹ But the view (*opsis*) of the performance and the expression of the actors and actresses through their bodies constituted a post-modern interpretation of the play that disturbed the audience of the theatre of Epidavros, which is more keen on 'traditional' interpretative codes.

Two tables, a borrowing from Peter Stein's *Oresteia*, with chairs around them and a bridge which led to the palace dominated the scene. Marmarinos accepted the idea of borrowing from the stage tradition of Greek tragedy.⁴² The costumes of the production were contemporary: shirt and blouse for *Electra* (Amalia Moutousi), long and strapless dress for her mother (Nonika Galinea who is the mother of the actress as well). The director tried to exploit the different acting style of the two actresses and to expose the lack of communication between the two women.⁴³ Moreover, "[t]he foundation of the dramatic persona not only upon the self but also on the public image of actor, was among the most dynamic elements in Marmarinos's work on tragedy." Therefore, "the presentation of Clytemnestra was focused on the glamorous image of Galinea, who is a popular star in commercial theatre".⁴⁴

Electra, until the end of the performance, remained on stage with her ankles tightly tied. She entered the scene on a hand-cart. Orestes was carried to the stage by Pylades as if he was helpless or asleep.⁴⁵ Chrysothemis' offerings to Agamemnon's tomb were chickens in a tiny box. Clytemnestra's dead body was placed on a table by Pylades as if it was a slaughtered animal. He covered it and tried to protect it from the flies. All the above details and others

⁴¹ K. Georgousopoulos, «*Electra*», *Ta Nea* 11.9.1975.

⁴² See Lakis Papastathis' TV production: «I anaviosi tou archaiou dramatos: Michael Marmarinos, Dimitris Mavrikios», [The Revival of Ancient Drama: Michael Marmarinos, Dimitris Mavrikios] *Paraskinio* 1998.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See E. Ioannidou: «Monument Texts in Ruins: Greek Tragedy in Greece and Michael Marmarinos's

Postmodern Stagings», *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies* 3 (2008), p. 23.

⁴⁵ According to Ioannidou, «the choice of Frieling in the role of Pylades became a playful suggestion on Pylades' much analysed silence, as if Pylades remained silent due to the actor's very incapability of speaking Greek» (p. 23).

constituted a kind of meta-text which functioned parallel to the text of the translation. For example chorus members operated parallel to the protagonists and thus either they depicted with their movements and gestures the speeches and quarrels of the main characters or they created verbal interpolations that disengaged spectators from the main action.⁴⁶ Thus, “[t]he projection of the actors’ forenames and the street numbers of their houses onto the trees behind the theatre of Epidaurus and the enunciation of their names by a little girl left little space for the austerity and detachment that usually characterizes the productions of Greek tragedy, especially in Epidaurus”.⁴⁷

Most of the critics considered that the production “undermines” and “arbitrarily approaches” the Sophoclean play.⁴⁸ But the director “attempted an interesting excess, an abolition of the beaten track between the textual sign and its stage significations in order to seek some hidden possibilities. He articulated a ‘popular’ spectacle with means that hid other perspectives and claimed for different perceptible abilities”.⁴⁹

The main body of Sophocles’ surviving plays has inspired contemporary director[s]-interpreters. There has been a great variety of approaches to the plays by the directors as well as the solutions to their staging. Some of the attempts are not integrated: others, repeat tested attitudes which cannot touch or appeal to contemporary audiences. In Greece, the dominant view that Greek tragedy belongs to a domestic cultural inheritance and the summer festival of Epidavros results in a great number of productions each year most of which do not move behind the surface impression. In recent years a greater experimentation with the classical texts has been observed. Young directors with vision and standpoint present tragic plays through the codes of modern society. In all cases the plays by Sophocles and other Attic playwrights have initiated an inter-cultural dialogue which never ends.

⁴⁶ See Dimitris Tsatsoulis: «Sygchrones morpheis graphis sti neoelliniki skini» [«Contemporary ways of writing in modern Greek stage»] in *Simeia graphis Kodikes skinis* [Signs of writing codes of scene, Athens: Nefeli 2007, pp. 43-94, 73.

⁴⁷ Ioannidou, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴⁸ K. Georgousopoulos, *Ta Nea* 17.8.1998. See also Y. Varveris, *H Kathimerini* 23.8.1998.

⁴⁹ S. Patsalidis, *O Aggelioforos* 20.9.1998.