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**THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY  
PRODUCTIONS OF GREEK TRAGEDIES BASED ON THE MYTH OF  
ORESTES, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE THEME OF  
MATRICIDE**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT AT  
CANTERBURY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**BY**

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**UNIVERSITY OF KENT AT CANTERBURY**

**FEBRUARY 1996**



## ABSTRACT

The present research deals with the representation of the women involved in the myth of Orestes - initiated by Agamemnon's return from Troy and his murder by his unfaithful wife - by contemporary directors. The issue of women's representation is intermingled with the theme of matricide since Clytemnestra's murder by her children is central to the tragedies dealing with the House of Agamemnon. Moreover, the directors' approach to that issue throws light on their consideration for the women's cause. The performances analysed have taken place in Greece and in Great Britain with the exception of a Finnish production of the *Oresteia* which is treated in the Appendix B. The plays discussed are Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*. One chapter is devoted to each of the three tragedians. The first part of the three chapters examines the tragedians' approach to the issues. The second part concentrates on contemporary approaches by directors.

The first Chapter deals with the position of Greek tragedy in contemporary theatre practice in association with the tragedians' treatment of women in general. Chapter 2, on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* discusses: a) Peter Hall's version produced by the National Theatre Company of Great Britain (Epidavros, 1982), b) Peter Stein's Russian adaptation (Epidavros, 1994), c) Karolos Koun's production for his Art-Theatre (Epidavros, 1982), d) Spyros Evangelatos' *Oresteia* for his Amphi-Theatre and e) Yorgos Michaelidis' production for his Open Theatre (Open Theatre, 1993). Chapter 3, on Sophocles' *Electra* discusses: a) Koun's and his Art-Theatre's production (Epidavros, 1984), b) Evangelatos' and his Amphi-Theatre's production (Epidavros, 1991), c) The Royal Shakespeare Company's production directed by Deborah Warner (Riverside Studios, 1991) and d) Andreas Voutsinas' and the State Theatre of Northern Greece's production (Epidavros, 1992). Chapter 4, on Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes* discusses: a) Kostas Tsianos' and the Thessalian Theatre's production of *Electra* (Epidavros, 1993), b) Kostas Bakas' and Mythos' production of *Orestes* (Herodeion, 1992) and c) Laurence Boswell's and Gate Theatre's production of *Agamemnon's Children* (Gate Theatre, 1995). The biographies of the directors whose approaches to the myth are discussed in detail are included in Appendix A.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am grateful to a number of people and institutions for their help while this thesis was being written. My warmest thanks go to my supervisor, Professor Michael Anderson, who helped to shape the thesis more than he realises and who provided much shrewd advice and gentle criticism; any errors are of course my own responsibility. I wish to thank particularly the department of Theatre Studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury where I spent three years as a postgraduate student. I would like to express my warmest thanks and appreciation to my husband, Dr. George Mavraganis, for his invaluable and constant support during the three years of my research. But the thesis would never have been written without the constant encouragement of my parents to whom it is gratefully dedicated.

**To my Parents,  
Dimitris & Chrysanthe**

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present thesis is to investigate the way contemporary directors represent women in their interpretation of Greek tragedies. The research focuses on the treatment of the women who are involved in the myth of Agamemnon's return from Troy, his treacherous killing by Clytemnestra and her lover, Electra's and Orestes' revengeful killing of their mother and the consequences of their action. Thus, Clytemnestra and Electra, their opposing attitudes, interests and spheres of activities as well as their different roles in relation to Agamemnon (wife, daughter) concentrate our research interest in relation to the directors' approach to them. Moreover, the theme of matricide and its treatment by the contemporary directors-interpreters is central to the present research since it affects the way the mother is viewed by her children and by the society in which she lives. The thesis deals with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*.

Each tragedy is studied on two levels. On the first level, the tragedian's treatment of the women and of the story of matricide in the particular play or trilogy (in the case of Aeschylus) is analysed. On the second level, the approaches of contemporary directors to the same topics are examined. The research includes productions performed either in Greece or in Great Britain with the exception of a Finnish, all-female production of the *Oresteia* (Appendix B) because of its interest in relation to Peter Hall's all-male production of the same trilogy. Most of the productions discussed are based on particular performances attended on a certain, stated date. Some of the productions have been studied through videotapes. In those cases the dates of the videotaped productions are indicated. All the studies are based on personal observation with the exception of Ariane Mnouchkine's *Les Atréides* because of its importance to the theme of women's representation. The length of the treatment of each production depends on the amount of material available. Therefore, Peter Hall's *Oresteia* gets a fuller treatment because of its richer documentation.

With reference to the method employed in the analysis of each of the productions, this is divided into two distinct parts. The first part is a descriptive one dealing with the translation, the scenery, the costumes, the music, the choreography of the production and their contribution to



the performance. The second part concentrates on the director's main interpretative approach in association with her or his treatment of women and of the theme of matricide.

Chapter 1 of the thesis presents the theoretical framework within which the thesis develops. In particular, it contains an analysis of the nature of the Athenian drama and of the representation of women by the three tragedians in the surviving Greek tragedies. It also outlines the reasons for which contemporary directors turn to Greek tragedy.

Chapter 2 focuses on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. First, it describes the Aeschylean treatment of women and of matricide through the issue of sex-conflict dominant in the play. Then it proceeds to analyse: Peter Hall's interpretation of the issues in the National Theatre's production of the trilogy (1981-1982); Peter Stein's approach in his Russian adaptation of the trilogy (1994); Karolos Koun's presentation of the issues (Art-Theatre's production, 1980-1982); Spyros A. Evangelatos' approach to the Aeschylean play (Amphi-Theatre's production, 1990); and Yorgos Michaelidis' reading of the play's issues (Open Theatre, 1993).

Chapter 3 concentrates on Sophocles' *Electra*. After examining the dramatist's approach to the opposing characters of Clytemnestra and Electra as well as his treatment of matricide, it considers contemporary interpretations. It deals with Karolos Koun's and his Art-Theatre's production of the play (1984), with Spyros Evangelatos' approach to the issues (Amphi-Theatre's production, 1991), with Deborah Warner's reading of the Sophoclean play (RSC, 1988, 1991) and with Andreas Voutsinas' interpretation (State Theatre Of Northern Greece, 1992).

Chapter 4 treats two Euripidean plays (*Electra* and *Orestes*) with reference to the playwright's approach to the female characters and to the events following matricide. The second part of the chapter discusses: Kostas Tsianos and Thessalian Theatre's production of Euripides' *Electra* (1988, 1989, 1993); Kostas Bakas' treatment of *Orestes* (Euripides' *Orestes*) after the matricide (Mythos' production 1993); and Laurence Boswell's approach to both plays in the Gate Theatre's production of *Agamemnon's Children* (1995).

After the final comparative conclusion, the first Appendix deals with the biographies of the directors whose approaches to the tragic plays have been discussed in detail. The second Appendix treats the

**Finnish all-female production of the *Oresteia* (1991). The final section contains illustrations from the productions discussed.**

## CHAPTER 1

### 1. THE POSITION OF GREEK TRAGEDY AND ITS CONVENTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE PRACTICE IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN BY THE THREE TRAGEDIANS

#### 1.1. The Background

Greek tragedy as an art form has survived through time and its ritual, political, psychological and aesthetic potentials have been explored in different historical and cultural environments. The complex and continuous process of the resurgence and "return" of ancient Greek drama began in the period of the Italian Renaissance and continued during the 17th century with French classicism which produced adaptations of the Greek originals under the creative spirit of Corneille (*Médée, Oedipe*) and Racine (*Iphigenie en Aulide, Phèdre*). During the 18th century the ancient plays offered their themes as libretti for operas.<sup>1</sup>

The 19th century brought a change in the attitude towards Greek tragedy because substantial consideration was given to the content of each play as a way of extracting philosophical concepts concerning tragedy and antiquity. The idealistic philosophy of Hegel, the pessimism of Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche's deep intellectual concern for tragic issues can account for the modified interest towards a challenging art form. Moreover, it was at the turn of 19th century that the philological approach to the dramatic texts was orientated in the popularising work of the Schlegels (A.W. Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the revival of Greek Theatre in Europe see Richard Beacham, "Europe" in part 5, "The Revival" of J. Michael Walton's *Living Greek Theatre, A Handbook of Classical Performance and Modern Production* (London, 1987), pp. 297-354. See also Hellmut Flasher, *Inszenierung der Antike* (München, 1991), pp.27-59.

<sup>2</sup> For the revival of Greek Theatre in the 19th century see Richard Beacham, *loc. cit.* and Helmut Flasher, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-109. See also Walter Puchner, "The Influence of Ancient Greek Drama in Europe from the Renaissance to the Early Twentieth Century", *Greek Classical Theatre, its Influence in Europe*, published by the Cultural Centre of the Municipality of Athens (Athens, 1993), pp. 58-62.



However, Greek dramaturgy was integrated into the European theatrical repertoire in the 20th century. The boost towards that direction was given by the new and very popular literary translations of Wilamowitz-Mollendorff, Ettore Ramagnoli, and Gilbert Murray which were operating in the climate of a bourgeois society who believed in the educative mission of the performances of tragic drama. That ideal was best served by the established festivals which offered a new incentive to performances of tragedy. The festival at Syracuse emerged before the First World War, the festival at Salzburg and at Orange were inaugurated almost immediately after; the Delphic Festival, very important for the revival of ancient plays in Greece, took place in 1927 and 1930. The festival of ancient Greek Drama in Epidavros was initiated in 1954 by a gifted man of the theatre, the director, Dimitris Rondiris. At the same time Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical models affected the way tragic heroes and heroines were represented on stage, while the philosophic visions of Friedrich Nietzsche concerning the "Birth of Tragedy" from the Dionysiac spirit of music were exploited thoroughly in the theatrical productions of the time. To these theories that affected the process of performing ancient plays, we could add the theory of Johann Jacob Bachofen about the matriarchal structure of antiquity, which, although expressed in the end of 19th century, was to become in the 20th century the intellectual formation for modern interpretations of Greek tragedy by feminist writers and directors.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, new theatrical writers excelled at adapting the ancient tragic plays in order to express the concerns of their age. Among them, Cocteau, Giraudoux, Gide, Anouilh, Sartre, Brecht, from the inter-war years, gave a new insight into the tragic plays.

During the last decade of the 20th century, many leading directors have turned to ancient Greek tragedy and various interpretations of the Greek plays are offered to modern audiences. The modern, creative theatrical treatment of the classical plays can range from a simple re-enactment, direct literal translation done in a pious, antiquarian spirit, to versions that recreate the classical themes and

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<sup>3</sup> J.J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*, (1861); Engl. translation, R. Manheim (Princeton, NJ, 1967). See also chapter 2.1. "The Aeschylean Treatment of the issue of Sex Conflict" of the present thesis, pp. 40-52.

elaborate on the myths treated by the Greek tragedians using them only as guidelines. In the second case, the replacements, abolitions and substitutions of the dramatic structures are underlined and the modern directors-adapters try either to express their own critical view with regard to the plays' issues or to initiate new methods of projecting the values of the ancient plays for the audiences of modern periods.

Moreover, the spread of feminism in Theatre Studies in the late 20th century as a practical as well as an intellectual and creative discipline has affected the classics in relation to literary criticism and stage practice. The absence of women playwrights in classical Athens, central to early feminist investigations, the later socio-historical evidence revealing the social practices and economic restrictions of women, compared with their predominant role in Greek plays which depict women as intelligent and even heroic, led the feminists to the conclusion, that, because of "the suppression of the real women, the culture invented its own representation of the gender, and it was the fictional "Woman" who appeared on stage, in the myths and in the plastic arts, representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women".<sup>4</sup> Thus, they felt they had to proceed to a feminist deconstruction of the ancient plays in order to depart from the patriarchal representation of the female gender. The deconstruction applies to the field of literary criticism as much as to the actual theatre practice.

Different interpreters of the tragic plays consider them according to their own different concerns. But the explosion of productions of ancient Greek tragedy in recent years brings with it the question of classical work and its assumed positive and unalterable values. But "Value" is a transitive term: it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes'.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, there is no canon to determine which work belongs to the "realm of classics", and an illustrative example could be offered by the field of feminist theatre writing: according to feminists, the staging process of the classical texts by

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<sup>4</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1990), p. 11.

modern directors is "guilty" of allowing the patriarchal subtext to work in modern society.

However, Greek tragic plays seem to affect modern audiences, and directors use them as a means of conveying a special message or even as a way of commenting on a contemporary situation. But, before we proceed to the choices of modern directors, it is important for the purposes of the present study to discuss the nature of Athenian tragic drama and its highly developed conventions. Athenian drama at the time of its creation and performance was a religious and public event played in the Athenian open theatre of the god Dionysos (end of February).<sup>6</sup> Modern directors are free to decide either to elaborate on some of the conventions of Greek tragedy and, thus, to produce powerful theatrical effects because of their contrast to the otherwise modern components of the production, or to give the impression of a modern play in performance by invalidating those conventions.

## 1.2. The Nature of Athenian Tragic Drama

The festival devoted to the god Dionysos was very important because it was open to the whole Hellenic world and it was viewed by the Athenians as an indication of their wealth and public spirit. Three whole days were set aside for the performances and the tragic poets composed for this one occasion. In each of the three days, three tragedies, a satyric play and a comedy were performed,<sup>7</sup> and the expenses were met by a rich citizen (*choregos*) who was responsible for providing the tragic or comic chorus and their trainer.

During the period in which the three major tragedians were competing, we should mention "the presence in the theatre of an immense audience of citizens, increased by the attendance of a great

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<sup>6</sup> For the dramatic festivals in general and their organisation, see J. Michael Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, Ch. 3: "Organization of the Dramatic Festivals" (Westport and London, 1980), pp. 59-80.

<sup>7</sup> According to Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2nd edition revised by J. Gould and D.M Lewis (Oxford, 1991), p., 64, note, 4: "[F]ive comedies competed in 434 B.C. when Kallias won fifth place (*I.G. xiv. 1097* on p., 121) and again in the fourth century, but three only in 425 and during the greater part of the Peloponnesian war". For the arrangement of the competition of comic plays see Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *op. cit.*, p. 66.



number of visitors from abroad, some of them being persons of distinction specially invited to seats of honour".<sup>8</sup> According to Demosthenes, *de Corona* 28, the price of the seat cost two obols while, according to Plutarch, *Pericles* 9. 2-3, Pericles instituted the theoric fund from which poor people were given the money to buy seats for the performances. From the evidence of the comic poet Aristophanes, we may be quite sure that boys were allowed in the audience as spectators.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars are divided, however, over the issue of the presence of women in the original audience of the theatre of the god Dionysos because the evidence, provided by the writers of that time, is contradictory. Against the presence of women in the auditorium stands a passage from Aristophanes' *Peace* (50-53) where a slave promises to explain the plot to the audience, and he specifically mentions the boys, the teenagers, the grown-ups, the top men and the top-top men. Women are omitted from the above reference and the same apparent exclusion of female audience is evident in the last three lines of Menander's *Dyskolos* (965-7), where Getas invites the applause of the audience of old men, of very young boys, of boys and of grown-ups. In contrast, there is evidence that strongly argues in support of women's presence in the auditorium.<sup>10</sup> Quite decisive is the information provided by Aristophanes' *Peace* 962-7 and *Frogs* 1050-1, both of which mention explicitly the presence of women among the audience. Moreover, Plato's *Laws* (vii. 817c) says that educated women would prefer tragedy, while in his *Gorgias* (502 b-d) he condemns drama because it gives pleasure to children, women and men.

Every play had to be presented by three male actors each of whom could take a number of roles in the same play. The fact that men played the role of women has been interpreted by contemporary feminist writers as a proof of the idea that women were objects who carried symbolic meaning: "Indeed the very act of men assuming the costume and mask of a woman reinforces the idea of a woman as symbol, and so

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<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, 263. For the popularity of Athenian dramatic performances see also Oddone Longo, "The theatre of the Polis" in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?*, edited by John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Oxford, 1990), pp. 12-20.

<sup>9</sup> See for example *Clouds* 537-9 and *Peace* 50-3, 765-6.

<sup>10</sup> See Pickard-Cambridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-5.

maintains male hegemony in the auditorium of cultural invention and continuity".<sup>11</sup>

The all-male actors had to wear whole-head masks.<sup>12</sup> The convention of masking is important with regard to the definition of character-portrayal in the ancient performances of Greek tragedy. In modern productions we expect differences of facial expression to be a key to the characters' inner psychology. But this was not the case in ancient Athenian productions where the ever-open eyes and mouth of the mask militate against any attempt at a psychological approach. The reaction of the stage-characters to their stage-life was expressed only by words and gestures. Furthermore, the performance of female roles by male actors made possible by the conventions of masking resulted in another convention with which the audience had to come to terms, namely the attribution of the male actors' actual voices to female heroines. The present thesis includes the discussion of Peter Hall's production of the *Oresteia* in which male actors held the role of women as well.<sup>13</sup>

To the aforementioned conventions of Athenian tragic theatre, we must add the constant presence of the chorus on stage during the time of the performance. The chorus had the privilege of initiating the action by appearing, usually after the prologue, and of marking the end of the tragedy with its exit (*exodos*). It is therefore in the majority of tragedies always there on the stage and this uninterrupted presence, indicative of the public nature of the Athenian tragedy, results in the exclusion of any privacy or secrecy in most of the cases in relation to the events acted.<sup>14</sup> The chorus as "the public eye" is a group of people without individual identity characterised by unanimity in each of their decisions and approaches. Stage-characters on the other hand, come and go, plot and perform, suffer and avenge, debate and reason but in front of the chorus.

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<sup>11</sup> Lesley Ferris, *Acting Women* (London, 1990), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> For the convention of masking see Pickard-Cambridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-6, and John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 43-6, 59-60, 232-50.

<sup>13</sup> See chapter 2.2. "A Male Feminist *Oresteia*", pp. 53-71.

<sup>14</sup> Privacy and secrecy characterise the scenes where two or three actors meet before the *Parodos*.



Acts of violence do take place in fifth century stagecraft off the stage and within the theatre building, *skene*. But these acts are reported by the messenger who reported the events of violence in a speech which was considered dramatically more effective than violence itself on stage. The reason for that should be found in "the oral character of Greek society in the 5th century B.C. and a consequent preference for the spoken word".<sup>15</sup> The same acts were projected to the chorus and audience by another convention, the *ekkyklema*, a wheeled platform which gives access to what is withdrawn from the audience.

Moreover, it is evident that tragedians had to derive their story from the world of Greek mythology. Aristotle's *Poetics* (1459b 4-7) informs us about the *locus classicus* from which the basic material was obtained: the great corpus of hexameter epics of the 8th-6th centuries B.C.. In a few cases tragedians left the mythological corpus in order to draw their stories from contemporary events.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the confined sources of the myths, which fifth century tragedians treated formulated another restriction and at the same time a convention to which they had to conform. Additionally, the characters of the myth had acquired some undisputable features before they had even been treated by the tragedians; in many cases different versions of the same myth were offered although the main line of development remained the same.

This short reference to the nature of the Athenian drama has indicated that it was a cultural phenomenon inseparable from the social, economic and political structures of Athens, since its audience represented a majority as opposed to the limited composition of a modern audience. The spectators were involved in an educational as well as religious experience. Moreover, all citizens were acquainted with the background to the myths the tragedians used and therefore the

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Walcot, *Greek Drama in its Theatrical and Social Context* (Cardiff, 1976), p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Apart from the corpus of the so-called historical tragedies (Phrynichus' *The Capture of Miletus* and his *Phoenissae* and Aeschylus' *Persae*: all three dealt with the Persian wars whose impact on Greek imagination resulted in their immediate acceptance to the traditional world of myth), the only other evident exceptions are Aeschylus' *Aitnaiai* and his *Glaucus Pontius* and Euripides' *Archaelaos*: another exception is Agathon's *Antheus*, a tragedy with an invented story (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451b 19).

playwrights addressed their plays to a homogeneous and knowledgeable audience.

In contemporary performances of Greek drama the nature of the theatre audience in general has changed. The social composition of the audience is usually limited by higher admission prices and social, educational background, and particular codes of behaviour have resulted in more "elitist" audiences. As has been suggested, "the survival of theatre is economically tied to a willing audience - not only those people paying to sit and watch a performance but increasingly those who approve a government, corporate, or other subsidy".<sup>17</sup>

In addition, fewer people are acquainted with the mythological corpus on which the tragedies were based. Therefore modern adaptations and performances of Greek tragedy tend to attract, mainly, the interest of a group of specialists who have the means to cross the barriers of culture. Modern adaptors and directors, however, try to communicate in a clear way the issues of the original and to translate the messages regarding the original by locating them in the present social and historical situation in order to be understood by the non-specialists and therefore to broaden their discourse.

### **1.3. Why Does a Contemporary Director Turn to Greek Tragedy?**

The rather demanding conventions of the ancient theatre, its public and political nature, do not seem to discourage modern directors who undertake the task of producing Greek plays in their own distant cultural environment and socio-political background. The reasoning which underlies their choices is diverse and depends upon their personal interests, their world view and their own cultural and socio-political history. This is apparent in the distinctive way the Greek tragic plays are treated by Greek and other European directors. On the one hand, for the modern Greek directors the choice is defined by their belief that Greek tragedy belongs to their own national inheritance and, therefore, it is their duty towards the cultural and historical continuity of the Greeks to reproduce these works which are considered peerless

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<sup>17</sup> Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences. A Theory of Production and Reception* (London, 1990), p. 4.



and unrivalled masterpieces.<sup>18</sup> Thus, a strong tradition determines their choice which could be paralleled with that of English directors towards Shakespeare. His official image has been propagated by the Royal Shakespeare Company which receives state subsidy and therefore, functions relatively free from commercial pressure. The RSC, although it aims at freeing Shakespeare from the stylised manner of presentation, establishes classic status for the playwright while at the same time, the performances aim at textual accuracy.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, European directors,<sup>20</sup> and among them British, approach Greek tragic plays as works of European literature whose values can explore our contemporary concerns in a way that is accessible to a modern audience.

To return to Greek tragedians and Greece, the National Theatre of Greece, founded in 1932, deals systematically with ancient Greek tragedy and because it is a public organisation permanently funded by the state, it has established ideological objectives concerning the treatment of Greek tragedies. The directors of the National Theatre aim at restoring the national poetic heritage by validating an authentic manner of staging which promotes and idealises the "authenticity" of the original text. The other major theatrical institution in Greece, the Art - Theatre, Karolos Koun, established in 1942, deals with Greek tragedy, not as extensively as the National Theatre but in the treatment of ancient drama by Karolos Koun and his successors (Yorgos Lazanis and Mimis Kouyioumtzis) there prevails the same notion of communicating the "eternal values" of the tragic plays to the audience: "ancient poetry, the great truths, the human situations and everything of substance in the

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<sup>18</sup> However, one must not overlook the possibility of a Greek director rebelling against this view: e.g. Andreas Voutsinas whose approach to Greek tragedy is discussed in Appendix B, p. 255-8 and in 3.5. "A Psychoanalytical Approach: Andreas Voutsinas' and the State Theatre of Northern Greece's Production of the Play [Sophocles' *Electra*]", pp. 159-168.

<sup>19</sup> See John Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre*, revised edition (London, 1979), p. 171.

<sup>20</sup> The generalisation concerns the view that more or less the same reasons determine the choice of Greek tragedy by European directors although, quite different incentive and motives could be found in different socio-political and cultural environments.

poet's work should be projected in a way that could touch the modern spectator".<sup>21</sup>

Is it then the splendour and grandeur surrounding the mythical world of classic Greek tragedy that captivates its modern European directors? This motivation could serve partly as an argument for the choice of Greek plays by modern directors. However, it was one of the main reasons of attraction for the directors of the late 19th and early 20th century because theatre studies had been affected by a classical tradition which emphasised tragic man whose suffering derived from domestic, political and ritual confusion when he demonstrated excess or impiety. Modern European directors however tend to approach Greek plays from a more critical point of view, emphasising the issues which seem to affect modern audiences. In an era in which the characterisation of "classics" has been forcefully doubted,<sup>22</sup> modern directors often become adaptors since they use the myths of the ancient plays for their own searching explorations. In many cases, they try to represent, for example, the tragic hero as a person with specific characteristics but without any challenging idealism, an everyday person who has to face particular phenomena such as war, murder or other forms of destruction and despair. This attitude can be explained by the fact that our age is not heroic, and the kind of heroic representation would seem a fruitless effort to revive the past.

One reason for which modern European directors turn to Greek tragedy is the attraction of a nature which exploits natural aspects of the divine. Ancient Greeks had a god for everything. The divine impersonation of nature had to do with natural allegory. Each goddess or god had her or his own private domain. Demeter, for example controlled the cultivated land and gave people the civilising gift of corn. Therefore, agriculture was developed, and man did not have to gain his food by hunting alone. Moreover, the myth of Persephone, Demeter's

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<sup>21</sup> Karolos Koun, *For the Theatre (Gia to Theatro)*, edited by Yorgos Kotanidis (Athens, 1981), p. 36. However, Karolos Koun's consideration for the modern audience and the quality of his innovative performances differentiate him and the history of Art-Theatre from that of the National Theatre.

<sup>22</sup> Feminism has turned against the patriarchal values of "classics" while Marxism insists in viewing art within its social and historical context. Historicism and Post-modernism both challenge the concept of classic status for specific works of art.



daughter, her symbolic death and rebirth may be interpreted in the light of the changing seasons of the year -the cyclical growth of their crops and their death. At the same time the death and renewal of the crops is associated with the female nature of the participants in Demeter's festival at Thesmophoria, a widespread festival of the female half of the Athenian citizen community, the women and maidens.

*The apparent closeness of Greek civilisation to nature and its forces is appreciated by a civilisation that has been far removed from nature and is dominated by technology. Modern directors escape to the free spirit and imagination of a culture based on nature and its associations. The cult of Dionysos in ancient Greece offers the best illustrative example of the forces of nature and its irrational power over human beings. Dionysos is seen as personifying the wild enthusiasm, the side of Greek civilisation which had to do with inspiration and not with preconceived ideas. His mainads, raving women, represented an irresistible folly which inverted the behaviour of "decent women" in the well-ordered and male dominated society. The same god was associated with wine and its liberated spirit. Euripides in his *Bacchae* depicts Dionysos as a force of the Outside, thus an outsider, and as specially associated with Thebes, since his mother was the King's daughter. Nobody can resist his unlimited power and the one who tries meets his doom. As a play, *Bacchae* has been in favour with modern directors because of its subject matter which seems very attractive in our age. According to the Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka, whose free version of *Bacchae* was commissioned for performance by the National Theatre at the Old Vic, London, in the summer of 1973, in *Bacchae* "[M]an reaffirms his indebtedness to earth, dedicates himself to the demands of continuity and invokes the energies of productivity. Re-absorbed within the communal psyche he provokes the resources of Nature; he is in turn replenished for the cyclic drain in his fragile individual potency".<sup>23</sup>*

Another pole of attraction for the modern directors in general can be found in the power of Greek mythology.<sup>24</sup> Many theories have tried

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<sup>23</sup> Wole Soyinka, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (London, 1982), p. xii.

<sup>24</sup> A very useful description of Greek mythology is given by Ken Dowen in his book *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (London, 1992), : "In fact Greek Mythology is a shared

to explain the corpus of Greek Mythology and to find a unifying approach in the hope that they will help one's understanding of its structure and workings.<sup>25</sup> It has already been mentioned that Greek tragedians were obliged to conform to a convention according to which their stories were derived from the mythological corpus. According to Aristotle (XXIII4, 1459b) the tragedians for their mythological subject avoided the Homeric material, but made great use of the stories in the cyclic epics.<sup>26</sup> The mythic world, organised and articulated by poets, was a kind of encyclopedia which dealt with the nature of the gods and with an enormous range of characters, story patterns and themes.

The mythological figures, who were to become tragic heroines and heroes, had some established characteristics and the tragedians were compelled to use the outlines of the known story. For example, Oedipus was known to have killed his father and married his mother by the time of Homer (*Odyssey*, 11. 271ff). Homer relates the story of Clytemnestra, who, during the Trojan expedition, betrayed her husband, Agamemnon, with Aegisthus. Consequently Agamemnon and Cassandra, the Trojan princess and his lover, were killed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (*Odyssey*, 11. 400ff). The tragic poet not only vividly enacted aspects of the mythic world but also gave his own particular interpretation to the myths. The same myth could be treated differently by different tragic poets. The story of Orestes who returns home to avenge his father by killing his mother and her lover Aegisthus has been

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fund of motifs and ideas ordered into a shared repertoire of stories. These stories link with, compare and contrast with, and are understood in the light of, other stories in the system. Greek Mythology is an 'intertext', because it is constituted by all the representations of myths ever experienced by its audience and because every new representation gains its sense from how it is positioned in relation to this totality of previous representations.", p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 22-38.

<sup>26</sup> Individual poems, *The Titanomachy*, *The Oedipodeia*, *The Thebais*, *The Epigonois*, *The Cypria*, *The Aethiopis*, *The Little Iliad*, *The Sack of Troy*, *The Returns Home*, *The Telegony*, proved to be a useful quarry for plot-material. The authorship is disputed and they have come down to us in fragments which survive in the form of direct quotations or direct references in the works of later writers. For more information see Malcolm Davies, *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Oxford, 1988) and *The Epic Cycle* (Oxford, 1989) by the same author.

treated by all three major tragedians in a quite independent way. This is because adaptability is one of the basic characteristics of myth.

Many contemporary directors find in myth the necessary tool for them to express their anxieties about our modern society and contemporary man. Greek myths are seen as having been tested through time and successfully carried out their task which was to advise and comment about the way life is, the way death is or the ways in which mortality relates to the divine and eternal. Contemporary directors invoke them as exemplars in order to make vivid and socially effective their given idea about several aspects of human life. In that way, Suzuki Tadashi's version of Euripides' *Bacchae* explores the theme of the reversible association of the oppressor and the oppressed; Pentheus is the tyrant-oppressor and Dionysos could be viewed as the oppressed Japan exacting vengeance on Pentheus-America.<sup>27</sup> Tony Harrison chose to use the memory of the destructive Trojan war, as portrayed in Euripides' *Troades*, in a version combined with Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in order to comment against the Cold War nuclear confrontation. The play was set at Greenham during the days when the Women's Peace Camp confronted the guards behind the wires who defended the silos.

These examples indicate the flexibility and adaptability of myth. Modern directors may point out different elements of the myth initiating new approaches according to their interests and their world view,<sup>28</sup> or they may keep the basic line and change the ending,<sup>29</sup> or they may change the setting of the story and thus comment on specific political or social situations.<sup>30</sup> The possibilities of reworking the myths can go on

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion and bibliography on Suzuki Tadashi's *Bacchae*, see Marianne McDonald, *Ancient Sun, Modern Light* (New York, 1992), pp. 59-73. She discusses the bilingual performance done in Milwaukee, Toga, and Tokyo in 1981.

<sup>28</sup> As the above examples indicated.

<sup>29</sup> In Suzuki Tadashi's *Clytemnestra* the heroine kills both Orestes and Electra while the action of the play takes place in Orestes' mind. The play was performed at the Toga festival in 1983.

<sup>30</sup> Tony Harrison sets his *Phaedra Britannica* in mid-nineteenth century India where Phaedra has become the "memsahib" wife of the British governor. The play was based on Racine's adaptation of the Euripidean story and was first performed by the National Theatre Company at the Old Vic on 9 September 1975.



endlessly since they depend on the directors'-adaptors' consideration of the priorities of a particular myth.

In addition to the reasons already mentioned, the specific form of Greek tragedy with its conventions does not pose problems to contemporary directors who always have the artistic freedom to abandon them. On the contrary, these conventions may attract their artistic interest in experimenting with unfamiliar theatrical forms of expression. A number of leading directors have re-produced Greek plays using the convention of masks, while almost all contemporary productions of Greek tragic theatre keep the tragic chorus as the necessary commentator of the events that take place on the stage.<sup>31</sup>

As soon as we start to consider the reasons for which contemporary Greek directors decide to produce ancient Greek theatre we are confronted with a situation which needs to be approached and defined more closely. This does not mean that the reasons which attract other European directors do not apply to the Greeks; on the contrary, there are added motives deriving from their belief that it is their duty to produce Greek tragedy because it belongs to their national inheritance. There is also the deeply rooted belief that because of their nationality, their productions have advantages over the productions of other European directors. As Karolos Koun, the leading Greek director, put it: "We Greeks, direct inheritors of ancient Greek drama, have a great advantage in attempting to interpret it; we happen to live in the same land as the ancients. This fact allows us to draw from the very same sources as they did and use to advantage all that Greek tradition has achieved ever since".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> As an example we could mention Peter Hall's *Oresteia*. The director used an all-male cast, masked actors and a full chorus. See 2.2. "A Male Feminist *Oresteia*", pp. 53-71.

<sup>32</sup> Karolos Koun, "The Ancient Theatre", lecture given to the International Conference about Theatre, (*Herodeion* the 4th of July 1957) and published in Karolos Koun, *We Make Theatre for our Souls (Kanoume Theatro gia tin psyche mas)* (Athens, 1992), p. 33.



As a result, the text of ancient tragedy may be used in order to support and establish a new theatre company;<sup>33</sup> in such cases the performance may be used as a manifesto which initiates the mode of interpretation they intend to adopt. In addition, a classical tragic text is used by Greek directors to confirm the identity of the company or to initiate a new direction. Finally, Greek tragedy is used by contemporary Greek directors as an experiment with the intention of initiating a new approach in the performance of classical Greek tragedy.<sup>34</sup>

The last case is not usually the approach modern Greek directors adopt, because within the limitations of tradition, they feel obliged to reproduce the text as closely as possible. European directors however, are free from the constraints of tradition and approach their texts with more freedom and innovation. This is the reason why contemporary adaptations of classical tragedies mostly take place outside Greece. Another important constraint derives from the language of the original text. If a director works with a translation in a language at some remove from the original she or he is freer to choose a vocabulary which best serves her or his intentions.

One of the methodological problems contemporary directors in general face in their productions of ancient Greek plays is the extent to which they are going to intervene in the original text. The dilemma, in Oliver Taplin's words, is whether they choose "authenticity or freedom".<sup>35</sup> However, total fidelity to the ancient performances is impossible mainly because of our ignorance of certain conditions of

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<sup>33</sup> In 1971, Thanasis Papageorgiou established Theatre Stoa (Archade Theatre) and the first play his company produced was Euripides' *Troades*. However, since then the company has never returned to the field of classical Greek Theatre.

<sup>34</sup> In both cases the example comes from the Thessalian Theatre which was established in 1975. During its first creative period (1975-1983), under the artistic direction of Anna Vayena, the company never produced a play from the field of Greek classical drama. Kostas Tsianos however the next artistic director (1983-today), established a new direction for the Thessalian Theatre as well as a new approach to the field of ancient drama with his folklore approach to Euripides' *Electra* (Summer, 1987). For more information see 4.4. "A Dominant Heroine in a Folklore Interpretation: Euripides' *Electra* by the Thessalian Theatre", pp. 191-200 and "Appendix A", pp. 253-5.

<sup>35</sup> Oliver Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (London, 1989), chapter 11, pp. 172-181.

production and because we could never recreate the original audience of the theatre of Dionysos and the director intervenes with the author's work in both cases, either she or he aims at "reproducing" the original or "altering" it. Of course there are cases in which the director ends in total rewriting of the tragedy's story. In such cases the original is adapted by the particular director. The result could be a successful adaptation of the myth, the original tragedy or tragedies used, intending to express modern concerns.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from free adaptation, other cases of infidelity are: a) the transfer of the setting of the play, in whole or in part, to eras different from those of the original. This kind of updating or modernisation of the play could mean the director selecting a historical milieu later than that in the work in order to make the play's issues more comprehensible or relevant today;<sup>37</sup> b) in addition, the director could choose to treat certain elements or parts of the play in order to emphasise a particular dimension of the play.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, we should mention the staging of a tragic play in the sense that the historical distance between it and the modern spectator will be emphasised rather than diminished.<sup>39</sup>

Within the choices of contemporary directors we include the way they view the heroines of Greek tragedy. In order to concentrate on the representation of women (mainly Clytemnestra and Electra) in

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<sup>36</sup> As illustrative examples of modern adaptations of classical texts we can mention Brecht's *Antigone*, Jean Paul Sartre's *Les Troyennes*, and Eugenie O' Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

<sup>37</sup> For example Suzuki Tadashi chooses to use *Trojan Women* in a Japanese setting depicting the agony following Hiroshima (1984) and Tony Harrison in *Common Chorus* has women perform Euripides' *Troades* for the soldiers at the nuclear installation at Greenham Common (1984).

<sup>38</sup> In this case we refer as an example to a production of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* directed by Mathiew Hamilton for Dance-Attic Studios in Spring 1993. In his production he diminished the role of Heracles whom he considered too brutal to portray and he concentrated on Deianeira who consciously murdered her husband.

<sup>39</sup> In this case an example comes from a production for the Festival of Epidavros 1994. Stavros Doufexis, a Greek director, in his production of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* for Desmoi, introduced a narrator in the role of the chorus' leader to read the modern Greek translation of the choral parts which were delivered by the chorus in the original.



contemporary productions of plays which deal with the theme of Orestes' matricide we should examine the way the three major tragedians treated their heroines.

#### 1.4. The Representation of Women by the Greek Tragedians

The dominant role of women in the productions of ancient Greek plays has been extensively discussed by contemporary classicists because it is sharply contrasted to their social and political life which may be seen as non-existent. Women in classical Athens were excluded from any possible participation in the political life, a man-citizen's privilege, while their participation in the social life of the city was restricted to their attendance and performance in a number of religious festivals. The rest of their time was spent within the boundaries of their household and their usual engagements ranged from weaving to the rearing of their children.

Archaeological evidence and prose texts written primarily by historians, philosophers and orators confirm this picture of Athenian women. Women's political and financial rights were exercised under the authority of a male relative who was their guardian and whose responsibility was extended to the management of their property.<sup>40</sup> In marriage women could not possibly choose their husbands who in most cases were much older than themselves. The Athenian male's greatest fear was his wife's adultery and the law was very strict on that because it was a threat to the secure pattern of male inheritance within a patriarchal social system. In the 5th and 4th centuries, the result of a woman's adultery was her expulsion from her *oikos* and exclusion from any further participation in the religious activities of the *polis*.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, her husband was bound by law to divorce such a wife, who was regarded as incapable of producing legitimate children. It is therefore apparent that the Athenian legal system was designed to preserve citizenship and the role of women in producing legitimate heirs had to be safeguarded. Thus, their activities were registered within the realm of their *oikos*. However, women were active agents in the religious life of the city of Athens. They had the privilege of partaking in

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<sup>40</sup> See Aeschines I 95-99.

<sup>41</sup> Aeschines I: 183; see also A.R.W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens*, vol. I, "The Family and Property" (Oxford, 1968).

the exclusively female fertility rituals of the Thesmophoria,<sup>42</sup> and they also participated in the ecstatic cults of Dionysos. All women could be initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries and they were initiated into religious life by participating in the cult of Artemis of Brauron.

On the other hand, Greek tragedy witnesses dominant images of female characters whose functions fall outside the scope of their attested everyday life. Tragic poets give them the explicit power to be responsible for their own life, to act freely according to their will and conscience even though their acts could endanger the city's law, to take political power, to speak in public using the structures of rhetorical speech in order to defend their case, to take their revenge against an adulterous husband and also to feel passionately for a man; they even usurp male heroism. The privileged treatment of female characters and their relationship with the dominant sex has attracted the interest of scholars who have tried to explain the discrepancies between their dramatic portraits and their real status as members of contemporary Athenian society. There is obviously a symbolic system operating in Athenian drama within which sex-role conflicts acquire a particular meaning for the fifth century Athenian audience.

Two main approaches have been attempted by scholars in their effort to interpret the problem of women's representation in Greek tragedy. The first is orientated in Freudian psychology and sociology and its main interpreter is the sociologist Philip Slater, who pointed out that Athenian women were viewed by their male counterparts as a source of anarchy within their male dominated and civilised *polis* while women, because of their imposed social and political seclusion, were hostile and seductive to their sons who idealised their fathers and felt a fearful dependence on older women, a feeling responsible for women's powerful representation in Greek tragedy.<sup>43</sup>

The other is based on structural anthropology and linguistics, and it has been adopted by many scholars who try to deal with the issue

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<sup>42</sup> See Froma I. Zeitlin, "Cultic Models of the Female: Rites of Dionysus and Demeter", *Arethusa* vol. 15 (1982) pp. 129-159 and her "Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*", *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* edited by Helen P. Foley (New York, 1981), pp., 169-217.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Boston, 1968).



of women's representation in Athenian drama from a feminist point of view. The whole theory is based on Levi-Strass's dichotomy between nature and culture. Accordingly Athenian females were more closely associated with nature and the wild, while males represented culture expressed through agriculture, sacrifice, marriage and life within the boundaries of the cultivated city.<sup>44</sup> Women could enter the structure of civilisation only through marriage and life within man's *oikos*.<sup>45</sup> The structural model of reading the symbolic role of women in Athenian drama offers another bipolar explanatory division between the female's association with *oikos* and domestic life and the male's affiliation with public life and city. The equation female: *oikos* and male: *polis* encourages the creation of a reciprocal model between public and private, male and female, which helps us to read the inversions of drama.<sup>46</sup>

The structuralist view reveals the deeper structure of the tragic plays and helps the decipherment of the nature of the relationship between male and female characters, hidden under the symbolic representation of female personages. That is to say, the development of the tragic plays usually reaffirms the order of the organisation of Athenian patriarchal society. The powerful images of the female personalities who have the strength and the courage to question the inevitable male authority are with few exceptions brought down to utter destruction and thus the "proper" order is confirmed. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>44</sup> In fact the two views are not completely opposed: anarchy and wild nature have plenty in common.

<sup>45</sup> The theory has been developed by the fundamental work of French classicists J.P. Vernant, *Mythe et Société en Grèce Ancienne* (Paris, 1974) and his *Mythe and Pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris, 1969) and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Recherche sur les Structures Sociales dans l'Antiquité Classique* (Paris, 1970).

<sup>46</sup> Froma Zeitlin in her substantial article "Playing the Other: Theatre, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek Drama", *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* edited by John Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Oxford, 1990), pp., 63-96 exploits the intimate relationship between woman in tragedy and the house (*oikos*) which is her proper domain. She explains that because women rule the relationship between inside and outside, men in their effort to enter the *oikos* meet their doom (Agamemnon, Heracles, Polymestor). Moreover, for a male to enter successfully the domain of the *oikos* female assistance is required (Orestes).

fearful images of women "revolutionists" remain in the male audience's mind, a vivid example of the alarming situation where a social inversion would bring women into power. Although the same motif is applicable to the surviving tragedies of the three major tragedians, the treatment of female characters by the three differs substantially, and a closer examination of the female stage-characters will reveal a diverse approach by the three surviving tragedians.

In most of his tragedies Aeschylus was concerned with the man-woman relationship and how this was developed within marriage and social and political life. In fact, the only surviving trilogy, *Oresteia*, deals extensively with the battle of the sexes. Clytemnestra is a powerful figure, female in appearance, but with a "manly counsel" (Ag., 11) who struggles for power and revenge. She is introduced as a dangerous figure who has been endowed with political power, contrary to her "female nature", during Agamemnon's absence at Troy; she uses that power to murder the victorious king and usurp the throne of Argos. In addition, she challenges the acceptable image of the faithful wife, since she took a lover while Agamemnon was fighting at Troy. At the same time, Agamemnon was allowed to bring his concubine home without incurring the same criticism. Clytemnestra's behaviour endangered the social structure of the male dominated Athenian society and Agamemnon's male heir had to undertake the task of killing his mother. The issue of male versus female also dominates the second part of the trilogy, *Choephoroi*, where Orestes kills his mother with the divine help of Apollo and the human support of his sister, who supports the patriarchal structure of the society.

But, the final part of the trilogy is the one which most clearly supports the patriarchal order of Athenian society. The outcome of the trial between Orestes, supported by Apollo, and the Furies who haunt him pleading the case of Clytemnestra, favours Orestes and with him Athenian male "supremacy". Athena persuades the Furies to become Eumenides whose new role is to preside over marriages:<sup>47</sup> "This ending can be seen as paradigmatic of future plot structures in the Western play-writing tradition. A great many plays in the tradition resolve various

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<sup>47</sup> A detailed analysis of the trilogy with regard to the theme of women's representation and the issue of matricide takes place in chapter 2.1. "The Aeschylean Treatment of the Issue of Sex Conflict", pp. 40-52.



kinds of civic, historical and psychological problems with the institution of marriage."<sup>48</sup> For his *Oresteia* Aeschylus has been criticised by most contemporary feminist writers as misogynist.<sup>49</sup>

Aeschylus' unsympathetic view of the liberated woman was in accordance with the ideal of his time that woman's status is achieved through marriage and subordination to her husband. The same impression is manifest in Aeschylus' *Danaids*, his earlier trilogy from which only the first play *Suppliants* has survived. The fifty daughters of Danaus seek refuge in Argos in order to avoid enforced marriage with their cousins, the fifty sons of Aegyptus. The first play ends in success for the virgin daughters of Danaus but what follows is highly speculative. One or two things we know for certain. The Danaids were taken as brides by the sons of Aegyptus; they killed their bridegrooms on the wedding night, all except Hypermestra, who spared Lynceus. The first part of the trilogy presents the turbulent movement, disrupting the normal order of arranged marriage, and our sympathy is directed by Aeschylus to the side of the girls who are fleeing from their brutal suitors but the trilogy's end glorifies marriage as the text favours the girl who surrenders to her suitor.<sup>50</sup>

The representation of women in Sophoclean tragedy does not seem to contradict the established values of Athenian male dominated society. His heroines perform deeds seemingly incompatible with the fundamental and conclusive social order, but the cause they argue falls within the sphere of their responsibility. That is to say that women in Sophocles rebel and fight for their family. Antigone performs the burial rites for her dead brother, and Electra is determined to kill the usurpers of the throne in order to restore her father's memory and the interrupted line of his *oikos*. Deianira acts out of passionate love for her husband; she uses magic to regain his love and unwittingly kills him. She, therefore, becomes a reluctant agent of revenge.

To take the example of *Antigone* first, the heroine takes the initiative in burying her brother, Polyneikes, whose burial has been forbidden by Creon's decree because Polyneikes marched against the

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<sup>48</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London, 1988), p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> See Froma I Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*", in *Arethusa* 11 (1978), pp., 149-185.

<sup>50</sup> See Synnove Des Bouvrie, *Women in Greek Tragedy* (Oslo, 1990), pp. 147-166.

city. Antigone defies the decree and thus becomes the guardian of tradition by demonstrating a commitment to her house and its status. She is the champion of *philia* and with her act exemplifies the cultural understanding of *philia*.<sup>51</sup> Her sister, Ismene, rejects her suggestion that she should help her with the burial with the excuse that women are not to fight men but rather to obey the men in power (*Ant.*, 61-67). However, our sympathy is directed towards Antigone who performs her duty to her family and by doing so, is elevated to the status of the last heir and defender of her lineage (*Ant.*, 941). As she is led away to her tomb, she laments for the two promises denied to her, marriage and motherhood; this turning point to her thought confirms that her act was a gender-specific task, not outside her accepted rights within her family. However, because she had the strength and the courage to enter into conflict with the contemporary political decree, and thus to be involved with politics which was a man's task, she is paradigmatically punished by death: "[H]er forced choice symbolizes the ultimately oppressive situation of women at Athens, and her actual fate is emblematic of the effect of such a situation: death in life."<sup>52</sup>

The case of *Electra* is quite similar. The story is the same as the one related in the second part of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* but *Electra* has a more prominent role in Sophocles' tragedy. Orestes still has the role of avenger but the stress is not on the actual deed. We are rather more interested in the deceptive tale of the Paedagogue that brings about *Electra's* determination to commit the murder herself. Her motives are revenge because of her εὐσέβεια for her father as well as because of the imagined results of her restored freedom: a worthy marriage achieved and honour at feasts and meetings because of her manly courage (*El.*, 983). *Electra* seeks to usurp the male role but her brother's arrival ends her plans. She wants to fight for the restoration of her father's *oikos* against her mother who has disrupted the line; it is

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<sup>51</sup> The word *philia* can be translated as friendship but it goes "well beyond our concept of friendship to cover a complex web of personal, political, business and family relationships, each of which when violated turn to enmity". See Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> Warren J. Lane and Ann M. Lane, "The Politics of *Antigone*", in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, edited by J. Peter Euben (London, 1986), p. 182.



worth noting that in Sophocles' play there is nothing about the pursuit of Orestes by the Furies. Clytemnestra is, according to Sophocles, a condemned murderess, a woman who has acted against her accepted social role and status, and therefore her punishment is wholly justified even if it comes from her own children.<sup>53</sup>

Our final example, Deianira, the central heroine of *Trachiniae*, is a figure in whom are concentrated all the features of the oppressed, married Athenian woman. She is passive, helpless, and her life is wholly dependant on her husband, Heracles (*Trach.*, 83-85), who after their marriage returns home only to produce children "like a farmer who comes to a distant field only at sowing time and harvest" (*Trach.*, 31-33). Sophocles has drawn her portrait very sympathetically and this may be because it fits the socially accepted and legitimate image of the submissive Athenian woman.<sup>54</sup> Deianira does not rebel against her husband and his mistress but she uses magic in an attempt to win him over. Nevertheless, "[I]t is ironical that the faithful and sensitive Deianira should produce a result to be expected by the 'pitiless woman' of Aeschylus; that the admirable monster-slayer should be destroyed by the woman he despises."<sup>55</sup> The unintended killing of Heracles and the subsequent suicide of Deianira have not interrupted Heracles' plans for the future: Hyllus, his son, is there to continue his will, his line, even his desires by marrying his father's mistress. The order of patriarchal society is thus reaffirmed by Sophocles despite his seemingly sympathetic portrayal of Deianira.

Euripides, the most innovative of the three dramatists, seems to be more sensitive with regard to the issue of women, although he has often been criticised as a woman-slanderer because he put on stage women who performed "wicked" deeds, like Phaedra or Medea. However, both external and internal evidence support the view that the dramatist actually approached the case of women's suppression with

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<sup>53</sup> A detailed analysis of Sophocles' *Electra* is found in chapter 3.1. "Electra and Matricide in Sophocles", pp. 123-131.

<sup>54</sup> Deianira has been characterised as 'naive' by S.B. Pomeroy in her *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1976), p. 109 but her character and fate should be considered as emblematic of the average woman in classical Athens.

<sup>55</sup> Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 389.

more comprehension and sympathy than the others. This is not to say that Euripides is a poet who devoted his dramaturgy to the cause of women's liberation. He was defined by the ideology of his age and he shared most of the ideas of his contemporaries. But the manner in which he portrayed some of his heroines indicated compassion and understanding. A more emancipated approach, however, could never have been allowed by his contemporaries as the case of the first *Hippolytus* indicated. The surviving play was rewritten by the poet since its first version was condemned by his contemporaries because he had presented Phaedra's confession of love to her step-son on stage.

To start with the external evidence supporting Euripides' favourable approach towards women, Aristophanes, the comic poet, criticised the dramatist in his *Thesmophoriazusai* (411 B.C.) for putting wicked women on stage. Thus, women appear to plot against him and desire to take revenge on him for all the slanders he has delivered against them. The play has been used to provide 'evidence' later used by scholars to attach to him the reputation of misogyny.<sup>56</sup> But a different interpretation could be that Aristophanes' reaction reflected the effect Euripides' heroines had upon the male dominated and patriarchal society of his age; Euripidean heroines like Medea and Phaedra could be a threat to such a domination and therefore, Aristophanes made the heroines of his play form a league with the purpose of punishing the dramatist. An example of contemporary outrage against Euripides' presentation of female characters is given by his first *Hippolytus*. Moreover, Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs* accuses Euripides because he has presented wicked women on stage: "I didn't clutter my stage with harlots like Phaedra or Sthenobea. No one can say I have ever put an erotic female into any play of mine" (*Fr.*, 1043-44).<sup>57</sup> He goes on to dispute Euripides' worth as a poet because "the poet should keep quiet about them, not put them on the stage for everyone to copy" (*Fr.*, 1053-4).<sup>58</sup> Apparently, Aristophanes was concerned with the bad effect the free will of Euripidean female characters could have on his

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<sup>56</sup> For a refutation see Jenifer March, "Euripides the Misogynist?", *Euripides, Women and Sexuality* edited by Anton Powell (London, 1990), pp., 32-75.

<sup>57</sup> Penguin translation by David Barrett (first published in 1964).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



contemporaries since women could copy them and follow their examples.

But Euripides' surviving plays provide the best evidence for his insight and his intense compassion for women's predicament. His *Electra* can serve as an illustrative example. The play is marked by innovations in the plot and in the portrayal of the central characters. Although the story is the traditional one of Orestes' return and his vengeance killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, it resists containment within the frame of the tradition. The recognition scene in the Euripidean play (*El.*, 524ff) is a parody of the Aeschylean version (*Or.*, 509ff), and the perception of the Erinyes seems to rationalise the personified Aeschylean Erinyes by regarding them as human consciousness. What is more important here is that the final solution to the psychologically presented effects of the matricide is superimposed by the Dioscuri (*El.*, 1233ff). And as the later detailed analysis of the fourth chapter will indicate,<sup>59</sup> Clytemnestra's killing by her children is not persuasively justified.

Euripides' *Medea* is another example of his "caring" treatment of female characters. Medea, the foreign princess, killed her children out of consuming desire for revenge against her husband, Jason, who deserted her for the king's daughter. This short outline of the story is unfair to the central heroine who receives a sympathetic treatment by Euripides. On the one hand, Medea has betrayed her father's *oikos* by killing her brother and, accordingly, she is cut off from her country and completely dependant upon Jason.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, her desperation arouses our sympathy. On the other hand, Jason's argumentation is not at all persuasive. In their first confrontation (*Med.*, 446-626), he includes amongst his arguments that his basic motive in deciding to marry Creon's daughter was to bring his children up worthily by producing more with his new marriage and by drawing the families together (*Med.*, 561-563). At the same time he does not seem to care about Creon's decision to ban his children from the country: therefore,

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<sup>59</sup> See chapter 4. "The Euripidean Treatment of the Theme of Matricide", pp. 171-225.

<sup>60</sup> For Medea's association with the notion of *oikos* see the interesting article by Margaret Williamson, "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*" in *Euripides, Women and Sexuality* edited by Anton Powell (London, 1990), pp., 16-31.



his argument is weakened and his treatment by Euripides is unsympathetic and ironic. Jason is a wicked man interested only in his own well being. At the end of the play, the arrogant man is completely destroyed: his future wife dead and his children killed. The final scene is indicative of Medea's triumph and Euripides' sensitivity towards her case: Medea leaves untouched and unpunished on the dragon-chariot of the sun while Jason's punishment seems to be justified.<sup>61</sup> In the same play, Medea delivers some passages which demonstrate Euripides' sympathy for women's lot as for instance the famous lines:

Of all things which are living and could form a judgment

We women are the most unfortunate creatures.

Firstly, with an excess of wealth it is required

For us to buy a husband and take for our bodies

A master; for not to take one is even worse (*Med.*, 230-234ff).<sup>62</sup>

The last illustrative example of Euripides' intense sympathy for the fate of women comes from his *Troades*. On the one hand, the play is concerned with the allocation of the Trojan women to their new masters and especially with the fates of Cassandra, Andromache, Polyxena; and on the other hand, it presents the bereavement of the former queen of Troy, Hecuba, completed by the assassination of Astyanax and by her failure to persuade Menelaus to kill Helen instantly.

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<sup>61</sup> The same ending has been interpreted differently by Froma I. Zeitlin in her article "Playing the Other: Theatre, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek Drama" in [*Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* edited by John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Oxford, 1990), pp. 63-96]: "... her spectacular departure from the city on the dragon chariot of her immortal ancestor, the Sun, suggests that there can be no place for her in the social structure down here on earth". This is because "even in this revolutionary play the typology still holds. Medea's formal function in the play is to punish Jason for breaking his sacred oath to her...". Even so the fact remains that Jason's act against his wife is considered punishable by Euripides, who approaches his heroine with deep understanding for what she has been through. As for the strange ending, during the play Medea has secured a place to live after the murders. Aegeus has promised her by oath a sanctuary at Athens. He could not break his oath to her and therefore she could have had a place in the social structure.

<sup>62</sup> Translated by Rex Warner in the *Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Greene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1955).

The play, which is an extended lamentation, is devoted with compassion and understanding to the fate of women in a post-war situation. The pain, the despair and the inevitability of the situation which the enslaved women have to face in the hands of their conquerors, are summarised in Andromache's dilemma: if she welcomes in her heart Neoptolemus, her newly imposed lord, she will be a traitor to her beloved dead husband, and if she remains faithful to her past, she will be hated by her new lord. Hecuba's shocking advice to her to forget Hector (her own son), and to win her new husband over with her feminine ways (*Tro.*, 700ff), is indicative of the enslaved women's inexorable fate.

Euripides' psychological insight into his heroines distinguishes him from the other tragedians although the fact remains that even his work is determined by the patriarchal values of his society. If we consider for example Andromache's words to Hermione, in *Andromache*, for her "paradigmatic" behaviour towards the amorous loves of Hector:

O dearest Hector, for your sake I even  
Welcomed your loves, when Cypris sent you fumbling.  
I was wet nursed to your bastards many a time  
Only to make your life a little easier. (*Andr.*, 220-223),<sup>63</sup>

we feel disappointed but the truth is that the social conditions of Euripides' age enforced acceptability of such behaviour.

Female characters hold a very central position within the surviving Greek tragic plays and in most of the cases they are shown to act in defence of the *oikos* which constitutes their own private domain. However, the outcome of the plays seems always to fall within the acceptable structure of Athenian society. The female intruders are usually denounced in one way or another and the male audience leaves the theatre quite relieved that the frightening female characters are only fictional. They have been given stage-life by male poets in order "to play the roles of catalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers and some times helpers or saviors of the male characters. When elaborately represented, they may serve as antimodels as well as hidden models for that masculine self...".<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, those female

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<sup>63</sup> Translated by Frederick Nims in the *Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Greene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1958), vol., III.

<sup>64</sup> Froma I. Zeitlin, "Playing the Other", *op. cit.*, 69.

stage-characters were represented on stage by male actors and, therefore, the identification of their fictional stage-personality with what represented the "otherness" in the features of the male gender, was more legitimate.



## CHAPTER 2

### 2. THE IMAGE OF WOMEN AND THE ISSUE OF SEX CONFLICT IN AESCHYLUS' ORESTEIAN TRILOGY

#### 2.1. THE AESCHYLEAN TREATMENT OF THE ISSUE OF SEX CONFLICT

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* deals extensively with the major issue of the sex contest together with the process of the "democratisation" of the city of Athens which becomes apparent in the third part of the trilogy. In that play the Areopagus, the people's court, was established to judge, according to the law, cases of bloodshed and thus to end nature's law of retribution and revenge. The establishment of the Aeropagus has been viewed by traditional classicists as the trilogy's main issue and they have disregarded the sex conflict almost completely. H.D.F. Kitto ends his chapter on the *Oresteia* by making assumptions to the trilogy's reference to contemporary politics (p. 95) while earlier (p. 91) he has indicated that "from the chaos in which the *Agamemnon* ends, Zeus, the Olympians, will force a way out".<sup>1</sup>

However, there is a complex polarisation of the trilogy's context since the male-female conflict is presented as a struggle between the new order of the democratic and civilised male dominated *polis* and the old order represented by the "malignant" force of female power. The resolution celebrates the superiority of the male-associated values over the female ones and therefore the superiority of the male requires total subordination of the female in the way the Furies, the female representatives, agree to become the Lesser Eumenides and offer their blessings for the city's prosperity and fertility. And it was because of that particular ending that modern scholars have criticised the trilogy from a feminist perspective as standing "within the misogynist tradition that pervades Greek thought".<sup>2</sup>

The three parts of the *Oresteia*, *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*, are dominated by the figure of the queen Clytemnestra, the

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<sup>1</sup> H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1993), pp. 91, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Froma I. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Myth Making in the *Oresteia*", p. 149, in *Arethusa Monographs "Women in Ancient World"*, *Arethusa* Vol. 11, No 1&2 (Spring and Fall 1978), pp. 149-184.

wife of the victorious king Agamemnon who was murdered by her plan of deception. Clytemnestra plays the central part in *Agamemnon*, a small part in *Choephoroi* while in *Eumenides* Clytemnestra's ghost appears just to utter a few lines in total despair and with the purpose of exhorting the Furies to chase Orestes, the matricide. However, irrespective of her actual presence in the plays, her act of revenge is always in the background. On the one hand, it reinforces the old vicious cycle of crime and retribution initiated by Atreus, who killed the two sons of his brother Thyestes and offered them to his unsuspected brother as a meal and which continued with Agamemnon's unlawful sacrifice of his innocent daughter. His act, for the purpose of appeasing the goddess Artemis who felt offended by the omen that two eagles tore a pregnant hare into pieces, prompted Clytemnestra's revenge. On the other hand, within the scope of the present trilogy she motivates the chain of revenge by the killing of king Agamemnon and of his mistress, Cassandra.

Clytemnestra's personality in *Agamemnon* is outlined by what the other characters of the play think about her, including the ever-present chorus of the old Argives who engage in conversation with the queen and who first witness her revenge and its immediate results, as well as by her own words, expressive of the thoughts and feelings that best explain her deeds. It is significant that the others, all men with the notable exception of the prophetess Cassandra, have a consistent view concerning her image: Clytemnestra is repeatedly associated with men because her deeds do not conform to proper feminine behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

Appropriate feminine behaviour is best displayed in Clytemnestra's deception-speech with which she welcomes her husband (*Ag.*, 855-913). The irony of the situation is that she uses the acceptable social code of the faithful and modest wife in order to achieve results that totally reverse that code and finally reveal that her past behaviour was contrary to it. Shamelessly Clytemnestra confesses her unrivalled love for her husband (*Ag.*, 856-7) and explains to him how difficult it has been for her to overcome the frequent rumours of his

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<sup>3</sup> First the watchman attributes to her the characteristics of *androboulon* (the one who thinks like a man, *Ag.*, 11); then the chorus of old men finds her speech clever and persuasive like a man's speech (*Ag.*, 351). There are other indirect references to her showing behaviour improper for a woman, which will be discussed in further detail below (e.g.: *Ag.*, 1107-1111, 1231, 1251).



death (*Ag.*, 861-876); she goes on to describe the threats of a possible popular rising (*Ag.*, 887-901). All these best fit the image of the socially respectable wife which is sharply opposed to Clytemnestra's true self.

Aeschylus' heroine conceives the plan of the fire signals in order to be informed immediately of Troy's conquest; she possesses the art of persuasion since she persuades Agamemnon to walk on the purple tapestry; she has taken a lover during her husband's absence to Troy; she manages to kill him and his concubine whom she does not accept as she was expected to do according to Agamemnon's words (*Ag.*, 950-955) and to the chorus' silent approval. In other words Clytemnestra's acts are unthinkable for a woman.

Thus, apart from the aforementioned direct comparison of her to a man, every time somebody ascribes female characteristics to her he is immediately contradicted by the development of the narrative: when the chorus discredits the effectiveness of her fire signals with the argument that woman's nature is easily persuaded by rumours before these are proved to be true (*Ag.*, 483-487), the herald comes to inform the queen and her fellow-citizens officially about Troy's fall; in addition, when Agamemnon expresses opposition to her "womanish ways" of welcoming him "with cries and worship" (*Ag.*, 914-918), he is ignorant of the purpose of her deceptive behaviour and he is finally deceived by her womanly manners. At the same time, there is a role reversal when the chorus accuses Aegisthus of lacking the strength to commit the murder himself (*Ag.*, 1634-5, 1644-7). As Froma Zeitlin has pointed out, Aegisthus "occupies the female interior space (*Ag.*, 1225, 26), and renounces masculine heroic pursuits of war and glory (*Ag.*, 1625). He is only an adjunct to, not an initiator of the plot against Agamemnon: the subordinate male, the strengthless lion (*Ag.*, 1224-5) is the only possible partner for the dominant female".<sup>4</sup> Before the chorus' eyes Clytemnestra becomes the man and Aegisthus the scared woman behind the man.<sup>5</sup> Even when they cry in despair "woman who stayed at

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<sup>4</sup> Froma Zeitlin, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>5</sup> According to R.P. Winnington-Ingram, [*Studies in Aeschylus* (London 1983), pp. 101-131], Clytemnestra "hated Agamemnon not simply because he had killed her child, not because she loved Aegisthus, but out of jealousy that was not jealousy of Chryseis or Cassandra, but of Agamemnon himself and his status as a man. For she herself is of manly temper, and the dominance of a man is abhorrent to her" (p. 105). Clytemnestra is the person who conceives and commits the murder of the



home waiting for the commander's return from the war, betraying him with another man..." (Ag., 1625-7), the essence of their words is that they cannot believe that a woman could perform such a disgraceful and horrible deed. Even Cassandra says in pure amazement "the female is the slayer of the male" (Ag., 1231-2) expressing how unorthodox and inconsistent with that of a female character Clytemnestra's act was.

The other female character who appears in the *Agamemnon* is Cassandra, the former Trojan princess and present concubine of her country's conqueror, Agamemnon. Even so, Cassandra appears to be encapsulating the "proper female values" which sharply contradict the character of the rebellious queen of Argos. She is the one who as a virgin daughter rejected the love of Apollo contrary to the "amorous queen" who dared to take a lover (Ag., 1208); before she enters the palace, she cries: "I am going in now to lament my and Agamemnon's fate" (Ag., 1313-15) while Clytemnestra, a few lines later, replies to the chorus' question about who is going to offer the burial rites to the hero (Ag., 1548-50), that he will be buried without being lamented by relatives (Ag., 1551-5) and she, thus, rejects another female role, that of the mourner of the dead relative. While standing above the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra, Clytemnestra speaks of Cassandra's faithfulness to her lover (Ag., 1442) ironically contrasted to her own betrayal.

Iphigeneia's sacrifice by her father is clearly mentioned in the original as Clytemnestra's motive for the murder of Agamemnon (Ag., 1525-9), although she is not given a justification for her murder.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, the second part of the trilogy comes to deprive her of the only reason that is given by her for the homicide: the sacrifice of her

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king and her husband but her motive is clearly stated : the sacrifice of her beloved daughter by her father (Ag., 1416-20, 1521-30, 1555-7). Moreover, in the second part of the trilogy, Aegisthus seems to be in charge of the palace and of the decision making (Ch., 716-8).

<sup>6</sup> According to H.D.F. Kitto, [*Form and Meaning in Drama* (London, 1959), p. 5], Clytemnestra is the gods' instrument: "the gods will bring upon Agamemnon retribution for all his bloodshed and violence". He adds that Clytemnestra's motive is "simply vengeance for her daughter, suddenly reinforced, at the last moment, by Agamemnon's insult to her in bringing home Cassandra; but because the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is paradigmatic or symbolic of all the bloodshed that the war involves, she is in effect avenging this too".

daughter by her ambitious father. Although the chorus in *Agamemnon* devote their parodos to her unholy sacrifice and the balance of the men's words seems to support Iphigeneia's case (*Ag.*, 218-247) against her father's impious offering to the goddess, they do not comment at all when Clytemnestra mentions Agamemnon's murderous sacrifice (*Ag.*, 1412-25), or when she declares that the main reason for her hatred of her husband was Iphigeneia's sacrifice for the sake of the Trojan war (*Ag.*, 1521-30). Clytemnestra's character is not acceptable to anyone, apart from Aegisthus, because it constitutes a threat against the male orientated values of society. She is thus constantly undermined to the point of being unsympathetic to an audience that has been raised according to patriarchal values.

In *Choephoroi*,<sup>7</sup> Clytemnestra's personality is depicted as more harsh, malicious and wicked as she is deprived of any human motivation for her husband's murder. Iphigeneia's sacrifice is no longer used by her as the motivating cause for the murder. On the contrary, her behaviour towards her other children, Electra and Orestes, shows neglect, indifference and hatred since Electra, according to her own words, is treated like a slave within the palace and Orestes wanders around in foreign places as an exile (*Ch.*, 135-7, 249-58, 407-8, 445-6, 915). Clytemnestra is described as an inadequate and unloving mother whose later behaviour comes to contradict the earlier passionate speech in which she asked her murder to be viewed as an act of maternal vengeance for her daughter.

It is characteristic that, when Orestes as the false herald of his own death in his turn deceives his mother by announcing her son's death, Clytemnestra speaks of unmeasured pain (*Ch.*, 690-5); but her immediate reaction of welcoming the strangers as friends, her urgent calling for Aegisthus (*Ch.*, 707-18) and Celissa's information that Clytemnestra's eyes could not hide her joy (*Ch.*, 735-8) are indicative of her secret relief from the threat which her son's life might have presented her and Aegisthus. Clytemnestra's bond with her children,

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<sup>7</sup> Misogynous allusions in *Choephoroi* are strengthened by the chorus' reference to crimes committed by individual women (*Ch.*, 585-622) : the mother, Althaea, who killed her son (*Ch.*, 603-11), the daughter, Scylla, who killed her father (*Ch.*, 612-22) and the wife, Clytemnestra, who killed her husband (*Ch.*, 623-30). The choral ode culminates with a reference to the collective murder of men committed by Lemnian women (*Ch.*, 631-8).



the expected motherly affection towards them, has been irreparably destroyed by the requirements of patriarchal society. She has to reject Electra and Orestes in order to survive because she knows that they hate her. She is relieved when she hears of Orestes' death because Orestes was a threat to her own life. However, this second phase of necessary development does not contradict the truthfulness of her feelings towards Iphigeneia as these are expressed in *Agamemnon*.

On the dramatic level, however, Clytemnestra, stripped of every noble incentive, becomes a godless woman to her children, *dystheos gyne* (Ch., 525), the contagious and hated parricide (Ch., 1028). At the same time, her desperate cry when she faces Aegisthus dead: "my love Aegisthus, you are slain" (Ch., 893) provokes Orestes' mockery and outrage (Ch., 891ff) because it is not acceptable for a woman to be in love with a man other than her husband. In such a case, love is equated with lust (Ch., 596-601). Nor do the ten years of Agamemnon's absence for an unimportant and exaggerated war (Ag., 403-455) matter for the relentless critics of Clytemnestra's supposed unjustified crime: "A woman suffers when her man is at war my child." (Ch., 920) says Clytemnestra to her son who is ready to take vengeance for his father's murder. His answer however proves that there is no possibility of understanding or communication between a woman who dares to fight for her rights and thus to oppose the patriarchal values of her society and a representative of that values: "but his struggle supports her while indoors" (Ch., 921). Additionally, when the queen tries to argue for Agamemnon's guilt (Ch., 918), meaning Iphigeneia's sacrifice and his relationship with Cassandra, Orestes supports the dead warrior because a woman who sits at home has no right to criticise a man who fights (Ch., 919).

Electra as a female figure is the opposite of her mother and her choice is conscious, as her words indicate when she prays to her dead father asking him to help her become more wise and more sensible than her mother, wishing her hands to remain clean (Ch., 141-2). She supports her father's cause and struggles to play the role of the good daughter. Her mother's comportment is unacceptable to her but she does not act against her: as a girl her proper behaviour is to wait for her brother, who as a man has the right to avenge their father's death. Electra has reached the age at which she should leave girlhood and take on the status of married woman. She herself mentions her future



marriage (*Ch.*, 486-8) when the murderous female and her lover will be slain by her brother and her father's disrupted *oikos* will be restored. And it is worth mentioning that at the moment when Orestes is ready to undertake his plan of killing the usurpers of his father's throne, Electra is ordered to go inside (*Ch.*, 554). "She is thus returned to the proper place of the unmarried daughter - on the inside - to await the outcome of the man's attempt to reorder the 'oikos'".<sup>8</sup> Orestes, the lawful successor of the king, takes the initiative of restoring his position.

In the course of the second part of the *Oresteian* trilogy, Orestes, Agamemnon's heir, returns home in order to avenge his father and restore his *oikos*.<sup>9</sup> In this effort, the god Apollo stands as an instigator, assistant and valuable supporter (*Ch.*, 269-305). The gods stand by the male heir, against the female usurper of the patrilinear order of society. Aegisthus, the male who stands by the female has to be killed first, in order to allow the intense opposition of mother and child, female and male to take place. Aegisthus, in this play too is said to be a "woman" (*Ch.*, 304-5) because he stands by Clytemnestra. To use H elene Cixous' description: "Aegisthus, the man of matriarchy, warrior from the women's quarters, is lost: '-Please a word, just a word-' facing the new man, the one who loses neither his time nor his blood nor his head, the future boss".<sup>10</sup> Orestes kills his mother. While he hesitates, Pylades, the guardian of Apollo's will, reminds him of his duty (*Ch.*, 900-2). As he stands above the two dead bodies, Orestes recalls the

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<sup>8</sup> Simon Goldhill, *Aeschylus, The Oresteia* (Cambridge 1992), p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> Orestes' return to his homeland and the killing of his mother have been viewed as his successful passing to manhood. Orestes is a young man, at the most appropriate age to succeed his father to the royal throne of Argos. But the succession is dependent on some "contests" which Orestes has to undertake and successfully complete. Orestes returns as an *ephebe*-exile to the city's borders and by using treachery, the acceptable ephebic weapon, defeats the maternal figure and successfully regains his father's throne as a man. For a bibliography see : J.P. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, translated by J. Lloyd (Brighton 1980), P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, translated by A. Szegedy-Maszakunder (Baltimore, 1986), first published in Paris, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> H elene Cixous, "Sorties" in the *Newly Born Woman* by H elene Cixous and Catherine Clement (Paris, 1975), translated by Betsy Wing (Manchester, 1986) p. 108-9.



image of the dead queen standing above the dead Agamemnon and Cassandra. The picture symbolically represents the re-establishment of the proper order of society by indicating the boundaries for women's proper behaviour.

However, the story of the house of Atreus has not ended yet. The sex conflict has another final part to be played. Matricide has always been considered a hideous crime whatever the reason. Clytemnestra finally has her own supporters, the Furies who chase the matricide without mercy. Mother's blood is responsible for the cruel and incurable hunting (e.g. *Choephoroi* 94-116). But Orestes has his own supporter: the god Apollo who ordered him to do the killing (e.g. *Ch.* 1030-1039). Accordingly, the trilogy is moving towards a final confrontation between Clytemnestra/Furies and Orestes/Apollo and the order of things that the two pairs represent.

Furies are always associated with women in the context of *Eumenides* and it is apparent from the beginning that there is a conflict between the old goddesses and the new Olympian gods.<sup>11</sup> With regard to their association with women, the Furies are the daughters of the Night (*Eum.*, 416-7) and they always invoke their mother to consider the situation which has been developed under the rule of the new gods (*Eum.*, 321-4, 745, 843-5), while there is no mention of a father. Moreover, their task is to protect blood ties by hunting mercilessly those who killed their kin, their mother: "our mission is to drive away the matricides" (*Eum.*, 210) as the Furies explain to the god Apollo. When he asks "about those women who killed their husband" (*Eum.*, 211) they answer that "the husband has not the same blood as his wife" (*Eum.*, 212). The same dialogue takes place between Orestes and the Furies at the sanctuary of the goddess Athena. When he asks: "Do I have the same blood as my mother?" (*Eum.*, 605-6) the Furies' answer comes to safeguard women's right to birth: "she was the one who fed you inside her body" (*Eum.*, 608). As far as the conflict of the two generations of gods and goddesses is concerned, the representative of the new order, Apollo, refers to the Furies as those "most hated by men and Olympian gods" (*Eum.*, 73). Furthermore, the Furies speak continuously about the humiliation they must endure because of the new rule (*Eum.*, 321-4,

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<sup>11</sup> The fact that the Furies are included among the older deities is specifically mentioned a number of times in the third part of the *Oresteian* trilogy (e.g.: *Eum.*, 150, 162, 728, 778-9, 882-3).



727-8, 149-54, 162-5, 490-2, 731, 778-9 etc) and Apollo describes the "old and ancient" virgin goddesses as being detested by men, gods and beasts, and as creatures who have been born to spread misfortune (*Eum.*, 68-72).

The new Olympian gods possess some characteristics associated with male power and domination.<sup>12</sup> Not only do they support Orestes' crime of matricide, but also they express verbally their strong dislike of women and their clear preference for men.

The mother of what's called her offspring's no parent  
but only the nurse to the seed that's implanted.

The mounter, the male's the only true parent.

She harbours the bloodshot, unless some god blasts it.

The womb of the woman's a convenient transit. (*Eum.*, 658-61).<sup>13</sup>

These words are uttered by Apollo in his defence speech in front of the goddess Athena and the judges, in order to improve Orestes' position by playing down the importance of his crime, since he deprives women of their unique and indisputable role in nurturing the offspring in their womb and in giving birth to it. Motherhood is therefore diminished and women's position in society is disregarded. Thus, according to Apollo, the murder of a woman by her son does not count in the same way as the murder of a male warrior (*Eum.*, 625-6).

The opposition between male and female, between Apollo/Orestes and Furies/Clytemnestra involves another important and ambiguous figure who finally decides the case, the goddess Athena. Her ambiguity lies in her image as the female who stands by the male and thus secures the male victory. Athena is offered by Apollo as an example to justify his argument that women's importance in the birth process is almost non-existent since she has been born from her father's head without being nourished in any "womb's watery shadows" (*Eum.*, 665; translated by Tony Harrison). Moreover, the same reason is given by her to justify her acquittal vote for Orestes:

It's my duty to come to a final pronouncement.

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<sup>12</sup> Apart from Apollo who stands by Orestes, Hermes is also invoked by his divine brother to be Orestes' escort and drive him to Athens (*Eum.*, 89-93), as well as Athena whose role will be discussed below.

<sup>13</sup> The translation is by Tony Harrison. See Tony Harrison, *Theatre works 1973 - 1985* (London, 1985).

I add my own vote to those of Orestes!  
I myself was given birth by no mother.  
I put the male first, although I'm unmarried,  
and I can't count the death of a woman  
of greater importance than that of her manlord." (*Eum.*, 735-40; translated by Tony Harrison).

Athena shows the same determination as her divine brother to protect male superiority and to stress the primacy of the male orientated values within Athenian society. However, she does not demonstrate the same aggressiveness as Apollo, but makes a conciliatory gesture in her effort to persuade the Furies to incorporate themselves into the new structure of society. The purpose of her gesture is to avert the curses that the Furies promise to deliver to the Athenian people when they felt betrayed by the court's decision (*Eum.*, 778-92, repeated in 808-822).

The reconciliation can thus be interpreted on the one hand as another victory for the party of the male-dominated structure of the new city which functions under the protection of the new Olympian gods, and on the other as an act of necessary retreat for the female-controlled party represented by Clytemnestra on the human level and the Furies on the divine. In other words, the new city with its male citizen body needs women to be wholly subordinate to men while their sphere of activity is confined within the borders of their father's or husband's *oikos*, and the only role which justifies their existence is in the reproduction process, already diminished by Apollo's words (*Eum.*, 658-61). Symbolically, the Furies, who have been renamed Eumenides, have taken on a new function which is to bless and protect marriage (*Eum.*, 895, 909, 959-67) as well as to secure the growth of vegetation and the prosperity of the sheepfolds (*Eum.*, 937-47), a role which signifies the image of the new woman whose activity will be confined within her husband's *oikos* while her role will be restricted to securing the reproduction process.

The political issue of the establishment of the new patriarchal city passes through the struggle between the old and the new, between the female and the male. On the one hand, the female has allied herself with the forces of the past which give primacy to the mother, to the blood ties as well as to the law of retribution identified with the old female values. On the other hand, the male has been associated with the values of the present, which stress the primacy of the father, through



Athena's presence and Orestes' acquittal, of the marital bond as well as of legal justice and the ordered structure of the new city. The establishment of the Areopagus by the goddess Athena signifies the passage into the new, male dominated world. Therefore, the trilogy, and especially its last play, seems to trace the movement from matriarchy, the social and political control of women, to patriarchy, the rule of men and the total subordination of women.

The issue of matriarchy as a historical reality of a social organisation in which women as a class had the political and economic supremacy has been described by J.J. Bachofen in his *Das Mutterrecht* (1861) where he treats myths from the body of ancient mythology as historical evidence.<sup>14</sup> He starts his theory from the stage of promiscuity (Aphroditic) followed by the reign of women who derived their power from motherhood expressed through the primacy of mother goddesses associated with fertility in religion (Demetrian stage). Gradually, men rebelled and at the end they established their own authority: their domain was based on the divine father principle.<sup>15</sup> *Mutterrecht* was associated with the material culture, with the feminine and the chthonic while patriarchy was connected with the spiritual and masculine values which were considered to be responsible for the development of civilisation.<sup>16</sup> The archaeological evidence does support

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<sup>14</sup> J.J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings*, translated by R. Mannheim (Princeton, 1967).

<sup>15</sup> Bachofen's theory was very influential upon Friedrich Engel's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, in the light of the researches of Lewis H. Morgan, translated by A. West and D. Torr, (Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), first published in Zurich, 1884). Engels criticised Bachofen's theory for its lack of historical evidence but himself spoke of matrilinear descent because in the situation of group marriages, the first stage in human relations, children recognised only their mother. He also believed that women had a privileged position within the household and in production which was home-based; they had political power as well. The change took place when the communal property became private and monogamous marriage was established. However attractive this theory of evolution seems to be, the evidence we have from matrilinear societies does not account for women's superiority in the household; our data does not support the existence of societies in which women have exercised power.

<sup>16</sup> Bachofen was expressing the ideas of the Victorian age which believed in the progressive development of civilisation and considered it as the result of the man's



the existence of the goddess of fertility but, apart from that Bachofen's work has been criticised for its lack of empirical data to support his theory, which is based on the treatment of mythology as history.<sup>17</sup>

Another more productive theory is the one articulated by J. Bamberger who considered matriarchy not as historical fact but as a myth, as a "social charter" that "may be part of social history in providing justification for a present and perhaps permanent reality by giving an "invented" historical explanation of how this reality was created" (p. 267).<sup>18</sup> With reference to the *Oresteia* and the myth of matriarchy it alludes to, Bamberger explains that these myths appear in societies in which "a sexual dimorphism in social cultural tasks" (p. 267) is apparent. Their purpose is to prove that women are unable to rule because of their "trickery and unbridled sexuality" (p. 280).

The above theory seems to apply in the case of the *Oresteia* where Clytemnestra rebels against the male dominated society by taking a lover during her husband's absence in Troy and by killing that husband and his lover, when both return to Argive soil. The reason is Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice their daughter in order to prosecute the Trojan war. Cassandra's murder demonstrates Clytemnestra's reaction against Agamemnon's right to impose on his wife his sexual desire for other women. But Clytemnestra assumes power by trickery and deception; the way she persuades her husband to walk on the purple tapestry is a powerful, symbolic representation of her plan of deception. In the second part of the trilogy, although Clytemnestra seems to have yielded her power to Aegisthus, her son returns to restore his father's *oikos* by killing the usurpers of his throne, his mother and her lover, using trickery as well. The third part of the *Oresteia* offers a kind of recapitulation of the issue of sex conflict by identifying

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struggle with nature and its elements. According to Victorian man, Civilisation was achieved when man took over the reign and the importance of the father was accentuated.

<sup>17</sup> See Paula Webster, "Matriarchy: A Vision of Power" in *Toward an Anthropology of Women* edited by Rayna R. Reiter, pp. 141-157 (New York 1975), p. 143; and Froma I. Zeitlin. "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*" in *Arethusa* vol. 11, no. 1&2, (1978) pp. 150-160. She gives a bibliography on the subject in note 5, p. 175-6.

<sup>18</sup> J. Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy" in *Women, Culture and Society*, edited by M.Z. Rossaldo and L. Lamphere (Stanford 1974), pp. 263-280.



Clytemnestra and her right as a mother with the chthonic Furies who support and fight for the enforcement of the maternal right. At the same time the Furies, by representing the old values, are sharply contrasted with the Olympian gods who represent the new order based on the right of father and on male authority. The whole structure of the play and its vocabulary seem to represent the myth of matriarchy at the stage when men took over. The end of the play is a celebration of men's power and authority over women by ascribing to them their considered proper place. The institutionallised subordination of women through the political act of the establishment of the Aeropagus reaffirms men's reign.

The documented history of the trilogy's performance in the 20th century indicates that the approach most favoured by contemporary directors-interpreters is the one that treats the trilogy as the process leading to the introduction of "democratic" values for the new city-state while the issue of the male-female conflict becomes subordinate and dependent upon the political argument. The next section will discuss some specific performances of the *Oresteian* trilogy with regard to the issue of women's representation within the trilogy's debate over the sexes. The productions under discussion are : a) Sir Peter Hall's version produced by the National theatre Company of Great Britain in the Olivier Theatre (November 1981) and at the ancient Theatre of Epidavros (July 1982), b) Peter Stein's adaptation produced by Melpomene Society for German-Russian cultural exchange in co-operation with the Academic Theatre of the Russian Army, and performed at Moscow (January 1994) and at the ancient theatre of Epidavros (July 1994), c) Karolos Koun's *Oresteia* produced for his Art-Theatre and performed at Epidavros in July 1982, d) Spyros Evangelatos' approach produced for his Amphi-Theatre performed at Epidavros (August, 1990) and e) Yorgos Michaelidis production of the trilogy for his Open Theatre (Winter, 1993-4). The discussion of a Finnish production of the trilogy directed by Ritva Siikala for the theatre of Raging Roses (Raivoisat Ruusut) and performed at Helsinki in summer 1991 will be included in the form of an Appendix because of the production's all-female cast.

## 2.2. "A MALE FEMINIST ORESTEIA"<sup>19</sup>

### 2.2.1. *An Ambitious Project*

Peter Hall directed Aeschylus *Oresteia* in 1981 for the National Theatre and it marked his first effort in the field of ancient Greek Theatre, at a time when his work as a director was at its peak.<sup>20</sup> The production was performed at Epidavros the 18th and the 19th of June 1982.<sup>21</sup> However, Aeschylus' trilogy had fascinated him from the early years of his work, when he was the director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in 1960 and had enjoyed Michel St Denis workshops on the use of the half and comic mask: "It was during that period that I started thinking about the *Oresteia*. I came within an ace of proposing it for the 64-65 season but then drew back because I felt we had not got the right theatre".<sup>22</sup> While he was director of Britain's National Theatre in 1973 he took up the idea of staging the trilogy but several postponements, including Tony Harrison's work on the translation over a period of 8 years, delayed the process until 1981. Moreover, the construction of the Olivier auditorium was for him a step further towards the completion of his plan because Denys Lasdun was influenced by the Greek amphitheatre of Epidavros and he constructed the tiers of seats around an open stage.<sup>23</sup>

With regard to the *Oresteia's* staging, Hall thought it was essential for Greek tragic plays to be performed in full masks because, he explained "the Greek stage is in itself a mask: hideous murders and violence happen behind the scenes; the terror is imagined. In the same way Greek tragedians, because they were masked, could deal with passions so extreme, they would be intolerable if expressed naturalistically".<sup>24</sup> The workshops with masks began in 1974 and many of the actors who tried to act with full masks quit because they found it

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<sup>19</sup> The British National Theatre's production of the Aeschylean trilogy directed by Sir Peter Hall was characterised as such by Victoria Radin in her article "Masks for the Sex War", *Observer* 15/11/1981.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on Peter Hall's work as a director see pp. 240-2.

<sup>21</sup> The present discussion is based on the videotaped performance of the 19th of June 1982.

<sup>22</sup> See John Higgins, "Sir Peter Hall", *Times* 21/11/1981.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Hall, *The Autobiography of Peter Hall* (London, 1993), pp. 311-312.

<sup>24</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 310



extremely difficult. The actors involved in the production experienced a new range of emotions dictated by the use of masks. Greg Higgs who had the role of Orestes confessed that the masks "produced the characteristic" for him.<sup>25</sup> However, their participation in the *Oresteia* signalled for them a new self-awareness; as David Roper (Watchman) pointed out: "it (the mask) has shown to us all our faults, and how bad we can be".<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the use of masks was an issue that divided scholars as well as audiences over their role in conveying the emotions that overwhelmed the house of Atreus. Peter Hall claimed that the emotions of the *Oresteia* are so violent that they must be contained within a mask. In addition, Tony Harrison argued that the mask and its language "compel us to keep our eyes open in situations of extremity when we might otherwise flinch away in horror and stop looking".<sup>27</sup> Michael Billington in his perceptive article "Masks that obscure a Tragedy" considered the use of masks as the major problem because from his point of view "masks make language very difficult to hear and deny the actor one of his most basic weapons".<sup>28</sup> John Barber agreed that "the masks make it hard to hear a text always exotic. Often you don't know who is speaking. Too often, voices are blurred or muffled by echo",<sup>29</sup> and Francis King added that masks "allow little variety and no fluidity of expression".<sup>30</sup>

Despite the stated disadvantages of the masked production of the Aeschylean trilogy, one could clearly assume that in the present case, the employment of an all-male cast to interpret both male and female roles makes the use of masks more justifiable. At the same time, masks have an alienating effect upon the audience because they enable the spectators to distance themselves from the enacted events and therefore to develop a more critical view towards the myth which establishes the rule of men over women in social, political and family life.

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<sup>25</sup> Channel Four Documentary on the National Theatre's *Oresteia* (Channel Four Production, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> See Janet Watts, "Terrifying Power of the Mask", *Observer* 4/4/82.

<sup>27</sup> See Michael Billington, "Masks that Obscure a Tragedy", *Guardian* 30/11/ 1981.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> John Barber, "Marathon in Masks", *Daily Telegraph* 30/11/ 1981.

<sup>30</sup> Francis King, "Masked Men", *Sunday Telegraph* 6/12/1981.

The other feature of the production which gave rise to critical controversy was the all-male cast. Hall denied that he was aiming at an archaeological reproduction of the trilogy. On the contrary, he clearly stated that his choice "was not an attempt at historical accuracy" but because the "three plays that make up the *Oresteia* are very much a man's view of woman as seen at a moment when matriarchy had given way to a male-dominated society"; he and Tony Harrison both "felt that the sexuality of the plays needed abstracting in order to be fully understood".<sup>31</sup> The plays' "strong male bias" has been admitted by Tony Harrison as well,<sup>32</sup> and according to him "to have women playing women ... would have seemed as if we in the twentieth century were smugly assuming the sex war was over".<sup>33</sup> These ideas seem to agree with Sue-Ellen Case's statement that because "female roles" in Greek tragic plays "have nothing to do with women", "these roles should be played by men".<sup>34</sup>

Amongst the principal contributors to this was Tony Harrison who undertook the task of translating the trilogy into a poetic and theatrical language.<sup>35</sup> In 1973 he started working on the translation of the *Oresteia* following Hall's ambition to stage the Aeschylean classic. The task proved slow and demanding and it was completed in 1981. As Oliver Taplin has asserted emphatically in the documentary which accompanied the filming of the production by Channel Four "Harrison's version is very much a translation ... It isn't a new script... it is really

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

<sup>32</sup> Channel Four Documentary on the National Theatre's *Oresteia* (Channel Four Production, 1983).

<sup>33</sup> See Victoria Radin, "Masks for the Sex-war", *Observer* 15/11/1981.

<sup>34</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London 1993), p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Tony Harrison has produced several books of poetry including his long poem "V" which caused a national debate in 1987, when televised on Channel 4. He also adapted and translated with outstanding success classic drama for the National Theatre, including (apart from the *Oresteia*) *The Misanthrope* (1973), revived at the National Theatre in 1989, *Phaedra Britannica* (1975), *The Mysteries* (1985) and *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* which had a world premiere the 12th of July 1988 at the ancient stadium of Delphi, later (1990) recreated at the National Theatre (Olivier). His play *Common Chorus* set in Greenham in the days when the Women's Peace Camp was active, was based on an adaptation of Euripides *Troades* and Aristophanes *Lysistrata*.



close to Aeschylus with very few omissions or additions or changes." However, the poet has given it his own colouring. The new text has been translated in a "slang-inspired"<sup>36</sup> Northern dialect which keeps the original's dramatic and poetic qualities and has enabled him to bring out "something of that novel and chunky character of Aeschylus's language".<sup>37</sup> Tony Harrison explained that "it was vital for the piece ... to have a sense of onward momentum, otherwise you end up - as others have done - with a production lasting 10 hours". Thus the verse had to be quick but not so quick as to undermine "the weighty, craggy quality of Aeschylus's verse". As a result he ended up using "that ghostly, alliterative Anglo-saxon, Beowulf measure. It has the quality. It can carry the traffic".<sup>38</sup> Tony Harrison and Peter Hall worked on the translation in various workshops at the National from 1975. Finally, they decided on a verse with four pulse beats in every line.<sup>39</sup>

The other major element of style in Tony Harrison's translation is the use of compound words in order to render one of Aeschylus' own stylistic characteristics. The poet describes the process with the following words: "I feel that when I perceive an element of the style in a poet, and one of those happens to be compound words, ... I match it with a compound word ... wherever I find a clarity of energy in English and I distribute that in whatever way seems appropriate to my style ...".<sup>40</sup> One distinctive group of compound words deals with relationships concerning either family and marriage ties or social and religious associations. In the first case he uses the compounds "bedbond", "bloodbond", "bloodclan" (House of Atreus) and in the second case words like "godgrudge" and "mangrudge", "life-lot" and "clanchief". In both cases the purpose is to emphasise the meaning of compound words which become more powerful, accurate, rigid and informative. However, his choice has been criticised as one that

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<sup>36</sup> *Times* of 4/2/82, "Poetry".

<sup>37</sup> Oliver Taplin in Channel Four Documentary on National Theatre's *Oresteia* (Channel Four Production, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Tony Harrison interviewed by Stephen Fay and Phillip Oakes for *The Sunday Times Weekly Review* 29/11/1981.

<sup>39</sup> The trilogy was spoken from 80 crotchets to the minute to 92 and its formality matched that of the masks which seemed necessary for that reason as well.

<sup>40</sup> Channel Four Documentary on the National Theatre's production of the *Oresteia* (Channel Four Production, 1983).



"exudes a gnarled and forbidding primitivism which excludes the audience".<sup>41</sup> Michael Billington finds that the "heavily alliterative Beowulfian type of verse" of Tony Harrison's translation "becomes almost impossible to digest in the theatre".<sup>42</sup>

The same compound words have been used by Tony Harrison for the additional purpose of "polaris[ing] the sexual antagonism of the piece"<sup>43</sup> as he carefully composes words that bring out what he considers the play's main issue: to underline the threat imposed by the imagined reign of women and therefore to celebrate the new rule by men who have defeated the primitivism of the female and proceeded towards a new man-orientated democratic state. Tony Harrison did not try to adapt the Aeschylean text but as every literary translation of an original foreign text can be considered a kind of intervention in the original text, Tony Harrison's poetic interpretation targets the sex-conflict issue which in his translation becomes more visible and, because of his choice of compound invented vocabulary, his rhyme and accentual metre, the issue appears clearly dominant.

The invented words that mainly accentuate the "sexual antagonism" are the compound words whose first part clearly state the gender: she-god/ he-god, she-child/ he-child, she-chief (e.g.: She-child of Tyndareos, Clytemnestra [Ag., 83-4]/ Artemis, pure she-god [Ag., 134]/ she-chief Athena [Eum., 443]/ she-kin Electra [Ch., 16]). In the Channel Four Documentary which accompanied the filming of the production Tony Harrison explained his choice as follows: "... I use he-god and she-god rather than god and goddess because goddess sounds in English like a diminutive, whereas he-god and she-god sound like equally matched partners: if not partners they are contestants." The result repays his effort as the sex conflict is powerfully depicted and successfully sharpened. The translator does recognise that the trilogy "has a strong male bias. The climax of the court scene finally decides that a man's life is more important than a woman's". Tony Harrison renders the Aeschylean text as it is in a modern Anglo-Saxon idiom but the emphasis he puts on the gender conflict makes his work a kind of social commentary on the fifth

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Cushman, "Masked Tragedy", *Observer* 6/12/1981.

<sup>42</sup> M. Billington, "Masks that Obscure a Tragedy", *Guardian* 30/11/1981.

<sup>43</sup> Channel Four Documentary on National Theatre's *Oresteia* (Channel Four Production, 1983)



century's ethics concerning women's role in the society. However, although underlining the battle of the sexes, he does not take sides. He follows the Aeschylean text in allowing the goddess Athena to decide that a man's life is more important than a woman's. But the use of his compound words gives the impression of an equal treatment of both sexes, at least from the point of view of the language which exhorts the modern audience to be involved in the conflict and to form its own view on the matter. Tony Harrison has observed that "most of the audience ... who have seen the play, they felt involved in the voting, in the trial scene" and "they open up the decision to the whole of society" since "they are voting on the relative status of a man or a woman" (Channel 4 Documentary). In that case the translation and the trilogy's performance in general have succeeded in drawing attention to the real issue of "sexual antagonism" which may be in favour of the women's plea for their own rights within the family and city life.

"The production also boasts one other unequivocal success: Harrison Birtwistle's music".<sup>44</sup> According to Peter Hall, Birtwistle's contribution to the *Oresteia* was unique: "he would sit for long periods without saying a word and then suddenly offer a solution to a problem with the conviction of a man who seldom has any doubt".<sup>45</sup> His music for the *Oresteia*, primarily percussive, has an operatic character and it plays an integral part in the performance of the trilogy, by punctuating dramatically and commenting on the verses, especially those of the chorus.<sup>46</sup> His six musicians on either side of the stage added pulse and colour to the verses.

Interviewed by Stephen Fray and Philip Oakes,<sup>47</sup> Harrison Birtwistle described in detail the instruments he used and their function: "I've used three groups of instruments - percussion, harp and members of the clarinet family - each of which has a specific dramatic function. The percussion governs the way in which the drama is paced, and one

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<sup>44</sup> M. Billington, "Masks that Obscure a tragedy", *Guardian* 30/11/1981.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Hall, *The Autobiography of Peter Hall* (London 1993), p. 314.

<sup>46</sup> Sir Harrison Birtwistle had been the National's head of music since 1972 and he contributed to several of the NT's major successes. Apart from the *Oresteia*, he had written the music to accompany other texts by Tony Harrison. Among them were the *Bow Down* (NT, 1977) and *Yan Tan Tethera, A Mechanical Pastoral* (NT, 1983).

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Fray and Phillip Oakes, "Mystery Behind the Mask", *Sunday Times, Weekly Review* 29/11/1981.



of its functions is to keep the rhythm going like a continuo. The harp has another punctuating role, which is to span the silences, while the wind instruments have sustained notes, and they play in unison in the bursts of incidental music that covers entrances and exits." Accordingly, the percussion dominates the chorus' words and most of the actors' deliveries, wind instruments are memorable in their accompaniments of Cassandra's wailings, while the harp underlines the tension of the voting scene.

Jocelyn Herbert, one of the best known English designers was responsible for the setting, the costumes and the masks of the *Oresteian* trilogy.<sup>48</sup> "I asked Jocelyn to do *The Oresteia*" argued Peter Hall "because I wanted someone who was prepared and would be excited to explore the world of the mask" and also because "I thought Jocelyn would be superb at giving me a strong neutrality to the text".<sup>49</sup>

The setting for the performance was very simple. For the Olivier, the designer wished to keep the architectural features and she created the scenery out of those features. For that purpose, she made a metal facade to echo the metal back doors of the Olivier. On a raised platform she designed a huge door which opened from both sides. A couple of stairs led up to the platform. For Epidavros the facade and the huge doorway were constructed from material which looked like the ancient stones of the theatre. The platform was the same but higher and stairs led up to it. The doorway stood for the two plays, *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, for the palace of the Atreids. During *Eumenides* the central door becomes, at the beginning, Apollo's sanctuary. As the door opens a huge circle representing *Omphalos* appears on the internal wall. As the play's action moves from Delphi to Athens, the central door opens to reveal a huge statue of the goddess Athena dressed in a long pleated dress holding her spear and wearing her plumed helmet. Jocelyn Herbert "removed everything from the stage that didn't fulfil a function and made something beautiful out of that minimalism".<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Jocelyn Herbert worked in the area of Greek drama in its modern productions-adaptations as well as in the modern reworkings of the ancient myths. Apart from the *Oresteia*, she designed Tony Harrison's production of *Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1988, 1990) his *Common Chorus* and his *Medea . A Sex-War Opera*.

<sup>49</sup> See Peter Hall in "Contributions from Colleagues" in Jocelyn Herbert, *A Theatre Workbook* edited by Cathy Courtney (London, 1993), p. 224.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Hall in "Contributions from Colleagues" in Jocelyn Herbert, *op. cit.*, p. 223



It has already been mentioned that one of the reasons why the NT's production of the *Oresteia* was very much discussed was the use of full face masks by the all-male cast. In her effort to create the particular masks, Jocelyn Herbert with her assistants tried various materials (clay, leather, fibre-glass) and they finally ended up using four layers of muslin "so the masks were light and porous".<sup>51</sup> The hair was usually black or dyed silk or cotton cord except for the Furies' hair for which they used dyed string. The masks for the old men of Argos were sallow and pale with shadows in accordance with their age (see Figure 1). The only identical feature was their beard. Jocelyn Herbert considered that if she "had had 16 different male masks it would have been very confusing but by making them similar" she "could enhance the telling of the story by strengthening the feeling of age of things remembered and of coming near the end".<sup>52</sup> Their costumes were slightly different in details, all long brown or grey and shapeless.

Clytemnestra's attitude is imposing and her long purple dress symbolises the tapestry scene. Her mask however seems to be very neutral and impersonal without allowing any feeling to escape its cool and calm confidence (see Figure 2). Cassandra's huge open eyes and her elaborate long dress with its gold embroidery recall the image of an Eastern princess. Agamemnon's mask is imperious, appropriate to the victorious leader of the Greek army and his huge helmet, the leather body and the large sword distance his appearance more. His entrance is accompanied by an iron cage which encloses his war spoil, Cassandra. Aegisthus' mask resembles that of Cassandra's with its huge open eyes: even the curly hair gives the same impression.

The masks of the slave Trojan women of the chorus in *Choephoroi* represent village women, wearing the traditional long, grey or beige dresses and the same colour scarves. The characteristics imprinted on their masks are harsh and distressed. Electra's mask however is more girlish with beautiful features, nicely shaped eyes, mouth and nose, and it closely resembles Orestes' beautiful and strikingly white mask (see Figure 3). He appears with his large sword barefooted and dressed in white tight trousers and T-shirt and a long

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<sup>51</sup> Jocelyn Herbert, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>52</sup> Jocelyn Herbert, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

vest held by a brown belt. "He looks like a pantomime boy".<sup>53</sup> Electra's state of continuous mourning for her father's death is depicted in her long black robe.

The process of creating the masks for the Furies was time consuming because at first Jocelyn Herbert, following Peter Hall's advice, designed "bestial masks with blood coming from the mouths". However, "the result was that the actors became like animals tracking about, but that didn't seem to work with the text".<sup>54</sup> She then discovered that the ancient vases depicted Furies as beautiful and charming creatures and she thought that the "main responsibility for their hideousness was carried by the poetic description of the terrified priest or the guilt ridden conscience of Orestes".<sup>55</sup> She therefore made attractive white masks for the Furies with black lips and long red brown hair (see Figures 3 and 4), "a distillation of the *femme fatale*".<sup>56</sup> Thus, the depiction of Furies as attractive women deepens the trilogy's opposition between male and female and signifies a positive approach towards an understanding of the female issues.

The other two important figures of the *Eumenides* come from the divine realm. Apollo, the god who represents light, has a golden-white appearance: his white dress is covered by a white-gold woven kind of mantle and his golden mask is framed by golden laurels. As for Athena, the female goddess who protects the male, her white robe is covered by a silver long mantle but her male qualities are given underlined emphasis even in this all male production of the *Oresteia* and are expressed by the silver helmet, spear, and breast plate. Jocelyn Herbert's work on the *Oresteia* was much admired by all the other collaborators. According to Tony Harrison "[T]he masks she created did not have their features distorted by the passions they were supposed to be feeling. They had a beautiful neutrality until, that is, they were worn by the actor and became animated by the emotions expressed by means of the text".<sup>57</sup> Moreover, her work is responsible for some of the

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<sup>53</sup> James Fenton, "The Magic and the Murder that made Greece", *The Sunday Times* 6/12/1981.

<sup>54</sup> Jocelyn Herbert, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>55</sup> Jocelyn Herbert, *op. cit.*, p. 230

<sup>56</sup> Victoria Radin, "Masks for the Sex-War", *Observer* 15/11/1981.

<sup>57</sup> Tony Harrison in "Contributions from Colleagues" in Jocelyn Herbert's *op. cit.*, p. 230.



features of the production which present a positive attitude towards the cause of women.

### 2.2.2. "Synthesis" Through Subordination

Peter Hall seems to have engaged in the project of the *Oresteia* out of ambition, and out of his practice of involving himself in "marathon" productions of classic plays, as he himself has admitted: "ever since I had seen Richardson and Olivier do the two parts of *Henry IV* in one day, I had believed in big occasions in the theatre. It was a belief that later led me to *The Wars of the Roses* trilogy and to the seven History Plays at Stratford; and at the National Theatre to both plays of *Tamburlaine the Great* to *The Oresteia* and to the cycle of three late plays by Shakespeare".<sup>58</sup>

With regard to the production's approach to the issue of sex conflict, it may be argued that the major contributor to the realisation of the idea was Tony Harrison and his sex-orientated translation which could not possibly be used in a production which rejects or underestimates the issue. Moreover, the representation of Furies as beautiful and feminine women, which signifies a positive approach towards Clytemnestra and her cause, is indebted to Jocelyn Herbert who conceived the idea of making the Furies charming against Peter Hall's initial advice to design "bestial masks for them".<sup>59</sup> Peter Hall's production of the *Oresteia* deals with issues which have the power to provoke the interest of critics and audience alike but none of these issues is fully exploited at the end. As has been suggested, his "range of productions might seem to be admirable" but he "sacrificed content to style. Hall's *Oresteia* was superficial when compared with Stein's at the Schaubuhne ...".<sup>60</sup> The following analysis of the trilogy will concentrate on the treatment of Clytemnestra and the Furies in close association with the other characters that affect their destinies.

Following the chorus' bow in greeting her majesty, a gesture that is made with the chorus facing the audience and not her, a sign of obligatory and not real respect, we are faced with a woman-like figure whose voice surprises the audience because it is a man's voice that usurps a female role. The alienating effect that prohibits any

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 101

<sup>59</sup> Jocelyn Herbert, *op. cit.*, p.123.

<sup>60</sup> See John Elsom, *Cold War Theatre* (London, 1992), p. 139.

identification with Clytemnestra's character has started. We have to get used to a convention unusual for a modern audience.

At first her movements are controlled and expressive but as she starts explaining her plan for the conveyance of the message of Troy's fall (*Ag.*, 281-316), her voice is trembling and at times interrupted by the excess of passion, for the time to fulfill the desired murder of her husband is approaching and her gestures follow her voice as she raises her hands in the sign of victory: the double victory of Troy's fall interpreted as such by the chorus members, and of Agamemnon's return which signals his death and her freedom. However, her words seem very wise, persuasive and appropriate when she states that:

... provided they don't give Troy's gods provocation  
and leave unmolested their sacrosanct seats

there's chance that the victors will never be victims (Harrison's translation of *Ag.*, 338-340)

and it is true that Tony Harrison's translation provides the means for her to build the image of the convincing queen.<sup>61</sup> When she leaves the stage she turns with a symbolic pose which is a recurrent image throughout the trilogy: she grasps the end of the drapery of her dress and she pulls it away from her body. So on the stage we see a powerful movement of her drapery every time she turns to enter the palace. That movement, because it is repeated and therefore constitutes one of her characteristics, makes her more human. At the same time it demonstrates her dominant personality. Her exit is accompanied by the same bowing of heads from the part of the chorus always facing the audience when they do so.

Agamemnon's entrance (*Ag.*, 783) is imposing, imperious and arrogant as he stands in full armour with huge helmet and large sword on a wheeled chariot made of bronze metal; at the same time his vanity is made visible by the cage which encloses Cassandra, his spoil of war. His words show a man very sure of himself and secure in his position. His first speech (*Ag.*, 810-855) is arrogant and Tony Harrison's translation makes this quality more apparent:

They raped one woman. We raped the whole city.  
Ground it to powder. Made mincemeat of Troy.

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<sup>61</sup> Tony Harrison's translation brings out Clytemnestra's power in manipulating communication as this is analysed by Simon Goldhill in his *Reading Greek Tragedy*, "The Drama of Logos" pp. 1-32 (Cambridge, 1986), p. 6-16.



His image is very distanced and his treatment unsympathetic (Harrison's translation of *Ag.*, 822-4).<sup>62</sup>

The encounter of the two spouses results in an outstanding victory for Clytemnestra's personality which seems proud, self-contained and decisive. Her deceptive greeting to Agamemnon sounds persuasive and affectionate (*Ag.*, 855-913). She acts like the socially acceptable and faithful woman who welcomes her man. Agamemnon is cold without any kind of affection for his wife. He is the general who should be respected. He delivers a speech about the importance of being modest (*Ag.*, 914-930) which is contradicted by his resplendent and arrogant appearance. But Clytemnestra employs all the power of her persuasion and her speech results in achieving her purpose: he agrees to walk on the purple carpet. At the same time, Agamemnon's unsympathetic treatment establishes Clytemnestra's image as the eminent queen who has reasons for the murder she is going to commit.

Before his ceremonial entrance into the palace, Agamemnon turns to Cassandra and speaks about her calmly, even tenderly (*Ag.*, 950-7). Clytemnestra at that point grasps her dress like a person who returns to a familiar gesture when she feels embarrassment and nervousness. However, her jealousy is justifiable since Agamemnon's behaviour towards his wife has been indifferent without any affection. But, when she comes back (*Ag.*, 1035-1046) she becomes indignant and fierce, the familiar gesture is nervously repeated and her attitude towards a helpless victim estranges the audience. The haunted and helpless figure of Cassandra is sharply contrasted with Clytemnestra's self-restrained and confident personality. Their different world view is not only apparent in their words but in their way of expressing them as well as in their comportment. Cassandra's movements indicate her desperation as she runs around the stage, throws herself down and raises her hands in abandonment. She responds to Agamemnon's tenderness by speaking for him with soft and tender voice (*Ag.*, 1223-1241) as if he was not responsible for her misery; however, all her outrage is addressed to Apollo when she furiously tears off her regalia as prophetess, in a scene which powerfully draws out the audience's sympathy.

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<sup>62</sup> It is noteworthy that when the herald brings the news of the king's return, he invokes all the "he-gods" whose association with the war becomes apparent, and thus the issue of men's responsibility for the destructive wars is emphasised.



The next point of interest is Clytemnestra's portrayal after the murder, when the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra are revealed on a wheeled platform and above them stands a dominant Clytemnestra. Agamemnon's body is naked and his hand raised, while Cassandra's head rests between his thighs. Agamemnon's raised hand is a disturbing reminder of his former power. Clytemnestra's blood-stained hand can be seen as she describes the details of her deed with savage satisfaction (Ag., 1384-1392) caressing her belly with sexual satisfaction in front of the shocked Argives, who cannot reconcile Clytemnestra's deed with her female identity. Her reference to Cassandra (Ag., 1438-1443) reveals jealousy and envy. The episode completely destroys her image until she starts explaining her motives for the murder, Iphigeneia's sacrifice, when her voice starts trembling and her gestures reveal real pain and pure affectionate love towards her dead daughter.

The treatment of Aegisthus in this production is sympathetic. His mask is reminiscent of Cassandra's: the same huge eyes, the long curly hair and the long dress with golden embroidery. He seems to be Cassandra's counterpart for Clytemnestra and this treatment indicates an approach which aims at being just to women's causes represented here by Clytemnestra who, like Agamemnon, has a lover as well. His voice, at first, (Ag., 1576-1611) is confident and controlled. He is a memorable, sympathetic Aegisthus whose motives appear to be well founded. Even when he becomes angry with the old men who repeatedly insult him, he remains calm. His final reaction however in drawing his sword against them (Ag., 1649, 1651) is a not unjustified response to their provocation. Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' depiction is human and an effort has been made towards a sympathetic understanding of their deed.

Clytemnestra's image also dominates *Choephoroi* whose action is concentrated on the plan of deception and consequent murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus by her son Orestes. His act is regarded as the necessary revenge for his father's murder. All the other women-characters who participate in this second phase of the history of the house of Atreus, the chorus of Trojan women, Electra and Orestes' nurse, clearly support Agamemnon's cause.

Orestes' appearance gives the impression of an innocent youth (see Figure 3) who performs the murders because he has been



persuaded that he is morally obliged to avenge his father's death. In this production Apollo becomes responsible for the matricide and Orestes seems like the instrument of a divine will, because his appearance and his voice make him sympathetic to the audience. Electra is sympathetic as well but her personality is not at all powerful; on the contrary she is colourless and she does not leave her stamp on the performance. The recognition scene (*Ch.*, 212-268) is played down by the director. Brother and sister hold each other's hands tenderly but Electra's excitement is quickly restrained by Orestes' words:

Easy! Still! Keep all emotion masked within.

Our 'nearest and dearest' would like us destroyed.<sup>63</sup>

Then her role is confined in her participation to the ritual that follows, distinguished from the other women of the chorus only in that she has a distinct speaking part. Electra is not presented as a strong personality who opposes her mother. The climax of the play is ritualistic and as a whole it elevates the figure of Agamemnon and reduces the status of Clytemnestra to that of an ignoble personality who brought misery and destruction to her family and to the state. The long invocation to the dead Agamemnon (*Ch.*, 306-509) is shared among Orestes, Electra and the chorus of Trojan women.

During *Choephoroi* no change becomes apparent in Clytemnestra's dominant character. This is contrary to Peter Stein's and Karolos Koun's Clytemnestras whose stature is diminished in the second play.<sup>64</sup> But the episode that demands our attention is the confrontation of Orestes and Clytemnestra (*Ch.*, 668-718). She enters from the palace's central door with the same splendour as in *Agamemnon*, in order to hear Orestes' news, and her appearance evokes the same bowing forward of the women of the chorus. Orestes, while relating the false news of his death (*Ch.*, 674-690) tries to avoid looking at her as he is not completely bereft of emotion. Clytemnestra's immediate reaction to the news is to touch her womb in a motherly gesture of sudden unbearable pain. Her following speech (*Ch.*, 691-7) is a mixture of pain and relief and although her voice is stable, her gestures seem to be very confused : at time she signals victory with her

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<sup>63</sup> Tony Harrison's translation of *Choephoroi* 233-5 published in his *Theatre Works* 1973-1985 (London 1985), p. 237.

<sup>64</sup> See 2.3. "A Political View of the Aeschylean Trilogy" and 2.4. "Karolos Koun's Political *Oresteia*", pp. 87-97.

hands and at times she holds her belly in pain. Her welcoming speech (*Ch.*, 707-718) however is delivered in a different mood: now she only seems relieved from the terror that her son would take vengeance for his father's murder by killing her and her lover, and this feeling has completely prevailed over her pain for the death of her child. As she invites the strangers inside, the women bend their heads forward in the same way as the Argives. But, while Clytemnestra does not leave the stage this time with her characteristic movement of pulling the drapery of her dress away from her body, Orestes performs the same movement with his hands while following his mother in the palace. It seems as if he has usurped her role, as if he has become her.

Aegisthus' entrance (*Ch.*, 838) is accompanied by a gesture fitting only towards a tyrant: the women of the chorus kneel. The scene alludes strongly to Aegisthus' oppressive regime. As soon as he enters the palace (*Ch.*, 855) a cry is heard identical to Agamemnon's in the first part of the trilogy. Aegisthus is now counted among the dead. The servant (*Ch.*, 875-886) in black costume, black trousers and black leather jacket formally announces his death. He is the only person dressed in contemporary clothes; he gives the impression of a man who has just left the audience in order to comment on issues which are valid and contemporary.

Clytemnestra almost collapses when she hears of Aegisthus' death (*Ch.*, 893). When the final confrontation between mother and son takes place, she tries at first in tender, human tones to persuade him not to commit the crime (*Ch.*, 896-8, 908, 910); then she threatens him with his "mother's bloodgrudges" (*Ch.*, 924) while her voice trembles with hatred. Her final pronouncement "You! You were the snake crawled out of my womb./" (Harrison's translation of *Ch.*, 928-9) is accompanied by a gesture in which she symbolically grasps her breast with her left hand and her belly with her right to indicate her motherly pain. But Orestes remains relentless and she enters the palace's central door alone, like Cassandra, while Orestes and Pylades follow her. In the second play Clytemnestra shows inadequate feelings towards her children. Few are the moments when sympathy towards her is invited from the audience because this interpretation of the play did not bring out the inevitability of the situation: she had killed the father of her children and therefore, in order to go on living she had to kill her motherly feelings. When Orestes sees the approach of the Furies (*Ch.*, 1048), he is transformed



into a frightened individual and his former words (*Ch.*, 973-1006, 1021-1043) appear to have been empty and pointless boasting. He becomes the victim of the "he-god", Apollo's provocation and of his society's patriarchal values which in this production appear to be inevitable; he is not depicted as the hero, the male heir, who comes determined to avenge his father as for example he is in Spyros A. Evangelatos' production, to be discussed later in this chapter.

In the third part of the trilogy the confrontation is transferred to a divine level. The play is dominated by the presence of Clytemnestra's supporters, the Furies, who are portrayed as attractive women (see Figures 3 and 4). Clytemnestra's ghost appears (*Eum.*, 94-139) with the same purple dress and with a bloodstained white net around her head and body. She comes down the stairs very slowly and ceremoniously, but she speaks up with a vengeful and passionate voice. Her appearance however, is distressing and arouses sympathy towards the ordeal of the mother who has been slain by her own son. As the third part commences the balance of our sympathy leans on the side of Clytemnestra and the Furies. The same is also true in the case of the first confrontation of Apollo, the "he-god", with the Furies, "she-gods" (*Eum.*, 179-234). Apollo, on the one hand, orders them to leave his shrine and his words are full of insults. The Furies, on the other hand, speak to him calmly and wisely with reasoned arguments.

The sympathetic portrayal of the Furies is depicted in the spectacular first *stasimon* (*Eum.*, 307-396) when they dance and sing like sirens with a thin womanish voice, and when they pursue Orestes with dancing steps and start touching his body with their hands. However, the figure of the goddess Athena is unfavourably portrayed: she looks like a hermaphrodite with her silver breast plate, her silver helmet and spear; she even recalls the image of the "phallic woman",<sup>65</sup> born out of her father's head. Her voice is dominant and authoritative. Very formally, with the sound of trumpets, she sets down the laws that will govern her establishment of the Aeropagus (*Eum.*, 470-489). The trial opens with the prosecution, the Furies who question Orestes (*Eum.*, 585-608). He is very much afraid, his voice as well as his gestures are indicative of his embarrassment; the way he appeals to Apollo (*Eum.*, 609-613) to be his witness denotes his fragile state of existence and his

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<sup>65</sup> See Gerry Harris, "The Archetype & its Shadow : Medea & the Everyday" in *Women & Theatre*, no 2 (1994), p. 18.



uncertainty about the morality of his action. He lacks the will and the strength to undertake the consequences of his murderous act because he is not himself persuaded of its rightness. And in this production, that image of Orestes has been overemphasised by his delicate appearance, his uncertain gestures and movements.

Apollo's figure continues to be unsympathetic because of his arrogant appearance, and the way he is depicted as behaving towards the Furies. The Furies however always remain calm and polite. He is also responsible for the part which has provoked feminist critics of the play:

The mother of what's called her offspring's no parent  
but only the nurse to the seed that's implanted.

The mounter, the male's the only true parent. (Harrison's translation of *Eum.*, 658-661).

But in Hall's *Oresteia* Apollo's words come to complete his image as an extremist who speaks out of passion to such an extent that no one can take him seriously.

The time for the voting procedure has arrived and one by one the judges pass by two ballot-boxes, stretch both hands above them and cast their vote to the accompaniment of the percussion music which intensifies the atmosphere of expectancy. Athena's speech (*Eum.*, 734-743), as was expected, gives the first blow to the Furies. She, the personification of the "phallic woman", puts the male first and therefore her vote favours Orestes. The urns are emptied by two of the judges and the votes are found to be equal. Orestes is acquitted from his mother's murder by Athena's vote. He leaves the stage joyfully after promising his country's alliance with the people of Athens (*Eum.*, 762-777). But his final victorious speech (*Eum.*, 754-777) is not accompanied by cheerful music. On the contrary, the wind instruments that are used, with the dominant flute, follow the despair and disappointment of the Furies. The music is sad in harmony with their mood and our sympathy directed towards their cause.

The final episode of the trilogy deals with the persuasion of the Furies by the goddess Athena to accept their new supportive role within the male dominated city of Athens. After Orestes' exit, the Furies burst out singing and moving in beautiful formations (*Eum.*, 778-880); but their words betray their despair and their songs are sad because their rights have been usurped by the new gods and the new rules. They



can only react by spreading disaster among the Athenians. However, Athena presents a better solution because she offers them a respectful shelter and restitutes some of the honours they used to have (*Eum.*, 848-869). The Furies accept (*Eum.*, 916-926), because in reality they have no other choice. Athena orders the women of Athens to bring the "deep sea-red" robes to dress their "honoured guest-strangers" (Harrison's translation of *Eum.*, 1025-1031). The white dressed women bring the robes on stage and then they approach the audience and sign to them to stand: "stand and be silent"; there, in an atmosphere of religious awe, Athena leads the holy procession out through the audience. The Athenian women remain on stage holding torches. Choral music with womens' voices accompanies the procession.

According to Peter Hall the trilogy's conclusion offers "a balance of opposites and some kind of synthesis". He claims that "the miracle of the play is that it's the women of Athens who come and finally make the synthesis at the end. So the sex-war is really resolved. And they are the ones who turn the Furies into the kindly ones, beneficent people of the future. A woman's voice is not heard in our production until the very end, when there is chorus singing because, until that point all parts were played by men".<sup>66</sup> Peter Hall's interpretation of the trilogy's conclusion, readable in the performance, is sympathetic but, at the same time, very much a man's view of the enacted events. This is because the Furies are virtually forced to accept their new roles since, after the trial, they have lost all power, respect and honour. The act of persuasion did not take place between two equal partners. Women, through the Furies, accept their new position and their role in reconciling opposing forces is added to the traditional values of women. The trilogy celebrates women's subordinate role in a society dominated by men, and Hall's interpretation seems to favour that approach since he ends the trilogy in an atmosphere of religious celebration.

If we try to evaluate Peter Hall's production of the *Oresteia* we are confronted with a situation in which his major interest is consumed in elements of style and presentation (masks, all male production, language of the translation, music) whose realisation is attributed to those who mainly contributed to their success, Tony Harrison, Jocelyn Herbert and Harrison Birtwhistle. Peter Hall attributes his main reason

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<sup>66</sup> Channel Four Documentary on National Theatre's production of the *Oresteia* (Channel Four Production, 1983).

for doing the *Oresteia* to Aeschylus' morality: "it's about how man can possibly live in society whether it was in 500 BC in Greece or whether it's now, how you actually discipline the individual, how the individual himself recognises that he has a dark side, very violent, very bestial side and very virtuous and very moralistic side. Aeschylus' morality ... is that [it is] only by recognition of all facets of the human personality, of all facets of the body politic ... that you can get a balance of opposites and some kind of synthesis ...".<sup>67</sup> This statement however, seems to be a vague generalisation whose realisation in scenic action is not discernible. On the contrary, apart from the final synthesis which means the persuasion of the Furies to become part of the new system and of the new world, there is no consistent line of interpretation to concentrate on the moralistic issue of the human being's divided self. Of course it could be argued that, for example, Clytemnestra has a bestial side which demands Agamemnon's murder and a virtuous side as a caring mother (Iphigeneia); but this is not explored any more than in the other productions we shall discuss later on this chapter.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



## 2.3. A POLITICAL VIEW OF THE AESCHYLEAN TRILOGY

### 2.3.1. A Conscious Project

Peter Stein produced Aeschylus' *Oresteia* with his Schaubühne company in 1980 (Première: 18 October 1980), using a new translation compiled by him and his *Dramaturg*, Marleen Stössel, which aimed at a simple prose presentation of the poetic Aeschylean text but at the same time, a maximum faithfulness to it. His second approach to the Aeschylean trilogy came more than a decade later in 1994 in Moscow at the Academic Theatre of the Russian Army (Première: 29 January 1994). The trilogy was translated into Russian by Boris Chekassiouk, in the same prose style.<sup>68</sup> Although the two versions are not identical, they are structured under the same prevailing insight into the trilogy's meaning.

One of the features of Stein's work in the eighties, his faithfulness to the authorial text, was to emerge with his first production of the *Oresteia*.<sup>69</sup> It is essential to note that the German version as well as the Russian one were lengthy productions because the director insisted on having the original text translated almost word for word. Otherwise, both of the productions emphasised the main stylistic characteristics of Stein's personal working method and in particular the meticulous construction of character and his attention to detail of gestures and of movement.

The male chorus of *Agamemnon* provides a powerful example of the meticulous attention to detail: the twelve actors were represented as old men who gathered separately from the women in the city, in places designed strictly for men, in the Community office or in the square's coffee shop in order to recall the past with their endless talk and to attempt unsuccessfully to predict and determine the future. Their movements and gestures were masterfully designed to convey this impression: they walked with difficulty with the help of their walking sticks, they occasionally coughed or sneezed. Moreover, the same impression of naturalism was evident in the abundant blood dripping

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<sup>68</sup> The present analysis will exclude comments on the language of the translation because of the researcher's lack of access to the Russian language.

<sup>69</sup> For a more general discussion of Peter Stein's work as a director see "Appendix A", pp. 249-253.



from the dead bodies at the end of *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* as well as in the actual vomiting of Apollo's priestess, after encountering the Furies at the beginning of *Eumenides*. His realistic imitative performances in both productions did not attempt to create the illusion of identity between the actors and the characters, who gave the impression of relating a story to the audience: for instance, the costumes of the Furies in the German production made them look like disfigured freaks because of the many swellings, tails, humps, distorted arthritic joints making identification impossible; and, among the three plays the same actors were viewed preparing the scenery for the next part, cleaning the blood or carrying tables and chairs for the court. In one case at the beginning of *Eumenides*, the backstage black wall structure was demolished and painters appeared to white-wash the remaining central wall. And when the scenery changed from Delphi to Athens, the lights switched on and workers appeared, to pull down the white wall which represented Delphi.<sup>70</sup> All these detailed preparations in front of the audience resulted in the rupture of dramatic illusion as well. Stein's Brechtian influence however, was accompanied by his attempt at psychological realism evident in the aforementioned discussion of the chorus of the old men in *Agamemnon*, as well as in the depiction of all the other characters (see below).

The other major component of Peter Stein's style which characterised his productions of the *Oresteia* is his political approach to the issues of the trilogy. Stein's politically motivated attempt to alter the consciousness of the bourgeoisie ended with his production of Brecht's *Die Mutter* in 1970; from that point onwards his choice of plays (e.g. Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and Maxim Gorky's *Sommergäste*) indicated his interest in exploring bourgeois realism and in criticising it.<sup>71</sup> The Aeschylean *Oresteia* has traditionally been viewed as the trilogy which deals with the political act of the establishment of the Areopagus, and Stein's 1980 and 1994 interpretations of the trilogy stressed this political element and presents the trilogy as a kind of political history, or didactic myth. His decision to produce the trilogy in Moscow however, at that crucial moment of its political history, revealed his intention to draw on parallel developments between the events portrayed in the *Oresteia* and

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<sup>70</sup> This description refers to the Russian production of Peter Stein's *Oresteia* performed at Epidavros in the 30th of August 1994.

<sup>71</sup> See "Appendix A", pp. 249-253.



events in recent Russian history. The director himself admitted in the programme of the Russian production that he "did that consciously", in the following words: 'I kept drawing parallels between what is said in the play and the present time. But not only Russian ones'.<sup>72</sup> Those parallels, evident in the German production as well, dictate Peter Stein's approach to the Aeschylean play and therefore, every other issue of the play has to be secondary.

The present chapter will concentrate on Peter Stein's Russian production of the *Oresteia* as performed on the 30th of July 1994 in the ancient theatre of Epidavros. At some points parallels are drawn from the German production studied from a videotape. Peter Stein's German production of the *Oresteia* was based on the expertise of his permanent production group at Schaubühne. From the designer to the actors, the group had been in harmonious cooperation because they knew and valued each others' work. For the Russian production, the director collaborated with Russian artists and technicians, employed by the Academic Theatre of the Russian Army in Moscow. However, it should be pointed out that the Russian version was essentially a remaking of the German production. The setting was exactly the same, the objects used by the actors were identical, even the costumes were copied from the German originals with the noticeable exception of those worn by the Furies, Orestes and the second costume of Athena.

With regard to the staging of the Russian production at Epidavros, Karl-Ernst Hermann's spatial design for the German production remained unaltered.<sup>73</sup> Moidele Bickel, the costume designer in the German production was responsible for the setting and the costumes in the Russian one. The acting area was the huge circle of the orchestra in the theatre of Epidavros, with the black walled royal palace up-stage. On the orchestra a meticulously ordered table with

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<sup>72</sup> Barbara Lehmann, "Enduring the Fact that you do not Understand", ("A conversation with Peter Stein following the general rehearsal of the *Oresteia* in Moscow on January 27, 1994"), published in the programme of the production, pp. 62-3.

<sup>73</sup> Karl-Ernst Hermann worked with Peter Stein for the first time in München on Bertolt Brecht's *In the Jungle of the Cities*. In 1972, he became the leading resident designer at the Schaubühne and from that time onwards he designed almost all of Peter Stein's productions. He was highly praised for his naturalistic setting for Peter Stein's production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1977).



documents and papers under lamps surrounded by twelve chairs awaits the old men of Argos to comment on past and present events. Even the murderous knives which will claim Aegisthus's life at the end of *Agamemnon* lie there. The victorious king enters the stage on a wheeled carriage rolling on the iron railroad whose pieces, assembled by the chorus at the moment when the great king appears, are in the orchestra from the very beginning. The same black-wall structure provides the background scenery for *Choephoroi* as well but instead of the elders' table there is Agamemnon's elevated tomb surrounded by the twelve chairs of the women mourners. In *Eumenides* however the atmosphere is quite different as the two terminal parts of the black wall are pulled down and the central one is painted white in order to represent Apollo's sanctuary. As the action moves from Delphi to Athens, the white wall is pulled down as well and the raised platform serves as the Athenian Court of Areopagus. Four other staircase-constructions are added to the single one of the previous plays because in the space provided among them the twelve Eumenides are wrapped in their crimson tunics like mummies (see Figure 9). On the platform the twelve jurors are sitting behind a white iron rail which separates them from Apollo and Orestes whose chairs are in front. A table, with two ballot vases, a black one and a white one, stands between Apollo and Orestes. That the place is actually Athens is denoted by a kind of spear, one of Athena's symbols, standing at the centre of the orchestra. The spear serves as a substitute for the marble statue of Athena present in the middle of the platform in the German production. And because Epidavros is an open theatre, Athena's flying machine used in the closed Academic Theatre of the Russian Army is abolished and the goddess descends from the auditorium.

The costumes for the Russian production were modified in the case of the third play, and that coincides with the alteration of the court scene which will be discussed in detail later.<sup>74</sup> The costumes are diachronic as the director has chosen them from different cultural periods. The Argive elders are wearing traditional suits and battered hats in contemporary style while Electra's and the Trojan women's

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<sup>74</sup> Peter Stein explains the process of alteration as necessary "because the Russian actors reacted to the situation totally differently" and that reaction was interesting "because they do not change the play, but they let it be seen from a different angle producing new and different points of interest". [Barbara Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 60].



appearance points towards Mediterranean widows or hired mourners with their black sets of skirt and jacket and black head scarves.<sup>75</sup> Electra looks less elegant than them. The king Agamemnon is figured as the arrogant and cool commander in his long white coat and black trousers. His large sword hanging on his back recalls his heroic victory while the creature next to him, his awarded booty, covered completely by a white sheet, evokes his image as conqueror (see Figure 5). When she stands her completely white appearance, the long dress and the white stick communicate her divine gift of prophecy which she later renounces by throwing away her white stick and diadem. Orestes' white hooded jacket and his white trousers in the Russian production differ greatly from the German version where he gives the impression of a spy with his long overcoat and black hat. Aegisthus wears an elegant and formal black suit and coat.

Apollo's purple tunic has now been abandoned in favour of a white outfit which approximates to that of Orestes. When Athena first appears she wears a long pleated dress and a silver top. Her helmet seems to be an elegant hat. However, her second entrance indicates the director's different treatment of the court scene. In the German version, the goddess wears the same white dress with a small *gorgonion* but without the silver top while in the Russian, she performs her task of supervising the process of Orestes' trial in a tight silver dress, very feminine and attractive. Moreover, in the Russian production, the Furies become human crone-like creatures with white and uncombed hair (see Figure 8).

Clytemnestra's self-confidence in her first appearance is emphasised by her long black skirt and mustard jacket. Her masculine looking purple suit with the long skirt when she welcomes the king communicates her determination to complete the murder while after committing it her white blouse with the reddish embroidery and her tight skirt ( see Figure 6) convey the image of "a giant controlling force, a sexual rod of dynamite".<sup>76</sup> However, when Orestes appears she looks middle-aged and tortured in her long gown and high heels.

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<sup>75</sup> In the Russian production the Trojan women's costumes are smarter and more elegant than in the German because the jackets and the knee-high skirts are tighter, while the high heel shoes give a formality to the occasion.

<sup>76</sup> John Chioles, "The *Oresteia* and the Avant-Garde. Three Decades of Discourse", *Performing Arts Journal* 45, no. 3 (September, 1993), p. 22.

The music of the production was based on the human voice: the continuous whispering of the old Argives, the woeful lamentation of the chorus of Trojan slaves, the imitation of barking by the Furies and the slow but mocking part played by Apollo with his lyre stamp each one of the three parts of the *Oresteian* trilogy. Moreover, the generally low lighting which comes from candles or from the focus of one of the projectors on a particular character or scene concentrates the audience's attention upon certain points of interest.

### 2.3.2. *The Process Towards Democratisation*

Since Peter Stein has concentrated upon a political interpretation of the play, the issue of sex conflict has to follow the development of the political and juridical consciousness from the tyrannical regime, where justice follows the law of retribution, to the establishment of democracy where justice is attributed according to the verdict of the Aeropagus. The old system is represented by the Furies, the new by Apollo and Athena. In that context, the newly established political system is not associated with the passage from matriarchy to patriarchy: that aspect of the plays has been reduced in emphasis. The Furies do support Clytemnestra's case but their relationship is not over-emphasised; they are considered mainly from the point of view of the old goddesses who avenge matricide and therefore they favour the law of retribution. Clytemnestra is treated as the powerful queen who "is ... abundantly equipped with reasons" for her husband's murder and Orestes<sup>77</sup> comes to fulfill what is considered, equally by gods and humans, his duty of avenging his father's murder and liberating his *oikos* from the tyranny of the imposed rule of the murderers who have disrupted the lawful succession to the throne and to the family.

With reference to the acting style, the Russian actresses and actors tried to approach that of their German counterparts; the proverbial Russian emotionality ascribed to the Stanislavskian method had to be adjusted to the Brechtian intellectual and conscious way the German team of the first production conveyed the trilogy's content. It is interesting to quote Peter Stein's view of the acting style of the

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<sup>77</sup> Barbara Lehmann, "Enduring the Fact that you do not Understand", ("a conversation with Peter Stein following the general rehearsal of the *Oresteia* in Moscow on January 27, 1994") published in the programme of the production (Moscow, 1994), p., 60.



Russians: “[I]n contradiction to German actors who are able to think dramaturgically, the Russian actors have no idea that a thought aimed at a certain goal aligns all parts of the body, all physical and emotional reactions, bundles them, sets them on their way and puts everything at rest - that is a completely un-Russian notion. There has to be some feeling tucked underneath, and if this feeling and this emotion exist, toughness and purposefulness emerge”.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the Russians had to try to dismiss their emotional orientation and adopt or imitate the way the Germans act because Peter Stein’s primary task was to “describe texts, to explain them and make them accessible to the actors -to install the actor as the custodian of a text”. And he concludes as follows : “I tried it here too, and despite incredible difficulties, I finally succeeding in doing it, to some extent”.<sup>79</sup> If we compare for example the performance of Edith Clever as Clytemnestra with that of Ekaterina Vassilieva in the same role we may admit that Edith Clever incarnates the role of Clytemnestra in the way conceived by the director whereas Ekaterina Vassilieva struggles to achieve the same result but in the end she “lacks the archetypal monumentality” of the German actress.<sup>80</sup>

*Agamemnon* is subtitled in the programme of the Russian production “the butcher is butchered” and the title as it stands is an accusation of the king’s murder of his daughter, Iphigeneia, and at the same time, a kind of justification of Clytemnestra’s act of revenge. The director does not treat Agamemnon sympathetically as the commander whose victory in the Trojan war can justify his earlier act of sacrificing his daughter for the sake of the expedition. He remains a butcher and Clytemnestra’s hatred and consequent murder springs from his inconsiderate and criminal act.

Clytemnestra’s first appearance on stage (*Ag.*, 258) marks her first confrontation with the Argive elders. In the Russian version, Ekaterina Vassilieva communicates the image of the powerful, self-confident and versatile queen in charge. She speaks in an authoritarian tone raising her right hand with authority like a priest; she commands respect and fear. We get the same impression from her appearance when the messenger comes to announce Agamemnon’s return (*Ag.*, 503-680). She shouts at the chorus because they dared disbelieve her

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<sup>78</sup> *Op.cit.*, 56-7.

<sup>79</sup> *Op.cit.*, 57-60.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Billington, “Born of Blood”, *Guardian* 27/8/1994.



in the first place. She does not address the messenger at all. Her voice is cynical and ironic. She is more powerful and respected than all the other Clytemnestras discussed in the present section. However, Edith Clever in the German version conveys an even stronger image because of the severity of her voice.

Agamemnon enters the scene (*Ag.*, 783) standing on a wheeled platform triumphantly holding his sword above his head with both hands. His arrogant pose is made more insolent by the presence of Cassandra, his war booty, who is covered by a white sheet in a submissive way (see Figure 5) which sharply contrasts with the imperial vision of the king. The chorus approach their king carrying the pieces of metal track on which his chariot will roll. As the king passes through they stand bowing their heads in respect. The Argive elders seem to be very proud of him but his expression and his image as a whole do not point to any sympathetic treatment by the director. While he is attempting to descend with the help of his citizens, Clytemnestra appears at the palace door (*Ag.*, 855) addressing him with her full authority. The old men return silently to their table leaving the space free for the couple's encounter.

Anatoli Vassiliev as Agamemnon in the Russian production conveys the same image of the king as his predecessor the German Gunter Berger. Ekaterina Vassilieva is powerfully convincing when she needs to indicate wifely affection towards her "long awaited husband", without losing her authority and power to persuade and impose her will upon him. Agamemnon looks cool and indifferent towards his wife who welcomes him with honour and who speaks at length trying to explain her anguish during the years he was absent at Troy. When he is finally persuaded to walk on the purple garments (different pieces of purple cloth, not one carpet, see Figure 5), Clytemnestra opens her embrace wide to welcome him but he turns to Cassandra with a tender smile. Moreover, he rejects his wife's touch when she tries to help him stand as he loses his balance walking slowly and barefooted on the expensive fabrics. His attitude towards Clytemnestra is harsh and unloving whereas she pretends to be the best of wives, very touched by his return. Stein's approach to Agamemnon is similar to Hall's and Michaelidis'. When Clytemnestra describes her suffering during his absence her whole body quivers with passion; she is almost crying out of joy and relief. Agamemnon's behaviour contributes to the factors



according to which Clytemnestra's act seems if not justifiable at least motivated.

Cassandra, Natalia Kotschetova, is presented as the innocent sacrificial victim of a divine will, as the former princess who has to accept the status of a slave, and as a prophetess who can predict her own death. As Clytemnestra enters the scene (*Ag.*, 1035) powerful, calm and self - confident to call her in, her image is sharply contrasted with the Trojan princess who is seen shaking under the cover on the white sheet. When the queen leaves, the men try to engage in conversation with her (*Ag.*, 1069ff) but she seems to have a vision as she shakes and speaks of the haunted house. And it is significant that as she speaks the Argives scatter to avoid her; they even go up to the audience in order to avoid her frightening words as if distancing themselves from the evil past or as if incriminating the audience as well, including it among the people of Argos. Cassandra's depiction is very sympathetic and innocent and her image stands in sharp contrast to the world dominated by crime and retribution which surrounds her.

The most powerful scene in *Agamemnon* is Clytemnestra's appearance (*Ag.*, 1372ff) on the *ekkyklema* over the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra (see Figure 6). The scene promotes the image of Clytemnestra as the most dominant and imposing of the whole play. As the queen enters the scene, self-controlled in her bloodstained white clothes, the Argive elders move whispering towards the audience and therefore the members of the audience become the citizens of Argos as she addresses herself to all of them. Her voice is coarse, full of sexual passion mingled with hatred of her murdered husband and his mistress. She looks powerful and untouchable. The theme of Iphigeneia's sacrifice returns in her speech as the main motive of her murder and it touches her deeply;<sup>81</sup> it is the only sensitivity she displays in the first part of the trilogy where her determination to commit the murder and her hatred of her husband clearly predominate.

Aegisthus, Serguei Sazontiev, conveys the image of the king in charge and appears tender and protective towards Clytemnestra. In the German version of the trilogy, the sexual element of their relationship is accentuated as he leans to kiss her upon her neck while the chorus

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<sup>81</sup> The name of Iphigeneia is clearly heard many times during her dialogue with the chorus and before Aegisthus' entrance (*Ag.*, 1372-1635) and it is pronounced with a voice full of passion.



accuses him of not having the courage to commit the murder himself, and he replies that guile is a woman's prerogative (*Ag.*, 1633-1642). Moreover, as both enter the palace triumphantly to reign for the rest of their lives (*Ag.*, 1673) they exchange a long lasting kiss on the mouth. In the Russian production both incidents are omitted while the emphasis falls mainly on the actual murder of the king as a retribution for Iphigeneia's sacrifice and for his father's unspeakable crimes against his own brother. Therefore, the act of retribution is presented stripped from any other emotion.

The political element is powerful as the chorus try to revolt against the two who are imposing their power on the people of Argos. The knives are waiting from the beginning of *Agamemnon* on their table and they are thrown against Aegisthus at the proper time (*Ag.*, 1649-51). But he is prepared to suppress any revolt and his armed men are ready to impose order. The voices of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, especially towards the end, are dictatorial and thus point towards the establishment of a tyrannical regime by the two usurpers.

The second part of the trilogy is subtitled "The Liberator becomes Crazy": the title refers to Orestes who returns to his homeland in order to restore his father's *oikos* and to liberate Argos from the usurpers of his father's throne, by killing Aegisthus and his mother, before he leaves the stage, haunted by the invisible Furies. The word "liberator" contains political meaning and signifies Stein's approach to the whole trilogy. The director considers the play as "the most exciting of the trilogy" because "[O]n the one hand we witness an original Greek ritual, and on the other hand there is a play by Strindberg, a mother is trying to seduce her son - a mine of psychoanalysis! ...".<sup>82</sup> The ritual of libations poured around the tomb of the dead Agamemnon plays a prominent part. The women of the chorus are to be regarded as professional mourners who perform the rites in honour of the king. The mourning coincides with the ritual of the invocation of their dead father by Orestes and Electra (*Ch.*, 314-514) when the two meet each other (*Ch.*, 212ff). As the ritual culminates, they all strike their hands on the tomb. For some moments we hear only the continuous striking.

Evgueni Mironov as Orestes is determined to commit the act and even his hesitation at the moment when his mother offers her breast in order to remind him of their intimate relationship is momentary, and

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<sup>82</sup> Barbara Lehmann *op. cit.*, p. 56.



Pylades exhortation appears to be unnecessary. With regard to the image of Electra, Tatjana Dogiljewa's performance recalls the Sophoclean *Electra* in her passionate hatred of her mother. When she first encounters Orestes (*Ch.*, 212ff) she cries and avoids his touch and when he shows her a red cloth she screams out of passionate love (see Figure 7); she makes us believe without understanding the words that Orestes is the only one she loves. The depiction of her personality is so powerful when she screams out of happiness for her brother's return and when she moves decisively around the orchestra and her voice is so dominant that she gives the impression of being the one who is going to commit the murder. Her passion and her "punk" hairstyle remind us of Fiona Shaw's Electra.<sup>83</sup>

Peter Stein indicates a sensitivity to the issue of Clytemnestra's character alteration, from the mighty queen whose deceptive, murderous plan reduces the great conqueror to a scared, fragile creature who enters the scene not from the central palace door as in *Agamemnon* but from a small door on the right (*Ch.*, 668). She looks worn down by the worries the years have brought to her and by the constant threat of her impending murder. Her former self-confidence has been destroyed and she walks with difficulty and hesitation. When she attempts to descend the central staircase she stumbles and her slave runs to her help. The scene recalls Agamemnon's stumble in *Agamemnon*. The same slave helps her to enter the palace from the left small door while he enters from the central one. Does the scene symbolise the yielding of the formerly powerful queen to male power and authority? Has she forcefully accepted the social code according to which women should remain indoors and not be involved in what has been considered as men's duties in the same way as Electra obeys her brother's order to remain inside and wait for the results? Clytemnestra's figure in *Choephoroi* is a comment on the way women are forced to compromise within a society's acceptable social structure unfavourable for them. Although she has been the active agent in her husband's murder and in the seizure of the throne she seems to have surrendered that power to her husband in order to be socially acceptable. Aegisthus in this second play (*Ch.*, 838-855) conveys the image of the king; he seems more virile and as he ascends the staircase, he chases the

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<sup>83</sup> Tina Engel as Electra in the German production has the calm, girlish figure which conveys the image of a maiden devoted to her father.



women of the chorus away. Clytemnestra's appearance and the high-heeled shoes she wears point to her new role of the supportive female. Electra is depicted as a powerful, revengeful woman in contrast to Clytemnestra's frightened character and thus the victory of the male values she represents is more evident.

The scene in which Orestes informs the queen about her son's death (*Ch.*, 691-699) is very emotional and Clytemnestra's reaction is indicative of her deeply felt pain at the news; she even mourns for his death as she throws herself on the central door striking it forcefully and desperately with her hands. Then, she calms down and slowly and quietly invites the strangers into the palace; while they, as men, enter the palace from the central door she enters from the small side door. The second encounter between the son and his mother (*Ch.*, 885ff) is marked by Clytemnestra's attempt to emphasise the nature of their relationship at the moment when he comes forward to kill her after the murder of Aegisthus; she uncovers her breast in a scene which has a sexual connotation especially after Orestes' deeply felt jealousy when his mother cries out of despair for Aegisthus' death.

The play's last scene has been adapted by the director: when the wheeled platform with the dead bodies appears (*Ch.*, 972), the chorus of Trojan women leave the stage screaming with satisfaction at the outcome and give way to the old Argives, the chorus of *Agamemnon*. Orestes comes out with the purple cloth which had been used to entrap his father hanging from his left shoulder and holding his bloodstained sword and the branch of an olive tree. The old men take the cloth which they rip and hold around the bodies and then they cover them with it. The handling of the scene explains the image of Orestes as "liberator", and it is significant that the word is used as a substitute for his name in the subtitle the director has given to the play. Agamemnon's son, the lawful successor to his father's throne, has killed the two usurpers and given the citizens of Argos their freedom back since Aegisthus and Clytemnestra enforced on them their tyrannic regime. The political issue of the establishment of democracy is thus celebrated. Peter Stein was mainly concerned with the political interpretation, making every other issue of the play subordinate to it. From a feminist perspective the same scene can be interpreted as the establishment of the men's reign in which women's position is very marginal and for that reason they have to leave the stage.



The trilogy's third part is subtitled "The Furies bless the city" and points to the final yielding of the old goddesses to the new order expressed by Apollo and Athena. The play has been adapted by the director in order to convey his political interpretation. At the same time, the feminist issues involved have almost disappeared under the force of Stein's political commentary on contemporary events. However, the Russian production differs a great deal from the early German version of the trilogy in its treatment of the court scene. The goddess Athena, Elena Maiorova, who represents democracy since she establishes the democratic court of the Aeropagus, becomes more attractive as a woman as her clothes indicate, and the god Apollo (Igor Kostolevski) becomes more aggressive towards the old deities who take human shape. Apart from that, the voting procedure which holds the audience's attention takes a more formal shape since Athena does not vote at the end as in the German production but Orestes' acquittal seems to be more the result of the people's voting.

With regard to the figure of Orestes in the third part of the trilogy, his role has been diminished: his presence gives an excuse for the enacted events but the main interest lies with the goddess Athena, the Athenian jurors and the old deities. And although the production includes Apollo's speech about the primacy of the father in the reproductive process, the sex conflict is placed in the background in favour of the issue of democracy and its application. And it could have been because the production took place in the newly established and fragile democracy in Russia, that, on the one hand, Athena, the representative of democracy, was presented as a very attractive modern woman, and Apollo as an arrogant figure who pretended to play the guitar with his lyre in order to mock the Furies, and danced frenziedly in the style of Elvis Presley; while, on the other hand, the Furies become more human and thus the issues they represented become more comparable to the issues of a newly established democracy.

Athena, after the preliminary hearing of the case (*Eum.*, 397-489), leaves the stage and when she appears again, she leads the procession of Athenian jurors who take their places on the raised platform in order to judge the case of Orestes' matricide. The Furies remain in the orchestra until Athena helps them to join the others on the platform. When Orestes' questioning by the Furies and Apollo's supportive speech end (*Eum.*, 585-680), the jurors stand up one by one



and proceed to the ballot-boxes to cast their votes. When the voting ends two of them empty the contents of the ballot-boxes and they start counting the votes. Athena, with her back turned to the audience, raises and lowers her hands pretending to be the scale.

The Furies' desperate cries (*Eum.*, 778-792, 808-822, 837-846) are followed by Athena's persuasive speech (*Eum.*, 794-807, 824-836, 848-869). She descends to the orchestra and speaks to them not from a superior standpoint but as a fellow goddess. At the same time, the jurors on the platform start fighting and we are confronted by two groups of people, the Furies, in the orchestra, who speak and stand as a group and the jurors on the platform who forget their former official position as well as the democratic principles they represent, and thus indicate that the new political order has not broken the vicious cycle of mutual vengeance, and that even democracy is threatened by the arbitrariness of its political disposition. Athena's patience and reverence manage to calm the Furies down. They finally agree to inhabit the city and bless Athens as good spirits. The jurors now stop fighting and embrace each other while their effort lies in restoring the court-room to its proper condition after having being destroyed by their fighting. And as Athena helps the Eumenides to ascend the platform, the jurors speak calmly to each other while their gestures indicate a kind of aversion. They then bring long red and purple tunics to "ordain" the Eumenides and the procession led by Athena ends up in the orchestra where, as she leaves the scene, the jurors tie the Eumenides up like mummies at the base of the platform (see Figure 9), in the foundation of their city, and as the jurors start their endless voting they chant in the rhythm of Byzantine music. Although Stein treats the court scene ironically especially in the way the jury lapse into fractious fights and squabbles in which the stage itself is upset, the endless voting at the end implies that the yearning for order and stability can at length be satisfied in the democratic state.

Peter Stein's production of the *Oresteian* trilogy was mainly concerned with political criticism of the function of the democratic institutions in a modern state. He therefore exploited the political issues of the original text, which he adapted in order to comment on contemporary political events. The text's other issues concerned with the sex conflict over domination and the final victory of the male orientated values have been suppressed because the final play in which all these issues culminate deals almost exclusively with the political



issues. However, *Agamemnon* as well as *Choephoroi* do comment on the issue of the war of the sexes for power and the image of Clytemnestra as the powerful queen (*Agamemnon*) who finally succumbs to the requirements of a male dominated society by yielding her power to her second husband (*Choephoroi*), Aegisthus. Her treatment by the director is sympathetic as a whole especially in the second part where we witness the downfall of a powerful personality due to society's fixed ideas about the role of women and due to her constant dread of murder by her son. In the last part of the trilogy, Clytemnestra's ghost does appear to awake the Furies but her importance remains in the background. With regard to the treatment of the issue of matricide, Orestes is determined to commit the murder which is regarded as necessary according to the law of retribution but neither is he presented as the rewarding hero nor Clytemnestra as a woman who deserves her punishment. Stein did not elaborate on the issue but his approach was concentrated on political commentary.

## 2.4. KAROLOS KOUN'S POLITICAL ORESTEIA

### 2.4.1. The Work Process

Karolos Koun directed *Oresteia* for the first time in 1980 and it was performed at Epidavros with Melina Merkouri in the role of Clytemnestra.<sup>84</sup> Mainly because of the popularity of the actress, both performances at Epidavros, the 10th and 11th of August, were a huge commercial success, although most of the critics condemned the whole production because of the cuts in the text by its translator, Thanasis Valtinos, (the performance of the trilogy lasted three hours and a half), the lack of choral music, the director's general "psychological" approach and the acting of Melina Mercouri whose voice was considered inadequate for the demanding role.<sup>85</sup> However, Karolos Koun's 1980 Art Theatre performance of the *Oresteia* provided a truly rewarding political reading of the original plays and its prevailing spirit could be compared to that of Peter Stein. In *Agamemnon* for example, Clytemnestra's entourage emerged from the audience with a giant red cloth spanning the first diazoma and, by touching both the audience and the elders of the chorus, implicating them equally in the events. It has been suggested that "[A]s Koun's Greece (similar to Stein's Germany...) had recently emerged from a dictatorship, the subtle, often subconscious, ramblings of the Chorus concerning violence and oppression and the slow movement toward inventing democracy were not lost on the politically alert spectator. And they were not lost because Koun created utter clarity at all levels of the text, especially with the choric odes."<sup>86</sup>

Karolos Koun's approach to the theatre was always political. He observed that "good theatre is always political", adding that "..... theatre

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<sup>84</sup> For a general discussion of Koun's work as a director see "Appendix A", pp. 242-247.

<sup>85</sup> See the reviews of two of the most "learned" theatre critics in Greece, Tasos Lignadis, "*Oresteia* from the Art Theatre, Abundant Noise for a Poor Result" ("*Oresteia* apo to Theatro Technis, Plousios Thorybos gia Phtocho Apotelesma"), *Mesimvrini* 19/8/1980; and Kostas Georgousopoulos, "The Element of Fear" ("Oi Fryctories"), *Vima* 20/8/1980 and 27/8/1980.

<sup>86</sup> John Chioles, "The *Oresteia* and the Avant-Garde. Three Decades of Discourse". *Performing Arts Journal* 45, no. 3 (September, 1993), p. 25.



from ancient times has been political. However, political does not mean support for a particular political party.... But the theatre is both political and existentialist. It is based on human beings, but humans seen within their environment. And since theatre deals with human beings within their environment, ..., it is always socio-political. Moreover, ancient theatre as well used to be socio-political or, better, it was concerned with state politics and the citizens' relationship to the state as well as with their problems."<sup>87</sup>

In 1982 (31/7 and 1/8), Karolos Koun's Art Theatre revived the Aeschylean trilogy at Epidavros with Magya Lymberopoulou, who had the role of Cassandra in the 1980 production, as Clytemnestra.<sup>88</sup> Karolos Koun approached the trilogy with the same political sense and the few alterations did not change the overall impression. Thanasis Valtinos' translation and Dionysis Fotopoulos' costumes and scenery were used in the second production as well. The 1982 production will be discussed in more detail in the present chapter with regard to its main line of political interpretation and the part played by Clytemnestra's powerful and imposing figure.

Thanasis Valtinos, a well known literary figure, undertook the task of translating the trilogy for the Art Theatre's production of 1980.<sup>89</sup> The same translation was used in the 1982 performances at Epidavros; it was based on the original text and the result was a "condensed", not a "curtailed" version of it.<sup>90</sup> The last part of the trilogy, *Eumenides*, "because the conflict has been transferred to a divine level between Furies and the new gods, is static - and exactly that part has been

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<sup>87</sup> Karolos Koun, "Matters of Progress" ("Themata Poreias") in Karolos Koun, *We Make Theatre for our Souls (Kanoume Theatro gia tin Psyche mas)* (Athens, 1992), p. 129.

<sup>88</sup> The present discussion is based on the videotaped performance of 31/7/1982.

<sup>89</sup> He is mainly a prose writer. Amongst his literary work we should include "Deep Blue Almost Black" ("Ble Vathy Schedon Mavro", 1985), "Elements for the Sixties Generation" ("Stichia gia ti Dekatia tou ' 60", 1990) which was awarded by the Greek State the first prize of Greek Literature for the 1990 and his recent "ΟΡΘΟΚΩΣΤΑ" (1994). His only other translation of Greek tragedy has been Euripides' *Troades* for the Art-Theatre directed by Yorgos Lazanis and performed at Epidavros (July, 1993).

<sup>90</sup> Babis Komninos, "Oresteia, The Performance of the Year" ("Oresteia, I Parastasi tis Chronias"), *Tachydromos* 7/8/1980.

condensed the most".<sup>91</sup> His prose translation however,<sup>92</sup> has been criticised "as lacking the rhythm of the ancient text",<sup>93</sup> mainly because in Greece the prevailing view concerning ancient theatre is that the translated text should render each word of the original. The translator's approach to Clytemnestra's image follows the line of interpretation adopted by the director: she is a powerful queen, the last symbol of matriarchy who strongly believes that she has right on her side since when Agamemnon sacrificed her daughter he uprooted her maternal instinct as well.

Dionysis Fotopoulos' setting for the 1982 performances at Epidavros created the necessary and appropriate environment for the ancient story to unfold according to the director's interpretation.<sup>94</sup> The palace of Atreus, simple, wooden and functional, dominates the background. The palace's central door opens automatically in the centre when a character needs to enter or exit from the palace. The same structure together with the wooden floor will be used for the whole trilogy. In *Choephoroi* a part of the floor in front opens to reveal the soil

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Valtinos' translation of the *Oresteia* has never been published.

<sup>93</sup> Kostas Georgousopoulos, "The Element of Fear" ("Oi Fryctories"), *Vima* 27/8/1980.

<sup>94</sup> Dionysis Fotopoulos is the leading designer in Greece. He has worked as a scenographer and costume designer since 1967 and has won awards for his talented and gifted work many times in Greece as well as at other international festivals. He has produced scene designs for more than 257 theatrical works and almost 40 films. His work does not overshadow the work of the other contributors of a performance, but is integrated into that of the playwright and of the director while the actors' and actresses' performances are complemented by his invariably successful costumes. In the field of ancient Greek theatre, he has worked with many directors and his designs have always attracted the admiration of critics and spectators. Karolos Koun in particular, worked with Dionysis Fotopoulos in almost all of his productions of ancient Greek theatre: "For me the masks of Dionysis Fotopoulos for the works of Aristophanes have embodied each revival of the poet's comedies..." [see Karolos Koun for Dionysis Fotopoulos in the latter's *Stage Design and Costumes* (Athens, 1986), p. 67]. Apart from Karolos Koun's *Oresteia*, he produced the costumes for Yorgos Michaelidis' *Oresteia* for his Open Theatre in 1993. In the summer of 1993, Fotopoulos was the designer for the Peter Hall Company's production of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (Old Vic, London).



which stands for Agamemnon's tomb and upon which the mourners will place their candles in respect for the dead king. A wooden ladder on the left serves to hide Orestes and Pylades when Electra and the Trojan women enter the scene. In *Eumenides*, the left and the right part of the wooden backstage construction open to reveal an iron net behind which the figures of the god Apollo and the goddess Athena appear. The nine jurors sit on the three benches, outside the wooden floor, three on the centre and one on the right. When the moment of voting comes one by one they enter the central door of the main building.

For the costumes of the performance, Dionysis Fotopoulos designed archaic long dresses and tunics to give the impression of a story distanced in the past. Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' clothes are almost identical, elaborate and appropriate to their social position and to their secret attachment. Their long purple tunics end in golden ornaments; Clytemnestra's hat with the long plaited hair is embellished with purple ribbons. The elaborate hat is abandoned however after Agamemnon's and Cassandra's murder and she appears with her hair let down (see Figure 10). In *Eumenides*, Clytemnestra's ghost is represented by a terrifying figure completely concealed in white bandages. Because most of the characters assume their role in front of the audience by leaving the chorus, the actor who is to become Agamemnon is dressed behind the tunic which is held in front of him by the other members. His clothes bear witness to the war situation he has lived through; his tunic is soiled and torn, while his war helmet is still on his head. He ascends the small platform brought in by four members of the chorus and clothed in black, Cassandra, sits behind him. However, the long, black tunic hides a tightly bound purple cloth, one of the symbols of her dedication to the god Apollo. All the characters of the trilogy wear half masks made out of white plaster. Clytemnestra's mask communicates her austere and powerful personality and brings to mind archaic statuettes.

The costumes of the chorus are of particular interest as well. The old Argives wear lengthy garments and have their long hair arranged in two plaits; the Trojan women are dressed in the long dark clothes of mourners while their heads are covered by long black scarves (see Figure 12). The upper faces of both choruses are covered by white plaster masks. The Furies are covered in black as well and their hair is so tightly covered by scarves that they seem to be bald. They also wear

distorted half masks with swollen cheeks. A significant point in relation to the chorus is that the voices heard are women's as well as men's, so that directorial choice weakens the impression of the victory of male values over the female.

The last point to be made in association with Dionysis Fotopoulos' contribution to the Art Theatre's *Oresteia* concerns the final scene in *Agamemnon* where seven men appear holding seven banners which depict mainly human faces whose eyes are predominant, while some of them include hands raised either in despair or in a pose which indicates prayer to exorcise evil. Dionysis Fotopoulos in his book *Masks Theatre*,<sup>95</sup> indicates his sources for the construction of the banners which were votive offerings that the worshippers used to carry with them in the church during Byzantine times, representing the part of the body that they wanted to be healed by god's intervention.

The composer Michael Christodoulidis<sup>96</sup> was responsible for the musical aspect of the production, which lacked the immediacy of live music since it was recorded for the performance. Usually in the choral odes a member of the chorus delivers the text and the others repeat the key phrases, emphasising them. Even Cassandra's lamentation is deprived of instrumental accompaniment and thus it becomes pure and imposing, while the Trojan mourners use tambourines to intensify their mournful cries. When instrumental music is heard however, it is associated with the music of Greek folklore. In the beautifully "spoken" ode for Helen, the brief musical accompaniment is based on the Cretan lyre. At the conclusion of the trilogy, patriotic music reminiscent of Mikis Theodorakis' *Axion Esti* reinforces the political interpretation of the scene. But because the production did not follow the traditional way of

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<sup>95</sup> Dionysis Fotopoulos, *Masks Theatre* (Athens, 1980), pp. 95-100. The kind of votive offerings that have inspired Fotopoulos belong to the Christian age as the cross in one of them indicates.

<sup>96</sup> He has composed music for many productions of ancient Greek Theatre mainly in cooperation with the Theatrical Organisation of Cyprus and with the director Nikos Charalambous. Among them we should include: Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (Epidavros, 1981), Euripides' *Troades* (Epidavros, 1982), Sophocles' *Ajax* (Epidavros, 1984), Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Epidavros, 1986), Euripides' *Andromache* (Epidavros, 1992) and Euripides' *Helen* (Epidavros, 1993).



interpreting Greek tragedy according to which the choral part should be sung to instrumental accompaniment, the criticism was unfavourable.<sup>97</sup>

The same negative criticism was applied to Maria Kynigou-Flaboura,<sup>98</sup> who choreographed the movements of the actresses and actors.<sup>99</sup> Her work however, was in accordance with the spirit of the production. Slow, awesome and ritualistic movements characterise the performance of the trilogy. Memorable scenes include Agamemnon's welcoming by the old Argives, Clytemnestra's persuasive gestures in her encounter with her husband, the Trojan women's ritualistic invocation to the dead king as well as Clytemnestra's hesitant steps in the second part of the trilogy.

#### 2.4.2. *The Restoration of Democracy*

Because the production of the trilogy is very well documented, Karolos Koun's views on its main issues have had wide circulation. According to the director, the trilogy, "apart from the poetry and the philosophy, deals with an existential problem. All the characters of the trilogy are victims of the fate of the Atreids. And they become tragic because they continue to possess full knowledge of the situation that pursues them."<sup>100</sup> In addition, Karolos Koun has analysed the trilogy as follows: "the *Oresteia* is an epic trilogy with historical, existential and political dimensions. Historical, because it covers a large period from the time of human sacrifices and the absolute sovereignty of the gods to

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<sup>97</sup> Kostas Georgousopoulos wrote: "If Helen does not become song, if Zeus' ode is not chanted and if the Furies won't dance (...) tragedy loses its soul", "The Element of Fear" ("Oi Fryctories"), *Vima* 27/8/1980. Tasos Lignadis pointed out that the "choral odes multiplied the number of actors", *Mesimvrini* 19/8/1980.

<sup>98</sup> She has choreographed many productions of ancient Greek Theatre for the Art-Theatre. Among them we should include: Euripides' *Bacchae* directed by Karolos Koun and performed at Epidavros in the summer of 1977, Aeschylus' *Persae* also directed by Koun (Epidavros, 1981), Aristophanes' *Knights* directed by Yorgos Lazanis (Epidavros, 1984) and Sophocles' *Philoctetes* also directed by Lazanis (Epidavros, 1988).

<sup>99</sup> According to Kostas Georgousopoulos, "she designed ... poses, she created pictures that at first, were frozen and then were released to formulate another static pose.", "The Element of Fear" ("Oi Fryctories"), *Vima* 18/8/1980.

<sup>100</sup> The extract from Koun's press conference for the 1980 production was published in *Eleftheros Kosmos* of 5/8/1980.

the passing of the 'patriarchal law' and the establishment of the Areopagus by the goddess Athena.... Existential, because the main idea of the *Oresteia* is 'if you do [commit something malicious] you will suffer' while at the same time all the characters are victims of Fate and they know it very well. Political, finally, since the fight against tyranny and despotism runs through the whole trilogy; the hardships of the war as well."<sup>101</sup> Karolos Koun's main line of interpretation however, penetrates the political essence of the trilogy, studied in the light of contemporary Greek politics. Therefore, any other issue is subordinate to the main one; and there are other issues which are touched upon but not explored, such as the role of fate in the characters' lives and the image of Clytemnestra as the last queen of the matriarchy.

With regard to the importance of Fate to the inheritors of Atreus' name, who are destroyed by its power, we should emphasise two moments in particular in the performance of the trilogy which clearly indicate the importance of the theme of Fate for the director. The first comes when the chorus of *Agamemnon* address the ode to Helen, just before Agamemnon's triumphant entrance; at that point the leader of the chorus removes his mask and delivers the famous speech upon *hybris*: "sooner or later, when the right time comes the first *hybris* gives birth to a new one, its invincible brother, the unholy daring and both of them become ruinous infatuation for the houses they befall".<sup>102</sup> The whole procedure of the actor's unmasking, which involves a rupture of dramatic illusion, is indicative of the importance of the theme. The director communicates his view directly to the audience without any pretence. The same approach is repeated in *Choephoroi* where a member of the chorus, Lydia Koniordou, removes her mask and delivers the last, significant words of the play: "This is the third thunderstorm that has suddenly broken upon the palace. It was initiated by Thyestes' eating of his children, then came the King's death - in the bath lay slaughtered the Achaean's warchief -. This is now the third affliction, and what should I name it: salvation or ruin? When is the fury of Fate

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<sup>101</sup> The extract from Koun's press conference for the 1980 production was published in *Avgi* of 5/8/1980.

<sup>102</sup> Νωρίς ἢ ἀργά, ὅταν ἐρθεῖ τοῦ χρόνου τὸ πλήρωμα, ὕβριν νέα γεννάει ἡ ὕβρις ἡ πρώτη ἀδέλφει τὸ ἀνίερό θράσος, ἄτες καὶ οἱ δύο γιὰ τὰ σπίντια ὀλέθριες: (*Agamemnon* 764-771 in Valtinos' translation).



going to stop, satisfied?"<sup>103</sup> The importance of Fate in Karolos Koun's production of the trilogy is also strikingly apparent in the emphasis it is given when Orestes orders his mother to enter the palace to be slain and she utters calmly, as if full of wisdom: "all these happen due to our Fate my son".<sup>104</sup>

The depiction of Clytemnestra's character is intermixed by the end of *Agamemnon* with the main issue of the trilogy's political interpretation. The dominant image of a powerful and self-confident queen prevails in the first part of the trilogy and her treatment by the director is sympathetic since she is given strong motivation for her husband's murder. On the one hand, her figure is strong, harsh and dominant and on the other hand she displays a decisive and reliable personality. Her first speech to the chorus (*Ag.*, 281-316) does not indicate any kind of affection between the queen and her subjects; even the chorus' disbelief in her information is hesitant and the scene underplayed by the director in order to stress her political power. At the same time, the issue of Iphigeneia's sacrifice is introduced by the chorus with almost ritualistic awe (*Ag.*, 104-257): one by one they deliver the words concerning Iphigeneia to the accompaniment of mournful flute music, while Clytemnestra stands at the palace's central door, with her back turned to the audience.

When Magya Lymberopoulou performs the scene of Clytemnestra's notorious encounter with her husband she manages to render successfully the double meaning of the queen's words and the subsequent irony of the situation (*Ag.*, 855-913). Her voice is full of passion and her ritualistic gestures concentrate our attention upon the hands which will commit the murders. Agamemnon (Antonis Theodorakopoulos) is not depicted as a vicious character and seems quite happy to be back home with his wife; his behaviour towards Cassandra is without exaggeration, simple and affectionate. But his personality is diminished in the force of Clytemnestra's powerful image. Katia Gerou in the role of Cassandra speaks in bombastic language

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<sup>103</sup> Τρίτη πάλι η μπόρα ετούτη, καταιγίδα αιφνίδια, στο παλάτι ξεθύμανε. Πρώτη αρχή τα Θυέστεια δείπνα, του βασιλέα ο θάνατος ύστερα, στο λουτρό σκοτωμένος των Αχαιών ο πολέμαρχος, τρίτη τώρα και πως να την πω σωτηρία η όλεθρο; Που θα σταματήσει χορτασμένη η μανία της άτης; (*Choephoroi* 1066-1076 in Valtinos' translation).

<sup>104</sup> της μοίρας είναι όλα γιέμου: (*Choephoroi* 910 in Valtinos' translation).



which lacks passion or persuasion; her movements are very slow and the whole episode (*Ag.*, 1072-1330) neither is effective nor has the power to attract the audience's sympathy for her misfortune in the way of Hall's and Stein's *Cassandras*. Thus, Clytemnestra's cause is served even further since the innocent Cassandra's murder is not stressed.

When Clytemnestra appears again after the murders (*Ag.*, 1372), her hair is let down and her appearance is startling because she holds a huge butcher's knife (see Figure 10). She is calm and cool as she listens to the chorus' accusations (*Ag.*, 1407-11, 1426-30, 1448-61, 1468-74, 1505-20, 1530-50, 1560-66), but her motives are clearly expressed: the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is the main reason for her husband's murder (*Ag.*, 1412-25, 1431-47, 1525-9, 1555-8). Her explanations are central to her speech and they are not ironically undermined in their presentation. Moreover, the inevitability of Fate holds a central part in her speech. Clytemnestra's personality is sharply differentiated from Aegisthus' whose expression of hatred outweighs hers. The last scene of *Agamemnon*, however, with its strong political implications transforms the image of Clytemnestra into that of a dictator: seven bodyguards enter the stage, holding the seven banners described above, together with Aegisthus (Yiannis Karatzoyiannis). The scene follows the violent suspension of the chorus' resistance and it implies the establishment of a tyrannical regime which is significantly associated with the fortunes of the Greek state, which remained for seven years under a military *Jounta* (1967-1974).

The second play and its ritual strengthen the political implications of the first play. Orestes (Mimis Kouyioumzis), returns from exile to his homeland to organise his mother's murder and at the same time to liberate his homeland from its tyrannical regime and restore its former political state. The atmosphere in which the encounter of Orestes and Electra takes place is that of political conspiracy. They do not embrace each other, and the expression of their affection is restricted because they must concentrate their attention upon overthrowing the usurpers. It seems that the theme of matricide in the present interpretation of the trilogy surrenders its importance to the political issue of the restoration of political power.

Electra (Reni Pitakki) is an imposing figure whose passionate expression of hatred against her mother (*Ch.*, 100-5, 129-149, 367-71, 394-9, 422, 429-33), desperate love for her father expressed through



her mournful words (*Ch.*, 164-5, 332-9, 363-71, 429-33, 456-50) and ritualistic movements make her an important figure of the trilogy despite her brief appearance (see Figure 11). She can be compared to Stein's powerful Electra. When she has been persuaded that the person before her is Orestes (*Ch.*, 234ff), she simply gives her hand to him since she has devoted her life to the purpose of avenging her father's death. When she speaks, Orestes gives the impression of a youth who awaits her instructions. Electra's dominant image however yields in importance to the trilogy's main line of interpretation which is the establishment of democracy. Therefore a strong Electra, representative of the democratic values, conspires with her brother against a powerful Clytemnestra, a ruler with complete power.

Clytemnestra's stature in this second part of the trilogy is reduced. Her former splendour and grandeur has given way to a scared and subdued figure, whose disproportionately high padded shoulders are ironically contrasted to her hunched back and her broken voice. However, she is the one who brings the theme of successive, fatal murders back to its rightful place. She is worn out, in fact overpowered by the expectation of her own death. When Orestes announces her son's death (*Ch.*, 674-90), her deeply felt pain is apparent in her voice but only momentarily, since her harsh life does not permit any indulgence in emotion. The same restrained reaction is apparent when she faces Orestes' decision to kill her (*Ch.*, 890ff). The scene, contrary to Stein's *Oresteia*, is short and is not treated as central to the drama since Clytemnestra quietly follows her son in to be killed as soon as she is persuaded of his determination to commit the murder. The last scene of *Choephoroi* brings back the theme of Fate as Orestes leaves the stage to seek salvation for the matricide he has committed, although he seems absolutely persuaded that he did the right thing.

The last part of the trilogy concentrates on the establishment of the Areopagus as the major court to judge cases of matricide, while it reduces the importance of the sex conflict according to which on the one hand, Apollo and Athena form an alliance with Orestes, and on the other hand, the Furies defend Clytemnestra's case against the matricide. In Karolos Koun's production, the divine conflict is not emphasised since the two Olympians appear through an iron net.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, although

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<sup>105</sup> The wooden background construction opens to reveal the figures of Apollo and Athena behind an iron net.

the Furies do appear, they are in a way dissociated from their traditional connection to Clyemnestra's cause as female chthonic goddesses since the voices heard belong to men as well as to women. Clytemnestra's ghost does appear to exhort the Furies to pursue her son, but the whole episode is not emphasised.

The main issue of Orestes' acquittal is celebrated as the victory of democratic values over a totalitarian regime. Athena's effort to persuade the Furies to assimilate themselves into the new order (*Eum.*, 794ff) is not given a lengthy analysis since the main line of interpretation lies with the process of equipping the body of citizens to judge on matters concerning human affairs and also with the justification of Orestes' act of murder, which makes it possible for him to restore his father's political power officially: he can now return to Argos and resume his rights as Agamemnon's heir on the throne of Argos since the Athenian court has acquitted him of his mother's murder. As the white-dressed men come out from the central door holding candles, accompanied by patriotic music, the whole scene recalls the end of *Agamemnon* in which Aegisthus' followers emerge to establish a tyrannical regime. In contrast the last scene in *Eumenides* celebrates the restoration of democracy after the years of oppression. In that way, the trilogy's political interpretation is completed by associating the final scene of *Eumenides* with the final scene of *Agamemnon*. But the powerful image of *Agamemnon's* Clytemnestra is not fully explored or integrated since, on the one hand, she is identified as the one who seizes political power and therefore deserves punishment and, on the other, the human aspect of the mother who has been hurt and whose reaction is determined by the Fate ends with her death in *Choephoroi*; from that point onwards, despite the brief appearance of her ghost, Clytemnestra's image is further weakened in favour of the play's political interpretation.



## 2.5. A "PATRIARCHAL" VIEW OF THE ORESTEIA<sup>106</sup>

### 2.5.1. A Tested Collaboration

Spyros A. Evangelatos directed the three plays that comprise *Oresteian* trilogy for his Amphi-Theatre separately but in the reverse order starting with *Eumenides* in 1986 and proceeding to *Choephoroi* in 1987 and *Agamemnon* in 1988.<sup>107</sup> All three productions were first performed at the Festival of Epidavros. In 1988 he was awarded the "Karolos Koun" prize of the municipality of Athens for his interpretation, (*dídaskalia*), of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. In 1990, the trilogy in its entirety was produced for the Festival of Epidavros.<sup>108</sup>

The same persons collaborated in the production of the trilogy as a whole in 1990. Apart from Spyros A. Evangelatos who directed it, Mikis Theodorakis wrote the music of the performance, Loukas Karytinis directed the orchestra, Yorgos Patsas designed the scenery and the costumes for the performance and Maria Horss was responsible for the choreography. Moreover, the same translation by K. Ch. Myres was used.<sup>109</sup> With regard to the actresses and actors, Eleni Chatziargyri took the same role as Clytemnestra and Leda Tasopoulou the roles of Cassandra and Electra, while Nikitas Tsakiroglou and Yiannis Fetris undertook the roles of Agamemnon and Orestes for the first time in the 1990 production. However, Evangelatos pointed out that: "[I]n the acting there were many inevitable changes since some of the actors changed ..."; in the music of the production "the requirements of the unified performance imposed cutting, recomposition and transposition."; "... the same happened in scenography (Yorgos Patsas). There are some pieces and ideas used in the three former productions

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<sup>106</sup> The word "patriarchal" was used by Sallie Goetsch to describe Evangelatos' production of the *Oresteia* in her article "Playing Against the Text, *Les Atreides* and the History of Reading Aeschylus" in *The Drama Review* 38, 3 (T 143) Fall 1994, p. 77.

<sup>107</sup> For a general discussion of Evangelatos' work see "Appendix A", pp. 236-9.

<sup>108</sup> The present discussion is based on the performance in the ancient theatre of Epidavros the 10th of August 1990.

<sup>109</sup> The real name of the translator is Kostas Georgousopoulos who uses the pseudonym K. Ch. Myres in his philological work. He wrote the translation expressly for the Amphi-Theatre.

but with the addition of new elements that create an altogether new production." He also added that he and Maria Horss "revived many of the initial movements of the chorus, especially in *Eumenides*". The whole trilogy was performed in three and a half hours but the director declared that "not only did the condensation not alter the trilogy, but also it helped the projection of its meanings."<sup>110</sup>

Evangelatos claimed that he tried to transmit the spirit of the Aeschylean trilogy. The points he tried to emphasise are explained as follows: "the metaphysical, existential search. The heroes' effort to communicate with the unknown.... But this ontological dimension is entangled with the political enquiry which is the second main element of the trilogy.... With the third play, the *Eumenides*, the gods decide to establish a new institution in the city, the court of Areopagus, ... and the play ends with the historical reconciliation between Athena and the Eumenides. It is therefore a clear political game: the new gods prefer to incorporate ... elements of the former political establishment in the new. ... All these metaphysical and political elements are interconnected with a third one: the aesthetic. ..., the successive changes of time and place. Even contemporary theatrical writers do not dare to present that kind of abstract conception".<sup>111</sup> The director emphasised in his production the points he considered the most important, as a further analysis of the trilogy's performance will indicate. But his production was totally unsympathetic to the image of Clytemnestra who appeared deprived of any noble motivation for the murder of her husband, while Agamemnon was presented as the hero who unjustly became a victim. Sallie Goetsch described Evangelatos' production of the *Oresteia* as "the most patriarchal production" she had ever seen because he diminished and denigrated Clytemnestra "by removing substantial quantities of Aeschylus' text".<sup>112</sup>

The productions of 1986 (*Eumenides*), 1987 (*Choephoroi*) and 1988 (*Agamemnon*) aimed at a major fidelity to the text of the translation in its entirety. The 1990 production of the trilogy as a whole however, although based on exactly the same text, suffered major cuts, in order for the director to reduce the length of the performance, and those cuts

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<sup>110</sup> See Spyros Evangelatos' interview by V. Angelikopoulos, "The Relay Race of the *Oresteia*" ("I Skytali tis *Oresteias*"), *Vima* 5/8/1990.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Sallie Goetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 77.



affected the already unsympathetic treatment of the figure of Clytemnestra. The same criticism does not apply to K. Ch. Myres whose translation,<sup>113</sup> a mixture of modern Greek poetic language with many archaic expressions, brought the text nearer to its dramatic substance. The portrayal of Clytemnestra's personality is faithful to Aeschylus while the language he uses demonstrates the translator's understanding for her. The same translation was used by Yorgos Michaelidis in his production of the Aeschylean trilogy for the Open Theatre, a production which is characterised by its sympathetic approach towards Clytemnestra.<sup>114</sup>

K. Ch. Myres in his introduction to the published edition of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* pointed out that his translation "dared to keep exactly the same number of verses as the original text" but that in a few limited cases "for reasons of comprehensibility, some alterations did take place especially in the lyric parts".<sup>115</sup> However, two examples from *Agamemnon* will be sufficient to prove that the text of the 1990 production was cut by the director in such a way as to diminish Clytemnestra's personality: the first example coincides with the herald's entrance to report Agamemnon's return; while in the original as well as in K. Ch. Myres' translation Clytemnestra expresses her satisfaction that her fire signals proved to be true despite the chorus' negative comments

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<sup>113</sup> Kostas Georgousopoulos is the best known theatrical critic in Greece. In his career as translator of ancient Greek plays, K. Ch. Myres has translated the following plays for various theatre productions: Sophocles' *Electra* in 1972 which was performed by the National Theatre at the Festival of Epidavros in 1972 (directed by Evangelatos); Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* for the National Theatre in 1977 (directed by Evangelatos); Sophocles' *Antigone* for the National Theatre in 1980; and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in 1993 for Thymios Karakatsanis' New Greek Theatre. Additionally, his collaboration with the Amphi-Theatre resulted, as well as the *Oresteia*, in his translation of Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (1982), the revised version of his translation of Sophocles' *Electra* (1991), the translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (1992), Euripides' *Bacchae* (1993), and Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (1994).

<sup>114</sup> See next sub-chapter, 2.6. "A Visual Enactment of the Process of the *Oresteia*", pp. 109-117.

<sup>115</sup> K. Ch. Myres, *Aeschylus' Oresteia (Agamemnon, Choephoroi, Eumenides)* (Athens, 1989), first page of the introduction. The full text of the translation was published in the programme of the 1991 production as well.

on her easily deceived nature, and then points out calmly "I don't need to hear more from you because I shall learn everything from the king, himself, my respected husband",<sup>116</sup> in Evangelatos' production, Clytemnestra in her reply to the herald insults him by saying: "I don't want you to tell me anything because my husband will tell me" ("Δε θέλω να μου πεις τίποτα. Θα τα μάθω από τον άνδρα μου"). In addition, after she has murdered Agamemnon, Clytemnestra gives her reasoning and there are four references to Iphigeneia in her dialogue with the chorus (Ag., 1417, 1432, 1527, 1555). In Evangelatos' production the name of Iphigeneia is mentioned only twice and in a passing way. His Clytemnestra says neither that Iphigeneia will welcome her father (Ag. 1555-6) in the underworld, nor that Agamemnon deserved his death because he commenced the series of woeful events by sacrificing Iphigeneia (Ag. 1523-30).

Yorgos Patsas' scenery for the 1990 production, very simple and functional, remains the same throughout the performance of the trilogy.<sup>117</sup> A huge iron building represents the palace of the Atreids. Its central part stands for the main entrance and as it opens reveals a central staircase which in the case of the carpet-scene is covered by a red carpet. The left upper part of the construction opens to become a

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<sup>116</sup> Χρεία δεν έχω τώρα να μου πείς περισσότερα./ Από το βασιλιά τον ίδιο θα μάθω τα πάντα: ( *Agamemnon* 599-600 in Myres' translation).

<sup>117</sup> Yorgos Patsas is one of the leading Greek scenographers whose work has always reflected the spirit of the director's intentions. His career began in the National Theatre but his work has contributed to the success of the Amphi-Theatre, for which company he has worked since its establishment. He designs the costumes and the scenery for almost all of the productions of Amphi-Theatre. [Of the classical plays for which he designed the scenery and the costumes include: Menander's *The Arbitration* (1980), Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (1982), Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (1983), Aristophanes' *Peace* (1984), Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (1986), *Choephoroi* (1987), *Agamemnon* (1988), *Oresteia* (1990), Euripides' *Bacchae* (1993)]. Kostas Georgousopoulos wrote for his contribution to Amphi-Theatre's *Psychostasia* (1979): "Patsas designed a setting full of concrete meanings" and he designed costumes which, although they did not belong to a particular time, "defined the human body and stamped it with meaning". [See Kostas Georgousopoulos, "Reference to Aeschylus" ("Anafora ston Aeschylo") in *Keys and Codes of the Theatre I, Ancient Drama (Kleidia ke kodikes Theatrou I, Archaeo Drama)* (Athens, 1990), p. 203.]



roof window for the watchman. The same building becomes Apollo's sanctuary and the building of the Areopagus in the third play of the trilogy. The floor of the acting space has been covered by blue flat stones. On the left and on the right side of the central building, an oblique external wall half reveals a staircase on both sides while the passages between the building and the wall constructions become the right and the left *parodos* respectively. The staircases will be used in the third part of the trilogy as the place of divine epiphany, because Athena and Apollo do not mix with the other human characters in this interpretation. In *Eumenides*, when the action moves to Athens the right staircase is covered by a white cloth which represents Athena's statue. However, when Athena reappears to preside over Orestes' trial she stands on the top of the iron construction and therefore her superiority to the already unsympathetically portrayed Furies is further stressed. In the front right of the acting space a hill of red soil surrounded by a number of spears "nailed" on it stands for Agamemnon's tomb. During the action of *Eumenides*, the hill is covered by a white cloth.

The costumes of the performance reflect the social status of the characters: they are a mixture of modern and ancient styles, especially in the case of the men's costumes, while the women's dresses seem to have been modelled on the actual dresses of the women of fifth century Athens. All men are dressed almost identically with trousers under a long tunic, leaving their chest naked. Agamemnon's appearance is quite memorable in his wheeled chariot surrounded by 12 spears fastened to it and with his hands raised as the saviour king who triumphantly returns into his land. Behind him an exotic princess, beautifully dressed in long yellow robes (see Figure 14), sits holding two spears in a pose which communicates security and pride (see Figure 13). Clytemnestra wears a long black tunic inside which is revealed a pleated dress with golden embroidery, while her long red shawl associates her with the Argive citizens who although barefooted have a similar shawl around their neck. Electra, the princess, is dressed in black because she is in a state of mourning and her long hair arranged in a plait testifies to her aristocratic origin, while the Trojan slaves appear as ghostly spirits in their long grey and beige dresses. *Eumenides* is dominated by a contrast between black and white: Black is associated with the distorted Furies, the representatives of the old order and the only figures of the trilogy with half masks, indicative of

their inhuman chthonic origin; white is associated with the new order which is represented by the new gods Apollo and Athena whose head is covered by golden rays like Agamemnon's helmet. Orestes is also dressed in white.

Maria Horss' choreography for the *Oresteia* could be characterised as simple, plain and uncomplicated.<sup>118</sup> The movements that mostly engage our sympathy are those of the three choruses. Starting from the chorus of *Agamemnon*, the old Argives move and dance as if the situations they enact transform them into young men. When they sing of Iphigeneia's sacrifice (*Ag.*, 104-257) they run with their hands open, full of passion and the same movements accompany the *stasimon* before the herald's entrance (*Ag.*, 351-487), when the men run around the scene with their hands open wide like birds' wings. Another interesting scene is the one in which two of the male chorus pretend to wrestle with slow, dream-like movements while the others have formed a circle, when they sing about Helen and the destruction she caused (*Ag.*, 681-809). Clytemnestra's movements are confident and full of passion throughout the trilogy. However, each time she needs to descend the staircase from the central door she needs the help of the chorus (old Argives or Trojan slaves), who perform their task in a way appropriate to the queen monarch. Her movements become more violent after she has murdered Agamemnon (*Ag.*, 1371ff) when for example full of hatred she throws the axe against his dead body: but at the end of *Choephoroi* (925-30), she walks to her death slowly, without vigorous movement. Also worth mentioning are the slow, rhythmic and ritual movements of the mourners in the second part of the trilogy, which later become violent as they invoke the dead (*Ch.*, 306ff), tear their garments and strike their hands on the floor. The Furies in the third part move aggressively as they chase the distressed Orestes. When they lose their case, they fall down like empty sacks, but even then their movements do not arouse the sympathy of the audience.

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<sup>118</sup> Maria Horss is one of the leading choreographers in Greece. She worked in the National Theatre as choreographer. While in the National Theatre she choreographed 45 performances of ancient Greek tragedy. In 1972 she worked with Spyros Evangelatos for the first time in Sophocles' *Electra*, for the National Theatre, but her first co-operation with the Amphi-Theatre was Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (1986) followed by *Choephoroi* (1987), *Agamemnon* (1988) and *Oresteia* (1990).



The renowned composer Mikis Theodorakis wrote the music for the production.<sup>119</sup> The music is in sympathy with the spirit of the production as it accentuates the metaphysical and political elements which stand in support of the party represented by Agamemnon, Orestes, Apollo and Athena. The choral songs are beautifully accompanied by the music conducted by Loukas Karytinis. In *Agamemnon*, the men of the chorus, when they sing about Iphigeneia's sacrifice (*Ag.*, 104-257) are accompanied by sad melancholic music which becomes passionate and intense with the domination of drums when the ode to Helen is delivered (*Ag.*, 681-809). Drums prevail in Agamemnon's entrance (*Ag.*, 810) as well while the music as a whole has the rhythm of a march and the reverence of a song of prayer. Cassandra's mourning (*Ag.*, 1072ff) is accompanied by the compassion of the violin but Clytemnestra's voice is always plain, harsh and full of hatred. The entrance of the mourners in *Choephoroi* (22-83) is emphasised by mournful music. Wind and stringed instruments underline the chorus' agony before Aegisthus' entrance (*Ch.*, 783-838), while the violin increases their anxiety when they await the results of Orestes' attempt to murder him (*Ch.*, 855-868). After Clytemnestra's murder the music becomes intense and urgent as Orestes is pursued by the Furies (*Ch.*, 1044ff). In *Eumenides* the music clearly expresses sympathy for Orestes and his supporters. His agony as he is hunted by his mother's blood-stained Furies (*Eum.*, 244-396) is reinforced by the sound of violin, drums and flute. When he is questioned by them (*Eum.*, 585-613) the music is melancholic and full of compassion but

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<sup>119</sup> Mikis Theodorakis was responsible for the revival of Greek music at the beginning of the 1960s, while his "Circles of Songs" (Greek poems for which he composed the music) brought great poetry to the ordinary people. He resisted the dictatorship in Greece (1967-1974) and he organised the resistance from abroad, where he mobilised public opinion against the colonels. In February 1987, he completed his first opera, "Kostas Karyotakis" or "The Transformations of Dionysus" which was performed in the National Lyric Theatre. During the same year he wrote a symphonic ballet with the title "Zorbas" performed in the Arena of Verona in 1988 and 1989. In 1993, he composed *Medea* which was directed by Spyros A. Evangelatos and performed at Herodeion (July 1993). His first work with the Amphitheatre was Aeschylus' *Eumenides* in 1986 but he had also worked with Evangelatos in the National Theatre's production of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* in 1977.

when the acquittal vote is announced (*Eum.*, 752-3) the music becomes joyful and victorious with the help of the drums. The music conveys sympathy for the chthonic Furies only when they are persuaded to bless the city of Athens in an operatic movement (*Eum.*, 916ff).

### **2.5.2. *The Glory of Agamemnon***

In articles and interviews in newspapers and magazines as well as in various programmes of his productions of the Aeschylean trilogy, Spyros A. Evangelatos has clearly stated the issues of the trilogy that concerned him the most, including the metaphysical and existential problem, the political question and the aesthetic, abstract conceptions of its composition. In his effort to convey these ideas, he underestimates the figure of Clytemnestra and her case while for example he shows great sympathy for Orestes and his act of revenge. The result serves the director's purposes but at the same time it becomes a production most unfavourably disposed towards women and their cause.

The "metaphysical and existential" concern is clearly depicted in the director's treatment of Agamemnon, Cassandra, Orestes and Electra as well as in his treatment of the choruses of *Agamemnon* and of *Choephoroi*: their dread of the unknown as they remain simply spectators of the dramatised events. Agamemnon (Nikitas Tsakiroglou) is a great hero who returns home, full of joy, in Evangelatos' interpretation, happy to meet his wife whom he addresses tenderly even when he remarks on her insistent demand that he should walk on the red carpet (*Ag.*, 914-30); he is very reverent towards the gods since he emphasises the words addressed to them (*Ag.*, 810-28), loving towards his people who welcome him wholeheartedly, gentle to Cassandra whom she accepts as a present from his army. Cassandra struggles to come to terms with the god Apollo's love towards her. Leda Tassopoulou as Cassandra conveys the perplexity of the situation with a stoic endurance and calmness (see Figure 14). Even when she is obsessed she never raises her voice (*Ag.*, 1214-1241, 1256-1294). Orestes and Electra, as soon as they meet (*Ag.*, 225ff), conspire to determine their mother's murder and their desperate invocation to their dead father (*Ag.*, 315-513), extended in this production, accentuates the metaphysical



question as the two children collect all their human power to communicate with him (see Figure 15).<sup>120</sup>

Orestes (Yiannis Fertis) is treated like a powerful, decisive but sensitive young man who suffers for his absolutely justified act of murdering his mother. Even in *Choephoroi*, the Furies take the form of troublesome and hostile creatures who torment the righteous young man. Electra (Leda Tassopoulou) is a decent daughter in mourning whose lamentation has passion but whose personality is diminished under the force of a powerful male Orestes. Before he announces his plan of deception for murdering Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (*Ch.*, 554-5) he orders Electra to stay inside and the chorus women not to tell anybody about it with the following words: "Now you take care of the house and you keep your mouth closed" ("τώρα εσύ το σπίτι να προσέχεις και εσείς να κρατήσετε κλειστό το στόμα"). The words delivered do not follow Myres' modest translation of the lines: "[Electra] has to go inside/ and you please keep my purposes secret" ("να πάει μέσα [Ηλέκτρα]/ και τις προθέσεις μου εσείς παρακαλώ να κρύψετε"). Orestes appears to be the man in charge and all the women are obliged to obey his orders; Electra is one of them in Evangelatos' interpretation of the trilogy.

The political issues of the trilogy are touched upon by Evangelatos, but not to the extent of Karolos Koun's or Peter Stein's more explicit treatment. In fact, politics seem a less important issue to the director than the "human being's dialogue with the unknown". However, the third part deals extensively with the political establishment of the Areopagus and with Orestes' effort to re-establish his father's reign. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are depicted, at the end of *Agamemnon*, as cruel and atrocious tyrants since they are deprived of any other substantial explanation for Agamemnon's murder, whose depiction as the leader blessed by the people prevails. The restoration of Agamemnon's throne coincides with the birth of democracy in Athens through the establishment of the people's court. But again the political

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<sup>120</sup> It is characteristic of Evangelatos' success in attracting the audience's sympathy towards the issues he values most, that when brother and sister meet and embrace each other in total despair, in the performance of the 10th of August 1990 at Epidavros, the audience applauded them, feeling their pain. Moreover, during the same performance, in *Eumenides* when the acquittal vote for Orestes is announced, the audience applauded enthusiastically.



issue is resolved at the expense of the Furies, Clytemnestra's only allies. The Furies are presented as disfigured and hostile creatures who stand for the old political system, but their attempt to resist the new order of things expressed by Apollo and Athena seems futile from the very beginning since the two gods stand in a position higher than them, never mixing with them on the stage. Athena, when she tries to persuade them to agree to become lesser goddesses (*Eum.*, 794ff), speaks to them from the roof in a tone full of authority. Her speech is not at all extended and the Furies appear to be very easily persuaded. Thus the fact that they do not have any other choice than to accept Athena's offer is emphasised.

However, it becomes clear that Clytemnestra's image has been devalued. Her austere and harsh personality becomes apparent from her first appearance. In her encounter with her husband (*Ag.*, 855ff) her cunning is contrasted with Agamemnon's purity and sincerity. Her voice is deceitful as are her gestures when she kisses her husband's hand in respect and devotion. When she appears again after her husband's murder dressed in the white, blood-stained tunic (*Ag.*, 1372ff) she is dominated by wild happiness and undying hatred of his dead body. Because her references to Iphigeneia are few and passing, she is stripped of any morally justifiable reason for the murders. In *Choephoroi*, as she descends the staircase with the help of the chorus, we are faced with the same Clytemnestra: her voice is still self-controlled and mocking while she does not indicate any remorse or fear of revenge. When she hears the false news of Orestes' death (*Ch.*, 674-99), she is clearly pretending to be overwhelmed by despair as she pulls both of her plaits by the root. But soon she returns to her former cool and self-restrained character. It is significant that the episode of Cylissa (*Ch.* 733-782) is given a lengthy description in this production because it reveals Clytemnestra's nature. After Aegisthus' murder, the servant who desperately looks for Clytemnestra in order to inform her of his death, screams that Orestes' "knife is on her throat and justly so".<sup>121</sup> The phrase does go back to the original text (*Ch.*, 833-4) but in this production is given great emphasis and no character expresses compassion for Clytemnestra. The scene of her murder (*Ch.*, 892-930) reveals the same unsympathetic creature: she appeals to Orestes for

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<sup>121</sup> Είναι με το λεπίδι τώρα στο λαιμό και δίκαια θα πέσει το λεπίδι να τον κόψει: (*Choephoroi*, 833-4 in Myres' translation).



her life, exploiting his filial instincts, and while Orestes, broken, needs Pylades' exhortation (*Ch.*, 900-3) in order to act, she returns to her powerful, firm and unyielding self as she calmly enters the palace to be killed. Her ghost-image in *Eumenides* (94ff) is full of hatred without any indication of sorrow or repentance. Clytemnestra's unsympathetic approach confers upon this otherwise successful production the title of the "most patriarchal production".<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Sallie Goetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

## 2.6. A VISUAL ENACTMENT OF THE PROCESS OF THE *ORESTEIA*

### 2.6.1. "The Red Oresteia"<sup>123</sup>

During the winter of 1993-94 Yorgos Michaelidis and his company produced Aeschylus' *Oresteia* for the Open Theatre.<sup>124</sup> The production was expected to be very successful and it attracted the interest of both critics and audience since its contributors were established names in the field of tragic theatre. The text used was K. Ch. Myres' translation of the trilogy for Evangelatos and his Amphitheatre's *Oresteia*. The scenery and the costumes were designed by Dionysis Fotopoulos who had also designed Karolos Koun's *Oresteia* (1980-1982), and the music was composed by Thodoros Antoniou.

For several months before the performance, the company had to attend theoretical classes directed by Kostas Georgousopoulos and Andreas Panagopoulos in order to come to grips with Aeschylus' plays in general and with his age. Yorgos Michaelidis has argued that "Aeschylus creates all three plays of the *Oresteia* according to set patterns. In his work we become aware of the following motifs: the motif of the visiting guest, of the dead, of the net (and trap), of the hunter, of the altar of the sacrifice and libations, of the deception and lies and of the trial." He finally concludes that "Aeschylus leads human beings from the situation of chaos to the harmony and order of the social structure."<sup>125</sup> The following analysis will suggest that the director has achieved his aim and confirms the importance of the visual impact of this production. His interpretation will be considered in relation to the image of Clytemnestra and the issue of matricide.

A very aggressive, blinding red in the floor, ceiling and in the wooden surrounding walls predominates in the scenery of the Open Theatre's production of the *Oresteia*. Dionysis Fotopoulos designed his third *Oresteia* after Takis Mouzenidis' production of 1972 and Karolos

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<sup>123</sup> This is the title of an article published in *Nea* of 22/12/1993 which refers to Yorgos Michaelidis' interview with Charis Pontidas.

<sup>124</sup> The present discussion is based on the performance of 2/1/1994.

<sup>125</sup> *Mesivri* of 18/11/1993, "Oresteia in a Close Theatre" (*Oresteia Kleistou Chorou*).



Koun's of 1980-82.<sup>126</sup> The action of the trilogy takes place mainly in front of a very impressive and complex wooden construction backstage which in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* stands for the palace of Atreids. The lower part of the wooden building opens up horizontally with the help of the chorus and reveals the inner part of the palace, its separate rooms, doors and small steps, all dyed in red as well. In the first part of *Eumenides*, the backstage building represents Apollo's sanctuary from which Orestes, surrounded by the Furies, appears; during the second part, when the action of the play moves to Athens, the red building is covered by a black curtain and behind it, with the help of appropriate lighting, the Athenian judges are silhouetted leaning on a wooden board. The red wooden floor discloses a fire on the gods' altar and enables Clytemnestra to offer her libations. Moreover, a very important device for the present interpretation of the Aeschylean trilogy is a kind of chest situated on the right side of the stage which contains the clothes that the actresses and actors put on in front of the audience in order to assume their roles. The same chest serves as the wheeled platform which brings the king and his mistress home, while in *Choephoroi* the chest becomes Agamemnon's tomb. On the same chest sits Orestes surrounded by the Furies in *Eumenides* (see Figure 19). In the third play two red wooden ladders are brought in for Apollo (right) and Athena (left) to stand on (see Figure 19).

The impressive scenery is completed by the costumes which seem to be contemporary and remote at the same time. As has already been mentioned, the characters dress for their roles in front of the audience. Together they (25 actresses and actors) form the chorus of *Agamemnon* and they enter the stage as such. According to the director, "the heroes come from the chorus" because he could not imagine that "an actor could possibly deceive the audience by pretending to be the real Agamemnon, Clytemnestra or Aegisthus".<sup>127</sup> Moreover, all the objects necessary for the creation of a particular character are brought onto the stage by the other members of the chorus who help her or him to prepare. In addition, those who are to play a distinct character bathe their faces and hair with clay, golden for

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<sup>126</sup> Dionysis Fotopoulos' contribution to the Greek theatre is discussed in 2.4.1. "The Work Process", p. 87-92, n. 94.

<sup>127</sup> See Yorgos Michaelidis' interview with Charis Pontidas, "The Red Oresteia", *Nea* 22/12/1993.



Agamemnon (see Figure 16), Clytemnestra (see Figure 17) or Aegisthus, Apollo and Athena, white for the priestess and light blue for Cassandra. Orestes' face is clear and Electra's (see Figure 18) too as if they do not need a mask to perform their task, or as if they are more real than the other characters.

To return to the costumes of the performance, they do not refer to a certain age or fashion, they are simple but revealing of the nature of the characters and mainly black, as if the performers have come from an orthodox monastery. The chorus of Agamemnon, consisting of men and women, are dressed in black trousers, skirts and T-shirts and the Trojan women of *Choephoroi* wear black veils as well as long black dresses. Clytemnestra resembles a bat as she opens her hands in her long mainly black tunic with golden touches which after the murder is abandoned for a white robe stained with blood (see Figure 17). Agamemnon is presented at the beginning as a leader whose face is covered by a kind of metallic net. His blue jacket with golden buttons and golden finish recalls military uniform (see Figure 16), while his first appearance in *Agamemnon* is marked by eight wooden spears crossed around his face and body. The same military look characterised the appearance of Electra and Orestes (black trousers and jacket - see Figure 18). Aegisthus is a handsome young man in his long elegant golden-black coat and Cassandra's long black dress hints at her present situation of slavery. The costumes of the Furies, made of silver plastic, are not attractive at all; when the chthonic divinities are reconciled with the new order of things, they tear off their plastic costumes (see Figure 19). As they stand people of Athens bring white tunics to cover the head of the now transformed Furies, above which a golden wreath is placed. The golden wreath appears on the heads of the white-dressed Apollo and Athena as well. Dionysis Fotopoulos' impressive scenery and modest but appropriate costumes help the director to visualise his interpretation successfully.

K. Ch. Myres' translation was used in the Open Theatre's four-hour production of the *Oresteia*.<sup>128</sup> The trilogy was performed without cuts, apart from a few parts including mythological references not very relevant to the plot. The translation was accompanied by live music composed by Thodoros Antoniou who has written the music for almost

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<sup>128</sup> For K. Ch. Myres and his work as a translator see 2.5.1. "A Tested Collaboration", pp. 98-105, n. 113.



all of the Open Theatre's productions.<sup>129</sup> The music is reminiscent of Byzantine liturgy and the familiar sound of the bells reinforces that impression. Describing some of the music's best moments, we should include: the percussive accompaniment during the re-enactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice (*Ag.*, 104-257), which resembles litany as the bells beat mournfully; the drums and the bells that increase the fear of the wretched Argives as Agamemnon enter the palace; the persistent sound of mournful bells when Orestes and Electra invoke their dead father (*Ch.*, 315ff), a sound which becomes even more suggestive mixed together with the lamentation. When the mourners lift the tomb to empty the scene, the funeral procession that takes place is accompanied by Byzantine chanting while the drums keep the tune; the hostile noise of the music when the Furies appear on stage which resembles dogs' barking and snakes' hissing (*Eum.*, 139ff). The music however ceases during the announcement of Orestes' acquittal (*Eum.*, 752-3) and in general the third part is not fully exploited musically.

Done Michaelidis choreographed the production and managed to render in movements the religious awe of the Byzantine music and the atmosphere of fear, distress, expectation, mourning and reconciliation.<sup>130</sup> In *Agamemnon* the chorus enters dancing rhythmically (40-82). During the re-enactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice,

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<sup>129</sup> He is a famous composer of symphonic music - he has composed 150 symphonies. He is also known for his academic career as a professor of composition at the University of Boston. He has composed the music for more than 140 theatre productions. In the summer of 1995, he presented at Herodeion (17-18 August) his opera *Bacchae*; he also composed the music for Michael Kakoyiannis' production of Euripides' *Trojan Women* (Epidavros, 26-7 August 1995). Among his theatre work we should include, apart from his regular cooperation with Michaelidis and his Open Theatre, Aeschylus' *Persae* for the National Theatre, directed by Alexis Minotis (Epidavros, 1984), Euripides' *Hecuba* for the National Theatre, directed by Alexis Minotis (Epidavros, 1985) and Sophocles' *Oedipus Colonus* for the National Theatre, also directed by Minotis (Epidavros, 1986).

<sup>130</sup> Done Michaelidis started her professional career with the Open Theatre where she choreographed productions almost from the time of its establishment. With regard to ancient theatre productions, she has choreographed, apart from the *Oresteia*, Aristophanes' *Frogs* for the festival of Epidavros in the summer of 1990 and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, produced by Thymios Karakatsanis' New Greek Theatre ("Nea Elliniki Skini") for the festival of Epidavros in 1993.



in a suggestive procession, they convey the body of Iphigeneia to the altar. In *Choephoroi* the women mourners are involved in the ritual undressing of Orestes whose body is touched by all of them as they approach him in order and with slow movements (after the recognition scene, *Ch.*, 225-45). The third part, *Eumenides*, appears more static than the other two in the present interpretation, with the exception of the transformation of the Furies to Eumenides (*Eum.*, 916ff), when they tear off their plastic costumes with vague, abstract movements. The happy blend of music and choreography contributed to the appealing visual impact of the production.

A few words must be added about the lighting of the performance, mainly red because of the colour of the setting, which seems majestic as the figures are reflected in the red wall of the backstage building and in the red wooden floor. When Clytemnestra appears over the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra (see Figure 17) the only lighting comes from electric torches which the members of the chorus hold. At the end of *Eumenides*, the celebratory lighting comes from candles as well.

### **2.5.2. *The Net of Fate in its Visual Enactment***

It has already been mentioned that Yorgos Michaelidis based his interpretation of the *Oresteia* on the recurrent motifs whose presentation characterises the performance.<sup>131</sup> Although all the motifs he has listed (visiting guest, the dead, net and trap, hunter, altar, sacrifice and libations, deception and lies, trial) are visually rendered in the performance, the one that is fully exploited and which finally stamps Michaelidis' approach to *Oresteia* is the motif of net and trap and their association with the inevitability of fate. The image of Clytemnestra, her treatment by the director and the treatment of the issue of matricide follow the main approach.

The net and its implication of entrapment is introduced to the audience by the chorus. When the chorus relates the events of Iphigeneia's sacrifice (*Ag.*, 104-257), the person who delivers Agamemnon's words enters the net, implying the inevitability of his act since he has been victimised by his duty to the Greek army. The members of the chorus carry the girl who plays the role of Iphigeneia in this particular scene on their hands, enter the net and put her on the

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<sup>131</sup> See p. 109.



back of Agamemnon: the people require the sacrifice and the king has to act it out. The net reappears with the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra (Ag., 1372ff) signifying Clytemnestra's deception (see Figure 17) and associating the murders with Iphigeneia's sacrifice. The same net however, entrenches Clytemnestra at the end of *Choephoroi* (929ff), who is caught in it by her son Orestes and Pylades and dragged into the palace to be killed. The way it is presented indicates on the one hand, the unbroken chain of murders and on the other hand, the inevitability of the murders as the doer becomes victim. The process involves the inevitable entrapment of Orestes by the Furies, who remains until his acquittal on the wooden platform used to represent Agamemnon's tomb, covered by the same net (*Eum.*, 245-754). However, with the events of the third part, according to the director's interpretation, the trilogy reaches its climax and needs divine intervention in order to help humans to establish a court to solve the cases of homicides and thus, to enable them to leave the situation of "chaos" and primitivism and enter the "harmony" of the civilised world.

The image of Clytemnestra (Marietta Sgourdaïou) is therefore developed mainly within the above pattern of interpretation. However, she is always given direct or indirect justification for the murder of her husband. First, the re-enactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice, although it implies the inevitability of Agamemnon's decision, powerfully introduces one of Clytemnestra's main motives for Agamemnon's murder. Then, it is the totally unsympathetic portrayal of Agamemnon's (Minas Chatzisavvas) personality which lessens the gravity of her deed: Clytemnestra from her first appearance on stage seems to be trustworthy, decisive and powerful but at the same time she is remote, austere and unsympathetic because of her morose face and her plastic-like tunic. Agamemnon's appearance is prefaced by a rupture of dramatic illusion. As the chorus sings and dances the ode concerning Helen (Ag. 681-716), the director enters the stage in modern clothes and delivers the speech about the lion who grew up to destroy his keeper (Ag. 717-736), and about the old *hybris* which gives birth to a new one (Ag. 763-771) while distributing bread to the Argives. The scene with Agamemnon follows immediately and his association with Michaelidis' words about *hybris* becomes inevitable: his words justify the association when he shouts like a warlike dictator. When Clytemnestra approaches him with an open embrace (Ag., 855) he



speaks to her coldly and with indifference (Ag., 914-30). As for his behaviour towards Cassandra, as he introduces her to Clytemnestra (Ag., 950-5), he violently pulls her head up by her hair. Minas Chatzisavvas' arrogant Agamemnon (see Figure 16) grants Marietta Sgourdaïou's persuasive Clytemnestra another reason to justify her decision. After the murders (Ag., 1372ff) Clytemnestra's voice and gestures are indicative of passionate hatred against her dead husband and wild joy for her revenge. However, when she mentions Iphigeneia her voice breaks because of her deeply felt pain and she clutches her womb (Ag., 1416-21). Her behaviour towards the dead Cassandra indicates jealousy and hatred but her insulting words (Ag., 1437-47) point to the human behaviour of a wife who has been humiliated by a husband who brought his mistress home. But the director's treatment of Cassandra (Dina Michaelidis) is very sympathetic as she mourns continuously (Ag., 1076ff) under the white net which symbolises her own entrapment by the supernatural force of fate. Aegisthus (Kostas Falelakis) is treated as a handsome, young man who has attached himself to a woman in order to achieve his purposes.

Before the end of *Agamemnon*, from the left side door a young woman enters the scene, opens her mouth although no sound is heard, embraces the dead body of Agamemnon and mourns; then she lifts the black net and enters in. All this time the chorus stands apart. This introduction to *Choephoroi* points to the inevitability of fate and initiates the theme of mourning and rituals related to the dead which is central to the whole play, while the young woman possibly looks forward to the figure of Electra (Chrysa Spilioti). Electra's treatment by the director is that of a young girl who has devoted her life to the memory of her father, and who lives to see Orestes avenge his death since she does not have the power to commit her murder herself: her subordinate role becomes apparent in the way she participates in the rituals as she brushes Orestes' face, cleans his body and helps him to dress. However, she gives Orestes the knife to commit the murders after he has announced his plans (Ch., 554-584). But her treatment is neither that of an important figure nor as effective as Stein's and Koun's Electras. Orestes (Zacharias Rochas) seems to be the real victim of fate. He has decided to commit the murder but he is not arrogant as is Evangelatos' hero. On the contrary, his face is sad and unhappy and it becomes clear that he



is the victim of a painful situation which requires him to murder his mother (see Figure 18).

Clytemnestra enters the scene dressed in the clothes of the previous scene, without any sign of regret or misery. When she is told the false news of Orestes' death (*Ch.*, 674-90) she seems to be very suspicious as she looks around her in disbelief and examines the strangers sceptically. And when she is finally deceived into believing in her son's death she sounds hurt (*Ch.*, 691-9), her movement to touch her womb signifies her motherly pain but she soon recovers and becomes cold and remote. The pain was instantaneous and the relief permanent. In her second encounter with Orestes (*Ch.*, 892-930), Clytemnestra is made glamorous by her golden clothes and determined to face the murderers herself, but as soon as she learns of Aegisthus' death she loses courage and throws away the axe she has called for (*Ch.*, 889). Her next movements seem to be calculated by her struggle to persuade her son not to kill her. She bares her breast and her voice is broken by pain as she says "I would like to grow old with you".<sup>132</sup> Orestes, who is very sensitive, human and fragile in this interpretation, embraces his friend Pylades in order to build up courage to commit the crime (*Ch.*, 900-3). He is a victim of fate. As the two friends drag her in with the same black net, Clytemnestra with a voice full of hatred warns her son that he will not escape his mother's bloodstained Furies (*Ch.*, 912). The last scene of *Choephoroi* condemns the morally reprehensible act of Orestes and thus restores to a certain extent the image of Clytemnestra as a mother whose life should have been spared by her son. This becomes apparent first in the way the women of the chorus wait for him with their heads completely covered by black scarves, a sign of deep mourning, shame and disgust. At the end he looks completely destroyed as he lies down caught in the black net. Zacharias Rochas' extraordinary performance conveys the image of the repentant Orestes.

Orestes' modest image is kept throughout *Eumenides*, in which he appears on the platform (Agamemnon's tomb) covered by the black net and displaying suffering after his deed. When at Delphi he begs Apollo to help him to overcome the consequences of the matricide (*Eum.*, 85-7) while in Athens, he answers the Furies' accusations with fear and respect (*Eum.*, 585ff) in contrast with the insolence of Orestes

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<sup>132</sup> μαζί σου να γεράσω θέλω: (*Choephoroi* 908 in Myres' translation).

in Evangelatos' production. However, the Furies, the assistants of Clytemnestra's lawful rights as a mother, are underplayed in significance and importance and are unfavourably depicted by the director as plastic monsters whose movements appear deformed. The unsympathetic treatment of the Furies becomes more evident in comparison with Orestes, the victim, and the two Olympian gods, Apollo and Athena (see Figure 19). On the one hand, Apollo has the arrogance of power and he speaks to them from a distance as if he despises them but, because of his confidence and his determination to secure the discharge of Orestes, he does not abuse them. On the other hand, Athena is very sympathetically depicted: she is moderate, reasonable and persuasive. Her image is effectively conveyed by the actress, Anthi Andreopoulou, whose facial expression and voice are calm and reassuring. Clytemnestra's episode in the final play (*Eum.*, 94-139) does not seem necessary for the development of the story since her association with the Furies is played down rather than emphasised. The director saw *Eumenides* as the magnificent portrayal of the admission of human beings to the harmony of the civilised world while the earlier plays stood for the chaos of the disorganised primitive society.



## 2.7. A COMPARATIVE CONCLUSION

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* has attracted the attention of contemporary directors because of the issues it involves which are developed in the lengthy context of three plays. Although the sex contest, the male-female conflict, holds a central part in the trilogy, almost all of the approaches discussed in this chapter have viewed the plays as the process towards democratisation and civilisation. Thus, on the one hand, the issue of women's representation through Clytemnestra and the Furies-Eumenides is mainly treated unfavourably by directors since the allies stand for the primitive, uncivilised world associated with the law of retribution and revenge and with tyrannical regimes. On the other hand, feminist critics warn that "the feminist reader" of the *Oresteia* must decide that "the female roles have nothing to do with women, that these roles should be played by men, as fantasies of 'Woman' as 'other' than man, as disruptions of a patriarchal society and illustrative of its fear and loathing of the female parts".<sup>133</sup> However, attempts have been made towards a feminist interpretation of the trilogy notably in Ariane Mnouchkine's production for her company Le Théâtre du Soleil under the title of *Les Atréides* (1991-2). Reference to this production is necessarily brief because it is based on others' descriptions of the production.<sup>134</sup>

Mnouchkine has taken a feminist tack in allowing her audience to understand Clytemnestra's motivations by preceding the Aeschylean trilogy with Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis*.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, she uses the same actresses and actors in various roles. "In each play we see Julianna Carneiro Da Cunha as Clytemnestra, and in the *Eumenides* as both the Ghost of Clytemnestra and Athena. One actress, Nirupama Nityanandan, plays Iphigenia in the first play, Cassandra in the

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<sup>133</sup> See Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London, 1988), p. 15.

<sup>134</sup> I did not have the chance to see the production myself and Ariane Mnouchkine never produced a videorecording of the trilogy.

<sup>135</sup> Mnouchkine first created her own trilogy, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* preceded by Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and then in the spring of 1992, she added *Eumenides*, translated by Hélène Cixous. Mnouchkine herself translated *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* and Jean and Mayotte Bollack translated *Iphigeneia at Aulis*.

*Agamemnon*, *Electra* in the *Choephoroi*, and one of the Furies in the *Eumenides*. Thus in each of the plays, we see the tableau of loving mother with her beloved child, since the actresses are the same although the roles have changed."<sup>136</sup> "Simon Abkarian, in his roles as Agamemnon, Achilles, and Orestes, shows us male victory in his own personae, as Da Cunha shows us the female losses. In each of Abkarian's new roles we remember the former ones; we see the arrogance and abuse of Achilles replicated by Agamemnon and Orestes. Abkarian plays Agamemnon and Achilles in *Iphigenia*; Agamemnon and Chorus Leader in *Agamemnon* and Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*."<sup>137</sup> And finally, "[A]ll of Mnouchkine's choruses insist upon sexual ambiguity: men play women, and women play men ...".<sup>138</sup>

However, Sallie Goetsch has criticised the "elimination of sexual identity" of the Erinyes which "was surprising in a production widely hailed as feminist ...";<sup>139</sup> Apollo's appearance which "was magnificent with his golden bow" while the chorus "was ... undignified. People not infrequently laughed at them";<sup>140</sup> and Athena's image because "she was sweet, almost gooey".<sup>141</sup> She adds that "... the preceding plays, and particularly *Les Choephores*, did not lead the audience to expect a production in which we would be forced to admire the male oppressor, in which the champions of female rights would be laughable and ineffectual, in which the woman who betrays her sex to the patriarchy would be too nice to resent."<sup>142</sup>

Despite that criticism, it seems that Mnouchkine in her production constantly undermines the male victories and she achieves that by the technique mentioned above of using the same actresses and actors for more than one role. By this means, Iphigeneia, Agamemnon's daughter

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<sup>136</sup> Marianne McDonald, "The Menace of Mnouchkine's *Eumenides*: Midnight Madness at Montpellier", *Theatre Forum* 2 (Fall, 1992), pp. 11-17, p.14.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Marianne McDonald, "The Atrocities of *Les Atrides*: Mnouchkine's Tragic Vision", *Theatre Forum* 1 (Spring, 1992), pp. 12-20, p. 15.

<sup>139</sup> Sallie Goetsch, "Playing Against the Text, *Les Atrides* and the History of Reading Aeschylus", *The Drama Review* 38, 3 (Fall, 1994), pp. 75-95, p.85.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Sallie Goetsch, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>142</sup> Sallie Goetsch, *op. cit.*, p.87-8.



and his sacrificial victim becomes Cassandra, his lover, and then Electra, his devoted daughter. At the same time, Electra's loyalty to him becomes complicated since by her presence we remember Iphigeneia's killing by him. As Clytemnestra takes the role of Athena, her victory over the Furies appears on another level as a victory of the female Clytemnestra over her daughter Electra who plays the role of one of the Furies as well.<sup>143</sup> But, the major feminist strength of the production is Mnouchkine's decision to precede *Oresteia* by *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and thus to show vividly Clytemnestra's reason for killing her husband. Michaelidis' production, discussed above, approaches Mnouchkine's interpretation because it includes the reenactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice by the chorus of *Agamemnon*.<sup>144</sup>

The common element of the approaches discussed in this chapter is the subordinate role of Clytemnestra's cause, whose image, even if she is treated with understanding, in the case of Stein's and Koun's productions, in *Agamemnon*, is usually diminished in the second and third play as the director's primary purpose and main line of interpretation become more apparent. And this is, in Hall's production, mainly the "balance of opposites and some kind of synthesis" that we get at the end of the play according to which Clytemnestra represents the part that has to submit to the new order of things;<sup>145</sup> in Stein's Russian production, the political interpretation in the form of parallels drawn between the dramatised events and the recent political developments in Russia and Clytemnestra's case is almost completely dropped in the third part of the trilogy; in the case of Koun's production, the political interpretation of the trilogy according to which Clytemnestra assumes the role of a tyrant or dictator (as we approach the end of *Agamemnon*); and in Yorgos Michaelidis' reading the visualisation of the progress towards a civilised world intermingled with the power of fate in which Clytemnestra becomes a simple link to the fatal process of

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<sup>143</sup> According to McDonald Athena embraces one of the Furies, the one who had the role of Electra (Iphigeneia and Cassandra as well). See McDonald, "The Menace of Mnouchkine's *Eumenides*", *op.cit.* 14.

<sup>144</sup> See also the Finnish production of the trilogy, discussed in the "Appendix B" (pp. 262-274), which includes the reenactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice at a crucial point, when *Agamemnon* enters the palace walking on the purple carpet.

<sup>145</sup> See Channel Four Documentary on the National Theatre's *Oresteia* (Channel Four Production, 1983).



murders which leads to the victory of civilisation. Evangelatos' *Oresteia* is more consistent than the others in his treatment of Clytemnestra who is totally unsympathetic from the beginning to the end, mainly because of her deprivation of any noble motive for Agamemnon's murder who is treated like a hero.

In short, Hall's Clytemnestra is a decisive and revengeful heroine in the *Agamemnon* and she keeps the same image throughout *Choephoroi* and in her short appearance in the third play. Agamemnon's lack of affection towards his wife, however, gives her another strong motive for her act; Stein's Clytemnestra is a memorable queen because of her austere image in *Agamemnon*, and her act of murdering her husband appears to be motivated because of his arrogance and indifference towards her. In the second part of the trilogy, however, she yields her power to her second husband while in the third play she is almost forgotten; Koun's Clytemnestra is depicted at first as the powerful "queen of matriarchy" in relation to a keen but almost dull and indifferent Agamemnon, although her image is diminished by the fear of retaliation in the second play; Evangelatos' Clytemnestra is a malicious figure towards a heroic and justified Agamemnon; and Michaelidis' Clytemnestra has reasons to justify the murder of an arrogant, insulting and unjust husband. With the noticeable exception of Peter Hall's portrayal of Furies which are beautiful and courteous, their appearance in the other four productions is fearful and distressing; they become sympathetic after being persuaded to take part in the new world and to offer their blessings while in all five productions the new gods are more or less viewed as the powerful founders of democracy. However, in Stein's, Koun's and Michaelidis' productions, the Furies are in a way detached from Clytemnestra, or their attachment is loose; in Hall's production the Furies are attractive creatures who clearly stand in support of Clytemnestra's lawful rights as a mother while in Evangelatos' production their unsympathetic and insulting treatment by the new gods follows their association to Clytemnestra.

Electra's part in the *Oresteia* is short compared with that of Orestes' and Clytemnestra's and confined to one play, *Choephoroi*. However, Peter Stein and Karolos Koun portrayed her as a dominant and imposing figure, whose image, in the case of Stein's Electra, is contrasted with the diminished and, in the second part, isolated Clytemnestra. Evangelatos' Electra is obedient and submissive to her



brother and male inheritor of Agamemnon's *oikos* against a malignant Clytemnestra, while Hall's and Michaelidis' Electra is not treated as an important or distinct figure and her character is not considered as the opposite of her mother's.

The very important issue of the matricide is treated differently by each of the five directors whose productions are discussed above and in accordance with their main line of interpretation. Thus matricide is condemned by Peter Hall through the sympathetic portrayal of the Furies, through Orestes' weakness and uncertainty about the morality and the necessity of his act and through the melancholy music that accompanies the acquittal vote. The issue is not stressed in Stein's production, although it is quite vividly portrayed, since the third part of the trilogy is concentrated on political commentary. However, Orestes' act appears to be necessary. In the case of Karolos Koun's production, Orestes' acquittal is seen as the victory of democracy over tyranny and oppression represented by Clytemnestra and the Furies. Spyros Evangelatos through his condemnation of Clytemnestra welcomes matricide as a necessary and important act. Orestes comes to avenge his father's unjustified death and although he hesitates at the moment of the actual deed, his insulting behaviour to the Furies as well as his wild happiness at the announcement of his acquittal, betrays his belief in the righteousness of his act. But Michaelidis is the only director among those whose productions are discussed in detail who clearly condemns matricide through a modest, unhappy and repentant Orestes.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. THE QUEEN AND HER DAUGHTER IN SOPHOCLES' *ELECTRA*

#### 3.1. *ELECTRA* AND MATRICIDE IN SOPHOCLES

Sophocles' *Electra* is the author's treatment of the story of Agamemnon's children after he has been treacherously murdered by his wife and her lover. The play dramatises Electra's determination to take revenge for her father's murder. This is achieved first by hurting Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (*El.*, 355) as she constantly insults her mother publicly for murdering her husband and for having an amorous relationship with the man who participated in the killing (*El.*, 262-286 and 516-526) and "thus honoring her dead father" (*El.*, 356), then, when she is misled into believing the false news of Orestes' death (*El.*, 680-763), by assuming herself the role of the avenger and planning the murder of the two (*El.*, 947-1057).

However, the traditional approach to the play has concentrated on the problem of "justice": "As in the *Oresteia*, the central problem is a problem of *dike*, "justice" what are we to think of the matricide?".<sup>1</sup> What has happened in Sophocles to the Furies, who traditionally pursued and persecuted Orestes for the killing of his mother in both Aeschylus and Euripides? Different types of answers have been given to Sophocles' treatment of the issue of the matricide. According to R.C. Jebb, Sophocles was only interested in producing a narrative in the Homeric manner and therefore he omitted the ethical or legalistic aspects of the story.<sup>2</sup> A second theory was expressed in an article by J.T. Sheppard, who believed that Sophocles ironically condemned Orestes' act since when Electra asked him after Clytemnestra's murder "How is it with you, Orestes" he replied "In the house all well, if Apollo's oracle was well" (1424-5):<sup>3</sup> Orestes thus passes responsibility on to the god. Again

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<sup>1</sup> H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy, A Literary Study* (London, 1993), p.131.

<sup>2</sup> R.C. Jebb's Introduction to his edition of Sophocles' *Electra* (Cambridge 1962), first edition: Cambridge, 1897, pp. xl-xliii.

<sup>3</sup> The translation is copied from J.T. Sheppard's article, "*Electra*: A Defence of Sophocles": *The Classical Review* 41 (1927), p.8.



when Aegisthus was led into the palace to his death he asked Orestes why he needed the dark to commit the murder and his answer, that Aegisthus should die in the same place as Agamemnon, provoked Aegisthus's allusion to the "present griefs of Pelops' clan and those to come" (*El.*, 1498). The reference to the future seemed to him to apply to Orestes' ordeal with the Erinyes. According to a third theory expressed by H.D.F. Kitto, with Orestes' act "[A] violent disturbance of *dike* has been violently annulled".<sup>4</sup> That "justificatory" theory is very different from the one which claims that "Sophocles is dramatizing, not the revenge nor the act of matricide, but the story of Electra as she is affected by her years of resistance to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, by the return of Orestes, and by his consummation of the revenge".<sup>5</sup>

The aftermath of Orestes' matricide is not a major issue in Sophocles as it is in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (458 B.C.) or in Euripides' *Electra* (probably produced the decade between 427-417 B.C.),<sup>6</sup> not to mention the Euripidean *Orestes* (408 B.C.). Although it is true that our interest in the Sophoclean play lies with Electra's attitude towards the events which culminate in the murder of Clytemnestra, her comparison with her Euripidean counterpart, whose personal tragedy dominates the play, makes the Sophoclean heroine more remorseless and frightening since her total commitment to the murder of her mother is followed by her absence of regret at the end of the play: to leave Orestes aside, the play's end frees Electra from any moral doubts about the rightness of her cruel behavior against her mother, which resulted in Clytemnestra's murder by her own children.

But how are we to approach Sophocles' *Electra* from the point of view of women's representation in the play? Feminist writing seems to have concentrated more on the *Oresteia* because it includes the whole series of murders starting from that of Agamemnon and because

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<sup>4</sup> H.D.F. Kitto, *op. cit.*, p.136.

<sup>5</sup> G.M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (New York, 1994), p.66. A similar view had been expressed earlier by T.B.L. Webster who pointed out that "as the importance of the murders decreases, the importance of Electra increases". See T.B.L. Webster, *An Introduction to Sophocles* (London, 1969), p.19.

<sup>6</sup> The approximate chronology of the play's original production has been taken from B.M.W. Knox, "Euripides" in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol.1, Part.2, *Greek Drama* (Cambridge, 1989), p.64.

Clytemnestra can be viewed in that trilogy as the wronged woman whose motives for killing her husband are substantial. Electra stands for the father whose memory she fights to restore, and opposes the world of her mother. Her treatment by the feminist writers is collective based on all three tragedians and the underlying myth. For example, Hélène Cixous deals extensively with the figure of Electra,<sup>7</sup> but her interpretation is collective, rather than the study of any single dramatic text.

With reference to women's representation in Sophocles' *Electra*, there are two conflicting aspects deriving from the opposing interests of Electra and Clytemnestra. On the one hand, if we take Clytemnestra's point of view, Electra is a ruthless daughter who fights her own mother in order to superimpose male patriarchal values. Electra's commitment to her dead father could justify that view. Note for example the contempt with which she speaks to Chrysothemis as she accuses her of valuing her mother more than her father, although she is born his child and is called after him (*El.*, 341-3). Moreover, because she has not reacted to Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon, she is called Clytemnestra's not Agamemnon's daughter (*El.*, 365-7). The whole play is devoted to Electra's determination to avenge her father's murder. On the other hand, as has been suggested,<sup>8</sup> because "her notorious crime is (apart from its effect upon Electra) left largely *exo tou dramatos* [outside the main dramatic action], while her subsequent outrageous behaviour takes place in the domestic setting of a palace where she lives in proper subordination to her sexual partner Aegisthus", Clytemnestra can not be considered as departing from modes of behaviour proper to the female; while Electra "usurps - or seeks to usurp - the male role" as she decides to commit the murder herself after the lying tale of Paedagogue.<sup>9</sup> It is true that Electra in a number of cases acts against the social standards acceptable for a woman, as when she decides to undertake the murder herself, even if her decision to carry out the murder herself comes when she believes Orestes to be dead. Chrysothemis, who represents the

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<sup>7</sup> See Hélène Cixous, "Sorties", in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 100-112.

<sup>8</sup> R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Sophocles and Women", *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique* (Fondation Hardt) 29 (Genève 1983), p. 246.

<sup>9</sup> R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *op. cit.*, p. 243.



proper code of behaviour, warns her to go indoors (*El.*, 328), and also reminds her of the limitations of her nature: "you were born a woman not a man" (*El.*, 997). However, a closer look at the play will indicate that the seeming discrepancy is not based on firm ground since Electra is the revolutionary heroine who has the strength and courage to fight the male structure of society, but only in order to reinforce its patriarchal principles and values.

Mary Whitlock Blundell, in the chapter of her book *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* devoted to Electra, points out that "[T]he murders of Iphigeneia and Agamemnon have created two warring groups of *philoï* [friends], cutting across the normal lines of family solidarity".<sup>10</sup> If we leave Iphigeneia's murder aside for the moment, Agamemnon's murder has divided the royal family into conflicting groups. One is represented by Electra who has been alienated from her mother but is devoted to the memory of her father whose name she fights to restore to his family and to the throne, since both roles, of head of the family and of king, have been usurped by Aegisthus (*El.*, 261-275). Electra's kinship is extended to those who support her father's cause, Orestes, the women of the chorus and Paedagogue, whom she calls father (*El.*, 1361). Chrysothemis is admitted to the group of Agamemnon's friends only when she is persuaded not to fulfill her mother's instructions to take gifts to Agamemnon's tomb from a wife who is his enemy (*El.*, 431-41, 466-71), but she loses her privilege when she refuses to participate in Aegisthus's murder (*El.*, 1015-1057). The other more restricted group is represented by Clytemnestra. Aegisthus appears at the end of the play only to be killed by Orestes, but the references to his name are very frequent and therefore his absence is not felt. However, we can gather from her prayer to Apollo (*El.*, 637-59) that Clytemnestra enjoys prosperity with a group of friends (*El.*, 651-2) and those of her children that "do not breed against her deadly hatred and bitterness" (*El.*, 653-4). These people and herself she wishes not to be affected by her bad dream which she hopes will recoil on her enemies (*El.*, 646-7). Both women are presented as leading a group in a revolutionary way for their society. Both are their own masters and they speak freely without taking into consideration any possible

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 151.

consequences of their feelings and sympathies. Both of them depart from models of behaviour appropriate for the female, not only Electra as R.P. Winnington Ingram has indicated.<sup>11</sup> The difference lies with the mode of presentation because Electra is fighting for a socially "elevated" cause,<sup>12</sup> whereas Clytemnestra is stigmatised by the murder of her husband and her present licentious life (e.g: *El.*, 273-4, 588-9).

As soon as Electra assumes a speaking role (*El.*, 86) we become acquainted with Clytemnestra's murderous act (*El.*, 94-102), the cruel killing of Agamemnon; the description is so intense that the homicide seems to belong to the action on stage: Clytemnestra and "her bed mate, Aegisthus, split his skull with an axe" (*El.*, 97-100) but before his death Agamemnon saw "the double hand which killed him" (*El.*, 204-6) and "screamed" (*El.*, 194-7). After the murder, Clytemnestra cleaned the blood stains from the dead Agamemnon's hair (*El.*, 445-7). The last detail, together with the information that Clytemnestra has made the day of her husband's slaughter ("by guile" *El.*, 279) a festival which she celebrates with hymns each month (*El.*, 280-81) outline, a monstrous personality even before she appears on stage. Moreover, her vengeful nature, manifested even against her own children, strengthens the impression of her villainous character: in particular, the fact that she tried to kill Orestes immediately after Agamemnon's murder in order to prevent any future act of revenge on the part of Agamemnon's son is inexcusable. The accusation is made by Electra in front of her that Orestes just escaped her hand (*El.*, 601, see also, *El.*, 293-8).<sup>13</sup> The only moment in which she becomes human is when she hears the news of Orestes's death (*El.*, 680-763) and her maternal impulse overcomes for a moment the feeling of relief from the danger her son's life meant for her (*El.*, 766-8). The scene recalls Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* 691-700 where Clytemnestra seems to grieve at the news of Orestes's death but only for a brief moment. But even if "the division of loyalties within the

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<sup>11</sup> See above page 125, n. 9.

<sup>12</sup> P.E. Easterling, "Sophocles", in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol.1, Part 2, *Greek Drama* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> See C.P. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus, A Study of Character and Function* (Iowa City, 1987), p. 168, who points out that Clytemnestra wanted and planned Orestes' death.



family"<sup>14</sup> could justify her outrage against Electra's everlasting mourning for her father (*El.*, 289-92, 516-26) and her final rejoicing at the news of Orestes's death (*El.*, 773-87), her previous attempt to murder her son in order to safeguard her and her lover's life (a Sophoclean innovation) transforms her to an unloving mother and a creature who is unable to engage our sympathy.

Another new element in the myth is the explanation Electra gives for Iphigeneia's sacrifice claiming that Agamemnon did not even have the choice of returning to Argos rather than sacrifice his daughter: when Clytemnestra invokes the law of retaliation for the murder of her husband, since he did not hesitate to sacrifice their daughter (*El.*, 528-51), Electra refutes her by arguing that Agamemnon performed the task to release the Greek fleet because Artemis was angry with him for killing her sacred stag, and asked for the sacrifice of his daughter in order to grant to the Greek fleet fair weather to sail either home or to Troy (*El.*, 560-76). Thus, Clytemnestra is denied any acceptable motive for her husband's murder. Contrary to the acceptable social code for women, she has taken a lover, has killed her husband, has threatened the life of her children and lives as she wishes. Because she constitutes a threat to the values of the patriarchal society, Clytemnestra is presented as a villain and is contrasted with another woman, Electra, who is a rebel as well but who fights for a just cause: to restore her family's *oikos*.

Electra from the very beginning is prompted by her desire for vengeance (*El.*, 245-50). She has rescued Orestes, whom she awaits to end her suffering by killing the murderers of their father (*El.*, 117, 293-309). In fact, the waiting has devoured her life which is spent in mourning; from the time she appears on stage until Chrysothemis' entrance she laments her father's murder and her degraded status she will take up mourning again after the false news of Orestes' death. Her mourning includes references to her present deprivation of material comfort, since she lives as a slave in compulsory subjection to her father's murderers (*El.*, 189, 264-75, 597-600, 814-16, 1192), she is poorly dressed and eats badly (*El.*, 191-2, 450) and she is denied

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<sup>14</sup> See, Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 151.

marriage (*El.*, 164-5, 187-8, 961-66).<sup>15</sup> But Electra is herself responsible for the conditions in which she lives because she has rejected the new order of things in her family and her state: Aegisthus is now the *paterfamilias* and the ruler of the state. Instead, Chrysothemis, who accepts the situation which has developed after the murder of Agamemnon, lives a life of comfort (*El.*, 358-64).<sup>16</sup> Electra however, revolts and attacks the new social order and its representatives. The result is a feeling of distress from her mother and Aegisthus (*El.*, 282-302) and Clytemnestra accepts that as a fact (*El.*, 516-24, 654). Moreover, she harmed her mother when she arranged her brother's escape (*El.*, 784-7). Electra acts against what is expected of women and therefore against the social code. This is apparent when she is confronted by her sister Chrysothemis who personifies the modest behaviour appropriate for a woman: she obeys the rulers because she lacks the "strength" (*El.*, 333) and because she needs to be free (*El.*, 339, 396).

It is Electra's second encounter with her sister however that brings to light the real rebel in her after hearing the news of her brother's death: she then feels compelled to act against Aegisthus, as she admits to her sister (*El.*, 955-9).<sup>17</sup> Her answer expresses clearly what one would expect from a conventional woman "you are born a woman not a man", her female weakness prevents her from participating (*El.*, 997). Electra in comparison to Chrysothemis and the other women is a rebel, a radical fighter for her ideas. But, if we observe the reaction of the other characters to her attitude as well as the final result, which is that Orestes undertook the task of matricide and tyrannicide, we should conclude that the reason for her behaviour was socially acceptable and

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<sup>15</sup> Electra's name means "unbedded" and her sexual deprivation is sharply contrasted with her mother's lust since her amorous relationship with Aegisthus is overemphasised in Electra's words: see for example *Electra* 97-8, 262-75, 587-90.

<sup>16</sup> The theme of material wealth in association with social status holds an important position in the play in relation to the central heroine. Electra in her effort to persuade Chrysothemis to take part in Aegisthus' murder argues that if they succeed apart from the reverence from the dead that they will receive, they will regain their wealth and they will attain a worthy marriage (*El.* 959-72).

<sup>17</sup> She does not mention the murder of her mother, perhaps in order to deprive her sister of a possible rejection of her plea due to the consequences of matricide.



expected from a woman: to stand by her family. Electra's rebellion does not endanger society's values but reinforces them. On the one hand, the women of the chorus approve and praise her for risking her life in the cause of vengeance (*El.*, 1081-97) and Chrysothemis concedes that justice is on Electra's side (*El.*, 338-9, 466-71, 1040-2). On the other hand, Electra does not have to defy her own nature and attack Aegisthus because Orestes, "her male champion and source of (physical) strength has now arrived"<sup>18</sup> and he will restore the order of things by killing the usurpers and by restoring his sister's proper place in society. Electra's contribution to the actual murder will be her phrase "strike twice, if you have the strength" (*El.*, 1415). The sex-roles are not reversed at the end.

Orestes enters the palace without encountering his mother first, and kills her before Aegisthus. No scene takes place on stage between the two and therefore no hesitation is shown on the part of Orestes. Moreover, Clytemnestra's unsympathetic depiction in the play, as the discussion has indicated, conforms with the absence of Erinyes or any feeling of remorse on the part of the murderer(s). The final words of the chorus, that the children of Atreus after long suffering have won freedom at last (*El.*, 1508-10) give a clear picture of the play's treatment of the issue of matricide.<sup>19</sup>

However, the play itself, because of the dramatic intensity it achieves, has attracted many modern directors. Sophocles' "dexterity in constructing plots, ... the dramatic quality of his verse, the beauty of his lyric poetry.." have been pointed out by classic scholars as well.<sup>20</sup> Despite the answer to the question of matricide, it is always true that "every artistic device is deployed with almost indescribable skill and tact".<sup>21</sup> The central heroine has a strong character full of passionate hatred which is directed against her own mother. There is hope and expectation which later appear to be false but at the end, in an

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Whitlock Blundell, *op. cit.*, p.175.

<sup>19</sup> Sophocles' *Electra* does mention the Furies (*El.*, 112, 276, 491, 1080, 1388) but all the references are related to Clytemnestra's murderous act while the matricide remains free of punishment.

<sup>20</sup> H.D.F.Kitto, *Sophocles, Dramatist and Philosopher* (London, 1958), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Cedric H.Whitman, *Sophocles, A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Harvard, 1951), p.161.

atmosphere of breathtaking suspense (during the recognition scene), the situation is overturned and the lifelong grief gives place to happiness and fulfillment.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, it involves issues and characters that could make it attractive to a feminist director. But the following analysis will indicate that most of our contemporary directors approach the play because of its dramatic and theatrical qualities, and only the Royal Shakespeare Company's production, directed by Deborah Warner, with Fiona Shaw in the role of Electra, approaches the play from a more sympathetic view towards women. The other three productions discussed have all been performed at the ancient theatre of Epidavros and are the following: Karolos Koun's and his Art-Theatre's production in 1984, Spyros Evangelatos and his Amphi-Theatre's production in 1991 and Andreas Voutsinas and The State Theatre of Northern Greece's production in 1992. Because the last director was influenced by the Royal Shakespeare Company's production (1988, 1991), his approach is discussed last.

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<sup>22</sup> See also Karolos Koun's view of the play as it is quoted in 3.2.1. *"A Unifying Approach to the Sophoclean Play"*, pp. 132-134.



## 3.2. AN ARCHAIC, MOURNFUL *ELECTRA*: KAROLOS KOUN'S INTERPRETATION OF THE SOPHOCLEAN PLAY

### 3.2.1. A Unifying Approach to the Sophoclean Play

Karolos Koun's preference in the field of ancient Greek Tragedies lay with the Aeschylean plays (he directed six out of seven of his surviving tragedies).<sup>23</sup> *Electra* was the second Sophoclean play to be directed by him in 1984 after *Oedipus Tyrannus* while he and his Art-Theatre only produced two out of the surviving eighteen plays by Euripides (*Bacchae*, *Troades*). The play was performed at Epidavros 4th and 5th of August 1984.<sup>24</sup> In a press conference given prior to the play's performance the director characterised *Electra* as an 'existential tragedy' whose essence derived from the phrase "you will suffer according to the wrongs you have committed".<sup>25</sup> The director's purpose was stated as to "emphasise the importance of the human factor in the Sophoclean tragedy", although he took into consideration "the play's splendid structure, the development of its images and its dramatic intention which could approach what today we call suspense".<sup>26</sup> With regard to the image of *Electra*, Karolos Koun spoke of an "attractive figure who lives in grief. She lives only to take revenge for her father's murder". *Electra* "is identical to her mother. Clytemnestra was awaiting Agamemnon's return in order to avenge her daughter's [Iphigeneia's] death. Similarly, *Electra* awaits Orestes' arrival and when she loses hope she decides to commit the murder herself".<sup>27</sup> The director's intention was to bring out the interesting relationship between mother and daughter although he admitted that the "play's central figure was *Electra*" and therefore the performance was built around her voice, her gestures and her pauses. The play's performance justified the director's

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<sup>23</sup> For a general discussion of Karolos Koun's work as a director see, "Appendix A", pp. 242-7.

<sup>24</sup> The present discussion is based on the videotaped performance of the 4th of August 1984.

<sup>25</sup> The extracts quoted from Karolos Koun's press conference were published in *Vima* 1/8/1984 under the title "Koun's *Electra* in Epidavros on Saturday and Sunday" ("*Electra* tou Koun stin Epidavro to Sabbato ke tin Kyriaki").

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

preliminary references to the play but what marked the production was the atmosphere of lamentation and despair within which the image of Electra was developed.

The scenery and the costumes of the production designed by Dionysis Fotopoulos to convey the atmosphere of lamentation represent Electra's world, which seems to be somewhere between the living and the underworld.<sup>28</sup> The orchestra of the theatre of Epidavros is dominated by the Royal House of the Atreids whose construction bears witness to a mythical origin: it is actually a hut woven with multi-coloured rags in the form of a net (see Figure 23a). With the help of lighting it takes on a golden-reddish colour which on the one hand gives the impression of the palace's wealth and on the other reinforces the production's dream-like atmosphere. Around the orchestra there are pillars covered with black fabric, another indication of the deep mourning which dominates Electra's world outside the palace.

The costumes of the production follow the division of sympathies between Electra and Clytemnestra. Those who belong to Electra's group are dressed in plain and simple clothes. Electra wears a long, black dress, Orestes and Pylades beige (see Figure 23c). Clytemnestra's party is dressed in rich, luxurious clothes showing Anatolian influence. The queen and her husband wear long, purple clothes with red ribbons. Clytemnestra's head is covered by a soft Anatolian cap, embellished over the ears with flowers from which golden and crystal ornaments are hung (see Figure 23e). Chrysothemis too is dressed in Clytemnestra's luxurious style but in yellow (see Figure 23d). Paedagogue's archaic image, long hair arranged in many plaits, half, white mask and huge stick, suggest that his participation in the dramatic events is a secondary and auxiliary one.

The text of the production was translated from the original by Yorgos Chimonas.<sup>29</sup> According to him, his translation "is theatrical and

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<sup>28</sup> For Dionysis Fotopoulos' work as a designer see 2.4.1. *The Work Process*, p. 87-92, n. 94.

<sup>29</sup> Yorgos Chimonas, a professor of psychiatry in the University of Athens, is a well known writer whose works *My Journeys (Ta Taxeidia mou)* and *The Poet's Enemy (O Echthros tou Poiiti)* have been translated into French in 1991 by Maurice Nadeau under the general title *L'Enemi du Poète*. In the field of classical drama, he has translated, apart from Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Bacchae* (1984) - produced by



not philological" meaning that he has approached the ancient text with flexibility sometimes keeping near the original and sometimes moving away from it.<sup>30</sup> The process has resulted in the 'essential lyricism' of the language of the translation,<sup>31</sup> faithful to the original in the sense that the meaning of the ancient words has been kept unaltered and alive. Therefore, the presentation of Clytemnestra and Electra is neutral as there is no indication of the translator favouring one more than the other. This is one of the reasons why the same text has been used in more than one production of the Sophoclean play.<sup>32</sup>

In this production the musical delivery of words has been abandoned in favour of a more formal and austere utterance, a practice that agrees with the marginalisation of the chorus, whose function is confined to an almost decorative appearance. Yorgos Koumentakis composed the music which is used as an accompaniment of the play's action; he uses wind instruments (mainly flute) to match the mournful atmosphere of the play. When for example Electra is betrayed by her sister in her proposal to kill the murderers and thus avenge their father, the use of flute accentuates the atmosphere of complete despair.

### 3.2.2. *The Inevitability of the Law of Retribution*

Karolos Koun's main line of interpretation has to do with the inevitability of the law of retribution and revenge and his production is built around it. For the same reason he chooses to stress the dark sides of the law by emphasising the condition of mourning in which Electra (Reni Pittaki) resides. Within this scope, neither does the director "moralise" in his presentation of the heroine by supporting her cause as

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the National Theatre in 1985 under the direction of Yorgos Sevastikoglou - and *Medea* (1989) - produced by the State Theatre of Northern Greece under the direction of Andreas Voutsinas. Yorgos Michaelidis used his translation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1988) for the play's production for the Open Theatre during the theatrical period 1991-2.

<sup>30</sup> Yorgos Chimonas, *Sophocles' Electra*, (Athens, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> See Spyros Payiatakis, "One of the most interesting Performances" ("Apo tis pio Endiaferouses Parastaseis"), *Apoyevmatini* 10/8/1984

<sup>32</sup> Yorgos Chimonas' translation of Sophocles' *Electra* was used by Michael Kakoyiannis in his production of the play for the Theatrical Organisation of Cyprus (Summer, 1983), by Karolos Koun and by Andreas Voutsinas (see pp. 159-168).

her just duty to her dead father, nor does he approach her as a rebel who has the strength to oppose a society hostile to her gender, as do Deborah Warner's and Andreas Voutsinas' heroines.<sup>33</sup> However, his reading of the Sophoclean play favours Clytemnestra whose role in the present production is more central than it is in the productions that will follow, and in a way more elevated since the director does not take sides in the presentation of the queen and her daughter: Clytemnestra and Electra are both victims of the law of retribution.

The performance commences with the appearance of a decisive Orestes, at least in the first phase of the drama (*El.*, 1-85), his mute friend Pylades and of the figure of Paedagogue whose character in the Art-Theatre's production is not developed beyond the role he plays in the plot to deceive Clytemnestra. The first scene takes place in the country and is sharply contrasted with Electra's mourning which marks her entrance immediately after. The contrast penetrates into the nature of Orestes' and Electra's character: he comes to perform the task expected of him, at the time he has chosen; she is forced by her principles to live in misery, unable to act, waiting for her brother in order to obtain her freedom.

As the lights fall on the royal hut, a black figure dominates the stage. Her face is strikingly pale and the black circles around her eyes bear witness to the desperate pain she feels for the murder of her father. As soon as she starts her monologue (*El.*, 86) she falls down while her voice hardens with passionate hatred against Clytemnestra as she refers to Agamemnon's murder by "her mother and Aegisthus, the lovers".<sup>34</sup> And then her hopeless cry for Orestes' return (*El.*, 117) accompanied by the gesture of scattering soil around her body, characteristic of situations of mourning, leaves her completely helpless on the ground. Electra's first monologue marks the further development of her image as a figure dominated by pain and mourning more than by hatred. The chorus' *parodos* (*El.*, 121) establishes formally the theme of grief and mourning as the women enter with slow ritualistic movements wearing black veils and holding black scarves (see Figure 23b).

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<sup>33</sup> Both productions are discussed in this chapter, pp. 149-168.

<sup>34</sup> Η μάννα μου κι ο Αίγισθος, οι εραστές: (*Electra* 97-98 in Chimonas' translation).



The director's treatment of the chorus makes its presence discreet throughout the play. The women of the chorus express their support for the heroine against Clytemnestra and that frees Electra from the constraint that the feeling of solitude and isolation in fighting for her cause brings about; as the women with their dead-slow steps surround her, she starts screaming against the murderers, cursing them, while the desperate and painful cry for Orestes' return that follows prevails even over the expression of hatred (*El.*, 121-250). Electra lies exhausted on the ground as they try with their warm words to soothe her. But their presence becomes marginal when Chrysothemis enters the stage (*El.*, 328). As the two sisters confront each other (*El.*, 328-471), the women make themselves almost invisible by sitting on their knees at the far left of the orchestra. The same position is adopted each time a character appears. In the meantime, they fill the scene with their ghostly appearance and the black cloth they hold. When Paedagogue announces the false news of Orestes' death (*El.*, 660ff), the women remain motionless and only when everybody else but Electra has left the stage do they accompany the heroine in her mourning (*El.*, 824-870) by throwing themselves down and striking their breasts. Before Clytemnestra's murder, the women have the chance to sing of their joy in Orestes' and Electra's reunion, and for the impending killing of the murderers (*El.*, 1384-1397) as soon as they are left alone with Electra. The play ends with the same picture of the women holding the black cloth, a sign of mourning which has not been removed even after the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

It has already been mentioned that Chrysothemis' appearance (Katia Gerou) is modelled on Clytemnestra's (Lydia Koniordou). Her nature however, as it is revealed in this production, is fragile and yielding. The sisters' first encounter is marked by Chrysothemis' innocent attempt to persuade Electra to yield to those who are in power. Her soft words and her affectionate gestures as she moves near her sister and tries to embrace her, help to complete her childish figure (see Figure 23d). But Electra approaches her as a sister by touching her head tenderly only when she tries with passionate voice to persuade her to act against their mother (*El.*, 431-463). She is willing to help and thus agrees to change the offerings.

On their second encounter (*El.*, 871ff), Chrysothemis emerges joyfully to bring the news of Orestes' return. She embraces her sister

warmly and speaks with passion of the infallible signs. When she is informed of her brother's death she collapses as well but even so she finds Electra's admonition to avenge Orestes excessive and absurd as she cries out in astonishment: "you are a woman - not a man".<sup>35</sup> Her refusal to help provokes Electra's rejection of her sister which is expressed more in pain than hatred as Electra remains dumbfounded. Chrysothemis however kneels in front of her and tries to persuade her to abandon her plan. Her refusal to participate in Electra's plan derives from her inability to comprehend and therefore to share Electra's world.

What is central, however, to the play in this production is the scene between Clytemnestra and Electra (*El.*, 516-660), the women who share the same world of hatred and revenge according to the director. Clytemnestra's heavy make-up and the thick black lines around her eyes give the impression of a witch, and her glamorous jewellery is in contrast to Electra's plain appearance, despite the fact that the attitude of both women towards life is the same, since they are dominated by the passion of revenge. When Clytemnestra speaks about Iphigeneia's sacrifice (*El.*, 530-551), her broken voice and her contorted face prove the honesty of her pain. However, her words meet Electra's disapproval, expressed through tightly closed mouth.<sup>36</sup> When her turn comes, her arguments (*El.*, 558-609) are expressed in a calm voice but the atmosphere is exploded by Clytemnestra's provoked anger (*El.*, 612ff). As they face each other hatred prevails over other emotions, but the director has managed to keep the balance in the presentation of the two although the text, which is faithful to the original, favours Electra.

Clytemnestra's prayer (*El.*, 634-659) is dominated more by the fear of revenge than by hatred. This is obvious in her screams, indicative of her confusion. The news of Orestes' death (*El.*, 660ff) brings her unexpected relief which causes her an immediate cry of happiness, accompanied by a gesture of embracing her own body. The same words leave Electra a lifeless body on the ground. The contrast between the two in Koun's treatment of the story seems to emphasise

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<sup>35</sup> Γυναίκα είσαι – όχι Άνδρας: (*Electra* 997 in Chimonas' translation).

<sup>36</sup> As soon as Clytemnestra appears the women of the chorus distance themselves from the two, occupy the space on the left and on the right of the orchestra, kneel and cover themselves with the black cloth. They really want to make themselves unnoticeable and leave the space free for the confrontation of the two.



the two different sides of the same coin: the inevitable law of retaliation. Nevertheless, by the end of Paedagogue's narration, Clytemnestra's motherly instincts recover, but only momentarily as she stretches her hands in a gesture of despair. The last scene between mother and daughter is powerfully depicted: Electra lying on her back like a wounded animal admits her defeat while the victorious Clytemnestra stands over her: "We are finished. What about you now" says Electra and her words comment on the harsh future of those who respect the law of revenge.<sup>37</sup>

Electra's deep mourning for her brother is apparent as she crawls on her knees and then stands looking ahead in despair and isolation. At the end, after her frenzied running around the stage, she collapses. Koun's Electra differs from Deborah Warner's and Andreas Voutsinas' heroine in that her reactions to the events are directed by pain and not by hatred. Even her decision to kill Aegisthus seems to be imposed on her by the pain and despair she feels after the announcement of her brother's death; the hatred against her father's murderers comes a long way after.

The recognition scene (*El.*, 1098ff) between Electra and Orestes is very powerful: attention is concentrated on the emotion of the two who have been forcefully separated and who share the same feelings of respect for their dead father and painful distress for the mother who killed him. Electra laments over the urn with the ashes of her dead brother (see Figure 23c). While she laments she faints and by the time she recovers she starts striking her breast continuously with the urn. She looks like a woman maddened by her pain. When Orestes reveals his identity the emotions of happiness and affection are apparent in their tender embrace. He seems to have forgotten his task and she is so content that even her words against the tyrants are said in a calm, soft way; only when she hears Clytemnestra's desperate cry from inside and screams "strike again" with all her passion are we reminded of their life long hatred. But when Orestes informs her of their mother's death, her voice as she says "She died! the unfortunate" is honest.<sup>38</sup> Orestes is not a distinctive character in this production as the directorial approach

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<sup>37</sup> Ἐμεῖς ἐτελειώσαμε. Ἐσύ πως θα τελειώσεις: (*Electra* 796 in Chimonas' translation).

<sup>38</sup> Πέθανε ἡ δύστυχη: (*Electra* 1426 in Chiminas' translation).

**favours Clytemnestra and Electra. He is not treated like a hero as his modest gestures and his soft voice indicate. Aegisthus' character is neutral as well. He is presented neither as a villain nor as a sympathetic figure and his appearance is modelled on Clytemnestra's. Matricide is not celebrated by the director. The mourning is not removed as the sad faces of Orestes and Electra indicate. The women of the chorus still hold their black scarves.**



### 3.3. AN HONOURABLE DAUGHTER

#### 3.3.1. Areas of Concern of the Amphi-Theatre's *Electra*

Amphi-Theatre's production of Sophocles' *Electra* directed by Spyros Evangelatos was first performed at the ancient theatre of Oeniades 10th of August 1991 and then at the theatre of Epidavros 16th and 17th of August 1991.<sup>39</sup> This *Electra* was his third treatment of the play. His first production for the National Theatre in 1972 initiated his career as a successful director of ancient Greek plays. His second approach to the play was realised in 1981 for the National Theatre, again in a translation of K. Ch. Myres, with Antigone Valakou in the central role. As has been suggested,<sup>40</sup> the director concentrated on the psychology of the characters and especially on Electra's outbursts of passionate emotion. Antigone Valakou "performed the Sophoclean *Electra* with tragic passion".<sup>41</sup> The same approach, although more intensified, characterises Evangelatos' Amphi-Theatre production of the play based on the revised translation by K.Ch. Myres and with Leda Tassopoulou in the main role: "...Evangelatos, in his revived approach to *Electra*, has defined the psychological passion of the heroes as their fulfillment in the world of the extraordinary uncommon experience".<sup>42</sup>

In the programme of the 1991 production, the director underlined his main interests in the play: "[A]n element to which I would like to give special emphasis is the way the characters break through the human condition, to seek a dialogue with the Unknown. ... The inner action springs naturally from the innate qualities of each character. ... *Electra* is a tragedy which does not produce catharsis from the conflicts of its characters. We find the heroine more desperate at the end of the play,

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<sup>39</sup> The following analysis is based on the performance of the 17th of August at Epidavros. For a general discussion of Evangelatos' work as a director see "Appendix A", pp. 236-9.

<sup>40</sup> Yiannis Varveris, *Theatre in Crisis 1976-1984 (I Krisis tou Theatrou)* (Athens, 1985), p.121.

<sup>41</sup> Stathis I. Dromazos, "*Electra*", in *Ancient Drama, Reviews (Archaeo Drama, Kritikes)* (Athens, 1993), p.65.

<sup>42</sup> See, Yiannis Varveris, "Passion Armed with a Sickle" ("Pathos to Drepaniphoron"), *Kathimerini* 25/8/1991 republished in *Theatre in Crisis III (I Krisis tou Theatrou)* (Athens, 1995), p.132.

than she is at the beginning". The psychology of the heroes who exceed normal human limits characterises Evangelatos' approach to the play. At the same time, he gives an answer to the question of matricide since at the end of the play his heroine, drained of every emotion, appear to lose strength and collapse. Thus, he does not seem to favour the restoration of justice through matricide. However, Clytemnestra is not depicted sympathetically at all: she is a villain and a murderess deprived of any elevated motive for her husband's murder. But Electra, in this production, is the noble daughter of her father who suffers in the unhealthy and immoral atmosphere of her home and who has to strengthen Orestes' will to execute the murders. Although her reaction to the events following her father's murder is indicated by her social position, matricide in itself is an intolerable crime.

K.Ch. Myres' revised translation of *Electra* is a poetic rendering of the original, accurate and concise. It conveys a strict passion which reaches its culmination as the play develops.<sup>43</sup> With regard to the image of Electra, in her first monologue (*El.*, 86-120) the words render her despair for her father's murder, but her language becomes more sharp and emotionally charged as the development of the play (Orestes' death, Chrysothemis' refusal to help her) intensifies her despair and isolation. As for the image of Clytemnestra and the way this unfolds within the language of the translation, it is closely modelled on the Sophoclean Clytemnestra. This is to say that the translation neither favours nor reduces her image.

The setting and the costumes of the play were designed by Yorgos Ziakas.<sup>44</sup> The main characteristic of the staging is that the

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<sup>43</sup> Yorgos Chimonas' translation of *Electra* is more modern than Myres' in the choice of words, more prosaic and more human in the description of characters and emotions. Myres' translation is printed in the programme of the production.

<sup>44</sup> He is a well known designer in Greece whose name is connected with the establishment of the Thessalian Theatre, together with Kostas Tsianos and Anna Vayena (see 4.4) in 1975. He has designed the scenery and costumes for most of the Thessalian Theatre's productions including Euripides' *Electra* (1988, see 4.4. "A Dominant Heroine in a Folklore Interpretation: Euripides' *Electra* by the Thessalian Theatre", pp. 191-200), his *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (1990) and Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (1992). He has also worked for the Theatrical Organisation of Cyprus (e.g. Aristophanes' *Wealth* in 1980), for the National Theatre (e.g. Aeschylus' *Seven*



scenographer has brought the stage into the orchestra space of the ancient theatre. The scenery seems to represent the courtyard of the Palace. Two huge pillars backstage made of square stones stand for the entrance gate of the palace and dominate the stage construction. Their prevalence is more apparent because of the low height of the surrounding walls (they reach to the waist-line of the average human body), and they too are built of square stones. At intervals the walls are cut to provide benches for the chorus and the other characters to sit on. In the central part facing the palace door, there is an opening in the wall to provide for the continuing flames of the hearth. At the right hand-side, another opening provides five to six steps to help the descent into the courtyard. The floor is covered with flat stones. To the left and right of the palace door, *parodoi* are indicated on the sides of the pillars.

The costumes of the production do not recall any particular era but are a mixture of different styles in association with the status of the characters. Orestes is dressed like the lawful crown prince and not like the exile-wanderer who returns to his country in disguise to restore his father's royal line. His look is more "contemporary" than that of the other characters because of his tight black trousers and long loose grey-black overcoat embroidered with patterns in gold. Although Electra wears black clothes, her whole appearance is that of a noble princess. Her hair is combed at the back of the head into a long plait, emphasising her snow-white face (see Figure 24). Her long black dress, held by a gilded belt, and above it an impressive grey mantle embroidered with gold, are in contrast to the expected image of a daughter who lives in mourning, rejecting the wealth of the palace.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, she looks like a respected princess. The thirteen women of the chorus have their heads covered by long, black scarves that reach low down their backs.

In contrast to Electra, Chrysothemis, her counterpart on Clytemnestra's side, wears a white dress. Her white mantle is embroidered with gold, while a prominent gold diadem on her forehead associates her with her mother's new family, since Aegisthus, the new head of family and state wears the gold crown and Clytemnestra a gold headpiece. Clytemnestra's very elaborate appearance is marked by a

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*Against Thebes* in 1981) and for the State Theatre of Northern Greece (e.g. Euripides' *Trachiniae*, in 1984).

<sup>45</sup> The mantle held at the back leaves her arms bare.

long velvet-silk dress reminiscent of the attire of an Orthodox priest at mass. Its black and dark red colour is rich in texture by itself but the gold ornamentation all over it adds to the luxury and wealth associated with the image of the queen. A gold frontal piece prevails over her chest and she wears a golden hat. Aegisthus' appearance is modelled on hers.

"The music of Nikos Kypourgos was discreet, as it should have been, sometimes threatening and sometimes mournful".<sup>46</sup> His music is associated with the choral odes while the episodes are dominated by the music of the human voice and thus the main characters' mood, arguments and gestures are presented without the accentuation of music. Before Clytemnestra's entrance the women's singing (*El.*, 474-515) to the sound of drums intermingled with the sound of the lyre and when Electra shares the *kommos* (lamentation) for her brother with the chorus (*El.*, 824-870), the tune plucked on the cord of a violin produces a discordant note. Trombone and drums accompany the choral ode after Chrysothemis' refusal to participate in Aegisthus' murder (*El.*, 1058-1107). During Clytemnestra's murder (*El.*, 1398-1421), drums again prevail, suggesting the heart beat of the anxious Electra who waits for the outcome. At the same time it has been suggested,<sup>47</sup> its "tunes 'commit' the murder".

### 3.3.2. *A Passionate Enforcement of Justice.*

Leda Tassopoulou who played Electra in the Amphi-Theatre's production of the play described her view of the heroine as follows: "[H]er [Electra's] faith gives way to despair which is expressed at times with the loss of control over herself. Her reasoning is driven by passion. Her uniqueness in relation to other characters of Greek tragedy is that

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<sup>46</sup> Yiannis Varveris, "Passion Armed with a Sickle" in *Theatre in Crisis III (I Krisis tou Theatrou)* (Athens, 1995), p.132. Sophocles' *Electra* marks Kypourgos' first collaboration with the Amphi-Theatre. In 1993 he wrote the music for the Amphi-Theatre's production of Euripides' *Bacchae* and in the same year he composed the music for Art-Theatre's production of *Troades*. Nikos Kypourgos has composed chamber music, songs and music for ballet, theatre, cinema and radio. In 1979 he was awarded a prize in Paris by Unesco for his composition "Knots".

<sup>47</sup> Yiannis Varveris, "Passion Armed with a Sickle" in *Theatre in Crisis III* (Athens, 1995), p.132.



she enforces passion with reasoning and reasoning with passion."<sup>48</sup> The actress tried very hard to convey this kind of passion but was not persuasive because of her personal mannerism and her highly theatrical voice.<sup>49</sup>

Evangelatos, apart from his concentration on the psychology of the heroine and to an extent of the other characters, gave emphasis to the role of the chorus, contrary to Koun's interpretation, and stressed the bond between the women and Electra, so that she seems to need their supportive words and their tender touch in order to face the difficulties of her life. Moreover, their affectionate relationship points to her role as the lawful princess whose rebellious act has the approval of the citizens. Electra's costume, which gives her princely status, emphasises the same point. Within this line of interpretation, Clytemnestra's figure has been diminished while Orestes' role in the story appears more important.

As Orestes (Yiannis Fertis) with his attendants enters the scene we are confronted with a dominant figure whose decision to restore order in his home and country seems to be in no doubt. His voice is harsh and indicates hatred against his enemies. The figure of Paedagogue (Nikitas Tsakiroglou) stands, in this production, for virtue and duty: his stern voice always reinforces the notion of duty for Agamemnon's children and his lying tale is delivered very persuasively.

Electra is first heard screaming in despair from inside. "Alas! me the wretched one".<sup>50</sup> However, her careful and well composed appearance is in contrast to our expectation of a poor and miserable Electra. She is a princess who mourns but her voice, sometimes fragile and sometimes full of passion and hatred against her mother, gives the impression of hysteria. As she invokes the gods of the underworld and the Erinyes to come to her help (*El.*, 110-116) she collapses in despair and provokes the audience's applause. The *parodos* (*El.*, 121ff) of the chorus initiates the women's affectionate relationship with their royal princess.

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<sup>48</sup> "Electra of Passion" ("I Electra tou Pathous"), Leda Tassopoulou interviewed by Eleni Spanopoulou, *Nea* 17/8/1991.

<sup>49</sup> See Minas Christidis, "A Problematic Performance" ("Mia Problimatiki Parastasi"), *Epikaerotita* 26/8/1991.

<sup>50</sup> Ἀλίμονόμου ἡ μαύρη: (*Electra* 77 in Myres' translation).

It has already been mentioned that the chorus in this production gains in importance mainly because of the women's intimate relationship with Electra. As they enter, they surround her restraining her hands like a child, while immediately after a disorderly movement around the stage in the footsteps of Electra gives the measure of their despair.<sup>51</sup> The shared lamentation culminates in Electra's crazed screams as she approaches the women one by one to remind them of Aegisthus sleeping in her father's bed. Before Clytemnestra's entrance (*El.*, 516), the choral ode (*El.*, 474-515) dissolves into a confused running to and fro and ends in the ritualistic dedication of a lock of their hair at the hearth of the palace. The chorus commands our attention again when Paedagogue pronounces the words: "Orestes has died".<sup>52</sup> Electra faints at his feet and the women rush in anguish to help her up. Then she collapses again and the women surround her so that it is almost impossible for the audience to see her. Her despair drives her to a wild laugh as she exclaims: "I am lonely now, without father and without you",<sup>53</sup> words whose power is diminished by the women's excessive support, contradicting her feeling of complete isolation.

The following shared lamentation (*El.*, 824-870) is marked by what seem to be the crazed movements and gestures of women who make a wordless buzzing sound and then embrace Electra. Chrysothemis' second entrance (*El.*, 871) finds Electra mourning in the arms of two women while the others sit on the benches of the surrounding walls. The next *stasimon* (*El.*, 1058-1097) is delivered with Electra lying down and one of the women caressing her like a small child. The atmosphere changes as Orestes commits the murder and the women wait for the result (*El.*, 1384-1421), squatting on their heels. When Aegisthus enters the scene (*El.*, 1450) the women leap over the walls of the palace courtyard and hide behind it. It seems that their role is finished now that Electra is in the company of her brother, or as if they

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<sup>51</sup> Spyros Evangelatos himself oversaw the choreography which has been described as an "unorganised improvisation" [See Minas Christidis, "A Problematic Performance" ("Mia Problimatiki Parastasi"), *Epikaerotita* 20/8/1991]. Maria Alvanou who also participated in the chorus was the chorus' trainer.

<sup>52</sup> Πέθανε ο Ορέστης: (*Electra* 673 in Myres' translation).

<sup>53</sup> Τώρα είμαι μόνη, δίχως πατέρα/ δίχως εσένα: (*Electra* 813-814 in Myres' translation).



do not want to share the guilt of the murders. At the end only their voice is heard while Electra sits alone, thoughtful and sad. However, Electra's intimate relationship with the chorus reduces the stature of her role which lies in the overwhelming despair and isolation, and converts her to a decent and honourable princess who has the full support and assistance of her people in what she does.

Another point of difference between Evangelatos' production and that of Karolos Koun is the way he handles the relationship between the two sisters. Chrysothemis' (Titika Vlachopoulou) tone when she first addresses Electra (*El.*, 328ff) is that of indifference and Electra in her turn speaks to her almost with distaste (*El.*, 341ff). As they confront each other, they walk around the orchestra. Even the scene in which Electra takes the vessel with the offerings away from her sister and gives her a plait of hair and her belt to dedicate to her father's tomb is not emotionally charged. And as she leaves, Chrysothemis almost orders the chorus not to tell anything to her mother (*El.*, 466-471). It is clear that the two girls belong to opposing camps and their contact is forced since they live under the same roof. Their last encounter (*El.*, 871ff) takes place in the same atmosphere. Electra does not approach her sister in a friendly way to ask for her help. On the contrary, she speaks to her as if commanding her. When her speech ends Chrysothemis' refusal is delivered in the same harsh and unloving voice as she enters the palace door. But the whole episode seems to be immediately forgotten by Electra since her reaction after Chrysothemis' departure is not that of despair. In general, the scenes shared by the two sisters are not very important to the production, because from the very beginning it is apparent that there is no way of communication between the two and because Electra's close relationship with the women of the chorus does not allow any feeling of despair and isolation to dominate her after her sister's refusal to help her with the murder.

Despite the production's final scene, in which matricide is not celebrated but condemned by the way the heroine reacts to it, Clytemnestra (Martha Vourtsi) is not sympathetically depicted. Her elaborate appearance, fitting her status as queen of the city, creates a feeling of fear which is justified when she starts speaking in a cold and mocking voice. Even when she refers to Iphigeneia's sacrifice (*El.*, 530-551) her expressions, her gestures and her tone betray indifference. She gives the impression that she uses the incident to make a point

against Agamemnon. And as Electra finishes her insulting speech she drops any pretense and screams (*El.*, 612ff) with hatred at her daughter who seems to listen without emotion. However, her prayer to the gods to protect her and those who support her is sincere (*El.*, 634-659). The pain strikes her instantly when she hears of Orestes' death (*El.*, 673). But she recovers soon and her well-being prevails over her motherly feelings, her voice hardens and she speaks to Electra with hatred and relief (*El.*, 793ff). Clytemnestra appears as a figure who deserves her punishment. Only at the end does her appealing voice: "my child, my child take pity on your mother" arouse a feeling of sympathy.<sup>54</sup>

The encounter between Orestes and Electra (*El.*, 1098ff) reveals Orestes' strong and confident character in contrast to Electra's need for protection. As Electra mourns over her brother's ashes, he approaches her to reveal his identity in a decisive but far from tender voice. Moreover, he shouts: "it's not Orestes'. It's fake" in the tone of one trying to persuade a mad person or a child.<sup>55</sup> The recognition scene with its display of affection (see Figure 25) is restrained because Orestes seems to be absorbed by his duty. His words are not tender and sweet as are those of Koun's Orestes. After the murder of his mother he indicates no pain or remorse.

Thus, Evangelatos' Amphi-Theatre production of *Electra* favours a heroine who acts out her passionate obsession with her father's revenge but whose "hysterical" cries and gestures neither attract our sympathy nor are persuasive. His heroine is not a rebel who acts according to her will and conscience defying the "limitations" of her nature. On the contrary, she seems to act within them as she needs the constant support of the women of the chorus who protect her. Electra is the honourable daughter of her father as her appearance indicates. When she mourns Orestes, her passion does not become hatred or despair but it remains as such, a single passion. The last scene of the play presents an empty Electra again as if her passion has been her only source of energy and life. At the same time her sadness after her mother's murder accords with her former decent image, since her

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<sup>54</sup> Παιδί μου, παιδί μου / λυπήσου τη μάνα σου: (*Electra* 1410 in Myres' translation).

<sup>55</sup> Δεν είν' του Ορέστη. Είναι φκιαχτό, με λόγια: (*Electra* 1217 in Myres' translation).



motivation for her "contribution" to the murders has been duty and not hatred. Matricide is not reconciled with her principles. Clytemnestra is as unsympathetic as she is in Evangelatos' *Oresteia* but in opposition to the trilogy, matricide is condemned in *Electra* because in this play Electra is more involved in it than the heroine in *Choephoroi* and matricide is against her proper female nature.

### **3.4. An Unrestrained Electra: Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of the Play**

#### **3.4.1. A Successful Cooperation**

It was in December 1988 that Deborah Warner directed the RSC production of Sophocles' *Electra* based on Kenneth McLeish's translation of the play, designed by Hildegard Bechtler and performed at the Pit.<sup>56</sup> Fiona Shaw who had the role of Electra should be listed amongst the names of those who contributed to the play's outstanding success: "Deborah Warner's new *Electra* (RSC, The Pit) is breathtaking in its controlled passion, its clarity, its psychological sharpness, and its sheer narrative drive".<sup>57</sup> Her "production digs right down to the proper RSC roots, with a great central performance by Fiona Shaw, an imaginative exploitation of this space not seen since the Howard Barker season, a rare sense of RSC ensemble, and the re-establishment of such members as Natasha Parry as Clytemnestra, Derek Hutchinson as Pylades, Sonia Ritter and Julia Swift in the Chorus, and Gordon Case as the dispossessed, Rasta-beaded Aegisthus".<sup>58</sup> "The result is an evening of fierce lucidity and driving passion that never for a second makes you doubt you are in the presence of great drama".<sup>59</sup>

The same production was revived at the Riverside Studios in December 1991 - January 1992 with more or less the same contributors if we exclude the five women of the chorus (apart from Kate Littlewood who participated in the first production of the play as well), Piers Ibbotson whose role as Orestes in 1988's production was taken over by John Lynch and Natasha Parry whose role was played by Sheila Gish. Philip Locke became the servant (Paedagogue) in the 1991/92 production while Richard Leaf undertook the role of the silent Pylades. The present chapter will concentrate on the 1991/92 production of the play at the Riverside Studios.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For a general discussion of Deborah Warner's work as a director see "Appendix A", pp. 258-261.

<sup>57</sup> John Peter, "How Sophocles Makes the Means to Dictate the End", *Sunday Times* 1/1/1989.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Coveney, "Electra", *Financial Times* 22/12/1988.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Billington, "Pity and the Fearful Passion", *Guardian* 22/12/1988.

<sup>60</sup> The following analysis is based on the performance of 4th of January 1992.



Deborah Warner conceived and Fiona Shaw realised a heroine excessively dominated by the passion of revenge against her mother and Aegisthus, a fanatic, a woman of pervasive will who resembles more her Euripidean counterpart than the Sophoclean daughter in mourning. She is a vengeful fury; the state of her inhuman rage forbids any emotion to surface: "[E]ven when she at long last recognises Orestes, there is 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".<sup>61</sup> Deborah Warner's interpretation of Electra constitutes a sympathetic approach towards women because of her heroine's unconventional, irreconcilable and independent nature. But Electra's feminist interpretation results in an unfavourable treatment of Clytemnestra who is presented with the characteristics and the weakness of the traditionally attractive female beauty. At the same time it has to be stressed that the production does not point to any topical or contemporary political interpretation and only the fact that Fiona Shaw is Irish-born and John Lynch (Newry-born) has made films in Ireland (e.g. *The Railway Station Man*) create the political analogies.<sup>62</sup>

The play's translation by Kenneth McLeish<sup>63</sup> contributes a great deal to the play's success since it accords with the director's approach

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<sup>61</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "A Relentless Seeker after Truth", *Times* 9/12/1991.

<sup>62</sup> However, Irving Wardle in his article "Magnificent Sophocles", *Telegraph* 22/12/1988, although he accepts that the director "indulges in no topical underlinings", adds that the play "brings emotions and events into an appealing close-up that prompts inescapable analogies with Ireland and Israel's occupied territories. It makes you feel the long years of waiting; and it makes you see the futility of the outcome".

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth McLeish has translated a number of Greek plays which have been successfully produced in contemporary stage by various directors. Amongst them we should include apart from Sophocles' *Electra*, *Omma - Oedipus and the Lack of Thebes* based on the works of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Greek mythology produced by the Young Vic Company (1993) and directed by Tim Supple. He also translated Euripides' *Hecuba* for the Gate Theatre, directed by Laurence Boswell (1992). Recently (Spring 1995) he has translated Euripides' *Electra*, *Orestes* and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* for the Gate Theatre's production of *Agamemnon's Children*, directed by Laurence Boswell, as well and Euripides' *Women of Troy* for the National Theatre directed by Annie Castledine. McLeish translated all the surviving plays of

of an Electra drained of any emotion and free from any convention. To mention a few examples concerning Electra's character, the translation reads:

I tear my own flesh raw (l. 92),  
I am crushed with grief (l. 118),  
you are eating your flesh away (l. 141),  
you are sullen and stubborn (l. 218).

Moreover, in some cases the translator departs from the text in order to render some ideas which fit the play's feminist interpretation: for example when Chrysothemis comes in from the palace she says:

Electra, indoors is the place for women" (l. 328)

which is not in the original but indicates Electra's revolutionary character; when Orestes appears having killed Clytemnestra, Electra faithful to her motives says:

The ... woman ... is dead" (l. 1440)

while the original could be rendered as follows: "She died! The wretch" (*El.*, 1426) which indicates a kind of remorse from the point of view of the heroine.<sup>64</sup> The translation itself is powerful; although it is not poetic, the words are sharp in order to convey the passion of the heroine. As has been suggested,<sup>65</sup> "McLeish's formally perfect iambics read well and combine familiarity with shapeliness exactly as do Sophocles' 'trimeters'". However, the same acute and unpoetic treatment of the language applies to the choral odes which in the present production are not sung; music is totally excluded from this austere production.

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Aristophanes for the series Methuen World Classics, edited by J. Michael Walton (see *Aristophanes, Plays One* [London, 1993]; *Aristophanes, Plays Two* [London, 1993]; *Aristophanes and Menander, New Comedy*. McLeish translated Aristophanes' *Women in Power and Wealth* and J. Michael Walton translated Menander's *The Malcontent and The Woman from Samos* [London, 1994]).

<sup>64</sup> Τέθνηκεν η τάλαινα (*El.*, 1426).

<sup>65</sup> Keith McCulloch, "Noble and Antique", *Times Literary Supplement* 6/12/1989. A point of unfavourable criticism on the translation made by the author of the article reads as follows: "McLeish seems himself to be drawn occasionally to viewing Sophocles' world as a primitive and mysterious one, as when he makes Orestes call Aegisthus a "priest-king", forgetting that nature-myth was as much a nineteenth-century addiction as laudanum". However, line 1495 is the only one of which such an observation can be made.



The other major contributor to the play's success was Hildegard Bechtler's spacious and imaginative setting and her extremely suggestive costumes.<sup>66</sup> The stage of the Riverside Studios is shaped in order to suggest a courtyard. The existing walls have been rough-washed white while huge and heavy metal doors indicating Clytemnestra's palace dominate in them. The floor, made of stone, communicates the cool stillness of a graveyard; it is however crossed by a channel of clear water running down the middle (see Figure 26) which will be brutally stained red after Clytemnestra's murder. A circle of earth to the right points to an altar mainly because of the remains of previous offerings which lay on it. As the designer confessed "[E]arth, air, fire and water were all represented" and as the tragedy unfolded the whole setting "became marked by events".<sup>67</sup> The chilling effects of the play are thus suggestively included within the construction of the scenery which "evokes an abattoir or torture chamber - a place where blood will be spilt".<sup>68</sup>

What is astonishingly conceived by the designer however is the figure of Electra. Her mourning black dress is torn into rags which reveal her bare flesh (see Figure 26); her "self-mutilating anger is shockingly revealed by the scratch-marks raking across a stretch of exposed thigh".<sup>69</sup> But her whole appearance bears witness to the tortures she has endured. Her hair chopped to the roots and her blazing eyes reveal a drained person (see Figure 27) who is unable to stand on stage without her roughly curved walking stick. Her figure is revealingly contrasted to that of her mother: Clytemnestra's audacity, clearly depicted on her hard face, her long blonde and well arranged hair, her revealing, shocking red, long dress accompanied by high-

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<sup>66</sup> Hildegard Bechtler was trained at Camberwell and Central St Martin's School of Art and Design. In theatre she has worked almost exclusively for Deborah Warner, designing apart from Sophocles' *Electra*, *Hedda Gabler* (Abbey Theatre Dublin and Playhouse London - 1991), *King Lear* (Royal National Theatre, World Tour) and *Richard II* (National Theatre 1995) with Fiona Shaw in the role of Richard. She also designed the set of John Buller's *Bacchae* for the English National Opera 1991-92.

<sup>67</sup> Jane Edwardes "Electra Shock, Jane Edwardes meets Hildegard Bechtler", *Time Out* 4/12/1991.

<sup>68</sup> Sarah Hemming, "Fresh as Pain", *Independent* 10/12/1991.

<sup>69</sup> Claire Armitstead, "Electra", *Financial Times* 9/12/1991.

heeled red shoes can even justify Electra's inability to forget her father's murder as well as her compulsive need for revenge; "... Sheila Gish as Clytemnestra is a superb siren with her scarlet dress, husky voice and commanding presence".<sup>70</sup> The other interesting figure of the production whose treatment differs considerably from that in the productions previously discussed is Chrysothemis, Susan Colverd, whose portrayal as a whole is loyal to Electra. She wears a green loose, old-fashioned and unattractive dress and a shorter green mantle above it while her hair is covered completely by a scarf tied around her head. Thus she does not appear as the glamorous daughter of Clytemnestra but as "a plump frump in green whose loyalty and perceptiveness are quite unfairly brushed aside by Electra" (see Figure 26).<sup>71</sup> The five women of the chorus look "Islamic, ..., but there are times when they don't look like women at all. They just look like rags".<sup>72</sup> They are dressed in long black, loose dresses and their heads are covered by long scarves (see Figure 28) which they sometimes tie around their necks. "[T]he chorus, five women in black, hover, squat, or cower back like frightened ravens".<sup>73</sup> The appearance of the male figures is in accordance with their role and status but without any shocking surprises; they all seem "contemporary" since they wear trousers and long coats. Orestes is dressed like a wanderer in exile, (as are the servant and Pylades), with his beige trousers within his high boots, and a long raincoat jacket over it. However, their significance and importance seem to have been swept aside by the powerfully represented female figures and especially by Electra.

### 3.4.2. *The Obsessive Realisation of the Power of Revenge*

Deborah Warner's production of *Electra* is characterised by an intense concentration on the figure of the heroine placed in an imaginative visual context. But the vigorous style of the production's performance and its harsh relentless intensity would not have been achieved without the sweeping power of Fiona Shaw's magnificent

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<sup>70</sup> Sarah Hemming, "Fresh as Pain", *Independent* 10/12/1991.

<sup>71</sup> Claire Armitstead, "Electra", *Financial Times* 9/12/1991

<sup>72</sup> Hildegard Bechtler interviewed by Jane Edwardes in "Electra", *Time out* 4/12/1991.

<sup>73</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "A Relentless Seeker after Truth", *Times* 9/12/1991.



realisation of Electra as a heroine who embodies a furious martyred role. Her Electra does not have any warmth or nobility but her vicious horror and inward grief are expressed in a terrifying self-mutilation because of the disfiguring effects of her deep, violent sorrow. Electra's revolutionary personality in the present production constitutes a feminist approach to the play. This is mainly because of Fiona Shaw's realisation of a heroine who does not obey the social conventions that dictate to her a behaviour appropriate to the honourable daughter of Agamemnon. Her Electra is not morally compelled to oppose her amorous mother as is Evangelatos' heroine. Her behaviour derives from her unrestrained nature; her powerful will to exact revenge motivates her reactions to the dramatised events. In that sense the RSC production is differentiated from those already discussed in the obsession with which the rebellious and unrestrained Electra seeks revenge, without allowing pain and emotion to overwhelm her will. Fiona Shaw's Electra approaches the Sophoclean heroine from the point of view of a woman with a powerful and distinct personality.

The opening sound of water running rapidly on the flagstones is followed by the attentive appearance of the servant who comes first to reconnoitre the ground.<sup>74</sup> Then he calls the two friends, and his fellow avengers scurry onto the stage hissing nervously at each other to stay silent. They all seem determined as faithful conspirators to conduct the operation of killing Agamemnon's murderers smoothly and successfully while the confidence with which Orestes refers to their plan excludes any possibility of failure (*El.*, 23-66). Moreover, Orestes' looks turn him into a convincing murderer who does not need a boost in order to realise the attack, which seems from his words to have been rehearsed down to the last detail many times.

The following scene switches the play's rhythm from feverish action to overwhelming suffering. Electra makes her entrance (*El.*, 86) from the palace's central, iron door by pushing it open with her head. We are confronted with a destitute figure "[R]ed rims surround eyes frequently glassy with tears. The skin of her nose is rubbed raw. Her

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<sup>74</sup> In the programme of the production as well as in McLeish's translation the Paedagogue is referred as Servant.

voice often has the hoarse, catarrhal sound of extreme misery".<sup>75</sup> Her distressed monologue is accompanied by wild body language as she "trudges around the stage, rocks herself on the floor and scrapes at her skin".<sup>76</sup> As she says:

I tear my own flesh raw (McLeish's translation of *El.*, 92),  
we realise that her passion does not have any nobility but that she actually experiences naked violence. Moreover, when she says:

I have no children to comfort me,

No loving husband to stand by me (McLeish's translation of *El.*, 187-8),

she does not complain in a way which can cause distress but simply makes a coarse statement of her solitary, barren state. The five women of the chorus interrupt her inexhaustible flood of accusing and murderous words by their separate and individualised speeches which of course do not match the intensity of Electra's words and are all on the same level.

Electra's relation to the women of the chorus is determined by the fact that she is so completely absorbed in the situation of unrelenting distress and raging hysteria, that on the one hand she is not able to establish any form of intimate relationship, and on the other, she does not need protection or any kind of approval or disapproval of her condition. Thus, the Argive women assume at first the role of five ordinary individuals who continuously comment on past and present events, speaking lines separately. They are supportive of Electra but at the same time restrained and remote: they never establish a close bodily contact with the heroine devoured by passion. Each one of the five approaches her with a different facial expression, showing personal grief. The individualisation of the chorus is abandoned as the drama reaches its climax and Electra is let down by Chrysothemis (*El.*, 992ff); her complete isolation then becomes suffocating: the women are united as a group and they start rhythmically beating the ground with the palms of their hands as they sing for the "sickness of the house" (McLeish's translation of *El.*, 1072) and pray to the gods that they may:

live to see

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Kemp, "Bloody but Unbowed", *Independent* 22/12/1988. Although the description is based on the 1988 production, it applies to 1991 as well.

<sup>76</sup> Sarah Hemming, "Fresh as Pain", *Independent* 10/12/1991.



**Agamemnon's daughter**

**Triumph against the enemies**

**who trample her now! (McLeish's translation of *El.*, 1091-4).**

Moreover, their individual gestures give way to unified movement as they draw their long black scarves over their faces while Electra holds the urn with her brother's ashes. The successful shift from the women's individualised treatment to that of a unified approach brings out the unrestrained and revolutionary nature of Electra's character.

The figure of Chrysothemis is treated in this production very distinctively by the director, as she is portrayed as closer to Electra than to Clytemnestra. From her first words (*El.*, 328ff) her warm personality and her caring love for her sister become apparent. Her clothes are clumsy (see Figure 26) and she is not represented as the girl who yields to the rulers in order to secure material wealth. Her deep concern for her sister is not welcomed; Electra is absorbed in her own situation refusing to see any other aspect of reality. And as happens with the women of the chorus, the two sisters never touch each other because of Electra's unrestrained anguish. When she tries to persuade Chrysothemis to bury their mother's offerings (*El.*, 431-463) her sharp but tender words derive from her will to harm Clytemnestra. Their first encounter ends in an affectionate secret agreement to act against their mother's will. Their last meeting however (*El.*, 871ff), takes place in an atmosphere of complete despair as Chrysothemis is told of Orestes' death. When she hears the news "she lurches from buoyant yet controlled optimism to an arm-flailing devastation as great as Electra's own".<sup>77</sup> And then, when she refuses to offer her assistance to Electra's plans to kill Aegisthus (*El.*, 992ff), the way she presents her arguments, her calm voice and confident gestures indicate a powerful personality, "no feeble little sister, but an antagonist who puts the case for submission as passionately as Electra's demand for revenge".<sup>78</sup>

However, one of the production's most exciting scenes is the one in which Electra repudiates her mother, who resembles "an over-age

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<sup>77</sup> Rosalind Carne, "The Agony and the Electricity", *Guardian* 7/12/1991.

<sup>78</sup> Irving Wardle, "Magnificent Sophocles", *Telegraph* 22/12/1988. Susan Colverd had the role of Chrysothemis in the 1988 production as well and the above description applies also to the 1991 production.

Hollywood love-goddess".<sup>79</sup> The scene is terrifying as Clytemnestra enters from the palace's central door (*El.*, 516) holding blossoms and fruits which are brought as offerings to the altar of the gods and starts shouting at her daughter. Immediately she describes her cogent reasons for having killed her husband (*El.*, 525-555). Her cold and self-assured voice causes Electra's reactions of bending double or sinking to the floor. But when she finishes her speech "the rebel daughter squares up to the mother like a prize fighter in a boxing ring-...".<sup>80</sup> And to make her presence more felt and threatening, Electra seizes a pomegranate from Clytemnestra's bowl and dashes it to the floor. As the red fruit splashes across the ground, it hideously suggests Agamemnon's murder as well as Clytemnestra's future killing by her children. The scene is followed by the servant's convincing description of Orestes' death in a chariot-race (*El.*, 680-763). Clytemnestra's reaction to the news of her son's death is as usual confused: her first spontaneous grief (*El.*, 766-771) gives way to an open relief as she smiles with satisfaction and invites the herald in (*El.*, 773ff). But what attracts the audience's attention all this time is Electra's reaction to the related events: "she lies crumpled against the huge iron door of the palace apparently about to vomit."<sup>81</sup> In short, Warner's emphasis on Electra's revolutionary personality has not left her with any other choice than to portray Clytemnestra as her "female" antagonist.

The other striking moment of the production is the traditional recognition scene between Orestes and Electra (*El.*, 1098ff). When he returns in disguise, in the company of Pylades, with his supposed ashes in an urn, Electra approaches them in exhausted desperation, with her wrists slashed, and begs them to hold it. Then she looks at it like a little child fighting her tears back and after paying ecstatic tribute to it, she smears the supposed ashes over her face and body in agony and wallows in dust and tears. The next movement comes from Orestes who approaches his wretched sister and convinces her of his real identity; in a very moving, scene, brother and sister embrace each other

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<sup>79</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "A Relentless Seeker after Truth", *Times* 9/12/1991.

<sup>80</sup> Claire Armitstead, "Electra", *Financial Times* 9/12/1991.

<sup>81</sup> Rosalind Carne, "The Agony and the Electricity", *Guardian* 7/12/1991.



pathetically. But soon Electra returns to her hysterical "whimpering" and "gibbering" which this time derives from joy and happiness.<sup>82</sup>

"John Lynch has a quicksilver energy as Orestes".<sup>83</sup> He is absolutely convinced that the murders have to be carried out and as he does not need any support from his sister, his personality develops quite independently from hers. When the servant barks at the sister and brother (*El.*, 1326-1338) who seem to have abandoned themselves to unrestrained joy and recalls them to their gruesome task, Orestes cleans his hands in the same channel that Electra used to cool her face and feet and moves to the palace. The inevitable murder is completed when a crash is heard behind the metal doors as if a body has been hurled against them. At the same time Electra on the stage (*El.*, 1398-1421) "apes her mother's murder, prodding and lugging with her staff as death cries come from behind the steel door...".<sup>84</sup> But the murder becomes visually apparent as the water of the channel turns red from the blood which has escaped Clytemnestra's body. The last shocking moment is when Aegisthus arrives at the palace (*El.*, 1442ff) full of agonising joy to confirm Orestes' death. His malign presence is smashed as he lifts the cloth on the body which he believes to be Orestes' but is actually Clytemnestra's. As one critic suggests, "John Lynch as Orestes and Gordon Case as Aegisthus invest their brief appearance with weight, but it is the showdowns between mother and daughter that have terrifying fury".<sup>85</sup> As the play ends, Fiona Shaw as Electra remains on stage in a "sober and thoughtful silence" with all her passion spent after the murder.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Kirsty Milne. "The Greeks had Words for it", *Sunday Telegraph* 8/12/1991.

<sup>83</sup> Rosalind Carne, "The Agony and the Electricity", *Guardian* 7/12/1991.

<sup>84</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "A Relentless Seeker after Truth", *Times* 9/12/1991.

<sup>85</sup> Sarah Hemming, "Fresh as Pain", *Independent* 10/12/1991.

<sup>86</sup> John Peter, "How Sophocles makes the means Dictate the End", *Sunday Times* 1/1/1989.

### 3.5. A PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH: ANDREAS VOUTSINAS' AND THE STATE THEATRE OF NORTHERN GREECE'S PRODUCTION OF THE PLAY

#### 3.5.1. A Close Co-operation

The State Theatre of Northern Greece entrusted Andreas Voutsinas with the direction of Sophocles' *Electra* for the Festival of Epidavros 1992 (10-11 July);<sup>87</sup> it was the director's first attempt to deal with a Sophoclean play.<sup>88</sup> In the press conference given prior to the play's performance he pointed out that he was interested in "the human factor" in his interpretation of the play and thus he used the "psychoanalytical method" because it is impossible for someone to "explore a human relationship without using Freud's alphabet".<sup>89</sup> In addition, in the "Director's Note" published in the programme of the production, Voutsinas admitted that his presentation of the Sophoclean heroine had been influenced by Warner's production of the play with Fiona Shaw in the central role: "the role of *Electra* played by Fiona Shaw is a unique moment in my theatrical life". Consequently, his interpretation of the play is determined by psychoanalysis while the figure of the heroine is indebted to Fiona Shaw's *Electra*.

Andreas Voutsinas used the full text of the translation of Yorgos Chimonas whose "theatrical" and not "philological approach" to the ancient text he accepts as his way of "reading" and "viewing" ancient Greek tragedy.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore the director admitted that "the presupposition to his theatrical approach of *Electra* was Yorgos Chimonas' translation ...".<sup>91</sup> The happy co-operation of the two was completed with the participation of other collaborators: Apostolos Vettas

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<sup>87</sup> The present discussion is based on the performance of the 10th of July 1992.

<sup>88</sup> For a general discussion of Voutsinas' work as a director see "Appendix A", pp. 255-58.

<sup>89</sup> The extracts quoted from Voutsinas' press conference were published in *Kathimerini* of 8/7/1992 under the title "A Human *Electra*" ("Mia *Electra* Anthropini").

<sup>90</sup> See Yorgos Chimonas' note published in the programme of the production (July, 1992). For more information about his work see 3.2.1. "A Unifying Approach to the Sophoclean Play", p. 133, n. 29.

<sup>91</sup> Andreas Voutsinas' "Director's Note" published in the programme of the production (July, 1992).



who designed the scenery,<sup>92</sup> Yiannis Metzikoﬀ who designed the costumes, Yorgos Kouroupos who composed the production's music and Eleni Gasouka who choreographed it. According to Voutsinas his co-operation with them as well as with the actresses and actors who assumed the roles gave him the freedom of expression he wanted.<sup>93</sup>

The orchestra of the ancient theatre of Epidavros is dominated by a building which stands for the palace of the Atreids. It is actually a wooden door based on a wooden rotating circle which can open from two sides (see Figure 29). From both thresholds, the chorus can pull out two sliding and twisted staircases designed to give to the whole construction the grandeur of a palace and at the same time to strengthen the director's psychoanalytic approach to the play, since the complicated and irregular paths and staircases of the building can be associated with the labyrinth of the human soul. The rotating circle is based on another wooden concentric circle and the play's action takes place on the concentric circles in front of the palace and on the staircases as well as other parts of the building revealed within the doors' opening. In front of the concentric circles a metallic basin represents Agamemnon's grave at the beginning of the play and the gods' shrines outside the main palace as the plot unfolds.

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<sup>92</sup> He is an architect whose settings are characterised by architectural lines and patterns. He started working as a designer in 1981 and since then he has been one of the main collaborators of the Experimental Art Theatre (Peiramatiki Skini tis Technis) of Thessaloniki established in 1979. He also designs settings (mainly) and costumes for the State Theatre of Northern Greece. From his collaboration with the Experimental Art Theatre we should mention *The End of the Atreids (To Telos ton Atreidon)* - setting and costumes (1989) and Euripides' *Ion* - setting and costumes - which was a co-production of the Actors Touring Company London and of the Experimental Art Theatre of Thessaloniki (It was performed in both English and Greek by English and Greek actors in the Lyric, Hammersmith, London 6-8 December 1994). He also designed the setting for Euripides' *Medea* (State Theatre of Northern Greece) directed by Andreas Voutsinas (1990) and the costumes and the setting for the all-male production at Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* directed by Thymios Karakatsanis (Nea Elliniki Skini) - Summer of 1993.

<sup>93</sup> See Andreas Voutsinas, "Director's Note" published in the programme of the production (July, 1992).

Yiannis Metzikoff was influenced in the costumes' design by the aristocratic style of costume which characterised Macedonia around 1500 A.D., according to traveller's descriptions and evidence from woodcut engravings: "[T]he post Byzantine elements are alternated with Western influences and references to ecclesiastical garments as well as to monastic garments...".<sup>94</sup> Thus, the twelve women of the chorus wear long pleated dresses embellished on the top with golden ornaments. The colours that prevail are black and dark red. Their heads are covered by high priestly caps embellished with gold chains that reach and decorate their foreheads. The same mode of appearance marks Clytemnestra's figure: her dress is covered by a dark red mantle embellished by a golden branch embroidered on her right shoulder; in front of her a long vestment embroidered in gold recalls the ceremonial vestments worn by orthodox priests (see Figure 32). The same vestment decorates Chrysothemis' elaborate dress as well. Aegisthus is dressed in the same style as Clytemnestra but wears sandals like all the male actors. However, Orestes' and Pylades' clothes seem to have been influenced by the way heroes of the Graeco-Roman world have been represented in 20th century films. It has been suggested,<sup>95</sup> that Orestes looks like "a protagonist of a war film" with his short dress covered by a mantle and his sandals with high straps. But Electra is dressed in a humble, servant's black dress which hangs around her body in pieces of different length. Her hair is cut short (as was Fiona Shaw's Electra); her left foot is bandaged and she always has to drag it with the help of a wooden branch used as a walking stick (see Figure 30).

The lyrical music composed by Yorgos Kouroupos emphasises the operatic mood of the production.<sup>96</sup> The music was recorded and the

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<sup>94</sup> He mostly designs costumes. His collaboration with Yorgos Michaelidis' Open Theatre produced a visually powerful *Hamlet* (1991-2). He also designed the costumes for the National Theatre's 1987 production of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, also directed by Yorgos Michaelidis. In 1993 he designed the costumes for the National Theatre's *Medea* directed by Nickos Charalambous.

<sup>95</sup> Dio Kangelari, "Suspense and Effects", *Ethnos* 17/7/1992

<sup>96</sup> He is a famous Greek composer, who lived in Paris until 1977. He participated in the Festival of Avignon with his *Enfants du Sable* (1973), directed by Yiannis Kokkos and with *Dieu le Veult* (1975) and *Griselidis* (1977), directed by Antoine



musical instruments used were flute, clarinet-saxophone, trombone, violincello and percussion. The music accompanies the choral odes, which are mainly sung, and other important moments of the production. Percussion prevails at the moment of Clytemnestra's murder and, when Orestes forcefully takes the urn with his supposed ashes from Electra, the drums beat frenziedly. The choreographer managed to combine the movements of the characters with the requirements of the music. The reading of the performance which follows will include elements of the actresses' and actors' movements with references to the lighting (Tom Stone) which concentrates the audience's attention upon a particular person.

### 3.5.2. *A Wrathful but Impotent Electra*

The cover of the production's programme presents half of the head of Filareti Komninou-(Electra) and half of the head of an ancient statue. Her mouth is gagged by a cross of plasters. Voutsinas' heroine struggles to survive between the director's intention to attribute all her motives to a latent sexuality consistent with Freudian psychoanalysis, and Fiona Shaw's unrestrained and powerful Electra. But the symbols of psychoanalysis and its interpretations contradict in many cases Fiona Shaw's frenzied heroine. Moreover, the combination of other influence, the Byzantine costumes and the complicated lyrical music reinforces the conclusion that "[B]ecause of its greediness and its ambition to include everything, Voutsinas' *Electra* did not go deep into anything".<sup>97</sup>

The director pointed out that Electra scares him "more than Medea or Clytemnestra" because "she wants to act, she puts in all her effort, but she needs somebody else to act for her. She herself does not

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Vitez. He composed the chamber-orchestra *Pylades* (1991-92) in collaboration with Yorgos Chimonas and Dionysis Fotopoulos. He composed the music for the State Theatre of Northern Greece's production of Euripides' *Helen* (1982), directed by Andreas Voutsinas and of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (1983), also directed by Voutsinas. He was also responsible for the music of NTS production of *Medea* (1993), directed by Nickos Charalambous and of Amphi-Theatre's *Trachiniae* (1994).

<sup>97</sup> Eleni Varopoulou, "*Electra* from Performance to Performance" ("I Electra apo Parastasi se Parastasi"), *Vima* 12/7/1992.

have inner power, she speaks words but she does not act".<sup>98</sup> Thus, Filareti Komninou in the role of Electra is upset, haunted by the lack of father and brother, a fanatic who lives ascetically and fights to escape from the palace and away from the conformism of those who live inside. Her appearance is that of a rebel and has been closely modelled on Fiona Shaw. However, the directorial approach did not give her the same strength to fight and the same stubborn refusal to be comforted by anyone. Voutsinas' heroine is not as independent in her reactions and gestures as Fiona Shaw's Electra; on the contrary, her inability to act stigmatises her personality from the beginning.

Voutsinas' Electra has devoted her life to the memory of her dead father; but because of her obsessive attachment to him, her rebelliousness against the laws of a society that requires women's submission is diminished. Freudian psychoanalysis applied to the presentation of characters in this production can explain Electra's love for her father, her revengeful hatred of her mother and even her indifference to married life. Freudian psychology stands against any attempt at a feminist approach to the play. However, Voutsinas' approach to Clytemnestra is not unsympathetic. According to him "she is a woman whose husband depreciated her and forgot her".<sup>99</sup> But at the same time he neither emphasised her role nor elaborated on her relationship with Electra. Moreover, his view of the play's end justifies the matricide: "as in *Medea*, the unfairly treated person has the right to press her case against the common sentiment, in *Electra*, revenge is absolutely justified although the moment of its fulfilment takes away something of the substance and the meaning of her life".<sup>100</sup>

The play starts, not as usual with the entrance of Paedagogue, but with the chorus of twelve women. A song is heard in ancient Greek, *Electra* 173-175; the lines are addressed to Electra by the chorus and try to inspire her with faith in the power of Zeus. The wind blows on the stage which is filled by steam coming from the palace as well as from Agamemnon's tomb (the metallic basin). As the women hide behind the

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<sup>98</sup> See *Mesimvrini* of 9/7/1992, "Electra that Causes Fear" ("Mia Electra pou Fovizei").

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Andreas Voutsinas, "Director's Note" published in the programme of the production (July, 1992).



palace, the Paedagogue enters to survey the area and then signals to the two friends to enter. Orestes (Vassilis Seimenis) is not the powerful and decisive young man who returns to avenge his father's murderers. It appears that he needs the constant support and affection of his friend Pylades who touches and caresses him constantly; they give the impression of being lovers.<sup>101</sup> Before they leave the scene, fire lights up on the basin and Orestes desperately invokes his dead father to give him strength.

Electra enters the scene from the small inner door of the construction, screaming her monologue passionately (*El.*, 86-120), cursing her mother with hatred, moving constantly with the help of the very important branch-stick, always pulling her deformed leg. The association with Fiona Shaw's Electra is immediate. As she speaks she is always followed by a white circular light which underlines her movements. The women are always around her sharing her pain as their calm and tender voices and their affectionate gestures indicate. Her mood is constantly changing from raging hysteria to disquieting passivity: as she shouts "let them suffer, those who committed the crimes",<sup>102</sup> she collapses and her body moves up and down rhythmically, then her voice becomes calm and even tender but only for a moment because her hysteric screams accompanied by percussive music return with the phrase "Justice has not spoken as yet for those who killed him".<sup>103</sup> Despite the surface similarities of Voutsinas' heroine to Shaw's Electra, his heroine seems in need of comfort and the women of the chorus assume that role.

Electra's despair and distress meet the consolation of the twelve women whose relationship to the heroine is strong, since they participate actively in the dramatised events and their importance is not diminished in the presence of other characters. They stand by Electra, they are her accomplices while at the same time they are responsible for the stage function of the main building which they help to rotate. During the first *stasimon*, Electra starts laughing madly; two of the chorus'

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<sup>101</sup> See Rozita Sokou, "Bad Direction Of *Electra* by Voutsinas in Epidavros" ("Kaki Didaskalia tis Electras apo to Voutsina stin Epidavro"), *Apoyevmatini* 30/7/1992.

<sup>102</sup> Να πάθουν, αυτοί που τα έκαναν: (*Electra* 210 in Chimonas' translation).

<sup>103</sup> η δίκη δεν εμίλησε γι' αυτούς που τον σκότωσαν: (*Electra* 245-246 in Chimonas' translation).



women hold her walking-stick and she turns around in circles with the help of a rope. The part of the song which speaks of the sins of the home of Pelops (*El.*, 474-515) is delivered by the chorus leader herself. The song, the rope and Electra's circles point to the accursed history of the royal family which carries along in its whirling movement the young members as well. When the women hear the false news of Orestes' death they bend their bodies under the weight of their deeply felt pain. The second *stasimon* (*El.*, 1058-1107), delivered after Chrysothemis' refusal to participate in Electra's plan, marks the chorus' intervention in the events. One of the women holds Chrysothemis' purple mantle and tries to get rid of it, but nobody accepts it.<sup>104</sup> She then throws it behind the building in a movement of rejection of the kind of love that Chrysothemis is able to offer. Red lighting concentrates on the chorus' leader who standing on the top of the staircase sings: "has there ever been a father with a child like this?"<sup>105</sup> At the same time Electra's stick changes hands among the women until one of them gives it to Electra, who puts it tenderly on the ground next to her and falls down again. The isolation and loneliness of old age emphasised by the walking-stick characterises Electra as well. At the end of the *stasimon* the women, united, face the heroine and repeat the aforementioned line with a small change which alters the original and Yorgos Chimonas' translation: "has there ever been a father with a companion like this?"<sup>106</sup> The director's psychoanalytic approach becomes apparent here: Electra's immense devotion to her father is rewarded by granting her the role of her father's companion. The director's justification of the murders is expressed through the chorus again. At the end all the women take off their mantles and their caps; they remain with white dresses while their hair is arranged in long plaits. They end with the refrain "has there ever been a father with a child like this?"

Chrysothemis (Lena Savvidou) in Voutsinas' production represents her mother's world; her appearance draws her nearer to Clytemnestra. Her expressions and gestures indicate indifference to

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<sup>104</sup> Chrysothemis upon leaving covered Electra's body with her mantle.

<sup>105</sup> Ποιός πατέρας είδε ποτέ τέτοιο παιδί; (*Electra* 1081 in Chimonas' translation).

<sup>106</sup> The repetition is to be found neither in the original nor in Chimonas' translation. Instead of "παιδί" they use the word "ταίρι".



Electra's suffering, in contrast to Warner's simple and affectionate Chrysothemis. Such a treatment leaves the central heroine more isolated. As she decides coldly to accept Electra's admonition to change the offerings and takes her belt and tuft of hair which were fastened to her wooden stick, she commands the women not to tell anybody about her folly (*El.*, 466-471). Her second entrance occurs in a different, joyful, mood because of her brother's return (*El.*, 871ff). Her happiness seems to be as honest as her mourning when she is informed of Orestes' death (*El.*, 924ff). But the bond between the sisters breaks down as soon as Electra demands that she become a participant in her plan to kill Aegisthus. Chrysothemis assumes her former status: as Electra reveals her reasoning she stands on the staircase, facing the audience like her mother. Her refusal (*El.*, 992-1014) comes coldly as she descends the staircase arrogantly, like her mother's daughter. She approaches Electra who lies breathless on the ground covers her with her mantle and leaves. However, Electra is really affected by the event. She does not have the strength to turn her sister's refusal into anger and determination to fight on her own. On the contrary, she looks desperate and impotent as she wanders around, with her sister's mantle on her shoulders. Finally, she throws it away in a movement which indicates rejection, but immediately collapses in front of the gods' shrine.

Clytemnestra (Aneza Papadopoulou) appears on stage in the first episode to illustrate Electra's speech when she quotes her mother's insulting and abusive words to her (*El.*, 289-292, 295-298): she enters from the main door of the palace to deliver the words herself while Electra repeats them: it is assumed that Clytemnestra is present in her imagination. Then, as she faces Electra from the top of the staircase during her real entrance (*El.*, 516ff), she speaks slowly and ironically. When she speaks of Iphigeneia's sacrifice (*El.*, 525-551) the pain causes her voice to break while the hatred against Agamemnon is even more apparent. Electra confronts her like a rival: she discredits and mocks her reasoning (*El.*, 558ff) and when she mentions Orestes (*El.*, 602), she immobilises her by entrapping her neck with her wooden stick. As she allows her to sacrifice (*El.*, 632-3), she approaches her mother and kisses her on the mouth and at the same time bursts into laughter. The Paedagogue's description of Orestes' death (*El.*, 680-763) leaves Electra in deep mourning on the ground, but Clytemnestra's

reaction is more interesting. As she hears the news she hides herself behind the palace and reappears slowly after checking around for any suspect face. She is suspicious like Clytemnestra in the second part of Michaelidis' *Oresteia*.<sup>107</sup> As the description concentrates on Orestes' last moments (*El.*; 745-763) Clytemnestra, more confident of the truthfulness of the story, enters the palace from behind. Only the end of her dress can be seen behind the staircase as if the queen wanted to recover from her pain on her own. At the end however, relief prevails as she appears again self-controlled and content. Voutsinas' Clytemnestra is more decisive and powerful than Electra. The news of Orestes' death drives Electra to a lamentation (*El.*, 824ff) dominated more by pain and despair than passionate hatred.

The recognition scene follows Electra's lamentation over the urn with the supposed ashes of her brother (*El.*, 1126-1170). Her mad cries frighten the two friends who hide behind the palace. Orestes is a scared young man, very different from Evangelatos' hero. As he tries to pull the urn away from her the ashes are spilt in a scene that recalls Warner's production. As the recognition takes place both of them hold the two ends of a rope and turn around in circles. Their affectionate caresses and passionate kissing (see Figure 31) have provoked the comment that their actions are "incestuous".<sup>108</sup> As Orestes enters the palace to kill his mother (*El.*, 1375) he throws his mantle in a symbolic movement of liberation. The building revolves three times and the red light focusses on Orestes who walks nervously and hesitantly on the upper level. In another glimpse of the palace's interior as it revolves we see Clytemnestra approached by Orestes and immediately afterwards her agonising scream is followed by the appearance of her covered body on the main threshold. However, the visual exploitation of the scene of murder, because it focuses the audience's attention on the actual deed, weakens Electra's wholehearted participation in it and her importance in the scene becomes secondary.

Kostas Sandas' Aegisthus is a human, down-to-earth character who enters drunk to chase the women of the chorus (*El.*, 1442). The scene with the rope is repeated, shared now between Electra and Aegisthus who belongs to the same family as well. As he discovers that

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<sup>107</sup> See p. 116.

<sup>108</sup> Dio Kangelari, "Suspense and Effects", *Ethnos* 17/7/1992.



the body belongs to Clytemnestra, he mourns deeply and convincingly (*El.*, 1474-5). He is killed in the palace but his dead body falls above Clytemnestra's. The palace door closes and Orestes washes his hands in the metallic basin. The light is focussed on Electra who has embraced one of the building's columns. Orestes closes his ears as if something is haunting him and leaves running from the right. That ending contradicts the relieved appearance of the women of the chorus with their white dresses. It seemed that Orestes was only the instrument of the murders whose main motivating force was Electra. To return to Voutsinas' words: "...revenge is absolutely justified although the moment of its fulfilment takes away something of the substance and the meaning of her life".<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Andras Voutsinas, "Director's Note" published in the programme of the production (July, 1992).

### 3.6. A COMPARATIVE CONCLUSION

Sophocles' *Electra* has theatrical qualities that make it attractive to a contemporary director and the four approaches we have discussed each constitute a different interpretation of the play. Karolos Koun's main line of interpretation concentrates on the inevitability of the law of retribution and revenge. Spyros Evangelatos' more conservative approach, although it aims at focusing on Electra's passion, describes the duty of a modest daughter. Deborah Warner however, managed to introduce into the play a feminist touch through the magnificent performance of Fiona Shaw in the role of the rebellious and unrestrained daughter. Andreas Voutsinas, although he aimed at rendering the same overwhelming passion in his heroine, involved Freudian psychoanalysis in the presentation of his characters, which finally characterised his approach.

Within that context, in Art Theatre's production Electra is a figure overwhelmed by the mourning in relation to a fragile and tender Chrysothemis, to an almost absent chorus and to an unheroic and indifferent Orestes. In Amphi-Theatre's production Electra is a respectable daughter who cannot stand the immoral atmosphere of her home and fights against it. The women of the chorus offer her a constant support and approval in contrast with her unloving and indifferent sister. Orestes in this production is a strong and confident young man. In the RSC's production of the play Electra is a rebel, a woman who suffers because she fights the established order of things in a male dominated world, who has no intimate relationship to the supportive but at the same time remote women of the chorus, who reject her caring and sensitive sister and who stand by her decisive and energetic brother. Finally, in State Theatre of Northern Greece's production Electra is a figure obsessively in love with her father, in need of protection and support by the women of the chorus, who is rejected by the wordly-minded Chrysothemis and who is drawn near to her young, narcissistic and less dominant brother.

The figure of Clytemnestra is more or less secondary in all four productions discussed above. However in Karolos Koun's interpretation she is approached more sympathetically than the others because she is viewed as a victim of the law of retribution in the same way as Electra. Evangelatos' queen is a fearful woman with harsh, mocking voice.



Deborah Warner, in order to elevate and justify Electra, had to present Clytemnestra as a “man’s woman” attractive and secure because of men’s protection. Finally, Voutsinas’ Clytemnestra is an indifferent figure whose role is not at all emphasised either in itself or in relation to Electra. She plays her part with confidence but she does not engage our attention or interest. Clytemnestra in Sophocles’ *Electra* has not attracted feminist attention perhaps mainly because of the short length of her role.

The answer to the question of matricide is treated differently in the four interpretations of the Sophoclean play. Karolos Koun ends the play without commenting on the question of matricide. Only Electra’s sad words “she died! the unfortunate” are a reminder of the necessary conclusion to a story of retribution. The same lack of comment characterises Warner’s approach to the matricide since she has disfavoured Clytemnestra from the beginning. Voutsinas’ approach to the issue is more complicated since Orestes leaves the scene haunted, probably because in his production he is a simple instrument of revenge (he is not confident about his deed) while the chorus women appear relieved and Electra exhausted. Spyros Evangelatos however, does condemn matricide through his heroine who remains sad and empty at the end, not because he adopts a sympathetic approach towards women’s representation but because, within the code of a male dominated society, matricide is not easily reconciled with an honourable daughter even if she has right on her side.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. THE EURIPIDEAN TREATMENT OF THE THEME OF MATRICIDE

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Euripides gives his interpretation of the aftermath of Agamemnon's murder in *Electra* and *Orestes*. *Electra* dramatises Orestes' treacherous killing of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and thus covers the same story as that in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and in Sophocles' *Electra*. In the present case, as in that of the Sophoclean play, *Electra* dominates the action, although she does not commit the murders herself, and holds our dramatic interest. *Orestes* is Euripides' free invention of the events following Clytemnestra's murder by her children. And although *Electra* holds an important part in the play, *Orestes* is the dominant figure while his, until now, mute friend Pylades occupies an important speaking role. With regard to the plays' original staging, *Orestes* can be accurately dated to the year 408 B.C., almost a year before Euripides withdrew in voluntary exile to Macedon,<sup>1</sup> whereas *Electra* is not firmly dated to a particular year but is convincingly placed in the decade 427-417 B.C..<sup>2</sup>

Both plays are almost always discussed in association, not only because *Orestes* comes as a logical consequence of the events dramatised in *Electra* but also because the main characters of the plays are treated by the dramatist in continuation. H.D.F. Kitto discusses the plays under the heading of "melodramas" because "they are grim and not gay, and are based on character-drawing rather than on the

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<sup>1</sup> See B.M.W. Knox, "Euripides" in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol. 1, Part 2, *Greek Drama* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 64

<sup>2</sup> The approximate chronology of the play's original production has been taken by B.M.W. Knox, *op.cit.*, p. 64. See also G. Zuntz, *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester, 1955), pp. 64ff. However, the probable date of the play's production was believed by earlier scholars to be the year 413 B.C. mainly because of line 1347 which had been taken to mean that the Dioscuri are trying to protect the Sicilian expedition. For the "traditional" date, see Richmond Lattimore, "Chronological Note on the Plays of Euripides" in *The Complete Greek Tragedies* edited by David Greene and Richmond Lattimore, *Euripides V* (Chicago, 1959), p. 227.



excitements of an intricate plot, ...",<sup>3</sup> and B.M.W. Knox characterises Euripides' treatment of the two plays as realistic: "his realistic treatment has destroyed the heroic and moral values underlying the myth and no ending which could re-identify the Orestes and Electra of these plays with their heroic prototypes is conceivable".<sup>4</sup> Moreover, another common element of the two is their endings which are unconvincing as they superimpose incongruous solutions and future arrangements (marriages, apotheoses etc) upon the dramatised story. But the same endings as we shall see in detail undermine the seriousness of the story. And most importantly, both plays explore the issue of matricide and its consequences while *Orestes*, if seen in association with *Electra*, as in the case of *Agamemnon's Children*, throws light on the murderous nature of the central characters whose motives seem unconvincing and base.

The treatment of the women figures by the tragedian in both plays will be discussed separately in association with the main issue of matricide. However, it should be mentioned that the conflict between mother and daughter is dominant in *Electra* where Clytemnestra and her daughter represent two opposing world views, although the queen is more modest and reverent than she was in Aeschylus and Sophocles. In the case of *Orestes*, Electra, the masculine sister, is still there but Clytemnestra becomes only a name while her earthly image is substituted for that of Helen's much "lighter" appearance.

Modern scholarship does not deal with the treatment of women by Euripides in these two plays; *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Troades* and *Hecuba* have almost exclusively attracted scholarly interest.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, feminist criticism has been expounded on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and his treatment of the story of Agamemnon's murder and of the matricide.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary directors as well seem to be more attracted by the

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<sup>3</sup> H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London, 1990), first published in London, 1939, p. 330

<sup>4</sup> B.M.W. Knox, *op.cit.*, p. 80

<sup>5</sup> See for example *Euripides, Women and Sexuality* edited by Anton Powell (London, 1990). For a more detailed bibliography on the subject see Chapter 1, pp. 34-39.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Froma I. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Myth making in the *Oresteia*" in *Arethusa* vol. 11, no. 1&2 (1978), pp. 149-184 and Sue- Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London 1988), p. 12-15

*Oresteia*, and by the extremity of the Sophoclean *Electra*, while *Orestes* is rarely performed even in Greece.<sup>7</sup> The present chapter will concentrate on two productions of each play, one English and one Greek. Starting with the Greek productions; *Electra* of the Thessalian Theatre, directed by Kostas Tsianos (performed for the first time at the open theatre of Lycabettus the 11th and 12th of August 1988; the performance discussed here took place at the theatre of Epidavros the 26th of July 1993) presents a powerful central heroine in a folklore exploration of the play's rural atmosphere; and *Orestes*, produced by the theatrical company Mythos and directed by Kostas Bakas (Herodeion 26th and 27th of August 1992), concentrates on the hero who is treated as such. The English production which will be discussed here includes both plays and *Iphigeneia in Tauris*. It was produced by the Gate Theatre (6 March - 1 April 1995) under the title *Agamemnon's Children*, directed by Laurence Boswell. The two first plays of the modern trilogy expose the murderous nature of the matricides since in the second part they are ready to commit a series of crimes in order to escape the death penalty. *Iphigeneia in Tauris* however will not be discussed separately because it does not fall within the scope of the present study since the main women figures discussed, *Electra* and *Clytemnestra*, are not involved in the story of *Iphigeneia's* recovery by her brother. Moreover, the theme of the matricide is only in the background, in Apollo's command to *Orestes* to steal the statue of the goddess *Athena* as another ordeal which he has to undertake in order to be purified from the blood of his mother.

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<sup>7</sup> Since 1954 when the Festival of Ancient Drama was initiated in Epidavros, *Orestes* has been produced only twice: in 1971 by the National Theatre, directed by Alexis Solomos (the same production was revived in 1973) and in 1982 by the National Theatre directed by Yorgos Sevastikoglou (the same production was revived in 1983).



## 4.2. *ELECTRA* AND THE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Euripides treats the myth of Orestes' return to his fatherland and his vengeance killing of his mother and Aegisthus in *Electra*, a play that concentrates more on the figure of Agamemnon's daughter than on the matricide itself. The Euripidean version of the myth is marked by innovations in the plot and in the portrayal of the central characters. Although the story is the traditional one, it resists containment within the frame of the tradition. The playwright elaborated on the suffering and sorrow of the Sophoclean heroine by introducing Electra's marriage to a poor farmer, and returned to the Aeschylean framework by placing Clytemnestra's murder last and by restoring, although verbally, Clytemnestra's avenging spirits. The result is a theatrically effective and coherent dramatisation with an original, rationalising approach to the subject matter.

The traditional critical approach to *Electra* follows the main line of controversy that characterises Euripidean criticism. Its evaluation varies from the claim that it is "undoubtedly Euripides' masterpiece" containing "a power of sympathy and analysis unrivalled in ancient drama",<sup>8</sup> to the sort of criticism that "he [the farmer] and it [the cottage] and Electra and the noble strangers are involved in a persisting interpretation which accords some measure of tonal unity to this indifferent play".<sup>9</sup> More recent approaches to *Electra* have concentrated on the play's "Double View" according to which "... Euripides complicates the mode by presenting side by side two divergent views of most of the play's characters, and in each case he leaves the audience to pick out the objectively correct view and to reject the one that is subjectively distorted".<sup>10</sup> But the play's interest lies with the depiction of characters

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<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Murray, *Euripides and his Age* (London, 1913), p. 154

<sup>9</sup> John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London, 1980), first published in London, 1962, p. 244

<sup>10</sup> W. Geoffrey Arnott, "Double the Vision: A Reading of Euripides' *Electra*", *Greece & Rome* (October, 1981), republished in *Greek Tragedy* ed. by Ian McAuslan and Peter Walcot (Oxford, 1993), pp. 204-217, pp. 206-7. Earlier than this article, Emily T. Vermeule made similar observations in the preface to her translation of Euripides' *Electra* (in *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Greene and Richmond

as well as with the unique and revolutionary Euripidean treatment of the traditional myth.

From the point of view of women's representation, the two main female figures, apart from the women of the chorus, are powerful and dominant. Electra directs the fearful and indecisive Orestes to the murder of their mother (*El.*, 961-987). As has been suggested, Electra "undermines his heroic stature, since a man who must take his pattern from a woman is by definition a failure in the male role".<sup>11</sup> Clytemnestra is more modest than her Aeschylean and Sophoclean counterpart but she still overpowers Aegisthus in her will for example to safeguard her daughter's life (*El.*, 27-30) and according to Electra's words Clytemnestra is the master of the house (*El.*, 931-936). Moreover, Electra is responsible for the planning of her mother's murder (*El.*, 647-663) and thus the contrast between the two women is emphasised. As has been suggested Euripides' *Electra* as well as Sophocles' *Electra* "are plays of character",<sup>12</sup> and their interest lies with the exploitation of opposing views and conflicting interests (especially in the case of Euripides) between Electra and her mother. As a result, the issue of sex conflict dominant in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, loses its importance in the other two tragedians since their heroines are more prominent than their male partners.

To return to the Euripidean Electra, she fights for her interests which are limited to clothes, marriage, money (*El.*, 175-189, 300-23, 997-1076): she indicates a genuine attachment to her father (*El.*, 1102-4) but her devotion to him is not the driving power for her hatred against her mother; jealousy of Clytemnestra's life is the main reason for her rejection of her mother (*El.*, 917-956). Therefore Electra's lust for revenge has an alienating effect on us as her viciousness is not at all persuasively justified. Clytemnestra's portrayal is affected by her daughter's words for her which give the impression of a woman who is preoccupied with her luxurious life (*El.*, 314-18) and with her beauty (*El.*, 1071-75) and who rejects her daughter (*El.*, 71). However, her visit to Electra in order to help her with her duties as a new mother, her

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Lattimore, V (Chicago, 1959), p. 3): "... this double vision is true of the whole play, as Electra's image of the truth, and the truth itself, stubbornly refuse to match" (p. 3).

11 Ann Norris Michelini, 'Electra: The "Low" Style' in her *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (London, 1987), pp. 181-230, p. 228.

12 H.D.F. Kitto, *op. cit.*, p. 333.



modest words to her and her expressed worry about her actions in the past (*El.*, 1105-9) outline a human character, more sympathetic than Electra's, who does not deserve the punishment by her children that awaits her.

The play begins with a Euripidean innovation: the appearance of the farmer-husband of Electra who delivers the prologue outside his cottage house: he gives an account of the past events (*El.*, 1-18) and explains the present situation (*El.*, 25-49). This innovation results in the removal of the action from its traditional setting (outside Agamemnon's palace) to the city's borders. It contrasts the farmer's moral standards, his tender and protective words to Electra (*El.*, 64-6, 77-81) and his spontaneous and wholehearted invitation to the strangers to enter his poor house in order to receive hospitality (*El.*, 357-363) to the well-born youngsters who respect the code of hatred and revenge only.<sup>13</sup> As has been suggested, "with Electra's farmer husband in the Euripidean version, the essential fact is that the dramatist has deployed human relationships within the story in such a way as to break through the crust of type-distinctions founded on status".<sup>14</sup> In the second part of the drama, after the arrival of the Pedagogue, the only reference to the farmer is made by the Dioscuri and it concerns his establishment at Phocis (*El.*, 1286-7).

Electra's first entrance is indicative of the self-imposed misery she lives in (*El.*, 57) because she wants to demonstrate Aegisthus' arrogance to the gods (*El.*, 58) and mourn her father (*El.*, 59). Her clearly expressed hatred against those responsible for her present degraded status is sharply contrasted to the farmer's politeness and respect for her (*El.*, 64-6) as well as to her own kind words to him (*El.*, 67-74). Her monologue before the *parodos* (*El.*, 112-167) is devoted to the memory of her dead father, a lament which includes the savage details of his killing by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (*El.*, 158-167). The chorus of Argive peasant women enter with the excuse of inviting Electra to a procession to the temple of Hera (*El.*, 167-174). Their first encounter with Electra initiates a recurrent comparison between rags and fine clothes which serves to concentrate our attention on the wealth

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<sup>13</sup> Orestes praises the man's morality and good manners in a long speech which admits that wealth and noble descent do not always mean good manners and courageous mind (*El.*, 367-390). Electra also praises his respect to her (*El.*, 253).

<sup>14</sup> See John Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

and poverty theme (*El.*, 175-189, 997, 1076). Electra rejects their invitation because of her "filthy hair" (*El.*, 184) and her slavish robe "torn to rags" (*El.*, 185), inappropriate for the daughter of a king.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, her vindictiveness and jealousy against Clytemnestra's sexual life in contrast to her own wasted life (*El.* 205-212) is sharply illustrated.

The role of the chorus is mainly confined to odes which relieve the intensity of the action and whose subject-matter is not closely relevant to the plot. The first of the three choral odes describes with astonishment the marvellous shield of Achilles (*El.*, 432-486) and the second relates events from the history of Atreus and Thyestes (*El.*, 699-750). However, the third deals with Agamemnon's murder (*El.*, 1147-1164) which comes at the moment when Clytemnestra's children kill their mother. Its relevance to the plot comes as a sharp reminder of her murderous act against her husband. At the same time, the women of the chorus are detached from the central heroine. Apart from *parodos*, in three other cases the women exchange words with Electra, but these exchanges are very short: before the messenger's announcement of Orestes' victory (*El.*, 751-760), before Orestes' and Pylades entrance with the corpse (*El.*, 859-879), and after Clytemnestra's murder when they first sympathise with Clytemnestra's suffering (*El.*, 1165-71) and then participate in the mourning shared among themselves and the repentant Electra and Orestes. At that point the women criticise Electra's behaviour when she promoted an impious deed against her brother's will (*El.*, 1204-5) and they clearly condemn their action (*El.*, 1226) because it was against their mother (*El.*, 1210-2). Otherwise, their role is confined to that of silent observers of the action who announce and greet newcomers (*El.*, 339-40, 988-997, 1233-7) and introduce the rhetorical debate between the two antagonists (*El.*, 1051-54). Electra's fierce nature neither needs nor allows any form of consent or support for her feelings and plans.

Orestes arrives with his friend Pylades under Apollo's instructions to avenge Agamemnon and restore his own position by killing Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (*El.*, 85-9). His commitment to guile, his isolation and stealth are apparent as he enters the Argive borderlands. He came

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Norris Michelini attributes Electra's behavior to "social determinants" which "have placed her in the wrong class" and "anyone who is trapped in a contradiction between the habit of high status and the fact of low status will experience embarrassments similar to Electra's". *Op. cit.*, p. 193.



unnoticed during the night and visited his father's tomb (*El.*, 90-2); he does not intend to enter within the city walls and he is ready to run back to foreign soil if his identity is recognised (*El.* 94-7). At the same time he needs his sister Electra to be his partner (*El.*, 100). It is characteristic that Orestes, in his first encounter with his sister, tries to ambush and trap her by maintaining his anonymity even after he is sure of Electra's resolve and the loyalty of the peasant and the chorus. Between lines 215 and 579, he speaks and acts in the *persona* of a friend of Orestes.<sup>16</sup> Thus, his role is not that of a powerful and resolute hero who returns home to restore "justice". Euripides presents him as a reluctant and cowardly youth whose actions are directed by the will of Apollo and of his sister whose powerful image overpowers his. According to M.J. Cropp "Euripides' dramatic strategy makes Orestes, in fact, into something of a cipher -a young man open to direction like Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, undertaking the deed because he is imperceptive and inexperienced, performing it only under the impulsion of Apollo and the vehemence of Electra".<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Orestes is not at all confident in planning the murders. The old servant suggests the scheme for the killing of Aegisthus (*El.*, 620-646) and Electra that of Clytemnestra's murder (*El.*, 662-70).

As the messenger relates the events of Aegisthus' murder (*El.*, 774-858), we realise that Orestes is not the hero Electra has expected him to be: he stabs Aegisthus in the back while he is sacrificing to the Nymphs, after he has been invited to the sacrifice by the king himself. His appearance contradicts Electra's idealised image of him; she expects him to kill Aegisthus in a face to face confrontation (*El.*, 336-8) and she confidently informs the old servant that Orestes would never

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<sup>16</sup> The setting of the plot on the border of the city, the use of guile and ambush, and the knife as killing weapon have been associated with the concept of ephebic wandering during the period of ephebes' initiation to male adulthood. See J. P. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, translated by J. Lloyd (Brighton, 1980); P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, translated by A. Szegedy-Maszakunder (Baltimore, 1986), first published in Paris, 1981; John J. Winkler, "The Ephebes' Song: *Tragoidia* and *Polis*" in *Nothing to Do With Dionysos*, edited by John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (New Jersey, 1990), pp. 20-62.

<sup>17</sup> M.J. Cropp, *Euripides' "Electra"*, with translation and commentary (Aris & Phillips Ltd, Wiltshire, 1988), p., xxxv.



come to their land secretly out of fear of Aegisthus (*El.*, 525-6). Moreover, when Orestes and Pylades return after Aegisthus' murder, they are ceremoniously crowned by Electra (*El.*, 882-6). She draws father and son together as victors (*El.*, 880-1) and contrasts the useless victory of an athletic contest with the feat of killing the enemy, Aegisthus, in an act of war (*El.*, 883-5). Electra repeats the athletic metaphor in her speech over the dead body of Aegisthus (*El.*, 953-6). She seems to distort reality, either to achieve her purpose which is the murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, or to keep the hatred against the royal couple alive.<sup>18</sup> But, compared to Orestes, she is the driving force of the drama as Orestes only obeys her will and follows her strategies.

The recognition scene is of interest because it recalls the same scene in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* at the same time as it reveals the nature of Orestes' and Electra's hatred. The scene in which the old retainer reports the signs on Agamemnon's tomb - the lock of golden hair, the footprints and the cloth woven by Electra years ago - and Electra's sarcastic insistence on the implausibility of such tokens (*El.*, 508-546) is a parody of the Aeschylean version of the myth where the same signs are reported by Electra herself and are treated seriously (*Ch.*, 164-211). When brother and sister finally recognise each other, the scene of joy and embracing is very short (*El.*, 575-85) before they concentrate, in a business-like manner, on their plan of killing Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Electra's desire for vengeance is stronger than her affection for her brother. Moreover, during the recognition scene their references to their dead father are non-existent. Only at the end, after having laid the plan for killing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, do they invoke their dead father to help them (*El.*, 678-684).

Aegisthus is an important figure in the play because he helps to stimulate the nature of Electra's hatred against her mother and him. However, he never appears on stage alive; he is portrayed through the eyes of other characters. According to Electra, he is an impious man who insults Agamemnon's grave by pelting his stone memorial with rocks (*El.*, 328); he is also weak since he tries desperately to prevent the revenge on him by Electra's children (*El.*, 265-8). But the

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<sup>18</sup> See W. Geoffrey Arnott, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-8. He explains that "Electra idealises him [Orestes] in her imagination as a hero with virtues and values straight out of the *Iliad*, the bible of the aristocratic code. ... The reality is totally different from Electra's epic vision".



messenger's speech gives a contrary picture of a pious king who sacrifices to the Nymphs and also a hospitable one since he invites the travellers to join him in the sacrifice (*El.*, 785-814).<sup>19</sup>

Electra's outrageous speech against the corpse of Aegisthus (*El.*, 907-956) constitutes an insult similar to the alleged drunken impiety of Aegisthus on Agamemnon's tomb. What is more, her insistence on Aegisthus' sexual activities reveals a hidden jealousy against the man and her "dominant" mother which is the driving force of her hatred: she taunts the dead Aegisthus with his looks and his alleged adulteries (*El.*, 945-951) and she rejects him as a husband (*El.*, 948-9). The original cause of her father's murder is almost forgotten. Moreover, she stigmatises his subordination to Clytemnestra and the fact that "a woman not a man is the master of the house" while their children become known from her mother's name (*El.*, 932-7). Electra expresses the traditional view of male oriented society in order to conform once more to the character of the woman who stands faithfully on the side of the man while Clytemnestra poses as the "emancipated" woman ahead of her age. Nevertheless, Electra's speech is not flattering for her image. On the contrary, it presents her as a creature whose jealousy overcomes her devotion to the memory of her father.

Clytemnestra's entrance, as a result of Electra's trickery, is elegant and imposing; her carriage attended by Trojan slaves indicates her luxurious life in contrast to her daughter's poor status. But when she starts speaking, the negative and arrogant impression created when she appears gives way to the figure of a woman who has substantial reasons for the murder she has committed, and the ability to explain her reasons very persuasively. Iphigeneia's sacrifice is presented as her main motive for the murder (*El.*, 1020-9) which is painfully repeated (*El.*, 1002-3, 1041-8), and Cassandra's presence at his side is described as an additional powerful motive for her act (*El.*, 1030-8), which is both human and sympathetic. The following two lines stigmatise the unfair situation for women of being always blamed for what they do whereas the men who commit the same actions escape gossip and blame (*El.*, 1039-1040). Clytemnestra's act of acquiring a lover, although it followed Agamemnon's former deed, was fiercely disapproved by the male dominated society. However, her questioning of these ideas and

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<sup>19</sup> Concerning the divergent view of the play's characters, the "double view", see W. Geoffrey Arnott, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-217



social practices puts Euripides in front of his contemporaries and his fellow dramatists since he indicates a sensitivity to the issue of women's unjust treatment by a society much prejudiced against any form of equal treatment of the genders.

Electra's refutation of her is the one expected from a daughter who supports the social values and who hates her mother passionately out of jealousy and because of her unconventional character. The theme of appearance and wealth is again emphasised through Electra's accusations of her mother's preoccupation with her beauty and sexual attractiveness (*El.*, 1070-5) after her husband marched away from home; and although Clytemnestra's behaviour is disgraceful according to her daughter, the passion with which Electra speaks, her obsession with clothes, money and marriage (*El.*, 175-89, 300-23, 997-1076) as well as her speech over Aegisthus' dead body (*El.*, 907-56) betray her deeply rooted jealousy.

However, the only argument that seems to be accurately directed by Electra against her mother is the contradiction between her words which declare her love for her children and her deeds which indicate indifference for her and Orestes, both of whom live miserably away from home, since Clytemnestra has not bestowed their ancestral home and its wealth to them (*El.*, 1086-1096). But even then Clytemnestra is more humanly and sympathetically drawn than Electra because she explains her actions without reacting angrily to her daughter's insults: she expresses a kind of remorse for her former actions (*El.*, 1110) and admits that fear of Orestes' revenge upon her forces her to keep him away (*El.*, 1114-5). Finally, she proceeds to her daughter's home to carry out the sacrifice for her. Her death that follows her restrained appearance is shockingly unjustified even for the murderers themselves, who regret their deed after they have carried it out (*El.*, 1172-1231).

Electra's viciousness resists any identification with her and the party of the avengers. As for Orestes, he is in a sense compelled against his will to commit his mother's murder (*El.*, 965-987), and his repentant and miserable condition at the end is therefore expected. But although, after Clytemnestra's murder, Electra drops her former jealousy and hatred against her mother and seems for a moment to repent (*El.*, 1177-1182), she returns a few lines later to her primary concern, a decent marriage (*El.*, 1197-1200) which reflects the established ideal of



Euripides' age that women take their status from marriage. At the same time her insistence on social concerns is another form of the play's condemnation of the act of matricide since its main motive seems to be Electra's personal interests. Her final speech before the 'divine appearance, however, is characterised by ambiguous screams of despair which give place to a clearly expressed love for her mother and her motherland (*El.*, 1224-5, 1230-1). Electra's regret at the end could be viewed as her acknowledgment that the matricide lacks any serious motivation. Clytemnestra's rights as a woman and a mother are thus justified.

The play's end, the divine epiphany, restores the play to its traditional frame but the solution comes hastily and unconvincingly superimposed by the Dioscuri (*El.*, 1238-1291): Orestes will be pursued by the Erinyes but in the end he will be declared innocent by the court of Areopagus because Apollo will take all the blame upon himself.<sup>20</sup> He will never return to Argos and Electra will marry Pylades. The ending itself seems to be alien to the story dramatised by Euripides, and ironic. The playwright condemns the matricide and depicts Clytemnestra and her cause more sympathetically than his predecessors. The play's quick reversion to the myth's traditional ending emphasises Euripides' distinct approach to the myth which is characterised by his sympathetic treatment of Clytemnestra and by his fierce condemnation of the matricide through the degraded nature of the matricides.

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<sup>20</sup> The blame for the matricide goes to Apollo: "the guilt for this death belongs to Phoebus" (*El.* 1296-7).

### 4.3. THE AFTERMATH OF THE MATRICIDE IN *ORESTES*

The plot of Euripides' *Orestes* does not follow the ending of his *Electra*. The play takes up the story of Agamemnon's children after they have committed matricide. *Orestes* is a play written after *Electra*<sup>21</sup> whose myth is based on the old story but whose structure and dramatised events are entirely a Euripidean innovation: Orestes and Electra are condemned to death by the Argives, Menelaus their only hope is not willing to take the risks associated with helping them, Orestes fails to persuade the Argives not to punish them with the death penalty and Pylades, his devoted friend, conceives a plan for punishing Menelaus' neglect by killing Helen while Electra completes the plan by proposing to kidnap Hermione in order to force Menelaus to grant them freedom. However, Helen is miraculously rescued by Apollo who appears just on time to rescue Hermione as well; his speech restores the play to its mythical framework: Orestes is to be acquitted in Athens. He also ordains future marriages and predicts happiness even between former enemies (Orestes-Hermione). The play ironically undermines the traditional "necessity" of the matricide dramatised in *Electra*, according to which Agamemnon's children felt compelled by the law of retribution and by Apollo's command to kill their mother, since *Orestes* reveals the criminal nature of the murderers who attempt to commit other murders without remorse in order to save themselves.

Criticism of the play has concentrated on the unconventional resolution of the situations created among the characters and on the inconsistency of the characters' behaviour. According to H.D.F. Kitto the play "is a melodrama based on character-drawing and character imagined sensationally, not tragically".<sup>22</sup> And Anne Pippin Burnett points out that "Orestes, Electra, Pylades, Menelaus, Hermione and Helen are all incontinently rescued and like the undeserving chorus of cowardly beast-men they are rewarded with freedom and love and, in Helen's case, with immortality."<sup>23</sup> Christian Wolf concludes that "[T]he *Orestes* is filled with innovations which may surprise, but also

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<sup>21</sup> See p. 171, n. 2.

<sup>22</sup> H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, (London 1993) - first published in London 1939, p. 346.

<sup>23</sup> Anne Pippin Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (Oxford, 1971), p. 222.



disappoint, the expectations which traditional tragedy fulfilled. Part of its peculiar 'tragedy' is that tragedy is no longer possible,...".<sup>24</sup> The action of *Orestes* falls into two distinct parts which mark the transformation in the character of the two matricides and a transitional stage. The same division follows the treatment of the matricide. The extended prelude (*Or.*, 1-315) demonstrates the tenderness and love shared between brother and sister in a sick-bed tableau (*Or.*, 211-315), while the responsibility for the act of matricide is clearly attributed to Apollo's command - Orestes and Electra appear to have accepted his order unwillingly (*Or.*, 27-34, 120-1, 160-2, 191-3, 268-276, 285-293). The episode shared among Orestes, Menelaus and Tyndareus (*Or.*, 356-728) brings about the gradual exposure of Orestes' criminal nature. Pylades' monstrous plan to kill Helen (*Or.*, 1069-1176) exposes Electra's shameful character and she is the one who builds upon Pylades' ill-conceived plan by proposing the ambush of Hermione (*Or.*, 1176-1215).

Electra delivers the prologue of the play; her words betray an exhausted woman, in a painful situation. She gives some details of their family story and informs the audience of the present situation. Electra's first speech spoken in a low voice because Orestes is asleep is modest as she expresses her remorse for the matricide accusing Apollo on account of his admonition (*Or.*, 24-33). The same image is kept throughout the first part of the drama. Even in her encounter with Helen, she manages not to display her dislike for the woman responsible for the Trojan war; she even calls her "blessed" (*Or.*, 86). Only when she leaves the stage does Electra express her disgust at the way she clipped the ends of her hair so as not to destroy her beauty (*Or.*, 128-9).

Electra's introductory speech is interrupted by the unheralded entrance of Helen (*Or.*, 71), and her short exchange with Electra marks her only appearance during the play. The presentation of her character follows the reverse order of Orestes' and Electra's character development. While they indicate mutual love and deep concern for each other during the prelude (*Or.*, 1-315), Helen speaks with indifference when she blames Apollo's conviction for what Orestes and Electra now suffer (*Or.*, 76) and then she quickly drops the theme of the

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<sup>24</sup> Christian Wolf, "Orestes", in *Oxford Readings of Greek Tragedy*, edited by Erich Segal (London, 1983), p. 356.



matricide in order to concentrate on her outrageous suggestion to Electra that she should carry her offerings to Clytemnestra's tomb because she herself is afraid to face the Argive public (*Or.*, 94-105). Thus, she is portrayed as a vain, selfish creature who blames the gods for her conduct (*Or.*, 79). However, her love for her sister does not allow her to be characterised as a morally insensitive woman. On the contrary, she accedes to Electra's suggestion that Hermione should be sent to Clytemnestra's grave and entrusts her with a libation, a lock of hair and a prayer to Clytemnestra in which she asks her to be gracious to all the family, even to her children who killed them (*Or.*, 119-121).

During the second phase of the drama, the criminal nature of Orestes, Electra and Pylades is exposed, mainly through their plan to kill Helen, (*Or.*, 1069-1176) while Helen is portrayed very sympathetically. Her sisterly devotion is apparent in the words of the Phrygian slave who describes her as weaving a further offering for Clytemnestra when her nephew and Pylades approach her with the secret purpose of killing her (*Or.*, 1431-36). The same scene, described by the slave, also indicates how much Helen values kinship: she agrees to her nephew's plea for help, she agrees to move to the household hearth and finally she becomes an easy victim (*Or.*, 1438-51). Helen is characterised by vanity and by an ability to love. That image of her does not justify the youths' attempt to kill her: she appears as a defenseless, innocent victim while they are exposed as degenerates and criminals. What is more, Helen stands by her sister, never accusing her of Agamemnon's murder; she has the power to love and the understanding to forgive even those who killed her beloved sister. The murderous attempt against Helen recalls the scene of Clytemnestra's murder by her children but while in the case of Clytemnestra they had some motives, the attack on Helen is completely unjustified.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> According to Anne Pippin Burnett, "[T]he poet has made her [Helen's] deputation to the tomb remind us of Clytemnestra's actions at the beginning of the *Choephoroi* or the Sophoclean *Electra*, but the result of his comparison is to establish significant differences rather than any real likeness between the two queens of this house." Clytemnestra "tried to placate her own victim whom she feared" while Helen prays for the "re-establishment of good-will", *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200. However, there is nothing to suggest that the poet attacks Clytemnestra in this or any other scene of the play.



The chorus' first entrance is a musical exchange between Electra and her friends who have come to offer their support. Electra constantly urges them to keep their voice low so as not to disturb Orestes' sleep (*Or.*, 132-210). They clearly stand by Electra's side throughout the play. Their odes are relevant to the events dramatised in the play and at the same time distanced. The first *stasimon* (*Or.*, 316-355) is addressed to the Furies who have maddened Agamemnon's son, and to Apollo's shrine at Delphi they also implore Zeus to show mercy to Orestes. The second *stasimon* (*Or.*, 807-843) relates the story of the golden ram and Atreus' crime, and ends in describing with horror Clytemnestra's murder by her children. Although chorus stand by the matricides and are opposed to Helen and the race of women in general (*Or.*, 1153-5, 1361-65, 605-7), they express their opposition to the matricide which is condemned in every possible way throughout the play. Faithful to Electra they assist the murderers by assuming the role of guards to inform them if anyone appears (*Or.*, 1255-1322), and then they question the Phrygian slave about the events of Helen's murder (*Or.*, 1360-1505).

The scene following the awakening of Orestes (*Or.*, 211-315) is characterised by mutual tenderness and affection between brother and sister, in a way that makes them and their suffering immediately sympathetic to the audience. Electra struggles to relieve him from his burden,<sup>26</sup> and Orestes responds to her kindness with affection while assuming responsibility, together with Apollo, for the matricide (*Or.*, 284-7). As has been suggested, the "long sick-bed tableau is an evocation of mutual physical tenderness that has no parallel in surviving Attic tragedy."<sup>27</sup> Even more, Orestes, the matricide, expresses deep regret for his act and blames Apollo for the advice which drove him to his "godless" crime (*Or.*, 285-7). The first part of the play condemns the matricide throughout the eyes of the repentant murderers whose portrayal resists any identification with their later criminal image.

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<sup>26</sup> She brushes his hair away from his eyes and tries to clean them (*Or.*, 223-6), she helps him to stand and then lie down again (*Or.*, 231-8) and she bursts into tears when the avenging Furies attack him while she feels powerless to help (*Or.*, 253-279). As Orestes' eyes are whirling (*Or.* 253), he sees his mother (*Or.* 255) and the scene recalls the opening of *Eumenides* in which Clytemnestra herself rouses the Furies (*Eum.* 94-139).

<sup>27</sup> Ann Pippin Burnett, *op. cit.*, p. 197.



Orestes' modest and repentant image is kept throughout his first appeal to Menelaus (*Or.*, 356-469), who undertakes the role of the saviour while assuming the role of the suppliant. When he sees the old Tyndareus approaching, Orestes is dominated by shame and a sense of worthlessness (*Or.*, 459-469); he is still human to the audience, even a victim of a divine command. Menelaus however has been made an exceptionally bad character in this play as Aristotle in his *Poetics* pointed out (*Poet.* 1454a 29, 1461b 21). "He is a man of reason adrift in a drama of emotion: he lacks nerve, and when those about one expect blind unhesitating loyalty, lack of nerve is equated with lack of virtue."<sup>28</sup> Orestes' second appeal to Menelaus (*Or.*, 640-680) is based on the heroic code for repayment of a favour. Since Agamemnon helped him to restore Helen and sacrificed his daughter for that purpose, Menelaus ought to help Agamemnon's son out of his difficult situation. But Menelaus, who never spoke in favour of Orestes' act of matricide, did not possess any heroic stature and refrained from assisting Orestes because his own position was not secure in Argos. However his mean character does not justify Orestes' Electra's and Pylades' attempt against Helen and his innocent daughter.

Tyndareus supports the laws of civilised society although his views about what legal procedures Orestes ought to have undertaken after Agamemnon's murder have been characterised as "academic" since "in the traditional Orestes legend these procedures never came into play."<sup>29</sup> However, Tyndareus' presence in the play is important because he seems to have been deeply affected by his daughter's death. And although he repeatedly condemns her daughter's act of murdering her husband (*Or.*, 499, 505, 538), his fatherly affection is betrayed by his effort to blackmail Menelaus into supporting his nephew's conviction (*Or.*, 536-7, 622-9) and by his attempt to induce the Argives to sentence his grandchildren to death by stoning (*Or.*, 914-16). Moreover, he clearly states that his initial purpose of coming outside the palace was to lay some flowers on Clytemnestra's tomb (*Or.*, 610-1). His fatherly love is contrasted with Orestes' insulting words for his mother (*Or.*, 547 ff) which rouse his anger and turn him into a formidable opponent.

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<sup>28</sup> M. L. West, "Introduction to *Orestes*" in *Euripides' Orestes* (Aris & Phillips, 1987), p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 35.



The situation is reversed when Orestes confronts the old man (*Or.*, 544-604). He drops his earlier modesty and speaks like Apollo in the *Eumenides* when he boasts that a father is closer in blood than a mother, and that he acted to honour his father (*Or.*, 546-563, *Eum.*, 657-673). He declares for the first time that in one sense the murder of his mother was not a crime at all because he avenged his father (*Or.*, 547) and he refers to her crimes, her marital betrayal (*Or.*, 574-5). He even declares boldly that his murderous act should be valued by his compatriots, because women could not follow his mother's example of betrayal (*Or.*, 564-571). The same Aeschylean image of Orestes is kept when he speaks in the Argive assembly.<sup>30</sup> Orestes has lost all shame and boasts of his murder, trying to use it for his political advantage (*Or.*, 934-7). However, both of his pleas, to Tyndareus and to the people of Argos, have failed and have produced the opposite results. In the first case Orestes' arguments caused Tyndareus' fierce anger against him which resulted in trying to persuade the assembly to impose the death penalty upon him (*Or.*, 607-614, 915-6). In the second case the Argives were not moved by his speech and sentenced him and his sister to death (*Or.*, 944-9). Moreover, only one man from the assembly expressed his approval of Orestes' action (*Or.*, 917-930) in contrast to the court of Areopagus in *Eumenides*, half of whose jurors acquitted Orestes.<sup>31</sup> Orestes' Aeschylean image together with the act of matricide is condemned by the Euripidean play.

Pylades' appearance (*Or.*, 729) has a demoralising effect on both Orestes and Electra. He comes as a noble hero determined to share the fate of his friend and in the crucial moment when Orestes and Electra have summoned up all their strength and courage ready to commit suicide (*Or.*, 1060ff), he delivers his conspiratorial plan of murdering Helen and thus motivates their consequent murderous acts: Electra's plan to victimise Helen's daughter and thus escape death and Orestes' assent to the plan that carries the prospect of their salvation.

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<sup>30</sup> The events that take place there are related by a messenger to the chorus and Electra (*Or.*, 866-956).

<sup>31</sup> While in *Oresteia*, the Areopagus was established in order to judge cases of homicide after Orestes' murder of his mother, in Euripides' *Orestes*, according to Tyndareus' words, Orestes could have brought the case into court instead of taking the law in his own hands (*Or.*, 491-506). His argument is not refuted by Orestes and thus stands as an additional condemnation of the matricide.



Pylades' scheme is taken up with horrible enthusiasm by his companions. The revenge-plan is completed by a demonic and savage escape intrigue suggested by Electra whose image becomes dangerous and inhuman: they will seize Hermione, the guiltless daughter of Menelaus, as hostage, and they will threaten him with her murder if he does not help them to escape (*Or.*, 1191-1203). Electra is characterised by her proud brother as a woman "with a man's mind" (*Or.*, 1204-5) which recalls Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon* (*Ag.*, 11). What follows seems to be another parody and rebuttal of *Choephoroi* 456-510 as the three invoke the dead Agamemnon to help them with their plans (*Or.*, 1231-1240). But Helen is not Clytemnestra and Agamemnon has no reason to desire her murder by his children. Moreover, in the first episode Orestes pointed out that his father could never have advised him to kill his mother (*Or.*, 288-293); now he even accuses him of being responsible for his troubles (*Or.* 1227-8). The whole scene seems to be designed as a comment on the villainous nature of the murderers while its association with *Choephoroi* diminishes their motives in killing Clytemnestra and makes the murder appear the result of their evil character.

During the scene of Helen's attempted murder, Electra recalls her Sophoclean counterpart (*El.*, 1415) as she cries "kill her, butcher her, strike her" (*Or.*, 1302-3). Thus, her murderous and unjust screams recall the case of Clytemnestra's murder as well and Electra's participation into the matricide is condemned. Her image becomes more harsh, hostile and ugly as it is contrasted with Hermione's innocence: she is willing (*Or.*, 1329, 1331-1344) to help her cousins in any way she can and becomes their victim. But the three murderers fail even in their vengeance plot: the trembling Phrygian slave announces that Helen has escaped through the roof (*Or.*, 1495-6). Orestes bursts out in pursuit of the slave who begs him in a comic tone to be left alive (*Or.*, 1506-1526). As has been suggested, "this brief scene recapitulates the play. Orestes plays viciously at an indecision with which he is himself really afflicted. The slave in turn is a distorted reflection of the Orestes who had cried out for his life (*Or.*, 644ff., 677ff.), and whatever pathos those cries had expressed is not grotesque ridicule. And the cause of that ridicule is Orestes himself."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Christian Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 345.



According to M. L. West "nothing the conspirators say convicts them of a genuine readiness to kill the girl: it is only a threat, to be maintained as long and as convincingly as necessary to persuade Menelaus ... ."33 However, the development of the story betrays Orestes' resolution to kill Hermione; as Menelaus tries to rescue her, his dialogue with Orestes reaches an impasse and only by Apollo's divine epiphany is the situation relieved (*Or.*, 1596-8, 1617-24). At the same time, Apollo makes him fail once more (*Or.*, 1625). Apollo ensures the play's happy end but his words seem to return the fictitious story to its mythical framework. *Orestes* condemns the matricide by presenting the same three young people who took part in Clytemnestra's murder as degenerates and cold-blooded murderers. Electra is again presented as the woman who supports her father's cause, the male cause, while Hermione has a fresh innocence and Helen appears to value kinship and human feelings.

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33 M. L. West, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

#### **4.4. A DOMINANT HEROINE IN A FOLKLORE INTERPRETATION: EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA* BY THE THESSALIAN THEATRE**

##### **4.4.1. *The Primacy of Folk-Dancing***

The Municipal and Regional Theatre of Larissa (Thessalian Theatre) produced Euripides' *Electra* for the first time in 1988;<sup>34</sup> the play, directed by Kostas Tsianos, the artistic director of the theatre, was performed at the open theatre of Lycabettus (11-12 August). Because of its outstanding success, it was revived in the summer of 1989 for the Festival of Epidavros (the play was performed in the last weekend of the festival, 8-9 September) and in the summer of 1993, 24-25 July, the play was performed again at the theatre of Epidavros.<sup>35</sup> During the summers of 1988, 1989 and 1993 the play toured through Greece, almost always performed in open theatres. The director, basing the production on the rural setting of the myth, put together folk customs and habits of Macedonia as well as costumes, rituals, rhythms and the folk dancing of Asia Minor in a musical and thematic composition. The play was a critical success, as the following quotations indicate: "... the 'Thessalian Theatre' has achieved a successful approach to the field of Ancient Drama ... having created a performance of clear style, clear cut

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<sup>34</sup> The Thessalian Theatre, the first municipal theatre in Greece, was founded in 1975 by three Larissians (Larissa is the capital of Thessaly), Anna Vayena, Kostas Tsianos and Yorgos Ziakas, who established the Thessalian Society for Cultural Development. Since then its progress can be divided into three creative periods. During the first period, 1975-1983, the Thessalian Theatre under the artistic supervision of Anna Vayena produced 18 plays, only two of which belonged to the international repertoire, without receiving any significant subsidy by the state. And because of its financial problems, in 1983 the Thessalian theatre was transferred to the municipality of Larissa and it became the Municipal and Regional Theatre of Larissa. The second period, under the artistic supervision of Kostas Tsianos ended in 1991 after producing 25 plays, three of which belonged to the field of ancient theatre, Aristophanes' *Wealth* (1986), Euripides' *Electra* (1988) and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (1990). Thessalian Theatre's third period began in 1991 with the same artistic director and it continues its successful progress.

<sup>35</sup> The performance of the 25th of July 1993 is discussed in the present chapter. For a general discussion of Tsianos' work as a director see "Appendix A", pp. 253-255.



goals and vision as well as a successful interpretative view point and interesting performance result."<sup>36</sup> "Performances of Ancient Drama which combine such a clear rich vision with intensity of imagination and the sensitivity to back it up are rare nowadays."<sup>37</sup>

Kostas Tsianos bases his interpretation of the play on his experience with the folk dancing group of Dora Stratou and he brings the discipline and proportion of the folk dances of modern Greece into the movement of the chorus as well as of the other performers.<sup>38</sup> According to the director and choreographer the production aims at offering new solutions to the problem of staging ancient tragedy by drawing from the aesthetics of the modern Greek popular tradition. "Folk dances and ceremonials still exist today whose ritualistic and magical-religious character is vigorously preserved. Compressed emotions, symmetry, austerity, the stark, clear line are all characteristics of our folk dances which find their equivalent in the principles of the ancient theatre. There are written descriptions in ancient texts (Homer, Plutarch, Xenophon), representations of the dance on Ancient pottery and on Byzantine frescoes which bear witness to the connection and to the continuing link which may exist between the dances of the past and those of the present."<sup>39</sup> The dancing is co-ordinated with the music composed by Nikos Xydakis, the fifteen-syllable verse of Christos Samouilidis' translation and the folk Thessalian dresses of the chorus women designed by Yorgos Ziakas. The success of the production, however, owes a great deal to the tragic actress Lydia Koniordou whose vigorous and solid acting as well as her vocal quality made up an

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<sup>36</sup> Iro Vakalopoulou, "*Electra* in the Forest Theatre", *Thessaloniki* 5/8/1988. The part quoted was translated into English in the programme of the 1993 production of the play, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Eleni Varopoulou, "A Folklore *Electra*", in *Vima* 21/8/1988. The part quoted was translated into English in the programme of the 1993 production of the play, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Dora Stratou's life had been devoted to the preservation and spreading of Greek, folklore dancing tradition. The Thessalian theatre's production of *Electra* was dedicated to her memory (she died the winter of 1987).

<sup>39</sup> Kostas Tsianos, "Notes on the Performance", published in the 1993 programme of the production, p. 15.

unrefined *Electra* marked by deprivation, humiliation, hatred and by a determination to take revenge.<sup>40</sup>

Christos Samouilidis' translation is used in all three productions of the play.<sup>41</sup> According to the translator, the "political verse, the fifteen-syllable, has been chosen because it is our folklore and national verse". Moreover, "the plays of Cretan dramaturgy, together with many other poems written by our national and traditional poets used the fifteen-syllable verse".<sup>42</sup> With regard to *Electra* the fifteen-syllable verse fits "the open-air, rural setting as well as the character of most of the play's *personae*".<sup>43</sup> The result is a faithful, powerful and clear translation whose dramatic qualities contribute a great deal to the production's outstanding success. In addition, Samouilidis' translation renders skillfully the play's dramatic culmination and it describes all the emotional forces that define the characters' reactions to events and situations. Its poetic force renders the extent of *Electra*'s hatred ("because my mother the plague, Tyndareus' daughter,/ threw me out of

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<sup>40</sup> Lydia Koniordou had the role of *Electra* in all three productions of the play. The other key figures who held the same role in all three productions of the play were Yiannis Thomas as the peasant husband of *Electra*, Vassilis Kolovos as tutor and Klimentia Pierrakou as *Clytemnestra*.

<sup>41</sup> He comes from Pontus, the Greek populated area around the Black Sea. His main research and literary work is devoted to the history and customs of the Greeks of Pontus: e.g. "The History of Pontiac Greeks" ("I Istoría tou Pontiakou Ellinismou"), 1992; "The Folklore, Traditional Theatre of Pontus" ("To Laiko Paradosiako Theatro tou Pontou"), 1980; "Karamanites" (1965, novel); "Black Sea" ("Mavri Thalassa" - novel), 1970; "Generation of the Borders" ("Akritiki Genia" - novel), 1972. He has also written theatrical plays: "Ten One-Act Plays" ("Deka Monoprakta"), 1976; "Three Plays" ("Tria Theatrika"), 1977; "Two Plays" ("Dyo Theatrika"), 1978. His translation of Euripides' *Electra* written for the Thessalian Theatre's production has been published together with a prologue and some useful comments by Govostis Publications (Athens, 1990). He also translated Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris* for the Thessalian Theatre's production of 1990 (directed by Kostas Tsianos as well). Finally, he reconstructed *Pytine* the last comedy of Kratinus, the ancient comedian.

<sup>42</sup> See Christos Samouilidis, "A Few Words for the Translation" in *Euripides' Electra* (Athens, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



my home in favour of her man/"),<sup>44</sup> in contrast to Clytemnestra's apparent regret, expressed in tender words: "I shall show you understanding my child because I do not feel happy for what I have done".<sup>45</sup>

Yorgos Ziakas designed the simple, rural setting of the production (see Figure 33).<sup>46</sup> The central building represents the humble cottage of the farmer which is a tiny hut made of reeds whose central opening stands for the entrance door. The two large reedy benches, left and right of the opening, are usually occupied by the women of the chorus, when their participation in the dramatised events is limited to the role of observers. The picture of the rural house is completed by the habitual well represented in the centre of the orchestra by a rectangular construction made of reeds, while the earthen water-pot makes the association more apparent. Throughout the performance Clytemnestra's carriage stands on the left side of the well.

The women of the chorus are dressed in the traditional Thessalian heavy but elegant "sigounia" (elaborate vests), their heads are covered by scarves which form a cap on the top and they are carrying their big white tambourines (see Figure 34). Electra's dress however, is a very simple, long, loose, beige garment (she also wears a black shawl on top of the dress) in contrast to Clytemnestra's very elaborate appearance characterised by a long purple coat which reveals a golden embroidered black and red patterned dress. A black tiara and a golden diadem completes her appearance (compare Figures 35 and 36). The male characters of the play are all dressed in the same way: black trousers held by wide belts and black long winter coats.

Nikos Xydakis renders the sounds of traditional instruments such as pontiac lyre, Cretan lyre, "sazi", "kanonaki" and "nei" in a musical composition which best fits the folklore interpretation of *Electra* rooted to the subsoil of a rural civilisation.<sup>47</sup> The best moments of the music are

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<sup>44</sup> Γιατί η πανούκλα η μάνα μου, η κόρη του Τυνδάρεω/ με πέταξε απ' το σπιτικό για χάρη του αντρός της: (*Electra* 60-61 in Samouilidis' translation)

<sup>45</sup> Θα δείξω κατανόηση γιατί κι εγώ παιδί μου,/ δε χαίρομαι τόσο πολύ γι' αυτά που έχω πράξει: (*Electra* 1105-1106 in Samouilidis' translation)

<sup>46</sup> For more information about his work as a designer see 3.3.1 "Areas of Concern in *Amphi-Theatre's Electra*", p.141, n. 44.

<sup>47</sup> Nikos Xydakis is a well known composer in Greece whose music is based on traditional instruments. He has put into music some poems of Dionysios Solomos,

when it accompanies the traditional Thessalian dancing of the women of the chorus with their tambourines during the choral odes, when it emphasises Electra's suffering through hatred and jealousy in her monody (*El.*, 112-166), and when it accentuates the epic deliverance of the messenger (*El.*, 774-858) and immediately after, the shared joy of Electra and of the women of the chorus (*El.*, 880-900).

#### **4.4.2. A Truthful Desire for Revenge**

Since the director's effort is concentrated on creating a contemporary expression of some principles of Greek drama based on the use of chorus and dancing, the theme of women's representation is pushed into the background. Lydia Koniordou as Electra dominates over the more human and indulgent Clytemnestra of Klimenia Pierrakou but despite the emphasis on Electra's implacable hatred and her revengeful machinations, the actress conveys powerfully the human aspects of the heroine; apart from her words, her whole body reacts to the dramatised events as she moves her limbs in a dance which corresponds to her mood according to events. Thus, she appears truthful to her motives and she easily obtains the audience's sympathy and support. At the same time, Clytemnestra is portrayed as the person responsible for her daughter's misery and, although her words indicate a human character who repents and forgives, her fine clothes and haughty gestures emphasise the vanity which overshadows her other qualities. Electra's devotion to her father's memory becomes dominant while the other Euripidean touches of her egocentricity, her impiety towards a dead body, her disrespect of her mother are pushed aside by what appears to be her main motive: revenge for her father's murder and hatred against her mother.

The music of the Pontiac lyre signals the start of the performance and is followed by the entrance of all the actors and actresses. The procession is led by the actor who is to become Electra's farmer-husband. The women of the chorus carry the coats of the male characters and some beautiful robes; five of the women help the play's male characters (Auturgos, Orestes, Pylades, Messenger, Tutor) to assume their roles by assisting them with their coats and the others leave the robes on the carriage and on the benches. Then the farmer

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the Greek national poet and he has collaborated with well known Greek singers in his recordings.



(Yiannis Thomas) occupies the stage and delivers the introductory prologue with seriousness and sincerity, even when the text allows some comic touches (*El.*, 43-4, 52-3). The director has adopted the same approach regarding the farmer throughout the play. The farmer also takes in the role of a "unifying" character since he remains almost continuously on stage even as a mute character: he returns with the messenger who announces Orestes' successful killing of Aegisthus (*El.*, 760) and he accompanies his deliverance by playing the drums, he leaves with him (*El.*, 858) to return with Orestes and Pylades, the victors, and the dead body of Aegisthus (*El.*, 880), he witnesses the episode dramatised between Electra and Clytemnestra (*El.*, 987-1148), the chorus's fourth *stasimon* (*El.*, 1147-65) and sits on the side bench until all the characters have left the stage. Then, he enters his cottage, pulls down the cloth which the murderers hang on the door after Clytemnestra's murder<sup>48</sup> and returns to his former position, sitting on the bench. The farmer assumes the identity of an observer whose honesty and tenderness, apparent in his monologue (*El.*, 1-53), in his caring concern for Electra (*El.*, 64-81, 341-5) and in his wholehearted hospitality to the strangers (*El.*, 357-363), are contrasted with the raw hatred of Electra and Orestes and with their inability to understand and forgive. His presence, almost throughout the play, makes the contrast even sharper and the difference between him and the murderers becomes dominant. Moreover, the tranquillity of the last scene with the farmer sitting on the bench outside his cottage signifies that for simple, everyday people, the adventures of their leaders are only a short episode which upsets their lives for a while before they return to their former routine.

Electra enters the scene (*El.*, 54) barefooted and exhausted, with slow and weary steps. Her first words, however, are powerfully expressed and indicate a woman with iron will who inflicts misery upon herself in order to make clear to the gods "Aegisthus' insults" to her.<sup>49</sup> But her harsh words become tender when she addresses the caring farmer (*El.*, 67-76) and give an indication of her potential for love. Her next appearance just before the *parodos* builds on our sympathy since she sings her monody (*El.*, 112-166) to the accompaniment of drums and dances. The heroine expresses her anguish over her father's

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<sup>48</sup> See p. 200.

<sup>49</sup> τις προσβολές του Αιγίσθου: (*Electra* 58 in Samouilidis' translation).

murder by the treacherous Clytemnestra whom she hates (*El.*, 116-124, 143-166), her concern for her exiled brother (*El.*, 130-139) and her deep sorrow for her own present misery (*El.*, 112-4, 118-121, 146-150) by using, in addition to her voice, her bodily movements, while her sighs indicate the sincerity of her emotions. Her excessive preoccupation with mourning is effectively depicted when she sings "I scratch and flay this face of mine",<sup>50</sup> and she strikes her feet on the ground, claps her hands and then falls down completely exhausted.

In this production, the chorus of women holds a central part mainly because of the importance of folk-dancing: "...the girls of the Thessalian Theatre evolve into simple, dynamic and expressive forms in their dancing which undoubtedly have the authenticity of folk expression".<sup>51</sup> The women of the chorus occupy the stage mainly during the *stasima* but when the other main characters engage in conversation, they leave the orchestra space and sit on the benches either holding their white tambourines in their lap or placing them next to their feet. With Electra they have a more personal relationship than with the other characters: they share her joy when she welcomes her brother home by singing and dancing to the light of the candles they hold (*El.*, 585-595) and they participate in the invocation (*El.*, 677-684) to the dead Agamemnon by assuming Electra's worshipping movements (they kneel and strike their hands on the ground as well). However, they do not display affection to the heroine by approaching or touching her and when she insults Aegisthus' dead body, they turn their backs to her and the audience (*El.*, 914-956), while Electra displays all her deep hatred intermixed with jealousy, stretching her hand to touch him sexually.<sup>52</sup> As they enter the stage singing the *parodos* (*El.*, 167-212) and dancing they offer Electra robes but she forcefully rejects their presents. They dance the first *stasimon* (*El.*, 432-485) in pairs according to a traditional Thessalian set of movements performed to music while the second one (*El.*, 699-746) is shared between the leader of the chorus, who delivers half of it seated on what will be Clytemnestra's carriage (see Figure 36), and the other women who sing and dance the other half. In place of the

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<sup>50</sup> το πρόσωπό μου αυτό, το γρατσουνώ, το γδέρνω: (*Electra* 150 in Samouilidis' translation)

<sup>51</sup> Theodoros Kritikos, "*Electra* of the Thessalian Theatre" ("I *Electra* tou Thessaliku Theatrou"), *Eleftherotypia* 27/8/1988.

<sup>52</sup> However, the theme of jealousy is not further explored by the director.



third *stasimon* (*El.*, 859-878) there is a song of joy accompanied by dancing, shared between the women and Electra, praising her brother's success in killing Aegisthus. As Clytemnestra enters the cottage to be killed, the women speak the fourth *stasimon*, while the white scarves they hold in their hands indicate their agreement with the matricide and their relief. The director's unsympathetic portrayal of Clytemnestra is thus strengthened even further.

Orestes (Dimitris Daktylas) is depicted as an indecisive character who acts under the influence of his powerful sister: he enters the scene (*El.*, 82) accompanied by his mute friend Pylades (Makis Destounis) and two other men who always accompany them like bodyguards, and wanders around full of fear and suspicion; when he finds the courage to face his sister (*El.*, 220), although without revealing his identity, he speaks in a low, timid but tender voice in contrast to Electra's powerfully emotional articulation (*El.*, 220-338); during the recognition scene contrived by Agamemnon's old servant (*El.*, 555-585), Orestes remains firm while Electra approaches him with slow, almost ritualistic movements and her body trembles with emotion; he anxiously asks questions of the old servant who conceives the plan for the first murder (*El.*, 619-645), while Electra in a harsh voice, full of hatred, dictates her plan for Clytemnestra's murder (*El.*, 647-663); he retreats when he sees Clytemnestra approaching, covering his face so as not to see her and his body is shaken, but finally he follows Electra's orders to commit the murder (*El.*, 63-987).

One of the performance's most powerful scenes is the one shared among Electra, the messenger (Nikos Arvanitis) and the chorus (*El.*, 747-858). The scene portrays Electra's deeply rooted hatred against Aegisthus and her life-long devotion to the prospect of avenging her father by murdering her mother and Aegisthus. The messenger delivers his words concerning Orestes' victory and at the same time dances what seems to be a wild war dance, to the rhythmic accompaniment of drums played by Electra's farmer husband. At times the women of the chorus join him while Electra moves her body passionately and her deep, uncontrollable hatred against Aegisthus and her consequent relief at his killing is depicted in the spasms of her face. The episode is indicative of the favourable treatment of homicide, which is described as a victory and seen through Electra's eyes. Thus, Electra's consequent action of crowning Orestes as a victor (*El.*, 880) is not ironically viewed

but is portrayed seriously as the necessary next step appropriate to a hero who delivered himself and his sister from a miserable, unwanted situation.

Clytemnestra does not enter the stage as an individual character, but is a member of the chorus who assumes her new identity in front of the audience. The other women help her to stand on the chariot while two Trojan girls, elaborately dressed with heavy garments, stand behind her, ready to assist the queen when in need (see Figure 36). Electra's former husband on the right waits passionately to witness the scene between mother and daughter. As they confront each other Clytemnestra stands haughtily on the carriage in her fine clothes, while Electra kneels in a prostrate position (see Figure 35). However, the theme of wealth and poverty is not exploited by the director, since Electra wears a simple but attractive, beige dress and her long hair beautifully arranged in a plait. Clytemnestra's first words (*El.*, 998-1003) are expressed arrogantly even when she refers to the loss of her daughter, Iphigeneia (*El.*, 1002-4). The way she speaks in her own defence (*El.*, 1011-1050) is calm and self-assertive; but when she exclaims: "Therefore, I killed my husband and I took the way/ I could and I went where his enemies were",<sup>53</sup> she has an expression of satisfaction and wild joy. The way she faces Electra's accusations, expressed in a modest tone, is condescending and her voice does not betray hurt or her expressions show regret (*El.*, 105-6, 1114-5). Electra, without any fear or hesitation, accuses her mother of murdering her father in cold blood, easily refuting all her arguments (*El.*, 1060-1099). At the end of the episode, Clytemnestra returns to the purpose of her visit asking Electra in a calm, business-like voice about the details of her situation (*El.*, 1123-1138). Tsianos' treatment of Clytemnestra does not do justice to her as he does not emphasise her human aspects. At the same time Electra's character appears to be consistent and her motives powerful and serious.

Clytemnestra's murder brings about the change in character of Electra who now appears on stage (*El.*, 1177) in a mournful condition having regretted her exhortation to Orestes to kill their mother and her participation to the murder (*El.*, 181-3). Brother and sister have their

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<sup>53</sup> Θανάτωσα τον άντρα μου, λοιπόν, πήρα το δρόμο/ που μπόρεσα και πήγα εκεί που βρίσκονται οι εχθροί του! (*Electra* 1046-1047 in Samouilidis' translation).



faces covered with red scarves as if to show that they do not want to face the world any more. Lydia Koniordou's performance as a repentant daughter is very convincing: she cries in pain as the chorus accuses her of being responsible for the murder because she persuaded her unwilling brother (*El.*,1204-5); and her whole body shivers in despair as she approaches the door of the cottage with slow, ritualistic movements, sharing with Orestes the cloth in order to cover their mother's dead body which they subsequently hang upon the door. Clytemnestra's body never appears on stage but the cloth is a powerful reminder of it. The director clearly condemns matricide but the passion with which his heroine denounces it matches her former consistency in hating her mother, and therefore reinforces her sincerity in everything she does, a characteristic that makes her sympathetic to the audience. Moreover, Clytemnestra's portrayal, her arrogant appearance and her indifference, does not justify the modest words the dramatist has written for her and her whole image seems to be unsympathetically presented.

The divine epiphany takes place on the cottage roof (*El.*,1238) and Castor (Christos Ninis) orders and predicts the future life of Electra, Orestes, Pylades and Auturgos (*El.*, 1238-1291). Before the final *exodos* however, a powerful farewell scene is played out between Orestes and Electra: she tries to approach him crawling on all fours; then she falls down and drags herself towards him, urging him to embrace her for the last time (*El.*,1321-4). As she leaves the stage, Electra gives the impression of a passionate woman who acts according to her beliefs and to her standards of what is right and wrong. Her passion stems from her moral standards according to which Clytemnestra's homicide has to be punished paradigmatically. Thus Tsianos' interpretation of the heroine resembles Evengelatos' approach to the Sophoclean Electra.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See 3.3. "An Honourable Daughter", pp. 140-148.

## 4.5. "THE TRAGIC FACE OF FATE":<sup>55</sup> ORESTES OF THE THEATRICAL GROUP MYTHOS DIRECTED BY KOSTAS BAKAS

### 4.5.1. *An Unsuccessful Cooperation*

In the summer of 1992, Kostas Karras, the actor who was to play the role of Orestes, formed a theatre company under the name Mythos in order to produce Euripides' *Orestes*. The play was performed at the Herodeion theatre in Athens on the 26th and 27th of August 1992.<sup>56</sup> Kostas Karras, a well known commercial actor in Greece, was assisted in his task by an experienced director in the field of ancient drama, Kostas Bakas, with whom he had collaborated in the National Theatre's production of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (Herodeion, summer of 1987). The modern Greek translation chosen by the director was written by Tasos Roussos, a contemporary translator of ancient Greek plays, published by Kaktos.<sup>57</sup> Andreas Sarantopoulos of the National

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<sup>55</sup> See Kostas Bakas' press conference before the play's performance published in *Eleftherotypia* of 25/8/1992 under the title "What the Director, Kostas Bakas says about the Play and the Production" ("Ti lei gia tin parastasi ke to ergo o skinothetis Kostas Bakas").

<sup>56</sup> The discussion of the production is based on the videotaped performance of the 26th of August. For a general discussion of Bakas' work as a director see "Appendix A", pp. 232-234.

<sup>57</sup> Tasos Roussos is a well known translator of ancient Greek drama whose translations of tragedy have been published by Kaktos publications between 1991-1992. Because his translations are vivid, energetic, vigorous and high-spirited, they have often been used for theatre productions. A short account of his translations should include his translation of the *Oresteia* produced in 1972 by the National Theatre and directed by Takis Mouzenidis, of *Philoctetes* directed by Alexis Minotis for the National Theatre (1977), of *Persians* directed by Minotis for the Experimental Theatre (1984), of Euripides' *Suppliants* directed by Kostas Bakas for the State Theatre of Northern Greece (1985), and of *Seven Against Thebes* also directed by Kostas Bakas for the National Theatre -with Kostas Karras in the main role- (1987). He has also collaborated with Spyros A. Evangelatos by providing the translation for many of his productions. Among them we should include Seneca's *Medea* (for the State Theatre of Northern Greece, 1979), Menander's *The Arbitration* (for the Amphi-Theatre, 1980) and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (for the Amphi-Theatre, 1983).



Theatre designed the costumes and scenery. Both Sophia Spyratou, responsible for the play's basic choreography, and Pericles Koukkos who composed the production's melodramatic music came from the National Theatre as well. However, the result was unfavourably received by the critics mainly because of the production's concentration upon the founder of the theatrical company, Kostas Karras: "Kostas Karras ... joined together a company and went to Herodeion to personify the tragic Orestes without any doubt or hesitation. [Kostas Bakas] ... was in a position to secure a well organised and presentable ... performance."<sup>58</sup> "...[Mythos] corresponded to Kostas Karas' desire to play Orestes ..." and "Kostas Bakas struggled to reconcile the irreconcilable".<sup>59</sup> The unfavourable reviews exempted the director whose approach and efforts to produce a worthy artistic result were underlined. He was not held responsible for approaching Orestes as a hero or for his insistence on building the performance around Karras-Orestes whose actions and reactions to the events were over-emphasised.

The director's approach to the play is plain and realistic; a low-key production which leaves the unrealistic end of the play out of any interpretative scheme. According to the director, "Euripides drives his protagonist to a complete impasse on purpose because he wants... to outline his morals which are not exalted any more... . The hero is in direct danger of losing his life and he reacts not as a tragic person but as an ordinary human being: with his instinct. He is driven to actions which are not heroic at all. In his effort to avoid death, he does not hesitate to use blackmail. He acts as a terrorist."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Bakas finds some similarities between Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian war and our contemporary world because in both eras "all values have collapsed... .The same tragic human face which devastated the house of

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His translation of Euripides' *Electra* was used by Yorgos Michaelidis in his production of the play for the National Theatre (1986).

<sup>58</sup> Thodoros Kritikos, "The Deification of an Adulteress" ("I Apotheosis mias Moichalidas"), *Eleftherotypia* 6/9/1992.

<sup>59</sup> Kostas Georgousopoulos, "Unnecessary and Purposeless" ("Peritta ke Askopa"), *Nea* 22/9/1992.

<sup>60</sup> See Kostas Bakas press-conference before the play's performance, published in *Avgi* of 25/8/1992 under the title "Orestes: the Tragedy of a Hero" ("Orestes: I Tragodia enos iroa").

the Atreids, ruined Euripides' world and has reached our modern world almost intact."<sup>61</sup> In his interpretation the director emphasises the role of Apollo, whom he considers "morally responsible for [Clytemnestra's] murder" and whose statue dominates the stage.<sup>62</sup>

Tasos Roussos' translation is in prose but the words chosen contain musical power and vigorous rhythms with explicit ability to render all the vibrations of the human soul.<sup>63</sup> It is faithful to the original text and its meaning. The translator has pointed out in the introduction to his translation that the central heroes attract our sympathy because with them, "the human and respectable bonds of brotherly love and faithful friendship are accentuated".<sup>64</sup> Like the director he sympathises with Orestes and Electra; he is sensitive towards their suffering which forces them "to survive in every way they could even if they had to blackmail" those indifferent to their case.<sup>65</sup> Thus Roussos describes with tender words the affection between brother and sister: "but now you wretched go inside/ rest your body for a while/ and your vigilant eye, have something/ to eat and wash your hair."/;<sup>66</sup> and he chooses mild words to bring out the youngsters' monstrous decision to take their revenge upon Helen and the innocent Hermione: "I wish I could see/ salvation coming out of the blue/ and I wish by committing the crime we may save ourselves;/ what I desire is beautiful, and the mouth/ utters it with flying words, spreading in my soul unwasted joy."<sup>67</sup>

Andreas Sarantopoulos,<sup>68</sup> the designer of setting and costumes, created a grey, dull scene which gave the actresses and actors the

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Tasos Roussos, *Euripides' Orestes* (Athens 1992).

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* p.22.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p.23.

<sup>66</sup> Μα τώρα, δόλια, πήγαινε στο σπίτι,/ ξάπλωσε λίγο για να ξεκουράσεις/ τα ξάγρυπνά σου μάτια, βάλε κάτι/ στο στόμα σου και λούσε το κορμί σου: (*Orestes* 301-303 in Roussos' translation).

<sup>67</sup> κι άμποτε να φαινόταν/ ανέλπιστα από κάπου σωτηρία,/ που, κάνοντας το φόνο, να σωθούμε;/ μακάρι; ό,τι ποθώ είναι ωραίο, το στόμα/ το λέει με λόγια φτερωτά, σκορπώντας/ ανέξοδη χαρά μες στην ψυχή μου: (*Orestes* 1172-1176 in Roussos' translation).

<sup>68</sup> He also designed the scenery for the 1987 National Theatre's production of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (Herodeion), directed by Kostas Bakas, the



opportunity to concentrate on the psychology of their roles according to the director's approach. In the centre of the orchestra of Herodeion, three or four steps lead to the palace which is denoted by long grey curtains hanging in a rectangular shape; these curtains enclose two other purple curtains, the actual entrance door to the palace of Atreids. Slightly to the left, from the audience's point of view, in a couch, covered by a black blanket, Orestes escapes his ill conscience, his mother's Furies, by sinking into a deep sleep. The statue of Apollo with his lyre on the right completes the plain and simple scenery (see Figure 37).

The costumes are more elaborate than the scenery and correspond to the attributes of each of the characters, to their social position and to their present status without referring to any particular historical period. Thus, the unshaven and barefooted protagonist wears black trousers and a black top while his assistant and attendant, Electra wears a long, black, loose dress which is embellished discreetly with lace in front - her hair is cut short; she also wears heavy make-up on her eyes which makes her appearance very imposing. The third in the company, Pylades has the appearance of a young warrior with high boots and a gun hung from his belt; his clothes are beige and khaki with a purple mantle above. The twelve women of the chorus wear long brown dresses and their heads are covered by long beige scarves. The young Hermione has long curly hair and she wears a simple, long, grey dress. Helen's appearance though is very elaborate with her long yellow dress, embellished with jewellery while on her head she wears an imposing golden crown made of snakes. Menelaus, the king-warrior wears a golden cuirass on top of a short purple dress and a long black mantle. Old Tyndareus is simply dressed in a long, grey pleated dress, while his golden diadem indicates his royal origin. The comic, fat and bold Phrygian slave is dressed in Anatolian luxury with a long, light green dress covered by a golden mantle; he wears make-up and earrings. The divine epiphany is dominated by golden and white-coloured dresses: Apollo is accompanied by Helen, on his right, and other two figures who each carry a golden sun as emblems.

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scenery and the costumes for the 1989 National Theatre's production of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* (Epidavros), also directed by Bakas and the scenery for the National Theatre's production of Aristophanes' *Knights* (Epidavros, 1991) directed by Bakas.

Sophia Spyratou's choreography, applied principally to the chorus, seems very restrained at the beginning as the women wander around Orestes' bed.<sup>69</sup> However, it becomes more vigorous as the women hear Helen's death cry from inside, when they start running and striking the floor with their feet (*Or.*, 1294-1322). The same reaction follows Electra's and Hermione's exit (*Or.*, 1353-1368): the women dance in frenzy, even rolling on the ground. Orestes' movements are awkward as a whole: he runs around the scene when stricken by his mother's Furies and then stands on the bed and with clumsy movements tries to use his bow in order to chase them away (*Or.*, 255ff and 268-279); when he is faced with Tyndareus he hides himself behind the curtains (*Or.*, 469); at the end, as he threatens to kill Hermione on the palace floor, his movements lack any control (*Or.*, 1567ff).

Pericles Koukkos' melodramatic music for the production is dominated by the flute during the *parodos* (*Or.*, 140-210), by mournful bells as the two friends leave for the people's assembly and the women of the chorus occupy the scene (*Or.*, 807-843), by flute again as Electra mourns her fate after the messenger's speech (*Or.*, 960-1012), by drums as Electra and the entrapped Hermione leave the stage to the chorus (*Or.*, 1353-1368) and by drums again when Orestes threatens to kill Hermione and burn the palace (*Or.*, 1596ff).<sup>70</sup> The vocal training of the actresses and actors aimed at the revelation of their psychological world; it was successfully accomplished in Dimitra Chatoupi as Electra and in the chorus women, but Karras as Orestes was not helped by his over sentimental voice, which at times sounded exaggerated.

#### 4.5.2. A Romanticised View of Orestes

"*Orestes* is based on two tragic *personae*, Orestes and Electra. The first one is the tragic face of fate and the second, the tragic face of

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<sup>69</sup> Sophia Spyratou has choreographed almost all the National Theatre's productions of ancient drama directed by Kostas Bakas: Aristophanes' *Clouds* (Epidavros, 1984), Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai* (Epidavros 1989), Aeschylus' *Persians* (Epidavros, 1990). She also choreographed the State Theatre of Northern Greece's production of Euripides' *Suppliant Women* (Epidavros, 1985) directed by Bakas as well.

<sup>70</sup> Pericles Koukkos has also composed the music for the National Theatre's production of Aeschylus' *Persians* (Epidavros, 1990) directed by Bakas.



passion."<sup>71</sup> This romantic view of the play marks Bakas' approach to it. Orestes is presented as a sympathetic victim whose misery was inflicted upon him by the god Apollo; his statue on the stage is a reminder of his moral responsibility. The affectionate scene between him and Electra (*Or.*, 211-315) is emphasised by tender embraces and affectionate gestures; when he sees Tyndareus (Nikos Galiatsos), ashamed and out of his deep respect for him, he hides himself behind the curtains like a child (*Or.*, 466-480); his emotionally charged voice and his desperate gestures in his encounter with Menelaus (Sophocles Peppas - see Figure 39) attract the audience's sympathy (*Or.*, 630-728); apart from Pylades (Stathis Kakkavas),<sup>72</sup> and Electra, his sister and attendant, the women of the chorus stand on his side. This is apparent in their maenadic frenzy when Orestes and Pylades are occupied in Helen's murder and Hermione's capture as a hostage (*Or.*, 1353-1368); even the herald (Vasilis Kolovos) suffers and bows down from pain as he describes Orestes' and Electra's condemnation to death by the assembly (*Or.*, 943-956). Orestes is not depicted by the director as the matricide, ready to repeat his mother's murder on Helen and to kill in cold blood an innocent young girl who runs to their help.

Although Clytemnestra does not play an active part in *Orestes*, her presence through the other characters' references to her is dominant. Moreover, her role is in a way taken by her sister Helen who stands for Clytemnestra and shares her destiny, since Orestes is about to kill her. With regard to her treatment, we must point out two characteristic moments of the production: the first is when Electra desperately screams: "she killed, we killed her" ("θανάτωσε, τη θανατώσαμε") that referring to line 197 of the original ("έκανες, έθανες" = "you did the deed, you died") which is more general since her murderers are not revealed and avoids direct accusation of her for Agamemnon's murder. However, the phrase adopted differs from Roussos' translation as well which reads "you killed, they killed you" ("θανάτωσες, σε θανάτωσαν") which is milder than the one delivered but more charged than the original. The particular choice of the third person ("θανάτωσε") of the verb "θανατώ-

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<sup>71</sup> Kostas Bakas' press conference before the play's performance, published in *Eleftherotypia* of 25/8/1992 under the title "What the Director Kostas Bakas Says about the Play and the Production".

<sup>72</sup> Pylades' role is reduced in this production to a minor character in comparison to his role in *Agamemnon's Children*.

νω" ("I cause death, I kill") for Clytemnestra and of the first person plural of the same verb ("θανατώσαμε") for Orestes and Electra by the director indicates a hostile approach towards Clytemnestra's memory; the second moment comes when Orestes with a voice full of hatred accuses his mother of betraying her husband and emphasises the importance of the father (*Or.*, 551-596). His passionate anger and violent gestures indicate his deep belief in what he says, which is not just an argument aimed at winning Tyndareus to his side. Moreover, the director in the press conference before the play's performance pointed out that in the play "there is a conflict - as in the *Oresteia* - between the old and the new, patriarchy and matriarchy, positive and negative".<sup>73</sup>

Helen's (Eleni Kiskyra) appearance on stage is brief but impressive. However, she is treated unsympathetically since the director emphasises only her obsession with her appearance and makes her vain and indifferent to suffering. Even when she expresses her sympathy towards Orestes' and Electra's suffering (*Or.*, 88-90, 121) and her love for her sister (*Or.*, 77-8, 117-123) her voice is false and ironic. Hermione (Peggy Trikalioti) is presented as an innocent girl who obeys her mother (*Or.*, 112-125) and cares for her cousins but her light steps and soft voice compared to Electra's imposing appearance (*Or.*, 1313-1348) make her look more silly than innocent, and thus the barbarism of the three is less shocking.

Dimitra Chatoupi in the role of Electra conveys tenderness towards her brother, decisiveness and intelligence in the rescue plan and hatred towards Helen. As she delivers the words of the prologue (*Or.*, 1-70), she stands still and frightened and only when she refers to Helen's homecoming (*Or.*, 56-70) does her face become wild with hatred. Her relationship with the chorus women is affectionate since they always stand by her, offering their unreserved help: as the *parodos* ends,<sup>74</sup> Electra falls and screams desperately but three of the women approach and embrace her; when the messenger announces the people's decision to put Electra and Orestes to death, Electra kneels and mourns bitterly (*Or.*, 960-1012). The women kneel as well, covering their faces with their scarves as an indication of mourning. The same gentle

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<sup>73</sup> See *Eleftherotypia* of 25/8/1992.

<sup>74</sup> In the case of *Orestes*, the song that the women of the chorus sing when they enter the orchestra is a lyric dialogue shared between them and Electra which culminates in a lament (*Or.*, 140-207).



concern is indicated by the women towards Orestes. For example, as Menelaus leaves him in despair (*Or.*, 718-28) and Orestes kneels and mourns with his eyes full of tears, the women of the chorus approach him and give him their hand to raise him:

The relationship between brother and sister is very affectionate as well. Electra at the beginning remains still because she does not want to interrupt his sleep (*Or.*, 134-9) and then, when he wakes up, she approaches him, embraces his waist (*Or.*, 211) and caresses his face (*Or.*, 219-20). When the Furies take hold of him she tries to keep his head still (*Or.*, 253ff) and at the end she tenderly puts him to bed, embraces him and goes into the palace (*Or.*, 307-315). Orestes returns her affection and the scenes dramatised between the two are carefully worked out in order to engage the audience's sympathy for the two. When Orestes and Pylades return from the Assembly, Orestes embraces his sister, kisses her and they both cry ( see Figure 38) in each other's bosom (*Or.*, 1018-1068). He bids farewell to his friend Pylades, holding a sword, ready to kill himself, still in his sister's embrace. However, Pylades' decision to be killed as well (*Or.*, 1069ff) is not given emphasis by the director who has concentrated his attention on Orestes and Electra.

Although Electra is presented as a powerful character in the play and Dimitra Chatoupi is an actress who usually dominates the stage, the director's approach has kept her under Orestes' shadow. Even when she conceives the plan of escaping the death penalty (*Or.*, 1177-1216), his overwhelming reaction, his embrace which comes as a reward for her sharpness brings him to the centre of the audience's attention again. When they invoke the spirit of the dead Agamemnon to come to their help (*Or.*, 1225-1246), Orestes, Pylades, Electra and the chorus women kneel with: Orestes in front of the orchestra more or less isolated by the others, Pylades behind him on the right, Electra far behind on the right between the curtains and the women divided into six on the far right and left. Orestes seems to carry all the burden of the decision; he is presented as the powerful leader of the group. With regard to Electra, there is indeed a powerful scene in which she delivers her plan (*Or.*, 1191-1203) with an expression full of hatred, holding the wooden sword to her neck and saying: "if, carried away/ by his anger, he [Menelaus] tries/ to kill you, then butcher/ his daughter" (*Or.*, 1198-

9).<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the director's overall approach to the play reduces even the figure of Electra, the only woman of the play who belongs to the group he favours.

Pylades' (Stathis Kakkavas) character is not fully exploited by the director because he did not want to overshadow Orestes. When he first appears, he looks imposing (*Or.*, 726) and powerful but tender as well towards his friend as he leads him to the people's assembly (*Or.*, 799-803). During his next appearance however, he looks cool and indifferent even when he says: "I must die with you and her".<sup>76</sup> Again, the main emphasis is not found on his plan but on Orestes' reaction to it through his movements since Kakkavas' (Pylades) soft and gentle voice is drowned by Kostas Karras' screams of joy and enthusiasm (*Or.*, 1131-1176).

The episodes involving Menelaus and Orestes do not hold any particular interest in this production since Menelaus is presented according to the text as an inconsiderate, scared warrior with soft voice, still in love with Helen and unable to keep his promises and to repay his debts (to Agamemnon) - but he is not arrogant as is Menelaus in Boswell's *Agamemnon's Children*. In his second appearance (*Or.*, 1554-1624), he is supposed to be angry but his reactions through his indifferent gestures and inappropriate tone make him ridiculous.

What is interesting in the case of Tyndareus in this production is his unusually bad character. His facial expressions and his voice are full of hatred and thus he does not engage the audience's sympathy as a father who is in pain, as the lines, *Or.*, 470-72, 525-534 indicate, because he lost his child; his appearance does not evoke pity as does Boswell's old man. His portrait elevates Orestes' image whose arguments to justify himself (*Or.*, 544-604) are not balanced by the pain of the father. And since Tyndareus condemns matricide and stands in support of Clytemnestra's lawful rights as a mother and human being, his hostile treatment in this production indicates the director's choice in favour of matricide.

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<sup>75</sup> αν παρασυρμένος/ ωστόσο απ' το θυμό του προσπαθήσει/ να σε σκοτώσει, τότε κι εσύ σφάζει/ την κόρη: (*Orestes* 1198-1199 in Roussos' translation).

<sup>76</sup> λοιπόν πρέπει/ μαζί μ' εσέ κι ετούτην να πεθάνω: (*Orestes* 1091 in Roussos' translation)



One of the performance's most enjoyable episodes is the one between Orestes and the Phrygian slave of Helen (*Or.*, 1369-1536). His comic appearance and his effeminate movements and accent evoke the audience's laughter. But because of that, even the scene in which he mourns Helen (*Or.*, 1381-1392) resists serious treatment. His words cannot make the audience feel sorry for Helen. Orestes confronts him very seriously until the last moment when he orders him to go inside and hits him with his sword in his back (*Or.*, 1536).

The last scene, before the divine epiphany, takes place between Orestes, Pylades, Electra and Hermione who is under the threat of death on the palace roof and the outraged Menelaus and the women of the chorus in the orchestra (*Or.*, 1567-1624). Electra and Pylades are now reduced to torch-bearers while Orestes holds his sword upon Hermione's neck. When Apollo accompanied by Helen and her divine brothers, Castor and Polydeukes according to lines *Or.*, 1636-7, enter the stage ceremoniously, only Orestes and Hermione are left on the roof (*Or.*, 1625). Apollo's appearance is remote and impressive. When he refers to Orestes his voice becomes affectionate and protective. The play's ending has followed the treatment of Orestes who, although his actions and his behaviour are anti-heroic according to the text, has been treated as a hero in Mythos' production of the play. Bakas' portrayal of Orestes can be compared to that of Evangelatos' depiction of the same hero in his productions of the *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Electra*. However Bakas does not bring out the ironic elements of the Euripidean play which are emphasised in the next production discussed.

## 4.6. A NEW "ORESTEIA" AFTER EURIPIDES: THE GATE THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF AGAMEMNON'S CHILDREN

### 4.6.1. A Skilful Production Group

*Agamemnon's Children* produced by the Gate Theatre and performed between the 6th of March and the 1st of April comprises three plays, Euripides' *Electra*, *Orestes*, and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* which, although they have not been designed as a trilogy, still perform a tragic arc with the revelation of the fate of the three children after Agamemnon's murder.<sup>77</sup> However, the character whose story is presented in its full development is Orestes.<sup>78</sup> His (Charles Daish's - see Figure 41) characterisation "makes an impressive journey from callow idealism brought up hard against an abomination in Elektra, through despair, frenzy and paralysed apprehension in the play that bears his name, to a tired but flinty Branagh-esque maturity in *Iphigeneia*".<sup>79</sup>

The production, directed by Laurence Boswell - his farewell production as artistic director of the Gate - is based on Kenneth Mcleish's adaptation-translation of the three Euripidean plays.<sup>80</sup> The imaginative treatment of the space was indebted to Anthony Mcllwaine.<sup>81</sup> The vocal music for the chorus is Mike Sands's triumph -

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<sup>77</sup> The three plays could be attended either individually, because of their self-sufficiency or together as a trilogy (Wednesdays and Saturdays were the trilogy days). The performances discussed here are *Orestes* of 13/3/1995 and *Electra* of 27/3/1995.

<sup>78</sup> According to Paul Taylor, "One Big Happy Family", *Independent* 10/3/95, the plays could have been called *Orestes' Development*.

<sup>79</sup> See Ian Shuttleworth, "Three Grief Encounters", *Evening Standard* 10/3/1995.

<sup>80</sup> For Laurence Boswell's work as a director see "Appendix A", pp. 234-236. A short account of Kenneth McLeish's work as a translator is given in 3.4.1. "A Successful Cooperation", p.150-1, n. 63.

<sup>81</sup> He was trained at Kingston School of Art. His theatre work is mainly in cooperation with Gate Theatre where he designed the setting for Marivaux's *The Cheating Hearts* (January, 1994), Aurie Lebase's *Aurelie, My Sister* (October, 1994), and Goldoni's *The Lover* (April, 1995).



<sup>82</sup> together with Christian Flint he choreographed the production. The costumes of the production, designed by Sammy Haworth, "are in ancient mode with a few modern trimmings".<sup>83</sup> *Iphigeneia in Tauris* will not receive a detailed analysis, apart from a few passing remarks for the reasons already mentioned in the short prologue to this chapter.

Before we discuss the director's approach to the plays, we should concentrate on their adaptation by McLeish. As has been noted the three plays in his "nimble translation-adaptation have been tailored into a sequence. The word 'tailored' implies no criticism. McLeish's changes are few, tactful and elegantly deployed: no violence or injustice is done to any of the three plays."<sup>84</sup> The translator himself describes the need for changes and their nature as follows: "It's possible still to write "literary" versions of Euripides' Greek - and some are excellent. But the heart of the experience lies elsewhere, and in particular depends on trying to match every breathless turn and swoop, every tiny sunshaft of language, every banality, pun or syntactical twist. There is not one possibility for every word, phrase or speech - there are dozens, and you should leave your text as open, as accessible to directors and actors, as possible. Often, I find, when 'strangeness' occur, it's best for me not to interpret them and try and smooth them out, but to go at them head-on."<sup>85</sup>

Thus what is meant by the word adaptation in the present case is not a change in the dramatised events or in their sequence; it does not aim at a different interpretation of the characters who take part in the plays, whose number and identity remain the same. The word adaptation is used in relation to the language and its interpretation since

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<sup>82</sup> Mick Sands was trained at Manchester University. His cooperation with Laurence Boswell and the Gate Theatre includes the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement (1992) *Spanish Golden Age Season* (Lope de Vega's, *Punishment without Revenge*, *Madness in Valencia*, *The Great Pretenders*) and Euripides' *Hecuba* (Spring 1992), see also "Appendix A" under the name Boswell, pp. 234-236.

<sup>83</sup> She was trained at the Wimbledon School of Art. She designed the costumes for the Gate Theatre's production of Marivaux's *The Cheating Hearts* produced in January 1994. She was the designer for the Royal Shakespeare Company Tours during 1987-8 and 1988-9.

<sup>84</sup> John Peter, "Theatre Check", *Sunday Times* 12/3/1995.

<sup>85</sup> Kenneth McLeish's "Translating Euripides" published in the programme of the production.

in some cases that the translator leaves out whole phrases for the reasons already mentioned and in other cases he renders a phrase of the original with a contemporary and colloquial expression. An illustrative example taken from the prologue of McLeish's translation of *Electra* - the part refers to lines 43-53 of the original - and compared to the same part of Emily Townsend Vermeule's translation of the same play published by *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (The University of Chicago Press) will indicate the nature of his translation-adaptation.<sup>86</sup>

Vermeule's translation reads as follows:

I have not touched her and the love-god Cypris knows it:  
I never shamed the girl in bed, she is still virgin. I would feel  
ugly  
holding down the gentle daughter  
of a king in violence, I was not bred to such an honor.  
And poor laboring Orestes whom they call my brother -  
I suffer his grief, I think his thoughts, if he came home  
to Argos and saw his sister so doomed in her wedding.  
Whoever says I am a borne fool to keep  
a young girl in my house  
and never touch her body,  
or says I measure wisdom by a crooked line  
of morals, should know he is as great a fool as I.

McLeish's translation is more concise and dramatic:

... but I swear,  
Aphrodite hear me, I kept away from her.  
She's slept alone. Still a virgin.  
She is a princess. I mean it's not for me to ...  
Not my place. It's Orestes I'm afraid of.  
My brother -in- law, at least in name.  
What would he say if he came home and found  
His sister married to no one, to me, and then if I'd...  
What? I'm an idiot? A beautiful young girl,  
Virgin-bride, and I don't take advantage?

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<sup>86</sup> See Emily Townsend Vermeule's translation of Euripides' *Electra* published by *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Green and Richmond Lattimore vol. V (Chicago, 1959).



You've dirty minds. No question, dirty minds.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, the translator's "skill of rendering 'spoken' (rather than 'written') dialogue is masterly. Where a character's words dart hither and yon, McLeish makes no attempt to render them into a smooth, poetic flow, but writes speeches of half-formed ideas, hanging phrases and generally jagged edges- the way people do talk."<sup>88</sup> McLeish's up-to-date vocabulary extends to the way the characters refer one to the other, especially when it concerns disturbed family relations:

Leave mummy to me, I'll see to mummy (*El.*, 647);

or when Clytemnestra says to her daughter:

You' re Daddy's girl,  
not Mummy's, ..." (*El.*, 1102).

Laurence Boswell's approach to the story of Agamemnon's children after his murder by Clytemnestra is intimately in accordance with McLeish's translation and results in a mocking and ironic treatment of Orestes' and Electra's furious compulsion to kill those responsible for their father's murder, and of the disastrous consequences of their action. Electra is presented as a ravaged creature (see Figure 40), irreverent and harmful; in the second part she becomes an hysterical woman who takes cynical pleasure in punishing innocent people. Orestes is guided by his sister in the first play, but he does not give the impression of innocence; in the play that bears his name he becomes half-crazed, a coarse and vulgar person who, together with his "bloodthirsty" friend Pylades, does not allow the feeling "that an affronted citizenry is wholly wrong to seek their deaths. They are victims not only of the inscrutable whims of the gods, chiefly a callous Apollo, but also of their own inner and outer violence."<sup>89</sup> But Clytemnestra and Helen are not treated sympathetically either. Both are presented as "self-absorbed, scheming minxes".<sup>90</sup> The trilogy does not constitute a feminist approach to the Euripidean plays and it does not intend to justify Clytemnestra although it does condemn matricide. If that was the case then *Iphigeneia at Aulis* would have been a necessary addition to the story of Agamemnon's Children. Orestes' role in the third part is characterised by the same

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<sup>87</sup> The official translation has not been published yet but it was kindly offered by Absolute Press prior to publication.

<sup>88</sup> Ian Shuttleworth, "Three Grief Encounters", *Evening Standard* 10/3/1995.

<sup>89</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "Roughly What the Man Wrote", *The Times* 10/3/1995.

<sup>90</sup> Carole Woddis, *What's On* 15/3/1995.

arrogance, and his reconciliation with his lost sister receives a mocking treatment as he exclaims in a light tone, when he understands the identity of the priestess, "what is going on? Pylades help me". Iphigeneia (Barbara Flynn) is a sardonic figure able to convey irony and pain. However, the third play is not fully integrated into this trilogy for the reasons already mentioned.<sup>91</sup>

Anthony McIlwaine designed a set which could be easily transformed to a different locale for each of the plays. "The audience sits on either side of the stage space, in specially created tiered seating that transforms the Gate into a miniature Epidaurus."<sup>92</sup> The two entrance doors are from either side of the auditorium and form two illuminated gangways that extend the acting space to the whole of the auditorium; the construction which encloses audience and acting space is wooden. The central building construction represents Electra's farmer husband's humble cottage in the play that bears her name, the palace of the Atreids in *Orestes* and the sacred temple of the goddess Athena during *Iphigeneia in Tauris*. Opposite to the building, the wall is given the shape of a window sill where the women of the chorus climb up in order to keep clear from the action. The main acting space, the circular orchestra, is surrounded by two further raised circular but narrow platforms. As has been pointed out, "Anthony McIlwaine's splendid environmental design gives the drama a powerful immediacy."<sup>93</sup>

In *Electra*, outside the cottage as well as in the surrounding space are scattered stones to indicate the rural setting of the play's action. In one case, on the platform in front of the palace wall, a heap of stones, with drops of blood on it, forms the base on which two wooden dolls stand with magical symbolism, indicated by the nails piercing on their body, the iron belt and the ropes around their waist, the bone which hangs from them and the white, knitted wool spread around them. The dolls could for instance represent the magic spell between mother and daughter which compels one to hate the other. In *Orestes* the palace, the stage and the platforms are covered by black cloths, a sign of mourning for Clytemnestra's murder. The ceiling above the stage has the shape of an iron net, reminiscent of the main issue of entrapment.

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<sup>91</sup> See 4.1. "Introduction", p. 173.

<sup>92</sup> Alastair Macaulay, "Agamemnon's Children", *Financial Times* 10/3/1995.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Taylor, "One Big Happy Family", *Independent* 10/3/1995.



The wooden, magical doll has now been substituted with a wooden statue of a bound and gagged woman symbolising the retaliatory attempt of murdering Helen and the taking of Menelaus innocent daughter as a hostage by the three bloodthirsty youngsters.

The devices used by the scenographer to solve problems of divine epiphany or the appearance of the youngsters with their victim on the roof well as the impressive entrance of the queen Clytemnestra deserve a separate mention. In *Electra* at the end of the play "the gods make their surprise entry stationed on little drawbridges that drop with an absurd, undignified suddenness out of one of the walls."<sup>94</sup> In the same play Clytemnestra and her Trojan slaves enter the stage from one of the gangways which rises in order to give the impression of the queen's carriage and retinue. In *Orestes*, brother, sister, their friend and their hostage appear on two "drawbridges" which drop from both of the palace's walls, while the divine appearance takes place on the central acting space.

The costumes designed by Sammy Haworth are expressive of the characters' age, attitude and social stance without referring to one particular period but comprising ancient and modern elements. Electra, crop-haired (see Figure 40) and barefoot, her feet soiled with mud, wears a plain, black, long dress. Orestes and Pylades are dressed in the same mode: black trousers, boots and long coat (Orestes when at his sick-bed is barefoot). Pylades's coat covers a silver cuirass and Orestes in *Electra*, as he cautiously enters the scene, holds behind him an iron shield. The women of the chorus in *Electra* are beautifully dressed in yellow and orange skirts or breeches that leave their belly uncovered; on their heads they wear multi-coloured scarves. The women of the chorus in *Orestes* wear black satin dresses as a sign of mourning. In the words of one critic, the choruses "sometimes look like Hare Krishna dancers, sometimes like Spanish mourners".<sup>95</sup> Clytemnestra is over-dressed in the image of a super-star wearing a night dress in black and gold while her hat of the same colour is decorated with rubies. Helen appears with a radiant smile in an elaborate dress, although simpler than her sister's, in black and purple. Both sisters wear a great amount of jewellery. Hermione looks like an innocent girl dressed in black because she is mourning her aunt. The

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "Roughly What the Man Wrote", *The Times* 10/3/1995.



old man, the paedagogue who saved Orestes' life, wears a Scottish kilt, blue and white-striped leggings underneath, a grey ragged cloth, sandals and red cap. In *Orestes* the same figure appears as the herald or attendant. Electra's farmer husband is poorly dressed in rags (grey, light blue). Menelaus is dressed in black (skirt, trousers and mantle) with a prominent golden necklace. Tyndareus is in a condition of mourning as well and thus he is dressed in black but his golden crown and necklace make him quite distinct. Apollo is dressed in white as is customary; the same white costumes mark the appearances of Castor and Polydeukes. Helen's half-naked Phrygian slave has an Eastern appearance with his long hair, golden fabric-belt and sandals.

Mike Sands' music mainly concerns the women of the chorus whose song sounds like an opera.<sup>96</sup> According to a critic the music is sung with "excellence". "We are not aware of cues; pulses are sometimes insensible; the choral odes seem to arise automatically from six or more women at once. The music is a skillful blend of plain song, kaddisch, and African and Sephardic chants, with exceptionally fine touches of various fioritura, and with striking harmonies between different vocal registers."<sup>97</sup>

#### 4.6.2. "An Unstable and Embittered" Electra<sup>98</sup>

Sara Mair-Thomas conveys the role of a daughter obsessively devoted to her grief for her father's murder and to her desire for revenge against her mother and Aegisthus. The actress "is vividly powerful as a spiky-thin, chopped-haired Electra, all barely repressed hysteria, her baleful pleasure in revenge passing through her body like a shudder of revulsion."<sup>99</sup> Her language is "spare and angular with little poetry to blot out the privations",<sup>100</sup> according to McLeish's translation. Her first monologue which is originally a lament (*El.*, 112-166), is delivered in a dry voice which "rises to a snarl or a shriek";<sup>101</sup> it does not cause pity or

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<sup>96</sup> The music of the production (mainly the choral odes) has been recorded together with the prologue of each of the plays. The tape carries the name *Agamemnon's Children* and Gate Theatre has the exclusive rights.

<sup>97</sup> Alastair Macaulay, "Agamemnon's Children", *Financial Times* 10/3/1995.

<sup>98</sup> John Peter, "Theatre Check", *Sunday Times* 12/3/1995.

<sup>99</sup> Paul Taylor, "One Big Happy family", *Independent* 10/3/1995.

<sup>100</sup> Ian Shuttleworth, "Three Grief Encounters", *Evening Standard* 10/3/1995.

<sup>101</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "Roughly What the Man Wrote", *The Times* 10/3/1995.



sympathy and it cannot be compared to Lydia Koniordou's distressed lamentation. As she enters the scene holding a vessel and an artificial flower, she delivers her words wild-eyed. When she calls desperately for Orestes to come home to avenge their father and deliver her from misery (*El.*, 127-139) she exclaims sarcastically "I spit on them" and spits on the vessel she holds while she destroys the flower and throws it away.<sup>102</sup> But, in her first encounter with the women of the chorus (*El.*, 167-212) she speaks like a crazy, unstable girl; her voice is full of hatred but her eyes and her trembling body give the impression of a scared, haunted child.

The play however begins in a light tone with the introductory monologue of Electra's farmer-husband (Ian Redford) who gives a delightful account of the events (*El.*, 1-53) and at the end communicates directly with the audience as he says:

What? I'm an idiot? A beautiful young girl,

Virgin-bride, and I don't take advantage?

You've dirty minds. No question, dirty minds.

pointing with his finger at them. The same spontaneity, simplicity and good nature is apparent when he seizes the sickle to protect Electra against the strangers and then immediately, when he is informed of their identity, calms down and generously invites them in (*El.*, 341-366). Orestes' words of commendation (*El.*, 367-400), however, appear as excessive, forced, haughty and indifferent compared to the farmer's plain language.

During the action, the women of the chorus usually occupy the area around the wall opposite to the cottage; they sympathise with Electra's pain and share her happiness but they distance themselves from the events and characters when Clytemnestra's murder is discussed and when it actually takes place. When the old man, the paedagogue, reveals Orestes' identity, they burst into a joyful song (*El.*, 585-95) repeating the words "he's come" and "gods send him home" while the old man shakes hands with all of them. Moreover, during the recognition scene which is indeed powerful (*El.*, 563-585), some of the women cry; and when they are informed of Orestes' victory over Aegisthus, they dance in frenzy with Electra, singing a song of triumph (*El.*, 859-65); they welcome him with raised hands and the chorus-

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<sup>102</sup> The phrase cannot be found in the original text and is McLeish's addition, bringing out Electra's vindictive and violent nature.

leader kneels to give him the wreath. But, as Orestes starts discussing with the others the plans for the murders they quickly leave the orchestra (*El.*, 596). Moreover, they are not in the main acting area when Electra insults the mutilated head of Aegisthus (*El.*, 907-956) or after Clytemnestra's murder.

With regard to the women's relationship to Clytemnestra, we should refer to the fourth stasimon (*El.*, 1147-1165) which is hostile to her. The song is headed in the production's tape "Blood for Blood". In the original the song condemns Agamemnon's murder by his wife, although his name is never mentioned. In McLeish's translation the women repeat his name adding "What crime? What guilt was his?", which is not in the original, before they go on to compare Clytemnestra to a lioness. The song gives the impression of a hymn to Agamemnon. In general, the women of the chorus stand by Agamemnon's children but at the same time it is clear from their attitude that they condemn Electra's barbarism, matricide and those who perform it.

Charles Daish as Orestes has "chiselled public schoolboy features";<sup>103</sup> he "sneaks into the city and has no idea how to exact revenge".<sup>104</sup> Orestes' inability to plan the revenge himself is not accompanied by modesty as the tone of his voice is demanding when he asks the old man's and Electra's help (*El.*, 612, 646):

What shall I do,  
Won't I kill them both?<sup>105</sup>

Electra's answer to the second question:

Leave mummy to me. I'll see to mummy  
contains irony and hatred against her unloved mother. In the presence of his mother, Orestes' courage abandons him although he quickly recovers after Electra's insulting words:

Don't be such a coward (*El.*, 982).

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<sup>103</sup> Paul Taylor, "One Big Happy Family", *Independent* 10/3/1995.

<sup>104</sup> Jane Edwardes, *Time Out* 15/3/1995.

<sup>105</sup> Pylades, Velibor Topic, has no speaking role in the first play but he takes the role of the messenger who brings the news of Aegisthus' murder by Orestes as well. The messenger's speech (*El.*, 774-858) is very interesting as he savagely and joyfully reenacts Aegisthus' murder, his last words and Orestes' crime. At the end he caresses Electra's face and leaves the stage to return as Pylades with the hero. Velibor Topic's portrayal as a vulgar messenger is doubled with his appearance as Pylades in the second play of the trilogy.



The scene is not given a lengthy treatment and Orestes' hesitation appears only instantaneous. Thus his guilt is more clearly established than Tsianos' Orestes who follows Electra's orders in killing his mother.

The recognition scene is lightly treated at the beginning. The old man, Patrick Godfrey, appears (*El.*, 487) holding a dummy, doll-like sheep and a parcel. Electra calls him "uncle", and when he approaches Orestes and examines his features, he exclaims:

Now what is he doing?

I'm not a statue?" (*El.*, 558-9).

Orestes' and Electra's embrace is emotionally powerful and this scene is treated without irony. Their affection however does not alleviate their harsh character as it is portrayed in all their other scenes.

Electra's murderous nature is brought out in the scene where she is faced with Aegisthus' decapitated head (represented by a bloodstained iron model). She then reveals her bloodthirsty, hysterical character: she snatches it from the hands of Orestes and talks to it with jealousy and hatred:

she ruled the roost. You were nothing. Are you blushing?

Your children not your children: hers. Are you blushing?

Husband, no husband, man, no man, social climber." (*El.*, 932-7).

Then, she throws the head away in order to take it again and continue her unholy monologue about the other women in his life (*El.*, 945ff) which indicates her sexual deprivation. Electra keeps the image of the female who fights for male privileges but what distinguishes her treatment in this production is her corrupt and unstable character, which is not emphasised by her "female nature" since it is shared by Orestes and Pylades in the second play.

Clytemnestra's (Etela Pardo) impressive entrance matches her eccentric character in this production. While she is speaking she looks at her golden ring; her French accent makes her voice ironic. She speaks slowly, with confidence, and her movements are feminine. In her speech (*El.*, 1011-1050) she lightly admits:

So I found a lover of my own. What of it? ...

My husband an adulterer - what do they expect? (*El.*, 1035-8) and when she admits repentance for her husband's murder she says gracefully that it was "the heat of the moment" (*El.*, 1105; compare it with Vermeule's translation of the same line 1105-6: "I'm not so happy/

either, child, with what I have done or with myself.<sup>17</sup>). Then, when the time comes to enter the cottage she exclaims with charming submission:

First you, then Aegisthos. I oblige everyone (*El.*, 1137-8)

and she enters looking at her ring again. Clytemnestra appears as a thinking only of herself queen and is unable to win the audience's sympathy. Electra does not hide her anger and in one case attacks her and pulls her by her dress as she asks:

What did I do? What did Orestes do? (*El.*, 1088).

Clytemnestra's murder is followed by a pathetic scene between two unstable youngsters (*El.*, 1177ff), Electra and Orestes. In particular Electra's reaction contradicts her former deeply rooted hatred against her mother. Both come out covered with blood; blood streams from Orestes' nose as well. Electra refers to Clytemnestra's death with the following words, not found in the original:

Mummy died

and as Orestes describes the murder, she screams:

Don't hurt Mummy

which is not found in the original either. The scene is indicative of her disturbed personality and her unstable character; it does not have the power to cancel the impression of her murderous nature which the next play will return to. The divine epiphany is ironically treated by the translator and by the director of the play. The audience bursts into laughter as the Dioscuri (Patrick Godfrey as Polydeukes and Ian Redford as Castor) exclaim:

This is very sad (*El.*, 1327)

when Orestes and Electra embrace each other. The gods are treated ironically as well: they seem to mock the human suffering.

The first play of this modern trilogy reveals the murderous nature of Electra and Orestes, condemns the matricide but at the same time mocks Clytemnestra's selfish nature. In short it is an ironic treatment of the story of Clytemnestra's murder by her children.

#### **4.6.3. A Morally Degenerated Company**

The second part of *Agamemnon's Children*, based on Euripides' *Orestes*, elaborates on the consequences of matricide and brings out the felonious nature of Orestes and Electra- they are ready to commit a series of unnecessary crimes- in a way that reduces the importance of



their motives for the matricide, as explained in *Electra*, and diminish their regret expressed at the end of *Electra* and in the prologue to *Orestes*. One critic notes: "Charles Daish's Orestes is so subdued that his torments have no particular impact";<sup>106</sup> and Electra "actually turns terrorist in the second play, *Orestes*. She organises both the retaliatory murder of Helen ... and the taking of Menelaus's innocent daughter, Hermione, as a hostage".<sup>107</sup>

Electra delivers the prologue (*Or.* 1-70) tersely. Her body trembles and her look is scared, almost crazy, as she keeps her eyes wide open and looks around in despair.

Three girls they had -Chrysothemis Iphigeneia me,  
(Electra, yes)- and one boy, Orestes.  
Agamemnon's Children, and hers.  
That bitch that foulness,  
who wrapped her own husband in a woven net  
and killed him ..." (*Or.* 23-26)

The words used for Clytemnestra do not indicate any kind of remorse for the matricide; on the contrary, they are vindictive and if they are compared to William Arrowsmith's translation, they betray Electra's unrepentant nature:

By her he had three daughters -myself,  
and my two sisters, Chrysothemis and Iphigeneia-  
and one son, Orestes there. All of us his children  
by that one wife -I cannot call her mother-  
who snared her husband in the meshes of a net  
and murdered him.<sup>108</sup>

Helen's appearance (Thalia Valeta) is mockingly heralded by Electra:

She is here too, Helen,

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<sup>106</sup> Alastair Macaulay, "Agamemnon's Children", *Financial Times* 10/3/1995.

<sup>107</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "Roughly What the Man Wrote", *The Times* 10/3/1995.

<sup>108</sup> William Arrowsmith's translation of Euripides' *Orestes*, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies* edited by David Greene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1958). Although Macleish's written translation (see note 81) mentions Chrysothemis as well, in the Gate Theatre's performance of 13/3/95 the name of Chrysothemis is not mentioned, perhaps because the three plays that compose *Agamemnon's Children* concern Electra, Orestes and Iphigeneia only ("[T]wo girls they had -Iphigeneia and me- Electra...").

hell to men.<sup>109</sup>

Her stylish appearance accompanied by a steady, frozen smile and by a gentle, caressing voice gives the impression of a woman "as serenely smug as a Hollywood goddess with the autograph hounds".<sup>110</sup> The contrast with the modest and innocent Hermione (Poppy Miller) is striking and Electra's words for her do not prove unjustified. The director does not approach Helen sympathetically. On the contrary, her vanity is overstressed. Her husband (Ian Redford) is not an important figure in this production. He enters the scene like a general on duty and speaks officially without indicating any real interest in his nephew's case. After his dialogue with the old Tyndareus (*Or.*, 470-490, 607-629) he abandons his earlier arrogance and becomes a man scared for his life and status. At the end (*Or.*, 1554-1624), when he thinks his wife dead and his daughter's life in danger, he appears with two guards with javelins but again he is impotent either to act or to arouse the audience's sympathy since he speaks authoritatively, as a general.

It is characteristic of this production that the scene dramatised between brother and sister when he wakes up (*Or.*, 211-315) is not either as extended or as tender and affectionate as the one described above, in the production directed by Kostas Bakas. The reason is that the present production does not set out to explore the gentle part of Orestes' and Electra's character, so as to attribute their following actions to their desperate effort to survive. They only embrace each other once when Electra goes to the palace to relax. The scene shared between brother and sister after they have been sentenced to death (*Or.*, 1018-1068) has the power to arouse sympathy for their fate. They embrace each other desperately, ready to die. As one critic has suggested "the way these characters embrace each other, ravenous for comfort, shows you how fate has, in their case, rendered the sibling relationship the chief emotional resource."<sup>111</sup> The emotional climate however is completely destroyed by the murderous plans for escape that follow. Orestes and Pylades become bloodthirsty men eager to commit the murders while Electra's voice is filled with wild joy as she explains to

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<sup>109</sup> This line of McLeish's translation will not be found in the original, although it refers to lines 55 and 60. Again her characteristic "hell to men" shows Electra's extremity of character.

<sup>110</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "Roughly What the Man Wrote", *The Times* 10/3/1995.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Taylor, "One Big Happy Family", *Independent* 10/3/1995.



them their plan for escape, which involves taking the innocent Hermione as a hostage (*Or.*, 1177ff). Her encounter with the unspoilt character of Hermione, concerned for her and Orestes, makes her appear a criminal, a serial killer as she declares:

They're inside, your cousins. Touching her heart (*Or.*, 1332) meaning Helen. Their barbarism applies to the murder of Clytemnestra as well since they appear to be always ready to commit a crime.

Pylades' image is that of a violent youth. In fact he looks like a gangster with his head completely shaven and a hair-band fastened around it (see Figure 42). He speaks like a rogue, smiling with irony and indifference even when he says: "I'm banished by my father" (*Or.*, 765). He seems to care only about Orestes, as is apparent from the way he carries him on his shoulders when they return from the Assembly (*Or.*, 1017). When he screams with his barbaric voice "wait" (*Or.*, 1068), ready to suggest a way out from the impasse, the women of the chorus and Electra withdraw in fear. Finally, he tries to persuade Orestes to follow his plan by ending his argument that the whole of Greece will call them "bitch-killers", (line 1142 of the original. However, there is nothing to suggest the word "bitch"), by pointing the middle finger of his right hand in a sexual gesture.

The women of the chorus (eight in number) have more or less the same relationship with the central characters as they had in the first play of the trilogy. In their *parodos* (*Or.*, 135-210) they do seem concerned for Orestes' suffering and they are supportive towards Electra. However, as the Phrygian slave (Kevork Malikyan) gives an account of the events of Helen's attempted murder (*Or.*, 1394-1502) the chorus' leader bursts into tears while on her face traces of blood can be observed; her reaction is expressive of the chorus' condemnation of the cold-blooded attempt against Helen. Although they help Electra watch for Hermione (*Or.*, 1246-1322), when she appears (*Or.*, 1323) they withdraw. The women sympathise with the fate of Orestes and Electra but they do not approve of their consequent actions.

The person who exposes the nature of Orestes' matricide is Tyndareus (Patrick Godfrey), whose role in this production is very emotionally charged. He is crushed by his daughter's death and although he tries to hide it by declaring:

She deserved to die, Klytemnestra, my daughter- (*Or.*, 538),

his eyes, full of tears, argue persuasively for the devastating pain he feels. Orestes' argumentation (*Or.*, 544-604) loses its impact, it becomes sterile, indecent and insulting compared to Tyndareus's emotional outburst. At the end he cannot even stand. Orestes' speech has almost finished him. Menelaus helps him from the stage. The episode with Tyndareus leaves Orestes' image badly damaged since he appears to be impudent and disrespectful. In addition, it condemns matricide and strips Orestes of any decent motive for it.

The last scene concludes the bloodstained guilt of the three harassed mortals as they appear on the platforms surrounded by smoke, while Orestes holds his sword to Hermione's neck. Apollo's timely epiphany with Helen on his side gives a remission to the criminals and informs them that there are still a few hurdles to go. None of the characters, apart perhaps from Hermione and to a lesser extent Tyndareus, is treated seriously in the second part of *Agamemnon's Children*. However, the play clearly condemns matricide through the murderous nature of those who committed it. The issue of women's representation is underestimated by the ironic treatment of Helen who stands on the female side.

The third part of the trilogy deals with the family's third child, the lost Iphigeneia and her recovery by Orestes. Orestes provides the link since he is a main character in all three plays. However, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* can be seen as the final phase in his adventure deriving from the matricide, his restoration to his former condition and his purification; but it does not present us with any development in his character. Iphigeneia conceives the plan of escape which involves deceit; Orestes only obeys her machinations.



#### 4.7. A COMPARATIVE CONCLUSION

Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes* are discussed in this chapter in association with three contemporary productions of the plays, two Greek and one English, and in association mainly with the treatment of the issue of matricide as well as with the presentation of the female figures by the tragedian himself and by the directors. The ironic treatment of the story of matricide and of its consequences characterises Laurence Boswell's approach to *Agamemnon's Children* (only *Electra* and *Orestes* receive a detailed analysis in this section) which is indebted a great deal to Kenneth McLeish's translation-adaptation. Kostas Tsianos' interpretation of *Electra* is based on the exploitation of folklore elements that derive from the association of the play's rural setting with customs and traditional practices in Thessaly (it is the Thessalian Theatre's production we are discussing); music and dancing, based on the Thessalian tradition, are very important elements in his interpretation. Kostas Bakas' approach to *Orestes* was concentrated around the figure of Orestes; he tried to give a realistic interpretation of the play treating the story very seriously, but this attitude left him exposed at some parts of the play which resist realistic interpretation, for instance the ending.

With regard to the treatment of the issue of matricide, the latter is fiercely condemned in Boswell's interpretation since the director uncovered the villainous nature of sister and brother by producing the two plays *Electra* and *Orestes* in sequence, as two parts of one trilogy, and by showing brother and sister commit unnecessary murderous activity in the second part as well. Tsianos' *Electra* disapproves of the matricide, according to the development of the story by the tragedian, but Electra's motives appear to be serious and justifiable. Bakas' *Orestes* does not deal directly with the issue. However, because the production grants to Orestes an acceptable and justified pattern of behaviour for his murderous attempts, matricide is not condemned.

The directors' approach to the female figures follows each play's main line of interpretation. However, what is characteristic of all three productions discussed here is the unsympathetic portrayal of Clytemnestra and Helen. In Boswell's interpretation, Electra is a powerful and practical character who arranges the realisation of all the attempted murders of both plays - apart from Aegisthus. At the same

time she is portrayed as neurotic and evil and clearly on the side of the male as she, together with Orestes and Pylades, form a gang which targets Menelaus, their enemy, using innocent women as victims. But Clytemnestra and Helen do not stand as worthy defenders of the female point of view since they are presented as haughty persons, obsessed with their looks and indifferent to "trivial" matters - note Clytemnestra's foreign accent. Orestes' viciousness in the production is surpassed by Electra's cynicism and Pylades' vulgarity. Hermione is modest and reverent as a child. Tsianos' approach to Electra is interesting and consistent: she is a passionate woman completely taken by the idea of avenging her father's murder and truthful to her motives. However, her devotion to her father's memory, which is presented as an elevated cause, as her obligation, does not allow any identification with an approach sympathetic towards women. Warner's Electra had passion and power but they were derived from her unrestrained nature. The human aspects of Clytemnestra's speech to her daughter (*El.*, 1011-1050) are not touched on by the director: she speaks with arrogance and indifference. Orestes is an indecisive young man always dependent upon the others. Bakas' emphasis on Orestes does not leave ground for any sympathetic consideration of any of the women's motives and ideas. He is presented as a victim of the god Apollo and of his morality. Thus, Electra is subordinate to him and Helen interested only in her female attractiveness while Hermione's innocence is treated as naivety. None of the above productions have been sympathetic towards women's representation. Boswell's production condemns matricide through the evil and weak behaviour of Electra and Orestes. Thus the other women figures, Clytemnestra and Helen are more sympathetically drawn.



## CONCLUSION

Greek tragedy attracts the interest of contemporary directors who turn to its tested form in order to express contemporary concerns, interests and ideas. The theatrical qualities of the tragic plays are employed to explore issues like the progress towards democracy and civilisation, the importance of family ties, the complex relationship between gods and humans and the relationship between men and women. The adaptability of the myths used in the tragedies facilitates the process of their interpretation by directors. The attention of contemporary directors seems to be more concentrated on the plays' fundamental issues arising from the stance of human beings towards life and less with the various aspects of women's representation in Greek tragedy in contrast to the interest recently shown in feminist studies of the theatre and culture of 5th century Greece. The myth of Orestes is treated in the present thesis. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, contemporary directors concentrate more on the political issues of the passing from a tyrannical to a democratic regime and from a primitive to a civilised society than the issue of sex conflict which is also prominent in the trilogy. In the case of Sophocles' *Electra*, the conflict between two women who represent different attitudes towards life is not usually dealt with by modern directors. Euripides' *Electra* is mainly treated like her Sophoclean counterpart, a revengeful daughter. It is of interest, also, that *Orestes* is rarely produced. And although Euripides is sensitive towards women's social oppression, contemporary directors do not usually stress the issue in productions of *Electra* and *Orestes*.

The approaches discussed in the second chapter of the thesis, which deals with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, are characterised by the fact that the main subject of the sex contest appears to be of secondary importance, although feminist writers criticise the trilogy's resolution which celebrates the subordination of women to a male dominated society. Peter Hall's interpretation is based on the trilogy's final synthesis achieved through the balance of opposing forces represented on the one hand by Clytemnestra and the Furies, and on the other hand by Orestes, Athena and Apollo. Hall's Clytemnestra and her allies belong to the party which submits to the new order. She is a revengeful queen, not sympathetically drawn. The Furies, however, are not unattractive figures and through them and a reluctant Orestes, matricide

is condemned by the director. Peter Stein's and Karolos Koun's approaches to the *Oresteia* are characterised by a strong political insight into the trilogy's issues. In both cases, the process towards democracy prevails over the sex conflict. Stein's and Koun's Clytemnestras are powerful, important figures, identified with tyranny during *Agamemnon*, but in the second play of the trilogy they become fearful of retribution creatures and their importance is diminished. The Furies are dissociated from Clytemnestra and they stand for the old institutions. Nonetheless, matricide loses its importance because Orestes' act is considered as tyrannicide. Spyros A. Evangelatos' *Oresteia* shows an extreme dislike for the figure of Clytemnestra while it presents Agamemnon as the respected hero who does not deserve his punishment. The Furies are insulted by Orestes and the representatives of the new gods, and matricide is justified through the arrogant and unrepentant Orestes. Yorgos Michaelidis' Clytemnestra is more human than her arrogant and impious husband. However, the director interprets the trilogy as the process towards a more civilised society and thus his Clytemnestra becomes a lesser figure in the second and third parts of the trilogy. The Furies, representatives of primitive society, are detached from Clytemnestra, although the director clearly condemns matricide: Orestes appears crushed under the burden of his act. Electra's part in the *Oresteia* is short, confined to that of a daughter who mourns her father's murder and lives in expectation of her brother's return to avenge his murderers. For that reason, Electra's treatment by the directors discussed above is of secondary importance, with the noticeable exceptions of Stein's and Koun's imposing figures.

Electra concentrates our dramatic interest on the Sophoclean treatment of the theme of matricide. In itself the play has not attracted the interest of feminist writers who approach the figure of Electra as an archetype, collectively based on the works of all three tragedians. However, contemporary critics concentrate on the conflict between Electra and Clytemnestra, who represent different attitudes towards life. The four approaches discussed on the third chapter of the present thesis differ considerably in their portrayal of the heroine. Karolos Koun's Electra has devoted her life to uninterrupted mourning for her father's murder. Koun's interpretation exploits the inevitability of the law of retribution. Thus, his Clytemnestra is presented as a victim of that law although the director does not comment on the issue of matricide.



Spyros Evangelatos' Electra is the respectable daughter of Agamemnon whose duty is to help Orestes in his gruesome but necessary task of killing their fearful mother. However, matricide is condemned at the end of the play through Electra's unhappy figure because a woman's participation in that disagreeable deed is not reconciled with her female nature. Contrary to Evangelatos' heroine, Deborah Warner suggests a rebel Electra who fights against the established order of her society, against her female nature and against her attractive and feminine mother. Warner's approach is sympathetic towards the women's cause which becomes apparent through her interpretation of Electra's point of view. Accordingly, she does not criticise the matricide since Clytemnestra has been disfavoured from the beginning of the play. Andreas Voutsinas has been influenced in his reading of the play by Warner's approach to it. However, his interpretation involves Freudian psychoanalytical elements since his heroine is passionately in love with her father. Voutsinas' concentration on Electra and her psychology reduces the dramatic interest of Clytemnestra. The play's conclusion leaves the question of matricide unanswerable because Electra who motivates the murder appears to be exhausted by her effort, the chorus women relieved and Orestes haunted. Orestes' part in Koun's and Voutsinas' approach is that of a simple instrument of revenge, while Evangelatos' hero is powerful and confident about the righteousness of his deed; Warner's Orestes equals his sister in his decisiveness.

The matricide and its aftermath are treated in Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*. All three contemporary approaches discussed in the fourth chapter of this thesis are characterised by the unsympathetic treatment of Clytemnestra and Helen who appear to be obsessed with their appearance. It is notable that critics have not shown interest in the female figures of these plays because of the inherent difficulties in interpreting them. Kostas Tsianos' *Electra* is devoted to her father's memory. In this production, Electra is a powerful heroine but she stands on the male side and considers Clytemnestra's style of life unacceptable and immoral. Tsianos approaches the play through the Greek folklore tradition which accords with the story's rural setting. The director condemns matricide at the end of the play through the emotional change which afflicts Electra after the deed. His Orestes, however, is dependent on his sister. Kostas Bakas' approach in Euripides' *Orestes* is centred around the figure of Orestes. The play is approached by the

director in a serious manner presenting Orestes, on this occasion, as a hero whose attempted murders are justified and consequently matricide is justified as well. His sister is subordinate to him. Laurence Boswell by placing *Orestes* alongside *Electra* in his production of *Agamemnon's Children* exposes the murderous nature of Electra and Orestes and thus presents an ironic version of the story of the matricide (Iphigeneia's recovery by her brother is not dealt with in this thesis). Electra is neurotic, wicked and harmful; Orestes becomes vicious in the company of his sister and Pylades. The director fiercely condemns matricide by presenting the three young people on the second part of this modern trilogy ready to commit unnecessary murders.



## APPENDIX A

### DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

**BAKAS Kostas:** He started his career as an actor at the Art Theatre after he had been graduated from the Art Theatre's Drama School. He participated in the Art Theatre's production of Jacobos Kabanellis' *The Court of Wonders (I Avli ton Thavmaton)* (1957) and *The Age of Night (I Ilikia tis Nychtas)* (1959), both directed by Karolos Koun. He became known as a director from his work for the National Theatre where he directed plays mainly from the modern Greek repertoire. With regard to the ancient Greek theatre, he concentrated on Aristophanic comedy and his first direction of a Greek tragic play came very late in his career, in 1985 - he directed Euripides' *Supplices* for the State Theatre of Northern Greece. The production participated in the Festival of Epidavros (Summer, 1985).

What characterises Bakas' work as a director is his ability to organise a production around a main interpretative line, or around a comic actor in the case of Aristophanic comedy, whose attributes carry the performance to a desired end. Thus, his cooperation with the actor Thymios Karakatsanis resulted in the critical success of Aristophanes' *Peace*, produced by the National theatre for the Festival of Epidavros in 1983; his cooperation with Jacobos Psaras ensured the dignity and the good reception of National Theatre's productions of Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (Epidavros, 1980) and *Clouds* (Epidavros, 1984); and Yorgos Michalakopoulos' acting marked the critical and commercial success of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (Epidavros, 1986) and *Thesmophoriazusae* (Epidavros, 1989), both produced by the National Theatre. As has been suggested his performances of Aristophanes move between "the traditions of Koun and Solomos".<sup>1</sup> Koun's influence on him is apparent in his insistence on the folklore elements of the Greek tradition. Alexis Solomos' conservative anachronisms and visually attractive performances affected his approach as well.<sup>2</sup> In short,

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<sup>1</sup> Yiannis Varveris, *Theatre in Crisis (1976-1984) (I Krisis tou Theatrou)* (Athens, 1985), p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> Alexis Solomos was the Artistic Director of National Theatre from 1980-82. He spent almost all his creative years as a director of the National Theatre. He directed

Bakas' productions of ancient Greek Theatre could be characterised as acceptable in classical terms.

Bakas directed many contemporary Greek plays for the New Scene (Nea Scene) of the National Theatre.<sup>3</sup> The productions of Vasilis Ziogas' *Antigone's Machmaking* (1977) and of Chourmouzis' *The Employee* (1977) established him as a director. Other acclaimed productions for the New Scene include Pavlos Matesis' *The Exile* (1986-7) and Kabanellis' *The Court of Wonders* (1982). Moreover, he directed Hourmouzis' *The Card Player* (1986-7) and Psathas' *Fon Dimitrakis* (1979) with great commercial success for the Theatre Alabra with Thymios Karakatsanis in the central role. Georgousopoulos wrote for the last mentioned production: "he [Bakas] organised a performance with inner rhythm, ... and without seeking recourse to exaggeration, he maintained the action within the development of the conflicts which derive from the characters as well".<sup>4</sup>

In 1987, Bakas directed his second tragedy for the National theatre, Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, performed at Herodeion (Summer, 1987). The production was based on T. Roussos' translation and A. Sarantopoulos' scenery while Kostas Karras held the role of Eteocles.<sup>5</sup> In that production Bakas "missed the theological trance which makes the play performable today".<sup>6</sup> In 1990, he directed Aeschylus' *Persae* for the National Theatre's participation to the Festival of Epidavros (Summer, 1990). From October 1992 to October 1995, Bakas was the Artistic Director of the Municipal and Regional Theatre of Calamata. While there he directed Gorky's *The Petty Bourgeoise* (Winter, 1993-94) and Lorca's *Blood Wedding* (Winter,

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all the tragedies of Aristophanes and his productions became famous. He also wrote many books on Greek Theatre among, introducing *The Living Aristophanes* (Engl. transl., Athens, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> New Scene was established in 1970 within the National Theatre as an experimental stage for new theatrical writers directors and scenographers.

<sup>4</sup> Kostas Georgousopoulos, "Wicked Morals" ("Favla lthi"), *Vima* 24/10/1979.

<sup>5</sup> More or less the same contributors produced Euripides' *Orestes* (Herodeion, 1992). See chapter 4.5. "'The Tragic Face of Fate': *Orestes* of the Theatrical Group Mythos Directed by Kostas Bakas", pp. 201-210.

<sup>6</sup> See Yiannis Varveris, *Theatre in Crisis B (1984-1989) (IKrisis tou Theatrou)* (Athens, 1991), p. 219.



1994-95). For the Summer Festivals of the open theatres of Greece, he directed Aristophanes' *Peace* (Lycabettus, 1993), Sophocles' *Antigone* (Chania, ancient theatre of Aeneiads, etc, 1994) and Euripides' *Trojan Women* (Lycabettus, ancient theatre of Philippoi, etc, 1995).

BOSWELL Laurence: He was the artistic director of the Gate theatre from 1990 to 1995. He took over the job from Stephen Daldry (Artistic Director Designate, Royal Court) and he earned his reputation as the instigator of the award winning (Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement 1992) production of *Plays of the Spanish Golden Age* including Lope de Vega's *Punishment Without Revenge* (1990) and *The Gentleman of Olmedo* (1991), and Tirso de Molina's *Don Gil of the Green Breeches* (1991).<sup>7</sup> The Gate Theatre occupies a tiny space above a pub at Notting Hill Gate; its auditorium cannot seat more than sixty persons. However, it is very productive and its seasonal framework contains more new plays than popular classics.<sup>8</sup> And Boswell argues: "... we must never turn into a place where you get the tried and tested. 'Undiscovered' must always be the big word".<sup>9</sup> Thus, he started his career at the Gate Theatre by exploring the works of Spanish theatre writers of the 17th century who were little known to his

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<sup>7</sup> Apart from Stephen Daldry, the two other former Artistic Directors of the Gate were Lou Stein (now Artistic Director of the Palace Theatre, Watford) and Giles Croft (now Literary Manager of the Royal National Theatre).

<sup>8</sup> The Gate Theatre in its fifteen years of life (1980-1995) has not received any public funding and thus it struggles to survive. According to the programme of the production of *Agamemnon's Children* (6 March - 1 April 1995), "[A]ll the actors, directors, designers and stage-managers are unpaid and work for expenses only". But according to Claire Armitstead article "Everything but the Kitchen Sink" (*Guardian* 3/9/1992) "[T]he brutal truth is that it [the Gate] could never have achieved as much if it had been funded. Because its actors work for little or no money, there is no financial limitation to cast sizes, which means directors can tackle plays of a scale that would normally be impossible outside the National or the RSC. This in turn has presented an extreme challenge to its directors and designers, who have reacted with extreme resourcefulness, setting new standards in fringe theatre productions"

<sup>9</sup> Claire Armitstead, "Everything but the Kitchen Sink", *Guardian* 3/9/1992.

country.<sup>10</sup> His approach to the Spanish theatre culminated in Lope de Vegas' *The Great Pretenders* (1991-92) and *Madness in Valencia* (1992-93). Boswell directed the Gate's National and International tours of the two plays as well as Marivaux's *The Cheating Hearts* (1993-94). As has been suggested "these productions [Lope de Vega's four plays] have been among the greatest boons of life in London".<sup>11</sup>

What attracted Boswell to Lope de Vega's plays was his poetic language in association to his theatricality. According to his own words, printed in James Woodall's article, "Lope was a very choreographic writer. He really understood the language of theatre as theatre, and it's true that many of his plays either stand or fall on dexterity of performance. You won't find any literary masterpieces there, just endlessly brilliant and popular theatre".<sup>12</sup> Boswell based his interpretations on David Johnston's powerful translations which managed to render the liveliness of the language of the Spanish writer. To a direct and potent translation compiled by Kenneth Mcleish was based his approach to Euripides' *Hecuba* produced for the Gate Theatre in autumn 1992.

*Hecuba* is Boswell's first attempt in the field of Greek tragedy; the second comes three years later with *Agamemnon's Children*.<sup>13</sup> He focuses on the psychological development of the heroine, from her helplessness, as the last comforts of her life, Polyxene and Polydorus are lost because of the brutality of both allies and conquerors, to the fearful avenging spirit which resembles madness as she blinds Polymestor and slaughters his children after cradling them. Moreover, Boswell's approach brings out *Hecuba's* "sexualised violence", apparent in the descriptions of Polyxena's lovely body as well as in the blinding of Polymestor which is "a symbolic castration".<sup>14</sup> And although *Hecuba's* ruthless vengeance which enables her to murder innocent children could cause our repel, Boswell's interpretation directs our sympathy

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<sup>10</sup> Lope de Vega's best known work was *Fuente Ovejuna* staged under Declan Donnellan at the National Theatre in 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Alastair Macaulay, "Madness' Tours the Country", *Financial Times* 18/1/1993.

<sup>12</sup> James Woodall, "Mad about the Spanish Bard", *Times* 16/12/1992.

<sup>13</sup> See 4.6. "A New 'Oresteia' After Euripides: The Gate Theatre's Production of *Agamemnon's Children*", pp. 211-225.

<sup>14</sup> Edith Hall, "Sexualised Violence", *Times Literary Supplement* 18/9/1992, p. 20.



towards the ravaged queen. Ann Mitchell's superb performance as Hecuba has been considered as a revelation: her "supercharged journey through naked grief, ribald sarcasm, glinting malevolence, vicious craziness and implacable resignation is one of the acting highlights of the year".<sup>15</sup> Polyxena is "memorably played with a nervy dignity by Sara Mair-Thomas",<sup>16</sup> - she plays Electra in Boswell's production of *Agamemnon's Children*.<sup>17</sup> Boswell's career as Artistic Director of the Gate Theatre ends with his direction of Carlo Goldoni's *The Lovers* (3-29 April 1995).

EVANGELATOS Spyros A.: He is one of the most popular directors in Greece and his successful direction of plays, more than 140 in different State as well as privately financed theatres, in addition to his participation in Greek and other International Festivals, has earned him a much deserved popularity. He studied classical philology at the University of Athens and was awarded his doctorate in classical theatre by that University. He also studied Dramatic Arts in the school of National Theatre of Greece as well as in Vienna. From 1977 to 1980 he was the Artistic Director of the State Theatre of Northern Greece, and from 1984 to 1987 the Artistic Director of the National Lyric Theatre. From 1991 he has been the Head of Department of Theatre Studies in the University of Athens. His name however has been associated with the Amphi-Theatre, which he founded in 1975.

Amphi-Theatre's artistic aims were declared then by reference to several explanations or translations of the word "amphi" in relation to the word "theatre".<sup>18</sup> With regard to its aesthetics "the Amphi-Theatre

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Coveney, "Isolated and Inclement Dane", *Observer* 21/9/1992.

<sup>16</sup> Edith Hall, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> See chapter 4.6. "A New 'Oresteia' After Euripides: The Gate Theatre's Production of *Agamemnon's Children*", pp. 211-225.

<sup>18</sup> The word "Amphi-Theatre" derived by "amfphitheazon" which was found in "Souda" Dictionary (10th century A.D.) published by Dimitrios Chalkokondilis (Milan 1944); it means "area viewed from all vantage points". The following interpretations are found on the first page of each of the programmes of "Amphi-Theatre's" productions: a) "near all around (concerning the public)", b) "from all aspects (concerning theatrical art)" and c) "amidst, together with (concerning its epoch)". Moreover, its two main concerns are defined as presenting "the ancient drama and

pursued a bond between the folkloric ... theatrical tradition and contemporary theatrical explorations".<sup>19</sup> The Amphi-Theatre takes part in the theatrical festivals of Epidavros, of Athens and of other Greek cities as well as in International festivals. Since 1985, after 10 years without a permanent home, it has been established permanently in Plaka and one fifth of its expenses are subsidised by the Ministry of Culture. From the time of its establishment in 1975, Amphi-Theatre has included a theatrical bookshop which publishes the texts or translations used and also scholarly philological and artistic studies of the authors and their epoch.

Evangelatos was the youngest director to take part in the festival of Epidavros when he directed Sophocles' *Electra* for the National Theatre in 1972. The same performance sealed his life-long cooperation with Yorgos Patsas, the designer, and with Maria Horss, the choreographer. The following year, they worked on Euripides' *Hippolytus* and in 1974, the three of them worked together in Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Cyclops*, both of which were performed on the same days (13 and 14 of July 1974) at Epidavros. Evangelatos also directed Euripides' *Bacchae* for the National Theatre, performed at Epidavros in 1975, his *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, Epidavros 1976, and Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* for the same festival in 1977.<sup>20</sup>

Before we proceed to the Amphi-Theatre's productions, we should refer to Evangelatos' method of approaching the ancient texts as well as the other texts of Greek and international dramaturgy. Because the Amphi-Theatre was founded by Evangelatos, its creative progress until now has been directed by his own aesthetic principles and choice of repertoire, which are dominated by Greek and classical theatre,<sup>21</sup> and

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the old (in many cases unknown) Greek theatre from 1600-1900 while at the same time dealing with foreign classical as well as contemporary theatrical writers. These definitions are also to be found in all the programmes of the Amphi-Theatre's productions.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> In all but one of these productions (*Aeschylus' Suppliant Women*), Yorgos Patsas designed the costumes and the scenery; Maria Horss choreographed all the performances.

<sup>21</sup> Of the 44 plays he produced for the Amphi-Theatre until the summer 1994, 18 come from the ancient Greek literature, including Homer's *Odyssey* (1976), 9 belong



thus, it is differentiated from Karolos Koun's and his Art Theatre's preference for modern Greek and International theatrical writers. Evangelatos' work for the theatre expresses his deep interest and concern for the revival of Greek theatre through Greek tradition associated with the knowledge of the theatrical past, Greek and classical in general. His philological background, his thorough knowledge of the texts of Greek dramaturgy and of their different interpretations have determined his approach which is always learned and illuminating. This is apparent in the compilations of works of Greek dramaturgy he produced for the Amphi-Theatre, and in particular his *Genovepha and her Past* in 1977 which was a compilation of seven theatrical works of the period 1795 to 1895, indicative of the process of Greek theatre in the last century; and his production of Aeschylus' *Psychostasia* in 1979, which was a composition of extensive fragments of *Prometheus Unbound*, his *Myrmidones* and *Aetnaeae*.

At the same time Evangelatos experimented in different modes of theatrical presentation, as a consequence of his strong belief that the actors should be at the centre of the theatrical activity and therefore, a thorough knowledge of all aspects of the mimetic art is a requisite. He worked on circus skills as well as on the folklore spectacle, as the performances of V. Kornaros' *Erotokretos* in 1975 (first production for the Amphi-Theatre) indicates; on the skills of clowns in the performance of Aristophanes' *Frogs* in 1977 (Amphi-Theatre); on theatrical expression through creative dancing in Aeschylus' *Psychostasia* (Amphi-Theatre in 1979); on the tradition of religious performances in Aeschylus' *Persae* produced for the State Theatre of Northern Greece in 1978; and on the spontaneity and improvisation of Commedia dell' Arte in *Quarrels at Giorgia* for the State Theatre of Northern Greece. Those experimentations earned him a reputation as an innovative and pioneering director.

Moreover, Evangelatos' method concerning ancient theatre originates in his belief that each play should be approached in a distinct

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to the Greek literature between 1600 and 1900, in addition to Moschos' *Neaira* (around 1475) and to *The Epic of Digenis Akritas* by an unknown author of the 12th century. If in the enumeration we include the production of four plays by Shakespeare and one by Molière, we may conclude that the percentage of the plays of modern dramaturgy Evangelatos has directed is relatively small.



way which derives from its own peculiar nature. Interviewed by V. Angelikopoulos for *Vima* (5/8/1990) he expressed his view as follows: "The problems of the plays of Aeschylus are different from those of Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes or Menander. And apart from that, there is always the peculiarity of each play of the same author .... In Aeschylus, *Persae* is completely different from *Oresteia*. Each play has its own personality. Thus, I face each play in a distinct way trying to discover its virtues and peculiarities while at the same time I ask the relentless question: *Why are we interested in the particular play today and how can I make it interesting for the people?* Therefore, I change my aesthetic approach in order to serve each play better".

A reference to Amphi-Theatre's productions of ancient Greek comedy should include Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in 1976, an all-male production of the play, his *Frogs* in 1977 and *Wealth* performed at Herodeion in 1978, Menander's *The Arbitration* in 1980, Aristophanes' *Peace* in 1984 and his *Clouds* in 1989.<sup>22</sup> Amphi-Theatre's productions of ancient Greek tragedy began with Euripides' *Rhesus* performed at Epidavros in 1981, and continued with his *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (Epidavros, 1982), Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (Herodeion, 1983) Sophocles' *Electra* (Epidavros, 1991), a new production of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* for the Festival at Epidavros in 1992, Euripides' *Bacchae* (Epidavros, 1993) and Sophocles' *Trachiniai* (Epidavros, 1994). To this record we should add his production of the *Oresteia* for the Festival of Epidavros in 1990.<sup>23</sup> Before then however, he had directed the three plays that composed *Oresteia* separately, starting with *Eumenides* in 1986 and proceeding to *Choephoroi* in 1987 and *Agamemnon* in 1988.

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<sup>22</sup> Menander's *The Arbitration* was a very successful production and was performed in Zurich in 1978, at the Edinburgh Festival in 1981, at the Festival of Nations in Sophia in 1982 at the International Festival of Denver, Colorado in 1982, at the Europalia in Brussels the same year, in Rome in 1984, at the International Festival of Merida-Malaga in Spain in 1986, and at the International Festival of East Berlin during the same year. The music of the performance was composed by Yiannis Markopoulos and the setting and costumes were designed by Yorgos Patsas. The play was first performed at the festival of Epidavros in 1985.

<sup>23</sup> See 2.5. "A Patriarchal View of the *Oresteia*", pp. 98-108.



**HALL, Peter:** He directed his first plays when he was at Cambridge; in 1954 at the early age of 24 he became the director of the Arts Theatre London. And then his career followed a very successful path which could justify the title he himself gave to the first chapter of his *Autobiography*, "Better Lucky than Rich".<sup>24</sup> In 1956 he directed Anita Loos's stage adaptation of Colette's *Gigi* with Leslie Caron, which was a great success. In 1959 he staged Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Coriolanus* at Stratford. In 1960 he became the new director at Stratford on Avon, and within one year he changed the name of the theatre from the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, and had the company known as the Royal Shakespeare Company. At the same time he acquired a new London base for the Company at the Aldwych Theatre because he considered that in "a second theatre, a London house, ... - in addition to transfers from Stratford of the previous season's Shakespeares - we could stage other classics and modern drama".<sup>25</sup> In 1963 he produced an astonishingly successful "trilogy", *The Wars of the Roses*, which was the overall name he gave to a trilogy of plays adapted from Shakespeare's three parts of *Henry VI* and his *Richard III*.<sup>26</sup> In 1964, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, he revived *The Wars of the Roses* with the RSC and added to it *Richard II*, the two *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V*. It was the first time the plays had been done as a sequence (Seven History Plays) which presented English history from Bolingbroke's usurpation of the throne to the death of Richard III.

From 1973 to 1988 Peter Hall was the director of Britain's National Theatre. In 1976 his staging of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* with Albert Finney was a magnificent success. His production of the *Oresteia* in 1981 was one of the highlights of his artistic direction at the National Theatre. His last piece of work at the National was a cycle of Shakespeare's late plays *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The*

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Hall, *The Autobiography of Peter Hall* (London 1993), pp. 3-135.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>26</sup> The four plays became three because according to Peter Hall's view the action of the three *Henry VI* plays was too protracted. John Barton and Peter Hall adapted the text compressing the four plays into three. On a few days they played all three parts in one day. "The ancient Greek example was reborn" (See Peter Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 179).

*Tempest*. Peter Hall founded the company which bears his name in September 1988, upon leaving the Royal National Theatre. In 1991 he revived Harold Pinter's *Homecoming* with the Peter Hall Company at the Comedy Theatre, the play having been first staged by the director for the RSC in 1965. In summer 1993 he returned to the field of ancient Greek theatre with a comedy, Aristophane's *Lysistrata*. The Peter Hall Company performed the play at the Old Vic (the first performance was at Liverpool Playhouse the 20th of May 1993). The same production was performed during the summer of 1994 in Greece at the theatre of Epidavros (3-4 September 1994). Peter Hall has also directed over 40 operas all over the world and many films. During the winter of 1995-96, he directed Ibsen's *The Master Builder* with Alan Bates in the central role (Haymarket Theatre Royal).

Peter Hall's work as a director of both RSC and NT was entrepreneurial. "He faced up to his task with the zeal of someone who once taught business management to army officers".<sup>27</sup> To the RSC, he attracted names such as Saint-Denis, Peter Brook, Clifford Williams (they joined the company as resident directors in 1962) and John Bury who earned the RSC reputation; and as has been suggested, it was Peter Brook "rather than anyone else" who "earned the RSC its world-wide reputation as an innovatory company".<sup>28</sup> As a director of the NT he brought writers and directors from the regions such as Bill Bryden, Peter Gill and Alan Ayckbourn. However, this side of his directorial work has been criticised as "being a substitute for having an artistic vision himself".<sup>29</sup>

Peter Hall's approach to the texts was influenced by F.R. Leavis who introduced to the study of English literature the technique of a rigorous, close reading of the text. He approaches the text of a theatrical play first and then he searches for meaning and symbolism. That analytic, textual approach characterises his directorial work, which is conservative. He has also been influenced by Rylands in the understanding of the shape and form of the verse of the theatrical text. He admitted in an interview to Sally Beauman in 1979: "perhaps our

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<sup>27</sup> John Elsom, *Cold War Theatre* (London, 1992), p. 132.

<sup>28</sup> John Elsom, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> John Elsom, *op. cit.*, p. 135.



ideal was to speak like Rylands and think like Leavis".<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in the companies he directed and especially the RSC, he advanced the speaking of verse. This is apparent in his Shakespearean productions whose process of preparation he describes as follows: "when I am preparing a Shakespeare play, I still mutter the text to myself in Elizabethan. It reveals the shapes and the colours".<sup>31</sup> The analysis of the *Oresteia* shows the same textual approach and reverence to the original text (Tony Harrison's translation follows the original closely) although his interpretation seems to have been affected by different factors (e.g. the use of masks, the all-male cast) and lacks integration.<sup>32</sup>

KOUN, Karolos: The Art Theatre of Greece was established in 1942 by Koun, a director who established a "school" in Greece. He was brought up in the cosmopolitan environment of Constantinople by a Greek mother and a father who was half Greek and half Polish German Jew. In 1928 he studied aesthetics at the Sorbonne and started his career as director at Athens College, where he taught English between 1929 and 1938 and where he produced Aristophanes' *Wealth*, *Frogs*, and *Birds* with his students. In 1935 he met Dionysios Devaris, journalist, actor and theatrical author. Devaris saw Koun's amateur performances for the American College and was greatly impressed by his abilities in the field of direction. He consequently persuaded him to become a professional director and together they established the Popular Theatre (Laiki Skini). Karolos Koun, in a lecture given on the 17th of August 1943 for the club of the Friends of the Art Theatre,<sup>33</sup> explained the first steps of his creative career in Laiki Skini: "To be honest, now that I can see the last ten years from a distance, the aesthetic elements I was driven by then, were connected with Greek popular folklore material, already fixed and apparent in the authentic life of villagers and

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<sup>30</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company. A History of Ten Decades* (Oxford, 1982), p. 268.

<sup>31</sup> See Peter Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>32</sup> See 2.2. "A Male Feminist *Oresteia*", pp. 53-71.

<sup>33</sup> The lecture has been published under the title "The Social Position and the Aesthetic Line of the Art Theatre" ("I Koinoniki Thesi ke I Aesthitiki Grammi tou Theatrou Technis") in Karolos Koun, *For the Theatre (Gia to Theatro)* edited by Yorgos Kotanidis (Athens, 1981), p. 23.

islanders, in our folklore music and even further in Byzantine iconography and in ancient vases. Accordingly, the plays we performed, *Erophile*, *Alcestis*, *Wealth*, *Birds* etc., were in absolute agreement with that spirit. I could say that our theatre was expressionistic". In the same lecture he pointed out that in order to achieve his aims he found and educated actors and actresses from the "lower class" (p. 23).

In 1939 Karolos Koun directed Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in a small room of the Greek conservatoire. That production was a landmark in his half century of artistic progress as a director. His interpretation was based on the Stanislavskian method, because according to his view Chekhov's plays could not be interpreted in any other way.<sup>34</sup> Stanislavski remained one of great influences on the director even later when he founded the Art Theatre, because he always believed in the primary importance of the emotion which he tried to discover under each word and phrase. From 1939 to 1941 he worked in the theatrical company of Katerina Andreadi and Marika Kotopouli. However he felt a strong need to establish his own company and follow his own aesthetic principles. In 1942 he founded the Art Theatre but his company's performances were given in the theatre of Kostas Mousouris (Aliko) since they did not have their own theatrical space.

In 1945 the Art Theatre was forced to suspend its performances and despite Karolos Koun's effort to breathe new life into his company between 1946-1949, the company ceased its activities for financial and political reasons as well as for lack of internal coherence. "I had to stop and create a new core from the beginning" said Karolos Koun in interview with Vaios Pangourelis for *Vima* Newspaper (4/10/1981). Between 1950 and 1952 he was working for the National Theatre. His purpose was to raise money in order to repay the debts of the Art Theatre (*Vima* 4/10/1981). During those years he continued to direct the Art Theatre's drama school and in 1954 the Art Theatre produced

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<sup>34</sup> One of the actors who took part in that production, Lycourgos Kallergis, pointed out that for the actors it was a new experience since they were obliged first to penetrate into the play's characters and then to identify with them and thus to interpret them "internally". See Lycourgos Kallergis, "We had to Express Ourselves Differently" ("Eprepe na milisoume me allo tropo"), in *Theatrika* vol. 2-3 (January to June 1990), p. 10.



*Our Town* by Thornton Wilder in its own theatrical space. The Art Theatre has continued its uninterrupted and successful progress until the present.

With regard to the repertory of the Art Theatre, we should point out that its major aim from the time of its establishment in 1942 "was to create and present modern Greek authors with concerns, sensitivity and questioning parallel to those of the universal modern theatre but without losing their own distinct nationality and without being alienated from their own inheritance and tradition."<sup>35</sup> The first modern Greek play to be performed by the Art Theatre was Yorgos Sevasticoglou's *Of Constantine and Helen* in 1943, which opened the way to the presentation of modern authors such as Jacobos Kabanellis, Loula Anagnostaki, Kostas Mourselas, Marios Pontikas and Yorgos Armenis.

Karolos Koun also directed plays by Shakespeare and he was invited to England in 1967 by the Royal Shakespeare Company to present *Romeo and Juliet*. He was the only Greek director who had been invited there to direct in the last thirty or forty years. Back in Greece, he also directed plays by Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov (*Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya*) and Bertolt Brecht. As well as Brecht, modern theatre as a whole found in Karolos Koun the ideal teacher and interpreter: Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Eugene Ionesco, Max Frisch, Friedrich Durrenmatt, Harold Pinter, Paul Green, were all presented to Greek audiences.

In the field of ancient Greek theatre Karolos Koun was outstanding as a director. The Art Theatre Company performed ten of Aristophanes' comedies and six of the seven Aeschylean tragedies. The director believed that Aeschylus and Aristophanes could not be characterised as conservative authors: "For me if their theatre is not a revolutionary theatre, with concrete messages for the world we live in today, I do not know what else it could be".<sup>36</sup> However, Karolos Koun directed only two of the surviving plays of Euripides during his lifetime: *Bacchae* for the Epidavria Festival of 1977 and *Trojan Women* for the

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<sup>35</sup> Karolos Koun, "The Modern Greek Play in the Art Theatre" ("To Neoelliniko Ergo sto Theatro Technis") published in Karolos Koun, *For the Theatre (Gia to Theatro)*, edited by Yorgos Kotanidis (Athens, 1981), p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> Karolos Koun, "The Director and the Ancient Theatre Today" ("O Skinothetis ke to Archaio Drama Simera"), Karolos Koun, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

same festival of 1979. After his death two other Euripidean tragedies were presented by his company, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, in 1990, and *Medea*, in 1995.

The Art Theatre's productions of ancient Greek theatre achieved an international success. In 1962 the company was invited by the Theatre of Nations to perform Aristophanes' *Birds* in Paris and was awarded the first prize for the best national representation. In 1964 the company was invited to perform the same play in the Royal Shakespeare Company International Season at the Aldwych Theatre. Amongst his great successes we should include the performance of Aeschylus' *Persae* in 1965 based on the treatment of the chorus and the music of Yiannis Christou, as well as the performance of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* in 1967 for which the director said: "we approached it with absolute seriousness and austerity and at the same time we treated it like a modern theatrical text".<sup>37</sup>

Karolos Koun's aesthetic principles affected his treatment of Ancient Greek Theatre. He was influenced by the strong elements of Greek folklore tradition and of Greek environment: "We Greeks, direct inheritors of ancient Greek drama, have a great advantage in attempting to interpret it; we happen to live in the same land as the ancients. This fact allows us to draw from the very same sources as they did and use to advantage all that Greek tradition has achieved ever since".<sup>38</sup> At the same time he admitted that in his interpretation of each ancient play, many foreign influences, contemporary events and ideas from outside Greece intruded on his thought but all together were transplanted into the Greek environment.<sup>39</sup> However, Koun's belief was that the "ancient poetry, the great truths, the human situations and everything of

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<sup>37</sup> Karolos Koun, "Oedipus": his discussion with Kostas Parlas for *Vima* of 17/10/1967 published under the same title in Karolos Koun, *We Make Theatre for our Souls (Kanoume Theatro gia tin Psyche mas)* (Athens, 1992), pp. 78-9.

<sup>38</sup> Karolos Koun, "The Ancient Theatre" ("To Archaio Theatro"), lecture given to the International Conference on Theatre, Herodeion the 4th of July 1957, printed under the same title in Yorgos Kotanidis' edition, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Karolos Koun, "I might be a Part of the Social Convention but sometimes I Function against it" ("Isos n' Aneiko sto Katestimeno alla Sychna Leitourgo Enantion tou") in Yorgos Kotanidis' edition, *op.cit.*, p. 52.



substance apparent in the poet's work should be projected in a way that could touch the modern spectator".<sup>40</sup>

Brecht's epic theatre also influenced Koun's approach to the ancient theatre: "Brecht's theatre helped us to find elements and theatrical analogies with ancient theatre".<sup>41</sup> His epic theatre was considered by Koun as a necessary equipment for the new understanding of the classical texts and his productions of ancient Greek theatre had the conception of a tale told without having to observe the unities of time and place, free from the restrictions of the realistic conventions of the well-made play. Moreover, Koun used the actors and actresses to help destroy conventional illusion since they put themselves "at a distance" from the characters they were portraying and the situation they were involved with in order to arouse reflection in the spectator, in accordance with the Brechtian "alienation" effect. The extensive use of masks in each of his productions of ancient Greek plays serves the same purpose while at the same time it accords with his view that the mask helps the characters to keep their impersonal character.<sup>42</sup>

Karolos Koun not only respected the role of the chorus in Greek tragic theatre, but also considered it "as a factor of the utmost importance for the ancient drama" because "it illuminates the heroes spiritually and oratorically, with its sound and music, its movement and stylisation; the chorus also creates the atmosphere of the play and it projects with its passion the messages of a particular poet".<sup>43</sup> Additionally, he treated the chorus as one of the actors who acts and reacts to the dramatised events, a view in accordance with Aristotle's *Poetics* (XVIII 7, 1456a 26). In his performances each member of the chorus expresses himself and all the others. He is an individual and at

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<sup>40</sup> See Karolos Koun, "Ancient Greek Tragedy" ("Archaia Elliniki Tragodia") in Y. Kotanidis' edition, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>41</sup> See Karolos Koun, "The Director and the Ancient Theatre Today" ("O Skinothetis ke to Archaio Drama Simera"), in Y. Kotanidis' edition, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> See Karolos Koun, "Sound and Movement" ("Echos ke Kinisi") in Karolos Koun, *We Make Theatre for our Souls (Kanoume Theatro gia tin Psyche mas)* (Athens, 1992), p. 165.

<sup>43</sup> Karolos Koun, "The Director and the Ancient Theatre Today" ("O Skinothetis kai to Archaio Drama Simera") a lecture published in Y. Kotanidis' edition, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

the same time a member of an entity. The chorus was never a problem for Koun but a live part of each play which could not be dispensed with.

MICHAELIDIS, Yorgos: His contribution to Greek theatre includes the introduction of Greek audiences to plays of classical, international dramaturgy presented under the light of his distinct approach as well as to modern Greek playwrights who tackle the problems of contemporary Greeks within the socio-political changes of their society. The director himself has at least twice produced his own plays-studies of Greek society and its morals, namely, *The Autopsy*, produced during the first years of the dictatorship in Greece (1967) at Orbo theatre,<sup>44</sup> and his *Athens after the Rain* ("I Athina meta ti Vrochi"), produced in February 1991 (Theatrical Season 1990-1991) with his permanent theatre company Open Theatre (Anoichto Theatro) founded by him in 1984 and established in its own building at Kalvou 70 & Gyze. However, since the early seventies, the director and his company have been housed at the Theatre of Kefallinias and before that at the Orbo Theatre.

The first production of his new permanently established company was Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* for the theatrical season 1984-85. Since then, Michaelidis has produced two more plays by Shakespeare: *The Tempest* in 1987-88 and *Hamlet* in the winter 1991-92, the year that Evangelatos and his Amphi-Theatre presented the same play.<sup>45</sup> In 1994, just after the production of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (end of 1993, beginning of 1994),<sup>46</sup> he successfully produced another Shakespearean play, *A Midsummer Nights' Dream*.<sup>47</sup> The company

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<sup>44</sup> The play took a strong political position against the dictatorship and the people of Greece went to the theatre risking their lives since, it was full of agents of the security secret service.

<sup>45</sup> Both productions were critical successes although they were based on different interpretations of the story of *Hamlet*. The more conventional direction of the second was counterbalanced by the visual impact of the first helped by Yiannis Metzikoﬀ's powerful costumes and scenery.

<sup>46</sup> See 2.6. "A Visual Enactment of the Process of the *Oresteia*", pp. 109-117.

<sup>47</sup> Yorgos Michaelidis interviewed by Niki Kastaniotis pointed out that he likes the plays by Shakespeare because "they add poetry" in our life: "these plays not only include poetry, but also they convey it within us". See Niki Kastaniotis, "This



has also produced plays by Beaumarchais (1985-6), August Strindberg (1987-8), John Ford (1986-7) and Chekhov (1989-90).

Before we proceed to Michaelidis' productions of ancient Greek Theatre, we should refer to his distinct methodological approach to the plays of mainly classical repertoire. As has been suggested and as the analysis of his *Oresteia* indicates,<sup>48</sup> the direction is based on tried and tested solutions to various problems of presentation that have shaped the physiognomy of the company, among which is "the personal reading of the direction" in which "the actor is included in the reading, independent of the different possibilities of each of the actors but according to the overall picture of the spectacle".<sup>49</sup> In this sort of approach, the actors and other contributors to the production respect the prevailing view of the director.

Moreover, Yorgos Michaelidis favours strong visual impact in the plays he presents to the audience, and his work as a director is constructed around that element which usually leads to magnificent performances but which often results in critics' dissatisfaction with his emphasis. Two illustrative examples of this kind of criticism derive from the field of tragedy. Kostas Georgousopoulos wrote for Michaelidis' production of Euripides' *Trojan Women* (Summer 1977, Theatre of Lycabettus) as follows: "In *Trojan Women* he had worked out the visual aspect (pictures from concentration camps, of the refugees after the destruction of Asia Minor, from Cyprus) before he even decided on the text. Thus, he tried to fit the Euripidean tragedy within the picture brought from outside".<sup>50</sup> The theatrical critic Yiannis Varveris pointed

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*Oresteia* has something to Offer" ("Auti i *Oresteia* echi kati na Proseri", *Avriani* 28/11/1993.

<sup>48</sup> See 2.6. "A Visual Enactment of the Process of the *Oresteia*", pp. 109-117.

<sup>49</sup> Platon Mavromoustakos, "The Return of Classics and their Memory" ("I Epistrofi ton Klassikon kai i Anamnisi"), *Epilogue' 92 (Epilogos' 92)*, [A Yearly Artistic Edition] (Athens, 1993), p. 112.

<sup>50</sup> Kostas Georgousopoulos, "Pity without Fear" ("Eleos dichos Fovo") in *Keys and Codes of the Theatre I, Ancient Drama (Kleidia ke Kodikes tou Theatrou I, Archaeo Drama)* (Athens, 1982), p., 163-4, first published in *Vima* 28/9/77. However, the same critic admits that "Y. Michaelidis is a daring artist. Even if one disagrees with him one cannot overlook his ability to organise a performance and to leave his stamp on it", p. 163.

out that Michaelidis in his production of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* for the State Theatre of Northern Greece, performed at Epidavros in summer 1983, addressed the performance to our eyes and not, as was more appropriate, to our ears.<sup>51</sup>

Euripides' *Trojan Women* was Michaelidis' first ancient theatre production in 1977 with his Open Theatre Company, the same year in which Yiannis Tsarouchis, the great painter and scenographer, produced the same play in a reconstructed car park in Kaplanou Street. In the second production mentioned above, Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*, he used K. Ch. Myres' translation of the original text while the music was composed by Thodoros Antoniou, one of his valued collaborators, with great critical success. The next ancient Greek play he produced with his Open Theatre company was Aristophanes' *Frogs* in summer 1990 for the festival of Epidavros. The music of the play was again composed by Thodoros Antoniou while the setting was designed by Yorgos Patsas and the costumes by the famous Greek artist Alekos Fasianos. The production was considered "the very best of all the Aristophanic versions" of that summer, mainly because one of the greatest of Greek comic actors, Thymios Karakatsanis took the role of Dionysos.<sup>52</sup> In the winter 1993-94 he produced Aeschylus' *Oresteia* discussed in detail in the second chapter of the present thesis. In the summer of 1995, he produced for the festival of Epidavros Aristophanes' *Peace*, which was a great "box-office" success mainly because a famous Greek comic actor, Thanasis Veggos, hold the main role of Tryggaesus and because it was the first time Veggos played a role from the ancient Greek theatrical repertoire.

STEIN, Peter: "Peter Stein: Germany's Leading Theatre Director" is the title of a book by Michael Patterson exploring his working genius and his outstanding contribution to the German as well as to world theatre in

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<sup>51</sup> See Yiannis Varveris, *Theatre in Crisis 1976-1984 (I Krisis tou Theatrou)* (Athens, 1985), pp. 194-96.

<sup>52</sup> See Andrianos Georgiou, "Theatrical Tour of the Summer" ("Theatriko Odoiporiko tou Kalokairiou") in *Theatrika* 4 (July-September 1990), pp. 6-7. In Summer 1993, Thymios Karakatsanis and his company New Greek Theatre (Nea Elliniki Skini) produced a very successful all male production of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.



general.<sup>53</sup> He became known worldwide for his productions with his company, the Schaubühne, in the former West Berlin where he worked as leading director from 1970 to 1985.

When he directed Edward Bond's *Saved* for the Munich Kammerspiele, which had a tradition of experimentation, he was awarded the annual accolade of "production of the year" from the influential West German magazine *Theater heute*. However, the production that established his technique as well as his approach to the classics was Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* in March 1969.<sup>54</sup> He employed a Brechtian critical approach to the play which was not dissociated from its cultural and socio-political background considered in relation to its relevance for our modern time. But, as has been suggested, "[T]he major achievement of Stein's *Tasso*, ... , was Stein's ability to employ a tough Brechtian critical approach without resorting to Brecht's 'rough theatre'. With an astonishingly sure hand Stein combined political analysis with an exquisitely polished aesthetic product."<sup>55</sup>

Apart from Stein's interest in the political theatre apparent in his adaptation of Goethe's classical play,<sup>56</sup> *Torquato Tasso* also "demonstrated his mastery of 'scenic writing' - in other words, his production deliberately sought to add a whole new dimension of meaning to the playwright's original text".<sup>57</sup> Moreover, it showed him the possibilities of collective work with a dedicated and intelligent ensemble, which were put into practice in the way he carefully structured his company at Schaubühne to function according to a

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<sup>53</sup> See Michael Patterson, *Peter Stein - Germany's Leading Theatre Director*, edited in the series *Directors in Perspective*, general editor: C.D. Innes (Cambridge, 1981).

<sup>54</sup> The play was performed in the Theatre am Goetheplatz in Bremen.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Patterson, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> Before *Torquato Tasso*, Stein had also undertaken a production of Peter Weiss's agit-prop *Vietnam Discourse* for Kammerspiele in 1968, which was banned by the administrative director (*Intendant*) of the Kammerspiele although Stein's group was later invited to perform the play at the Berlin Schaubühne. This protest political play had been preceded by Brecht's early play *In the Jungle of the Cities* for Munich's Kammerspiele.

<sup>57</sup> David Bradby and David Williams, *Director's Theatre* (London, 1993), Ch. 7, "Peter Stein", pp. 186-223, p. 193.

communal organisation.<sup>58</sup> The same model of collaborative organisation was to be found in Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and in Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil.

From 1970 onwards Peter Stein's company was established at the Schaubühne in West Berlin, situated amongst workers' tenement blocks and subsidised heavily by the West Berlin authorities in order to promote Berlin as a free cultural centre. The fact that Stein produced works which dealt with the history of the working class in order to raise political consciousness, contradicted the establishment of his company in a West Berlin theatre subsidised to promote the values of a capitalist society. That contradiction became sharper when the company moved into a building on the Kurfürstendamm in the heart of Berlin's "West end".

The company's work was based on the learning process, on political research which raised their political consciousness and which was therefore in accordance with their primary political aim. Everybody had to attend political seminars which were organised as a part of their daily schedule. *The Communist Manifesto* and the writings of Lenin were at the centre of their studies. Additionally, the members of the group had to prepare essays on issues that were at stake with regard to the production they had decided to undertake. Before the production of *Bacchae* directed by Grüber, the whole group was involved in a preparation which was presented in a theatrical form to the audience under the title of *Antikenproject I (Antiquity Project I)* directed by Peter Stein, in February 1974. Moreover, before his remarkable production of Shakespeare's *As you Like it (Wie es euch gefällt)* in 1977, the whole company devoted two years (1976-7) to academic research concerning the Elizabethan view of society; they were also trained in practical skills, for example in Elizabethan music and dancing. At the end they decided to present the material to the public over two evenings under the English title *Shakespeare's Memory*.

One of Stein's last ventures in a strictly political theatre was his production of Bertolt Brecht's *Die Mutter (The Mother)* in 1970. Many members of the Schaubühne felt it essential that their work should be

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<sup>58</sup> The organisation consisted basically of the five members of the directorial committee and of the *Vollversammlung*, the general committee which could veto any decision of the directorial committee.



directed to the workers in whose name they were making theatre. Therefore they arranged special performances to which only workers and apprentices were invited. But, the Schaubühne failed to win a significantly proletarian element for its audience despite the fact that it was situated in a working class area. Peter Stein and his company turned to bourgeois classics with Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* in 1971 and Maxim Gorky's *Sommergäste (Summerfolk)* performed in 1974.

It has already been mentioned that *Antikenproject* was Stein's first effort in the field of classical Greek literature. And while the project led to a production of *Bacchae* directed by Grüber, Stein's involvement in it stimulated his approach to the tragic plays which culminated in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in 1980. The project which was actually performed by the actors comprised: the *Exercises for Actors* which involved among others breathing, listening, exploring movements of the limbs and facial expressions; *The Hunt* in which one actor, the victim, in a heavily padded costume was chased by two other actors dressed like American gangsters and armed with large knives. The chorus encouraged the pursuit with bestial sounds. The victim was eventually stabbed and the chorus with bloodstained hands, after realising what they had done, covered up the traces of the killing; the *Sacrificial Object* followed, a construction around which the chorus danced primitive dances; finally, the *Initiation* took place according to which three actors and three actresses were stripped naked and then buried in sand. When uncovered, their faces and hands were decorated. The *Antikenproject* ended with the reciting of Prometheus' monologue by Eberhard Feik.<sup>59</sup>

Although Stein resigned as the Schaubühne's director in 1985, he returned there periodically to produce plays like Eugene O' Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1986) and Jean Racine's *Phèdre* (1987). Since 1990, Stein has been the director of theatre for the annual month-long festival at Salzburg. He "hopes to make Salzburg the European center for the finest German-language productions. (From 1990 to 1993, largely because of Stein's efforts, the number of non-musical theater seats rose from 34.000 to 80.000)".<sup>60</sup> In 1992 he produced *Julius Caesar*, using the Riding School made famous by Reinhardt's outdoor staging of

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<sup>59</sup> The description of the *Antiquity Project* was based on the information provided in Michael Patterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-107.

<sup>60</sup> See Samuel L. Leiter, *The Great Stage Directors* (New York, 1994), p. 279.

*Faust*. In 1993 he staged the world premiere of Botho Strauss's *Equilibrium* with Jutta Lampe and in 1994 *Antony and Cleopatra*.<sup>61</sup> During the same year he produced Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in Moscow.<sup>62</sup>

TSIANOS, Kostas: His name has been associated with the establishment and successful progress of the Thessalian Theatre (1975-until today). He has been the artistic director of the Municipal and Regional Theatre of Larissa since 1983.<sup>63</sup> He studied drama in the Dramatic School of the Conservatory of Athens with Dimitris Rondiris and his approach to the Greek plays has been affected by his teaching.<sup>64</sup> His career has also been influenced by Dora Stratou in whose folk dancing group he was an apprentice for six years and then an assistant.<sup>65</sup> In one of his interviews he confessed that he had informed Stratou of his intention to produce Euripides' *Electra* using the folk dancing tradition and she had promised to offer her group, the musical instruments and her musicians but her illness prevented their plans.<sup>66</sup> Before the establishment of the Thessalian Theatre he worked as an actor - he started his career as an actor - with Yorgos Michaelidis, in the Theatre of Nea Ionia and with Yorgos Charalambidis in the theatrical group of Karezi-Kazakos.<sup>67</sup> His experience with Stratou's folk

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<sup>61</sup> The information concerning Stein's recent directorial work comes from the book of Samuel L. Leiter' *loc. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> See 2.3. "A Political View of the Aeschylean Trilogy", pp. 72-86.

<sup>63</sup> See 4.4.1. "The Primacy of Folk-Dancing", p. 191-195.

<sup>64</sup> Dimitris Rondiris served as a director of the National Theatre from 1934 until 1955 with a break during the German Occupation. He used the sources of Greek tradition in order to approach ancient tragedy, while feelings and emotions associated with musical expression were of great importance in his work as a director. In his productions of ancient Greek tragedy, chorus held an important part. For more information see Aiki Bacopoulou Halls' article on Greece published in Michael Walton's *Living Greek Theatre* (1987), pp. 261-295.

<sup>65</sup> See chapter 4.4.1. "The Primacy of Folk-Dancing", pp.191-195.

<sup>66</sup> See Maie Sevastopoulou, "From Larissa to Epidavros" ("Apo ti Larissa stin Epidavro"), *Theatrika*, Vol.,1 (October-December 1989), p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



dancing group affected his acting as well. According to Yiangos Andreadis "he performs dancing".<sup>68</sup>

During the first years of the establishment of the Thessalian Theatre (1975-1983), he directed: Mitsos Efthymiadis' *The Protectors* (Summer, 1981); Dimitris Psathas' *Von Dimitrakis* (Winter, 1981); Dimitris Vyzantios' *Babylonia* (Summer, 1982); and H.C. Andersen's *The New Royal Clothes* (Winter, 1978-9) - Theatre for Children.<sup>69</sup> Tsianos' work as a director is characterised by his insistence on producing plays by modern Greek theatre writers. He has only directed three tragedies - apart from Euripides' *Electra*, *Choephoroi* (Summer, 1992) and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (Summer, 1991)- and only one play from the International repertoire - F.G. Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* (Winter 1989-90).

As the artistic director of the Municipal and Regional Theatre of Larissa he directed with critical and commercial success plays like Kechaidis' - Chaviara's *Laurel and Rose Laurel* (spring, 1984), Gregorios Xenopoulos' *The Temptation* (Winter 1985-86) and himself performed in plays directed by others.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Tsianos directed a play that he himself wrote, *The Golden Key (To Chryso Kleidi)* (Winter, 1986). However, Tsianos became a well-known and respected director with his production of Euripides' *Electra*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Yiangos Andreadis, "Thessalian Theatre's *Electra*: An Exemplary Performance" (Parastasi Paradigma i *Electra* tou Thessaliku Theatrou", *Mesimvrini* 2/8/1993.

<sup>69</sup> Between 1975 and 1983, the Thessalian Theatre produced eighteen plays of which only two belonged to the International repertoire - Anton Chekhov's *Five One-Act Comedies* (1978) and Nicolo Machiavelli's *Mandragola* (1977). All the other plays produced belonged to the modern Greek repertoire.

<sup>70</sup> Among the plays he performed as an actor we should include Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Winter, 1983-84) directed by Kostas Bakas in which he hold the role of Azdak, Carlo Goldoni's *The Coffee-House* (Winter, 1984) directed by Vassilis Papavassiliou in which he hold the role of Don Marcio and Eduardo de Filippo's *Filoumena Martourano* (Winter, 1986) directed by Nikos Charalambous in which he hold the role of Domenico Soriano.

<sup>71</sup> See 4.4.1. "The Primacy of Folk-Dancing", pp. 191-195. It is characteristic that the first production of Greek drama by the Thessalian Theatre came as late as summer 1987. It was Aristophanes' *Wealth*. The paly directed by Yiannis Karahissaridis was not performed at Epidavros.

His second venture in Greek tragedy, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, was another outstanding success: the play was performed at Epidavros (August, 1990) and participated in the International Festival of Classical Theatre in Merida, Spain (9-10 July 1992) where it received dithyrambic praise.<sup>72</sup> Tsianos directed and choreographed the play based on Christos Samouilidis' modern Greek translation, Yorgos Ziakas designed the scenery and the heavy, elaborate dresses (a mixture of Byzantine, African and Asian influence) and Lydia Koniordou took the role of Iphigeneia. Apart from the collaborators, the director's approach to the play was similar to his approach to *Electra*. From a rural but austere Electra he moved to a sacerdotal and homesick Iphigeneia characterised by the same strict morality; the women of the chorus through their impressive dance were important contributors to the play. Moreover, Tsianos treated the story very seriously although the play belongs to the "romantic plays" because of their "romantic and exotic material ... which deal with the adventures and ordeals of heroes in far-off lands."<sup>73</sup>

The same group attempted a third production of tragedy, Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (Summer, 1992), in the same style. It was based on Electra's and the women of the chorus' ritual lamentation of the dead Agamemnon accompanied by ritualistic dancing. The production stressed the "necessity" of matricide and Lydia Koniordou as Electra appeared as the honourable daughter who mourned her father and prayed for her mother's punishment. Tsianos' approach to Greek tragedy through folk dancing and tradition excited at first audience and critics but its repetition involves the danger of becoming tedious.

VOUTSINAS, Andreas: He is one of the most controversial directors whose work on ancient drama has been severely criticised by the conservative Greek theatre critics. He studied drama at the Old Vic theatre in London from 1950 to 1953 and then in the United States,

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<sup>72</sup> See "First Appearance Abroad" ("Proti Emfanisi sto Exoterico") in the collective issue of *15 Years of Thessalian Theatre (15 Chronia Thessaliko Theatro)* published by the Municipal and Regional Theatre of Larissa (1991), pp. 242-44.

<sup>73</sup> P.E. Easterling, "Euripides" in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, ed., by P.E. Easterling and B.M.W. Knox, vol., 1, part, 2, *Greek Drama* (Cambridge, 1989) pp. 64-87, p. 80.



following Elia Kazan's advice to continue his studies with Lee Strasberg the leading American director and acting teacher. In 1957 he was offered a place to study drama at the Actors Studio in New York where he developed as a successful director. He worked there as a director from 1965 to 1967. In 1967 Strasberg invited him in France to give seminars to French actors and actresses and since 1974 he has lived in France and received a subsidy from the French state for the acting school he established for 200 students.

To concentrate on his career in Greece, Voutsinas never established his own theatre-group but worked as a free-lance director with various acting companies. In the field of ancient Greek theatre, he mainly directed plays for the State Theatre of Northern Greece because he was offered the opportunity to experiment with new forms and ideas, since that theatre organisation allowed directors to approach the classical plays in their own distinctive and sometimes "controversial" way.<sup>74</sup> In 1982, Voutsinas directed Euripides' *Helen* for the State Theatre of Northern Greece and the play marked his first appearance in the theatre of Epidavros. However, the play shocked and outraged the critics: "through the self undermining topless odalisques, bengal lights, fountains, accessories and decorations, the exotic Andreas Voutsinas in a gay-parody of performance defamed Euripides' *Helen*, the state Theatre of Northern Greece, its administrative council, the company and all those who collaborated with him for the production."<sup>75</sup> The reason for their fierce resentment was the idea that the half-naked women constituted an insult for the sacred place, as well as that Greek tragedy

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<sup>74</sup> The State Theatre of Northern Greece, based on Thessaloniki was founded in 1961 and during the summer of the same year a truly remarkable theoritian and practitioner, Socratis Karantinos first produced a Greek tragedy (Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*) for the festival of Filippi. During its third period 1974 to 1977, the State Theatre of Northern Greece was managed by Minos Volanakis, the innovative director, who was responsible for the first participation of the theatre to the festival of Epidavros. During the 35 years of its progress, the State Theatre of Northern Greece produced 18 classical tragedies but it enriched the domain of ancient tragedy with the equipment of the modern theatre. New directors were offered the possibility to experiment with diversities of forms, means and methods.

<sup>75</sup> Yiannis Varveris, *Theatre in Crisis 1976-1984 (I Krisis tou Theatrou)* (Athens, 1985), p. 157.

should remain faithful to a form the conservative critics thought appropriate to its stature. In an interview for the newspaper *Greek North* (Ellinikos Vorras) (31/10/1982), Voutsinas insisted that the Greek critics envied his success and he pointed out that the 12.000 spectators at Epidavros applauded the play although, he did not have a regular public like Evangelatos. He also said that the critics' unfavourable approach to the play was an insult for the spectators.

In 1983, he directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* for the State Theatre of Northern Greece; the production designed by Dionysis Fotopoulos was performed at the festival of Epidavros. In 1986, he directed the same play for the Theatre of Vembo, with Lakis Lazopoulos, a well known comic Greek actor, in the central role and in the summer of 1987, he directed Euripides' *Andromache*, again for the State Theatre of Northern Greece again. According to Iro Vakalopoulou, Voutsinas dealt with the play "in his characteristic 'talented' extravagant way absolutely neglecting the classical play's needs".<sup>76</sup> But the play which again caused the critics' fierce condemnation was Euripides' *Medea* for the State Theatre of Northern Greece, performed at the festival of Epidavros the summer of 1990. His production had a strong feminist message and a prevailing eroticism. The feminist approach becomes apparent in the following description: after Medea (Lydia Fotopoulou) is allowed by the king to stay in his land one more day, she embraces her nurse (Emilia Ipsilandi, an actress who supports the feminist movement) and leaves the stage to the women of the chorus who deliver lines 410 to 445 and then sing "worthy, worthy, the gender of women" and honour, honour to the gender of women" two phrases which are repeated many times during the performance. Moreover, the bond between Medea and her nurse is overstressed and in fact the director presents her as another Medea who guides her to fight against the male injustice. The relationship between the couple is dominated by passionate kisses and desperate embraces which were considered by the critics unacceptable for the sacred place of Epidavros.<sup>77</sup> However, Voutsinas' production of Euripides' *Medea* was a powerful representation of the tragic story of a

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<sup>76</sup> Iro Vakalopoulou, "Ancient Drama's Suffering" ("Archaïou Dramatos Talaiporia"), *Theatrika* 11 (January-March 1993), p. 41.

<sup>77</sup> See Thodoros Kritikos, "Seduced and Abandoned" ("Apoplanimeni ke Eggataleimeni"), *Eleftherotypia* 16/8/1990.



woman and of a mother who acts out of passion and love. The other major production of ancient Greek tragedy directed by Voutsinas for the State Theatre of Northern Greece was Sophocles' *Electra* (Epidavros 1992).<sup>78</sup> For the 1994 festival of Epidavros Voutsinas and the State Theatre of Northern Greece produced Aristophanes' *Birds*. The director built the production around Peisthetairos and his adventures and eliminated the choral ballet along with the wings and feathers. The production was critically acclaimed because Voutsinas was not provocative and he avoided vulgar language and slang.

Voutsinas' approach to the plays of classical dramaturgy as well as to modern theatre is determined by the influence of Lee Strasberg and Elia Kazan both of whom served the realistic theatre; their directorial method began with Stanislavsky, and they added into the realism of Method acting the intensity of the awareness of human suffering in a society in contradiction with itself.<sup>79</sup> The human condition explored, realistically intermingled with a psychoanalytical approach, marks Voutsinas' method of interpreting plays.<sup>80</sup> This short reference to his productions in Greece will conclude with Moliere's *Don Juan*, a play he directed for the State Theatre of Northern Greece performed at the Festival of Herodeion in 1988, and Alan Bennett's *The Madness of King George* produced for the National Theatre Season 1993-94. Both productions were commercial successes while the second one was critically acclaimed mainly because of the actor, Yorgos Michalakopoulos, who took the role of King George. During the Winter of 1995-6, he directed Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women* for the Theatre of Athens.

WARNER, Deborah: She comes from a totally different background from that of the male Cambridge arts graduates who have dominated

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<sup>78</sup> See the production's detailed analysis on the third chapter of the present thesis under the title: 3.5. "A Psychoanalytic Approach: Andreas Voutsinas' and the State Theatre of Northern Greece's Production of the Play", pp. 159-168.

<sup>79</sup> See J.L. Styan, "Realism in America: Belasco to the 'Method'", *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 1* (New York, 1981), pp. 109-122.

<sup>80</sup> See also his approach to Sophocles' *Electra* described in chapter 3.5. "A Psychoanalytic Approach: Andreas Voutsinas' and the State Theatre of Northern Greece's Production of the Play", pp. 159-168.

the RSC - she was appointed a resident director of the RSC in 1988. She did not read English at university but was trained as a stage manager at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London (1977-1980). In 1980 she founded Kick Theatre Company and in 1985 her production of Shakespeare's *King Lear* for that company won *Drama Magazine's* Special Achievement Award and a *Time Out Theatre* Award. However she decided to disband the company since it did not receive any grant from the Art Council and in 1987 she joined RSC and directed *Titus Andronicus* in Stratford-upon-Avon. The production moved to the Barbican Pit for a second sold-out season (Summer, 1988) which won her the *Evening Standard* Award for 1988. To refer to some of the play's critiques: "[T]he great virtue of Deborah Warner's production for the RSC at the Barbican's Pit is that it leaves the audience in no doubt that this early play, though flawed, is a work of authentic Shakesporean stature";<sup>81</sup> It is played "on a simple set of scrubbed wooden boards" and its success "is greatly helped by a superb performance from Brian Cox in the title role".<sup>82</sup>

Warner's productions are characterised by simple sets and that simplicity is combined with stunning dramatic effect. As has been suggested "[L]aying things bare has become her hallmark" and her productions "are distinguished by a strongly focused almost ritualistic intensity of atmosphere that needs to be experienced at close quarters to receive its full hypnotic effect".<sup>83</sup> This is apparent in her productions of *King Lear* in which she uses everyday objects as props, in *Titus Andronicus* and in *Electra*.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the director believes that she has to stay with a production not until its first night but for the whole of its life: she saw *Titus Andronicus* over seventy times "not out of narcissism but to encourage actors to go on re-examining the play, mining it deeper each night".<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Charles Spencer, "Rape, Foul, Murder and Cannibalism", *Daily Telegraph* 6/7/1988.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> See Paul Taylor, "The Bare Essential: Deborah Warner Talks to Paul Taylor", *Vogue*, (December, 1989), p. 58.

<sup>84</sup> See 3.4.1. "A Successful Cooperation", pp. 149-153.

<sup>85</sup> Paul Taylor, "The Bare Essential: Deborah Warner Talks to Paul Taylor", *Vogue* (December, 1989), p. 58



In 1988 Warner started her cooperation with the actress Fiona Shaw, in the RSC's production of Sophocles' *Electra* on a bare Pit stage designed by Hildegard Bechtler.<sup>86</sup> In 1989 Warner moved to the vast stage of the Olivier Theatre with Brecht's *The Good Person of Sichuan* also starring Fiona Shaw. The third fruit of the potent Warner/Shaw collaboration came with Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, first produced at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (July, 1991) and transferred to the Playhouse in London (September, 1991). Critics praised the collaboration: Warner's production "continually opens up new perspectives on Ibsen's great well-worked-over play;... . Thanks to an excellent central performance from Fiona Shaw, this version of the tragedy has stretches of harrowing hilarity, ..".<sup>87</sup> And "Hildegard Bechtler has designed a cold, grey, anti-macassar-less mausoleum".<sup>88</sup>

Warner's and Shaw's first joint Shakespeare project come in spring-summer 1995 with the production of *Richard II* for the National Theatre (Cottesloe) with Fiona Shaw in the title role. This cross-gender casting is explained by Warner to Claire Armitstead as follows: "[I]t somehow declares an area of theatrical experiment that's very exciting and not arbitrary. I wasn't sniffing around for a male role. I wouldn't cast Fiona as Hamlet because I think there are huge problems there. ... . The point with Richard is that the one thing it isn't about is active physical sexual relationships. It just struck me that on a very simple plane he is somewhat feminine, which has led the play into some very difficult areas, where he's shown as effeminate".<sup>89</sup> Her approach however does not constitute a feminist interpretation of the play since the director does not attempt to challenge any concept of male supremacy by allotting the role to an actress. Although Shaw's Richard cannot be categorised as "homosexual", her "king is a man-child, personally unformed ..." and the production's oddities "have more to do with the actress's interpretation than her sex".<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See 3.4. "An Unrestrained Electra: Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of the Play", pp. 149-158.

<sup>87</sup> Paul Taylor, "Irony in the Soul", *Independent* 5/9/1991.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Coveney, "The Fatal Mistake of Marrying for a des. res.", *Observer* 7/7/1991.

<sup>89</sup> Claire Armitstead, "Kingdom under Siege", *Guardian* 31/5/1995.

<sup>90</sup> Benedict Nightingale, "A Very Feminine Perspective", *Times* 5/6/1995.

Warner has drawn strong female performances out of Fiona Shaw in *Electra* and in *Hedda Gabler* but she does not seem to have any particular interest in the feminist theatre in itself and her work has mainly been concentrated on the classical revivals. And as the analysis of *Electra* has indicated,<sup>91</sup> it is Shaw's feverish activity and her physically imposing personality that makes her part the most important and thus she marks out the female characters she personifies. The two women have a long and exclusive working relationship and they are "affectionately referred to at the National as the terrible twins".<sup>92</sup>

Deborah Warner has also directed operas, for example Berg's *Wozzeck* for Opera North in Leeds using the simplicity and potency of Hildegard Bechtler's setting and costumes (Spring, 1993). Another of her productions that should be mentioned is *King John*, first produced in Stratford (Winter, 1988) and then transferred at the Barbican, Pit. In 1987 before she joined RSC, she had directed Bengali actors in *The Tempest* in Bangladesh.

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<sup>91</sup> See 3.4. "An Unrestrained Electra: Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of the Play", pp. 149-158.

<sup>92</sup> Claire Armitstead, "Kingdom under Siege", *Guardian* 31/5/1995.



## APPENDIX B

### A FEMALE ORESTEIA

#### *The Production Group*

Peter Hall's all male production of the Aeschylean play may be considered in comparison with an all female Finnish production which was produced and performed at Helsinki a decade later, in the summer of 1991,<sup>1</sup> by a group of women, The Raging Roses (Raivoisat Ruusut), including the director, Ritva Siikala, and leading actresses from different kinds of theatre all over Finland. Aeschylus' trilogy was the group's second production: in 1988 they put on *Raging Roses - A Chronicle of Power*. It was an adaptation from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays about the Wars of the Roses.<sup>2</sup> The play was performed in a disused machine workshop in Katajanokka and the performances continued during the summer of 1989 because of audience demand.

It was the director's (Ritva Siikala) dream to "get together all Finland's most talented, passionate, life-loving workaholic women actors" and to "built up a first-rate repertoire ... out of the world's greatest drama."<sup>3</sup> Her plan started to materialise in the summer of 1986 when she was teaching at a training course at the Theatre Academy, a course in which all the participants happened to be women. In a few months

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<sup>1</sup> The present discussion is based on the videotaped performance of the trilogy.

<sup>2</sup> The *Wars of the Roses* was the name given by Peter Hall in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of plays adapted from Shakespeare's three parts of *Henry VI* and his *Richard III* in 1963. According to Peter Hall, "[T]he *Wars of the Roses* established, as nothing else had, the style and purpose of the company" (*The Autobiography of Peter Hall* [London, 1993], p. 178). The Finnish production of the *Henry VI* plays was based on a brand new translation and it used a different name, but the fact that the production gave the company its name and established its success invites comparison with Peter Hall's production especially when the Raging Roses' second production happened to be a female *Oresteia* that in a sense responds to Hall's all male choice for the production of the same trilogy. See "A Male Feminist *Oresteia*", pp. 53-71.

<sup>3</sup> From Ritva Siikala, "Raging Roses - A Chronicle of Power" (Marjaniemi, 20/9/1987), English version, published in the programme of the production. The group's name at the time was *Women 88* (*Naiset 88*).

she managed to gather together the most prominent Finnish actresses and she decided to break through by setting in motion a work process which would take place only once. Thirty-five women actors, plus a supportive team of another thirty-five men and women, were spiritually committed to the enterprise. The Shakespearean production was a great success and the company decided to go on to the next big project, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Ritva Siikala explained her choice as follows: "[A]nd we wanted to continue as we had begun: from one intellectual giant to another, from peak to peak. We wanted to delve ever deeper into the roots of culture, and so we decided to seek the foundations of ourselves and our ideas in Greek culture, in classical tragedy".<sup>4</sup>

The theatre of the Raging Roses established itself in Finland as a feminist group through Ritva Siikala's founding manifesto where she analyses the aims of the group: "[W]omen will act both male and female roles. For once, women will stop being whores, virgins and madonnas, everlasting appendages of a man. Women will act rich and complex characters, all kinds of people". She goes on to declare that: "[W]e shall penetrate to the summit of power, we shall open doors that have been closed to women. Women will act every role. For once, they will have a chance to wrestle with genuine problems".<sup>5</sup> It is apparent that the director's dream was to make possible for women to perform what were considered great roles from the universal "first-rate" male repertoire and by doing so to denounce what were traditionally considered the appropriate roles for women. She did not challenge these roles as having been produced by a society based on women's suppression as most feminist groups did. Her view was moderate and very interesting since she has respected the condition which gave birth to the particular kind of literature and art in general. Her feminist experiment, based on women playing men, lies in answering the following questions: "[W]ill the use of power take on new nuances? Will situations change? Will the personalities of women artists overturn the laws of the man's world? Will we find the frontiers of masculinity/ femininity/ humanity?"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Ritva Siikala, "Director's Note", on the paper which advertised the production *Raamattu 1994 (The Bible 1994)* (26/6/1992).

<sup>5</sup> From Ritva Siikala, "*Raging Roses - A Chronicle of Power*" (Marjaniemi, 20/9/1987).

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*.



After *Oresteia* the group decided to organise for the Summer of 1994 a theatre festival in which the Finnish group would co-operate with women artists from neighbouring countries, in order to explore across culture and language boundaries a series of five events which survey the Bible's image of woman. The festival was named *Raamattu 1994 (Bible 1994)* and Estonia, Sweden, Latvia and Norway were the partners with Finland in the process which followed the destinies of Judith, Ruth, Hanna, Rute and Eve. Ritva Siikala directed the story of Eve. The Finnish director explained why she undertook the task of organising the festival in the following words: "The *Oresteia* summer showed us that Greece was not to be our final destination. It became clear that our deepest and most complex beliefs about the limits and dimensions of being a woman or a man - of being human - come from further east, from the furthest corner of the Mediterranean. They were to be found written in a single thick volume ... : the Bible."<sup>7</sup>

#### *A Finnish Première of the Trilogy*

Before the Raging Roses' production of the trilogy the Aeschylean play had neither been translated into Finnish, nor been performed by any theatre group. Ritva Siikala and her all female company commissioned a translation of the trilogy which was the first into Finnish. Kirsti Simonsuuri was responsible for the translation while the play had been adapted at several points by the director in co-operation with Marja-Kaarina Mykkänen and Solja Kievari. Although it is impossible to give a full analysis of the production because of the difficulty in commenting on the quality of the Finnish translation, there are significant visual and representational aspects which may be compared with the British National Theatre's all male production.

For the production's setting, a machine workshop in Katajanokka, was used with brick walls and earth floor. The place was reconstructed in consultation with the designer Pekka Korpiniitty, in order to meet the needs of the production. The audience faces a soil-covered space which has in the middle a concentric stone-mosaic, in the shape of the ancient Greek orchestra. On the left side of that mosaic stands a rock, used by the actresses during the performance. Most of the

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<sup>7</sup> See Ritva Siikala, "The Journey" published on the paper which advertised the production *The Bible 1994* (Helsinki, 1993).

performance's action takes place in the space mentioned above. Behind that acting space extends a large semi-circular corridor marking the characters' entrances and exits, since it connects two huge brick door constructions. At the rear, iron constructions are used by the characters when they want to withdraw from the plays' action (e.g. Orestes and Pylades when they see the women's procession approaching), when they want to seek refuge (e.g. Orestes hunted by the Furies), as well as in the cases of the gods and goddesses (Athena and Apollo) who usually descend from these constructions. The constructions consist of metal staircases and metal *tumbulae* (cylinders).

Most of the characters perform in masks and that is another similarity to Peter Hall's production although in the present case the masks are half masks.<sup>8</sup> However, all the characters are free to uncover their faces according to the director's guidance. All three choruses are masked but among the characters only Clytemnestra and her son Orestes, the homicides have their faces half hidden behind golden, attractive masks. The chorus of *Agamemnon* is divided into a main one and a supportive group which consists of Argive women attending the events concerning the royal family. The main chorus of the old Argives wear masks which cover the upper part of their head and which incorporate a blue cap of rectangular shape and a false beard, hanging from their chin. Clytemnestra is simultaneously played by five different actresses (see Figure 20), and in one case a sixth appears on the scene.<sup>9</sup> Their masks and clothes are identical. Their golden masks are an extension of their red Pharaoh cap tracing the nose but their eyes are clearly seen and their mouths are uncovered (see Figure 20). Orestes' mask is closely modelled on that of Clytemnestra's. It is the same gold mask tracing his eyes and covering his nose. The masks of the chorus of Trojan women (see Figure 21) in *Choephoroi* and those of the Furies in *Eumenides* are overdecorative. The masks of the Furies are designed to convey an image of otherness although they do not inspire fear.

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<sup>8</sup> In the production programme there was no reference to the name of a particular person who constructed the masks. However, Tytti Huhtaniska and Hanna Perttula were mentioned with regard to the performance's costumes.

<sup>9</sup> The effect of this is discussed later, pp. 268, 271.



The character that attracts the audience's attention more, and which marks the director's innovation and one of her adaptations is the figure of a half-naked young woman with a long white skirt who introduces the characters, and who represents Time. The costumes of the main characters are rich and most of them extravagant. A long necklace marks Agamemnon's appearance, probably indicative of his role as the leader of the House of Atreus while the other members of the family, Aegisthus, Electra and the palace slaves wear the family's emblem which is silver with concentric circles and a blue gem in the middle.<sup>10</sup> Electra, although she is wearing a black dress, indicative of her state of mourning, seems very elegant. On her head she is wearing a tightly fitted cap which seems to represent short-cut hair.<sup>11</sup>

The representatives of the divine world, Apollo and Athena, are dressed in modern clothes. The role of Apollo's priestess is in a way divided among five similarly dressed women, although one of them alone holds the speaking role. Clytemnestra's ghost appearance at *Eumenides* is quite distinct: a voluminous distorted, swollen and deformed face with huge eyes and accentuated cheeks, reminiscent of the portraits of Francis Bacon. The black and yellow dominates her appearance and the whole picture of her is frightful and nightmarish.

Otto Donner, a music composer well known in Finland, who joined the Raging Roses from the beginning, is responsible for the performance's music, which accompanies the trilogy accentuating different moments with the use of the appropriate instrument. The music is mainly percussive, although pipe, xylophone and guitar are dominant as well. The musical moments that mark the performance are: the oratorio sung by one of the chorus' women when the reenactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice takes place; the sorrowful song of the third Cassandra, a soprano whose role is confined to that song; the chorus of Trojan women's beautiful chanting as they pray to Zeus as well as their

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<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, Clytemnestra did not wear the particular coat of arms because she was coming from another very important *oikos*, or because she did not like the idea of belonging to a man's *oikos*, and therefore being dominated. On the other hand, Orestes entered Argos as the herald of his own death; accordingly he needed to disguise his identity and not wear his family's emblem.

<sup>11</sup> Her appearance recalls Fiona Shaw's Electra. See chapter 3.4. "An Unrestrained Electra: Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of the Play", pp. 149-158.

celebratory chanting at the moment when Clytemnestra is driven away by Orestes and his friend; the music that accentuates Orestes' persecution by the Furies; and the beautiful aria delivered by one of the Furies towards the end of the performance.

### *A Kaleidoscopic Approach*

Taking into consideration the fact that the trilogy celebrates the victory of the male over the female in social, political and human terms, the undertaking of male roles by women could be considered daring as well as pioneering. Ritva Siikala does intervene in the original story, but her intervention is confined to staging the events of Iphigeneia's sacrifice by her father, or rather to presenting the re-enactment of the events with puppets, just before Agamemnon's murder by his wife: thus the director provides a clearer justification of her act. The other innovations do not influence the development of the story but they are restricted to visual effects: for example, the introduction of the Time-girl who speaks only once in the re-enactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice is a powerful visualisation of the destiny which is accomplished as time moves inexorably onwards. But what about Tony Harrison's statement "to have women play women ... would have seemed as if we in the twentieth century were smugly assuming the sex war was over"?<sup>12</sup> Does it apply in the present case where women hold the roles of the men as well? These questions however, in order to be answered require a careful reading of the trilogy's performance which will include a close inspection of Clytemnestra's split personality represented by her six different faces.

Each of the three parts of the trilogy is initiated by the figure of the Time-girl who leaves the stage immediately after a character is introduced and seeks refuge in one of the many iron constructions. Her first appearance in *Agamemnon* is underlined as she stands on the orchestra's rock and looks around in anticipation of the events that will justify her existence as the inevitable realisation of future occurrences. Accordingly, the episodes that mark the story's development this interpretation are: the re-enactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice, Agamemnon's return, Cassandra's oriental mourning and the symbolic appearance of the sixth Clytemnestra at the end of the *Agamemnon*.

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<sup>12</sup> See Victoria Radin, "Masks for the Sex War", *Observer* 15/11/1981.



However, the whole play is dominated by the five figures who belong to the same character, Clytemnestra. She or they are going to personify the punishment which comes with time.

The Clytemnestras enter the acting space after the colourful speech of the watchman in full authority and triumph: Troy has fallen to the Greeks and the news has reached the Clytemnestras immediately due to their beacon plan. One of them who seems to be the eldest and in charge stands in one of the balconies informing the elders about the news; the other four are dancing on the circle orchestra echoing her words. When they join together they start speaking separately. The five Clytemnestras represent the five different aspects of her character, or at least this might be the reason the director has decided to divide her role (see Figure 20). In that case each of the five should play a recognisable and distinct part of her personality, but this is not the case in the Finnish production. First of all the five Clytemnestra are dressed in the same way and a theatre audience is not able to distinguish from far away who says what and if there is a consistency in the words she delivers throughout the trilogy, especially when the actresses wear masks. Secondly, even if you overcome that difficulty you will be faced with five persons who convey exactly the same sentiments with the noticeable exception of their instant reaction to the false news of Orestes' death, to be discussed later on. For example, when Agamemnon returns triumphantly home all five welcome him. Their speech is divided among them: one expresses passion, the other pretends wifely affection but as one speaks the others adopt her expression and all together communicate the same feelings. The same is noticeable when Agamemnon caresses Cassandra: they all indicate jealousy and hatred. Moreover, the same feelings are clearly depicted in all of them when they invite Cassandra to join them inside. At the same time, the five different persons are not able to draw the spectators' sympathy as their attention can not be concentrated on one character. The only time we feel Clytemnestra's pain and understand her reasoning is during the scene of the reenactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice and through the woman who holds the puppet representing Clytemnestra.

The Clytemnestras' appearances on stage are usually marked by the womanly, pretty and even ceremonious way they all together shake their hips and buttocks (see Figure 20). One of the scenes that is quite memorable is when the five images of the same woman come to

encounter Aegisthus. The role of Aegisthus is acted out by a very attractive star of the fifties, Anneli Sauli. In that case the choice of the actress who plays Aegisthus conforms with Aeschylus' presentation of him as the man who hides behind the woman and takes up her role (*Agamemnon*, 1632-35) and therefore, a new feminist interpretation is not attempted. Aegisthus, angry with the Argives, orders his men with white shields to attack them but the entrance of the five Clytemnestras postpones it. Then as the five stand a sixth one walks ceremoniously towards them, pulls her mask off and speaks to one of them very solemnly. She represents the spirit of the new woman, after her husband's murder, who advises the necessary reconciliation. However, the way all five touch Aegisthus' body recalls the same scene with Agamemnon and is perhaps indicative of her will to put on the mask of the obedient woman in order to survive. Her gestures however and her split personality make her image difficult to be approached and understood and she remains unsympathetic to the end.

Agamemnon together with Cassandra enter the scene on an iron carriage (the same one which is used at the end of *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* to display the dead bodies).<sup>13</sup> He stands as a victorious king but she lies down covered by a white net. Eila Pehkonen, a very famous Finnish actress, has the role of Agamemnon. Her appearance is very close to the image of the king as this is described in the Aeschylean play and therefore very close to the role of Agamemnon. She is a woman with male characteristics. Even her voice is faithful to that image which brings forward the question of the director's choice again. If Ritva Siikala wants to create a potent, manly and even virile Agamemnon why not put a man to play that role? The director does not propose a new interpretation of the victorious king but she elaborates on his traditional image. However, she has managed to give a powerful scene outlining Agamemnon's behaviour towards his concubine and Eila Pehkofen's elaborate and declamatory style conveys his image very

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<sup>13</sup> In Yorgos Michaelidis' production of the *Oresteia*, the chest which contains the clothes for the actresses and actors serves as the platform which brings the king home, while in *Choephoroi* the chest becomes Agamemnon's tomb. The same chest is used in *Eumenides* on which Orestes sit surrounded by the Furies. See 2.6.1. "The Red *Oresteia*", pp. 109-113. In both cases the platform becomes a symbol of Agamemnon's murder and of the retaliation that follows.



successfully. Before Clytemnestras' welcome speech and while he is introducing his new acquisition to his citizens, he uncovers her and caresses her face with sexual connotations, if we are to judge from the conspiratorial laugh of the Argives who surround him. The same scene is repeated before his decision to step down, and while he is speaking to his wife about her. He again pulls playfully at her plait. His gestures of course give an additional justification to Clytemnestra for her murder but the receptive way in which Cassandra accepts his caresses, as well as her anxiety and uneasiness when he decides to step down, make him more human.

Cassandra's personality is also divided among three actresses all of them identically dressed. The one on the stage participates in the current events and she represents what the men are thinking of her (see Figure 21). The one hanging on an iron rod represents her thoughts, her past while the third one is a soprano whose role is confined to singing. This distribution of Cassandra's role into three characters is more successful than Clytemnestra's in that it concerns the two, the one who personifies her past and the one who lives the current events. Nevertheless, the employment of the third one to sing indicates a simplistic view whose purpose is exhausted in making the presence of the soprano visible. Cassandra's insane dancing to the rhythm of Eastern music is impressive but her pain and despair is more clearly depicted in the cries of her past image.

However, the episode that captures our interest is the reenactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice, which takes place after Agamemnon's exit and before Cassandra's scene.<sup>14</sup> The episode is inserted into the trilogy in order to support Clytemnestra's act of murdering her husband. The Time-girl is the appropriate character to introduce the subject of Iphigeneia's sacrifice and Agamemnon's guilt. She unfolds the long mustard silk garment which is used by Iphigeneia to wrap around her head. The actress who plays Iphigeneia is very persuasive in her innocence. Two of the chorus women hold two faceless puppets: the one with the yellow band represents Agamemnon whereas the other with the yellow mask stands for Clytemnestra. The actresses who

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<sup>14</sup> Yorgos Michaelidis' *Oresteia* and Ariane Mnouchkine's *Les Atréides* include the reenactment of Iphigeneia's sacrifice as well in a more or less detailed way.

speaking for the two puppets are absolutely convincing and the episode leaves its mark on the trilogy's performance.

The other character whose role is divided among two actresses is Orestes who after his mother's murder is portrayed by a different woman with more harsh characteristics. Orestes approaches his father's tomb as soon as he enters the scene accompanied by his friend Pylades.<sup>15</sup> The first Orestes is a sympathetic figure, very polite and sensitive; his voice is tender and kind with no indication of hatred, despite the hardship he has suffered which is evident in his appearance. He shows real brotherly affection for his sister with whom he plays like a child when they meet.<sup>16</sup> Even when they all together recall the image of Agamemnon to come to their assistance he retains his politeness.<sup>17</sup> The immediate scene describes his deception speech. It is interesting to note that the shields which Aegisthus' men hold in the first play are used in this scene to indicate the palace doors from which the five Clytemnestras appear, now without masks. As Orestes informs the queen of her son's death, four parts of her, four Clytemnestras, seem really shocked and distressed by the news while only one is really relieved. Then, they all become cool again. This is one of the scenes which justifies the director's decision to divide Clytemnestra's role among five different actresses. Aegisthus' murder takes place unnoticed and the audience's attention is concentrated on Clytemnestra's murder. Orestes with his bloodstained knife in his raised hands bears down on her. She summons all the persuasion at her command to avoid her death: one of her images kneels indicating

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<sup>15</sup> *Choephoroi* starts with the Time-girl who pours the contents of what seems to be a golden apple around the orchestra. The content is like flour and with it she sketches Agamemnon's tomb.

<sup>16</sup> The production's Electra is a sympathetic character very much committed to her father's memory. She seems decisive, powerful and she does not remain unnoticeable as most of the *Choephoroi's* Electras. The new element in her representation by the director of the production under discussion is that she remains on the stage during and after her mother's murder by her brother and although she feels the pain when the bodies appear on stage, her interpretation does not go further than that and therefore her presence on stage remains unexplained.

<sup>17</sup> By the end of the scene, the chorus brings clothes to dress Orestes with his new identity, that of the traveller.



her breast. Orestes hesitates and this hesitation is truthful to his kindly image. But he finally goes on with the murder.

When he next appears on stage he is not the same character. The viciousness and the horror of the matricide is clearly depicted on his face as well as in his movements: he runs around the orchestra in a crazed condition, holding his bloodstained knife and inspiring fear in the chorus. Moreover, he is certainly not wearing a wreath. Even when he has arrived at the sanctuary of the goddess Athena he is not ritually cleaned. He still holds the blood stained knife. From the moment of the matricide onwards Orestes will be represented by a different actress. He will not return to his first innocent image again because, irrespective of the court's decision, the killing of his mother has marked his life. The director's decision to give the role of Orestes, the matricide, to a different character constitutes a feminist approach to the issue of matricide since it condemns his act by indicating that the murder of his mother has irreversibly killed his former kind and human nature. No religious purification or lawcourt's decision could shift the burden of his murderous act. Therefore, the director gives indirectly her own judgement which is in support of Clytemnestra and the Furies and against Orestes and the modern gods of the patriarchal establishment.

The final part of the trilogy, *Eumenides*, has an operatic feeling because of the many choral songs. The protagonists of the play come from the divine world apart from the defendant and the Athenian jurors. But the issue of the sex conflict is not represented as the main subject. The play deals more with the domination of the new order of things represented by Apollo and Athena over the old represented by the Furies and thus, the personification of Time from the beginning of the trilogy is now justified and explained. This is evident when the Time-girl leaves the silver ball on the orchestra rock which will be used by Athena as a symbol of her acquittal vote. Moreover, the portrayal of the two contestants, the Furies and the Olympian gods, emphasises the primacy of the time issue and more specifically of the issue of the change which comes with time. On the one hand, Apollo and Athena are dressed in modern costumes and they both have a confidence and an ease in their movements, in the freedom they climb on the iron staircases and in the ease with which they kiss each other on the mouth when Athena votes for Orestes. On the other hand, the Furies look very formal in their black, long dresses accompanied by their huge hats.

They are the representatives of the old world and of the old value-system. Their movements are characterised by the same formality and from the very beginning they seem to react strangely by modern standards. As the action moves on and they lose control of the situation, they become more scared and nervous.

What has become then of the issue of matricide? Orestes, in his new image, has sided with the new world represented by Apollo and Athena. When he first meets Athena, he hands over to her his bloodstained knife in a symbolic way as if he is entrusting his case to her. Clytemnestra's fearful ghost does appear in a powerful visualisation to awake the Furies and make them hunt the murderer. The matricide is condemned through the bloodstained hands of Orestes and his new harsh image, but the issue is not stressed because the end is more concentrated on the conflict between the old value-system and the new. Orestes' murder, which is considered as the most violent and inhuman of all crimes from the old value-system, is now seen through a new spectrum as an act of retaliation against a person who killed another, against the mother who killed the father. Orestes is acquitted at the end, the Furies react violently, like maenads banging with iron rods at the iron constructions, but time does not come back. It only moves onwards and they have to be persuaded to find a place in the modern world. And that is how the play has been understood through the direction of Ritva Siikala. The problem of sex-conflict, the impending issue of the passage from matriarchy to patriarchy has been pushed to the background and although the performance does include some feminist readings of the trilogy, the third play, whose interpretation decides the director's approach altogether, drops the issue of women's suppression by the new male-dominated world represented by Apollo and Athena.

Ritva Siikala's dream, as has been stated above, was to make it possible for women to act out roles that men had held in their repertoire for centuries. She did achieve that purpose, women actresses played the role of Agamemnon, Orestes, Apollo but she did not take advantage of the opportunity she was given to present an integrated female view of the trilogy, either by remaining faithful to the text and only accentuating or overturning by representational means some crucial incidents and situations, or by adapting the trilogy as a whole or part of it and especially its end. It is perfectly possible for an all female cast to



perform the *Oresteia*, to give its own interpretation and to offer a new insight into the trilogy just as it is possible, from another perspective, for an all male cast to present the issue of sex war as that has been viewed by a writer who created in a male-orientated Athenian society. Ritva Siikala's all female production of the *Oresteia* was an interesting interpretation of the sex conflict from a feminist perspective which could have been exemplary if it had been treated with more consistency. However, within the history of productions which are more or less "patriarchal", since they reproduce the exclusively "male" values, it stands as a noticeable exception.

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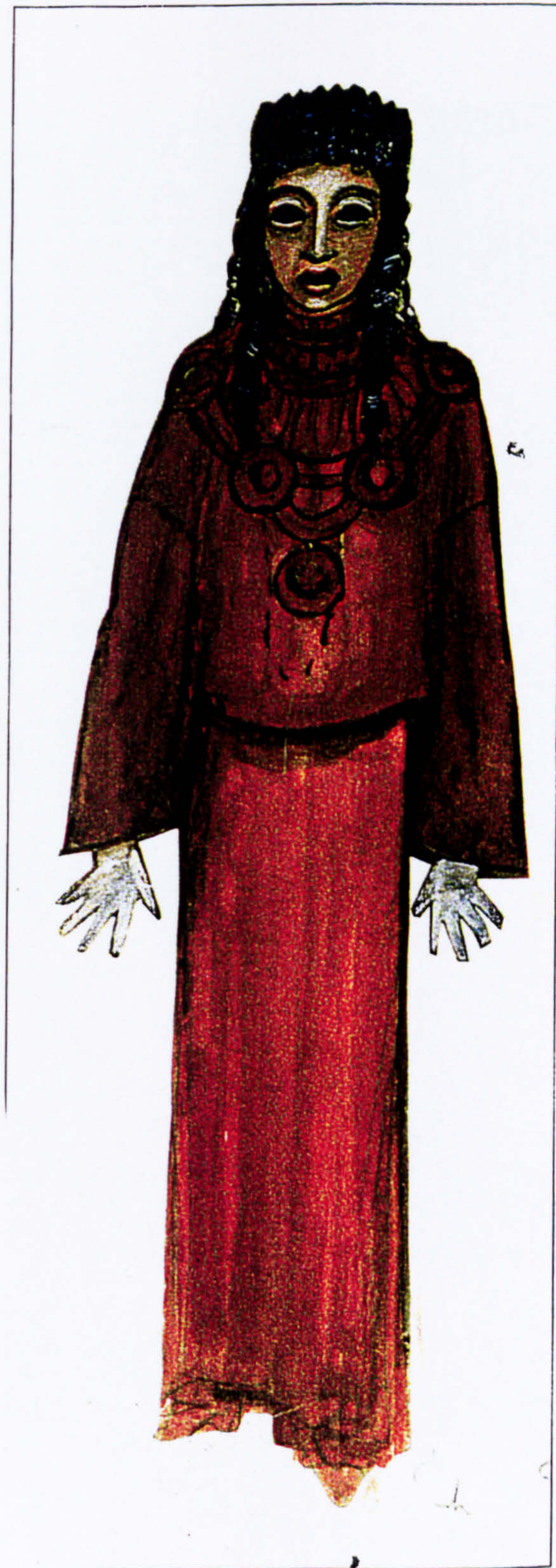


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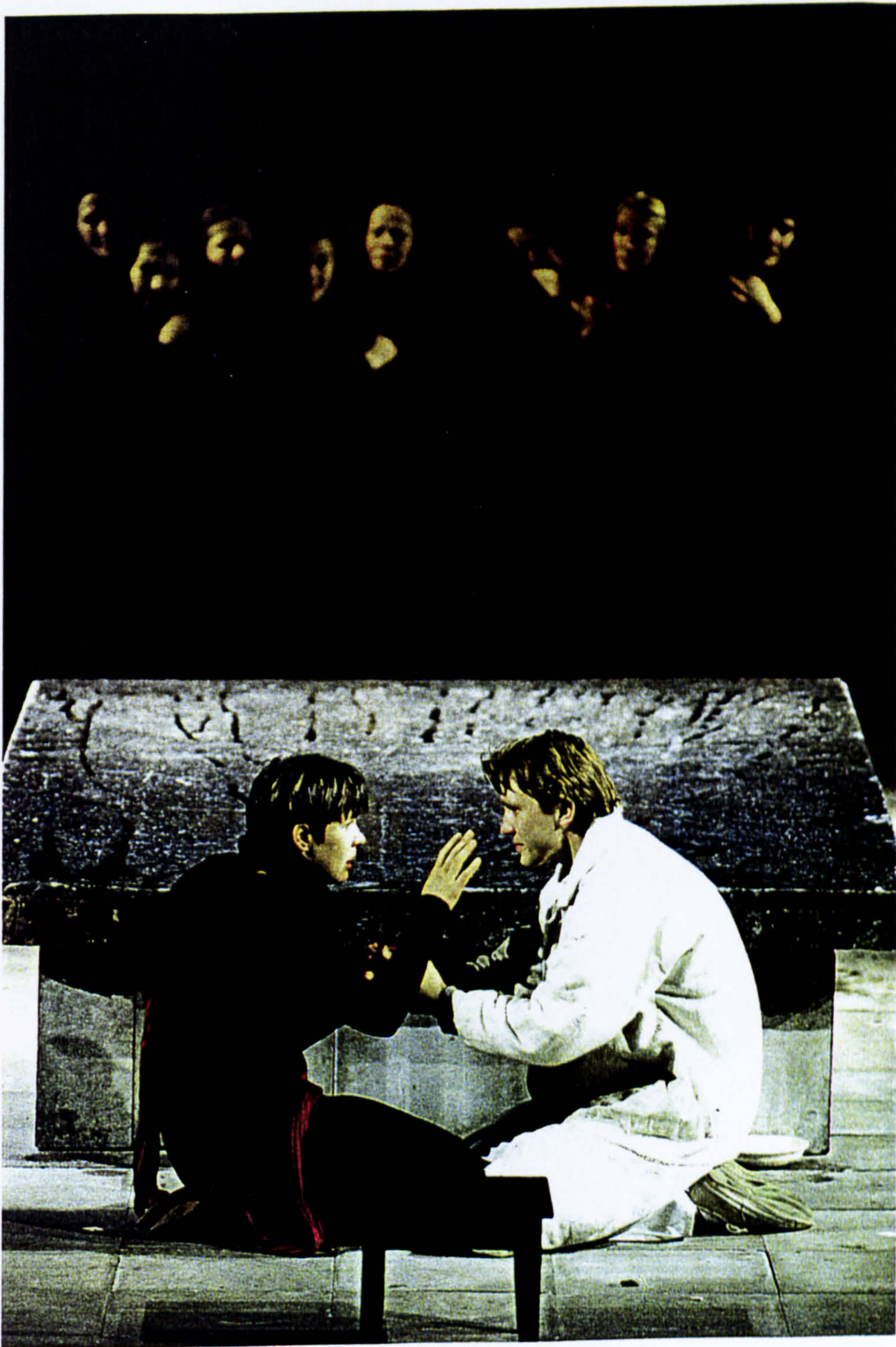


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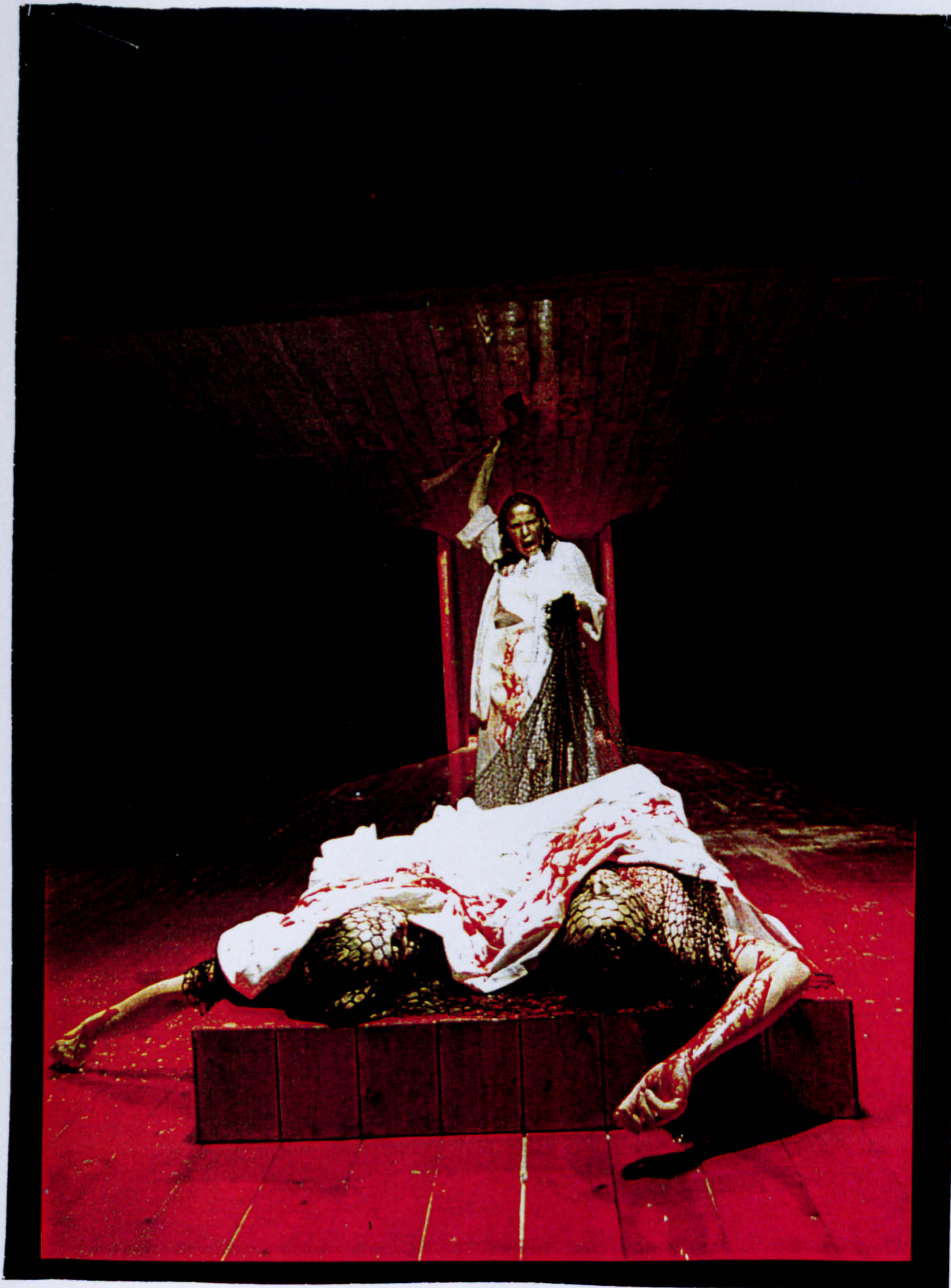
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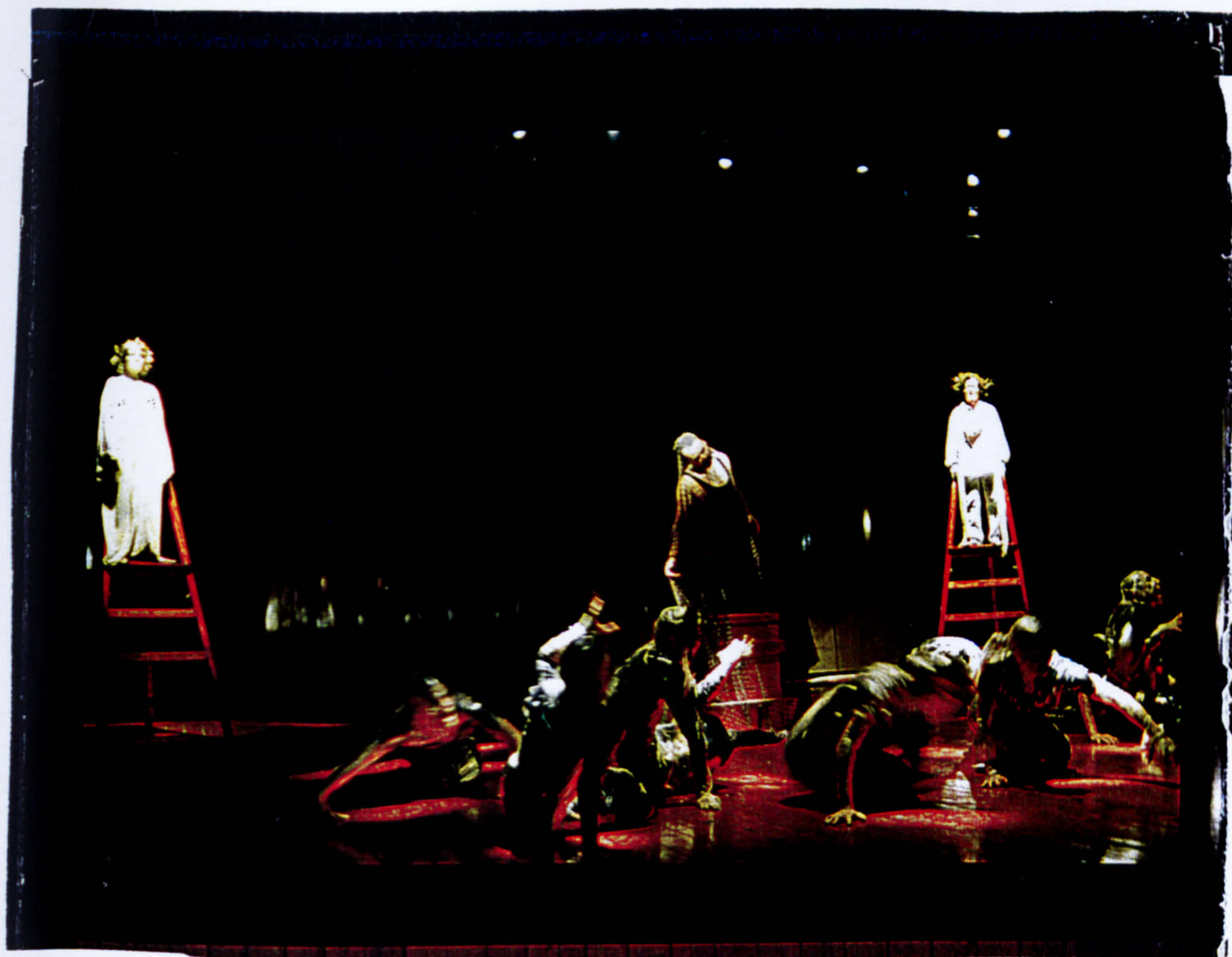
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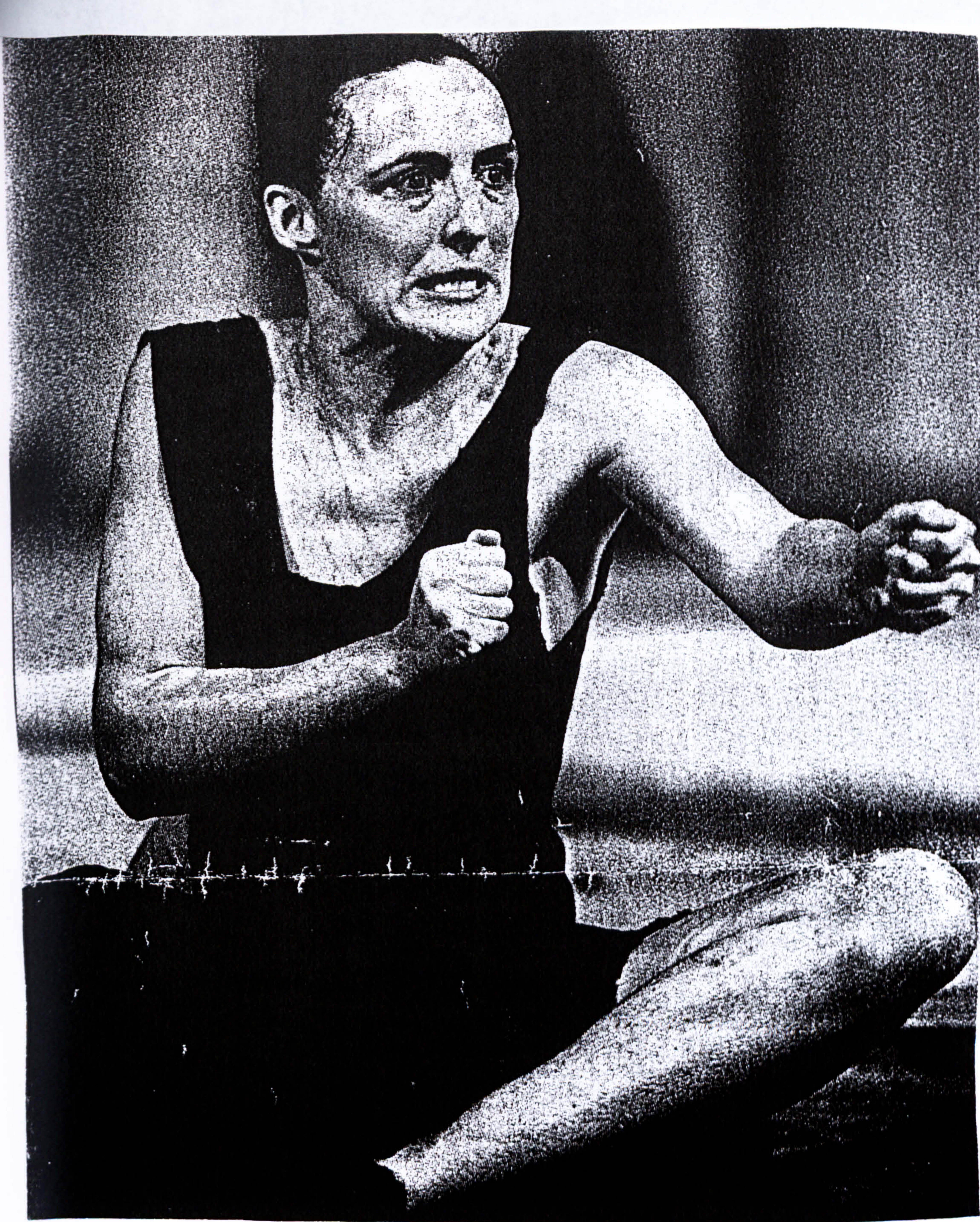


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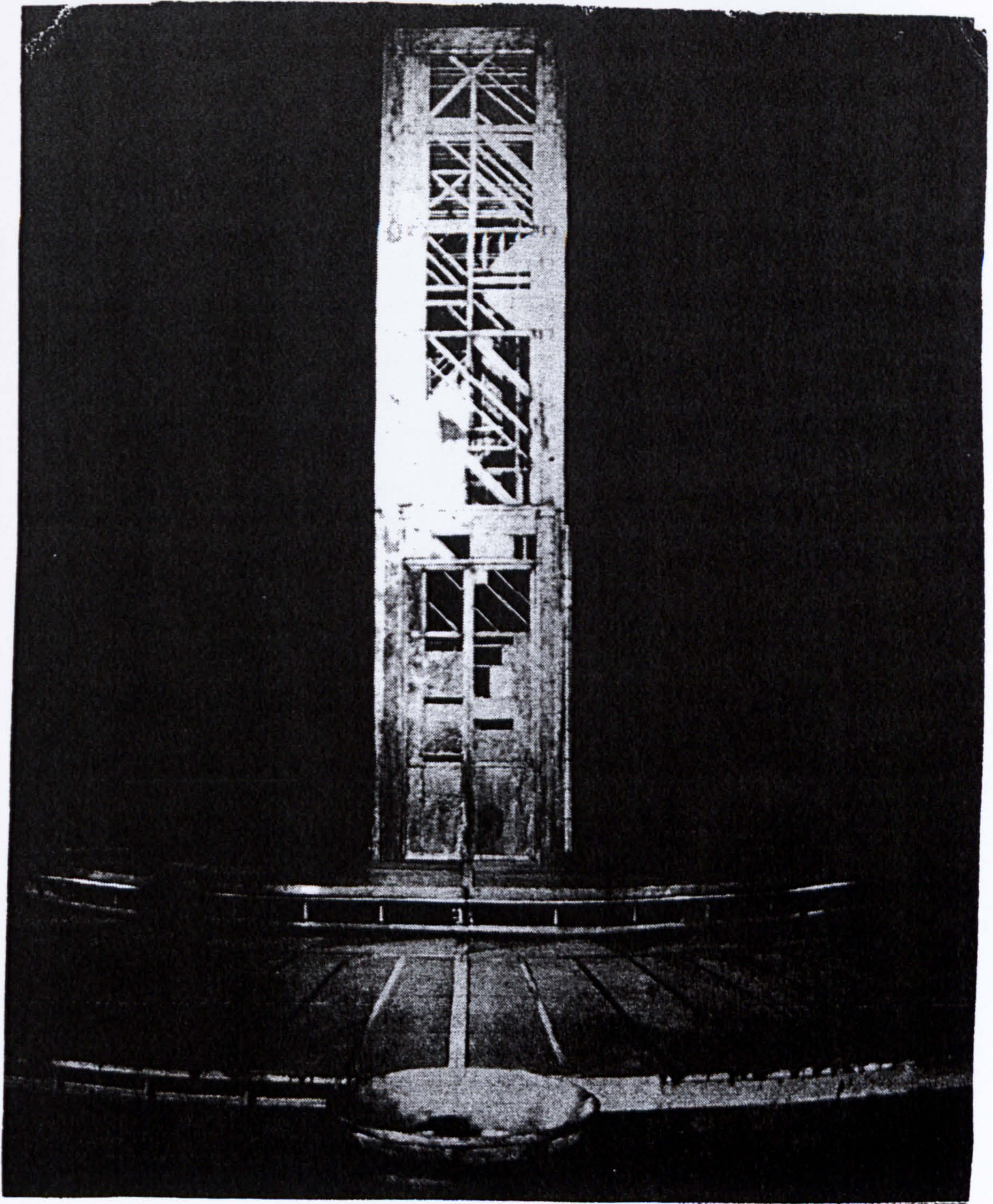


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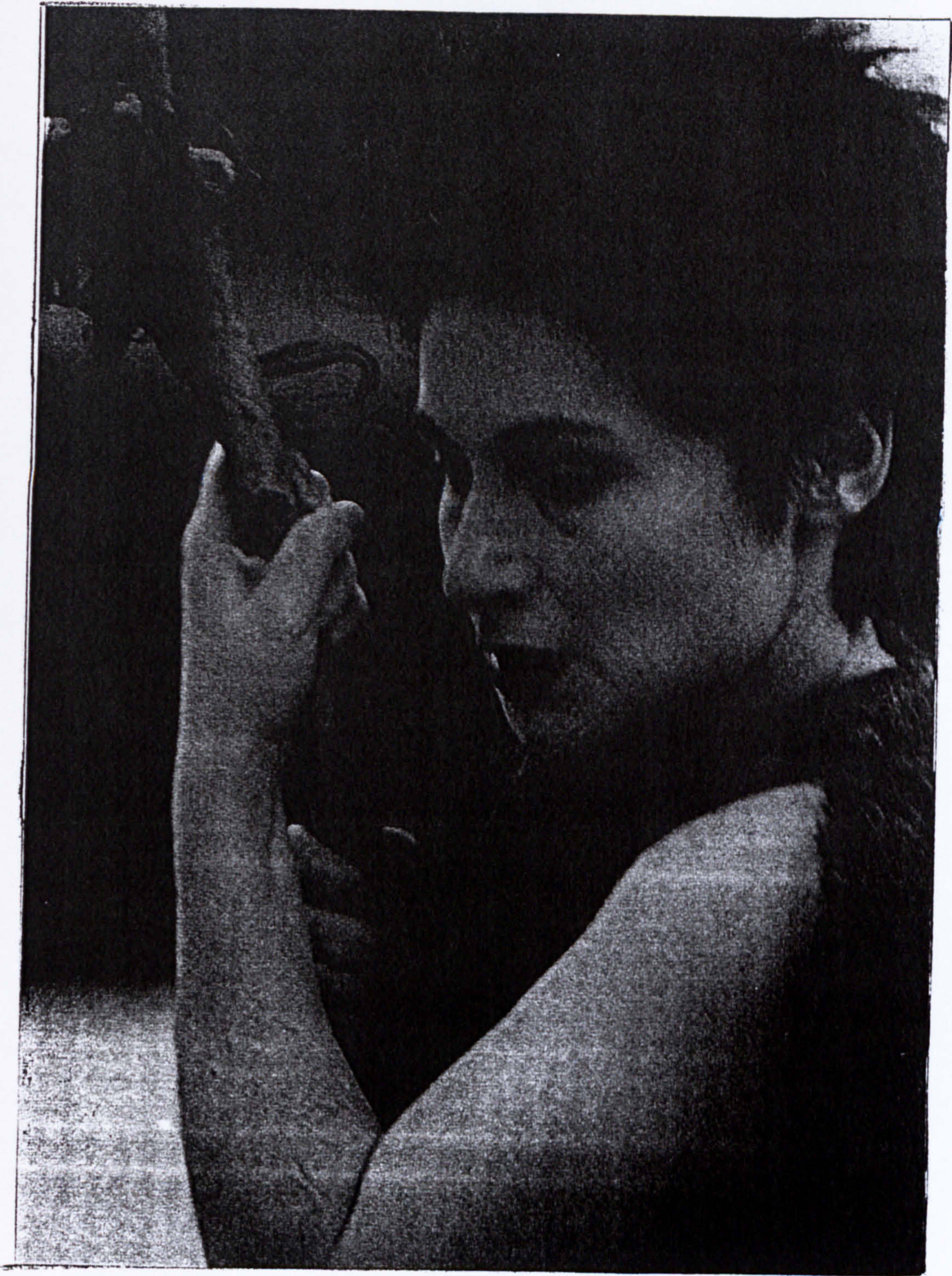




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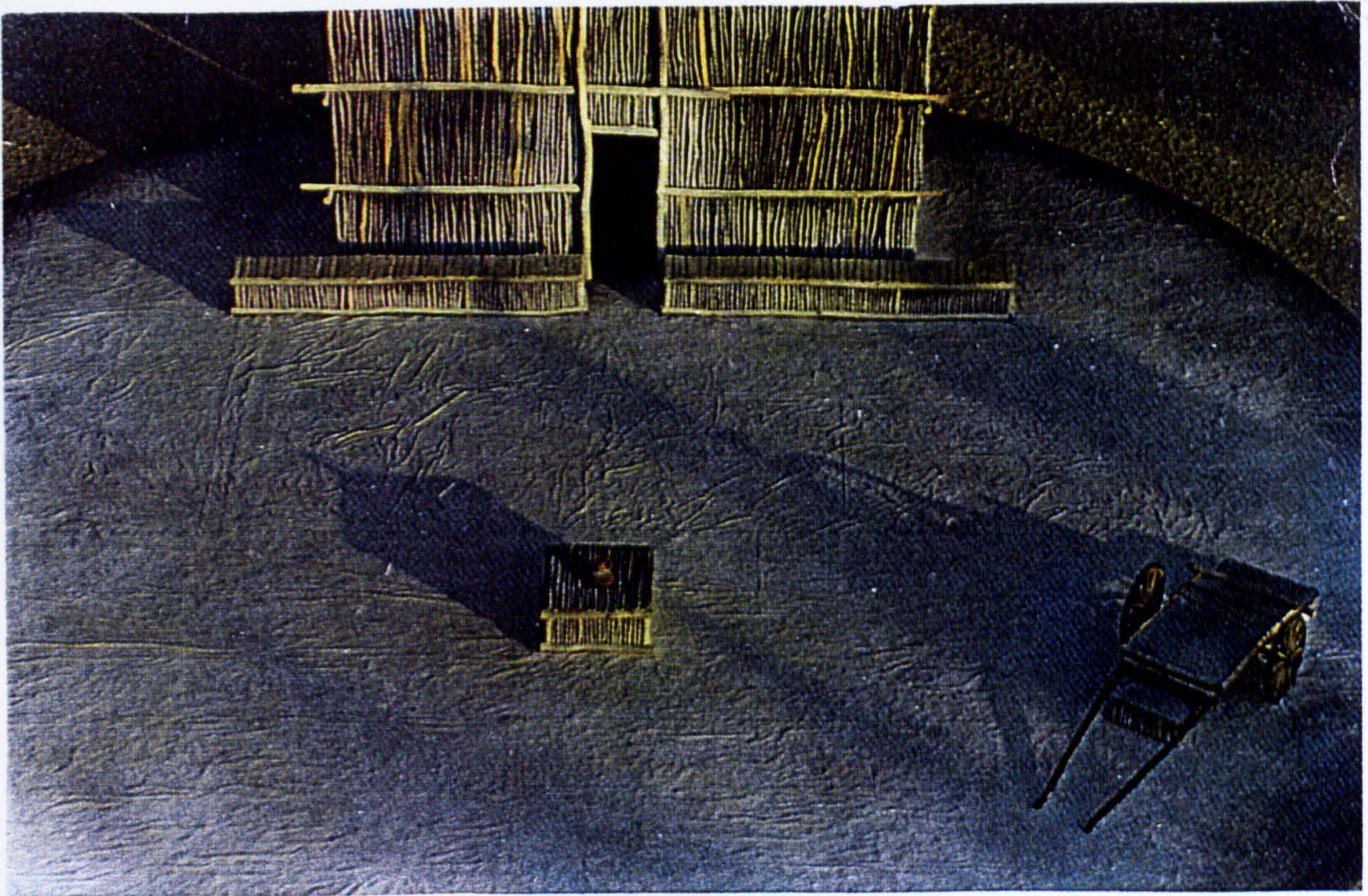


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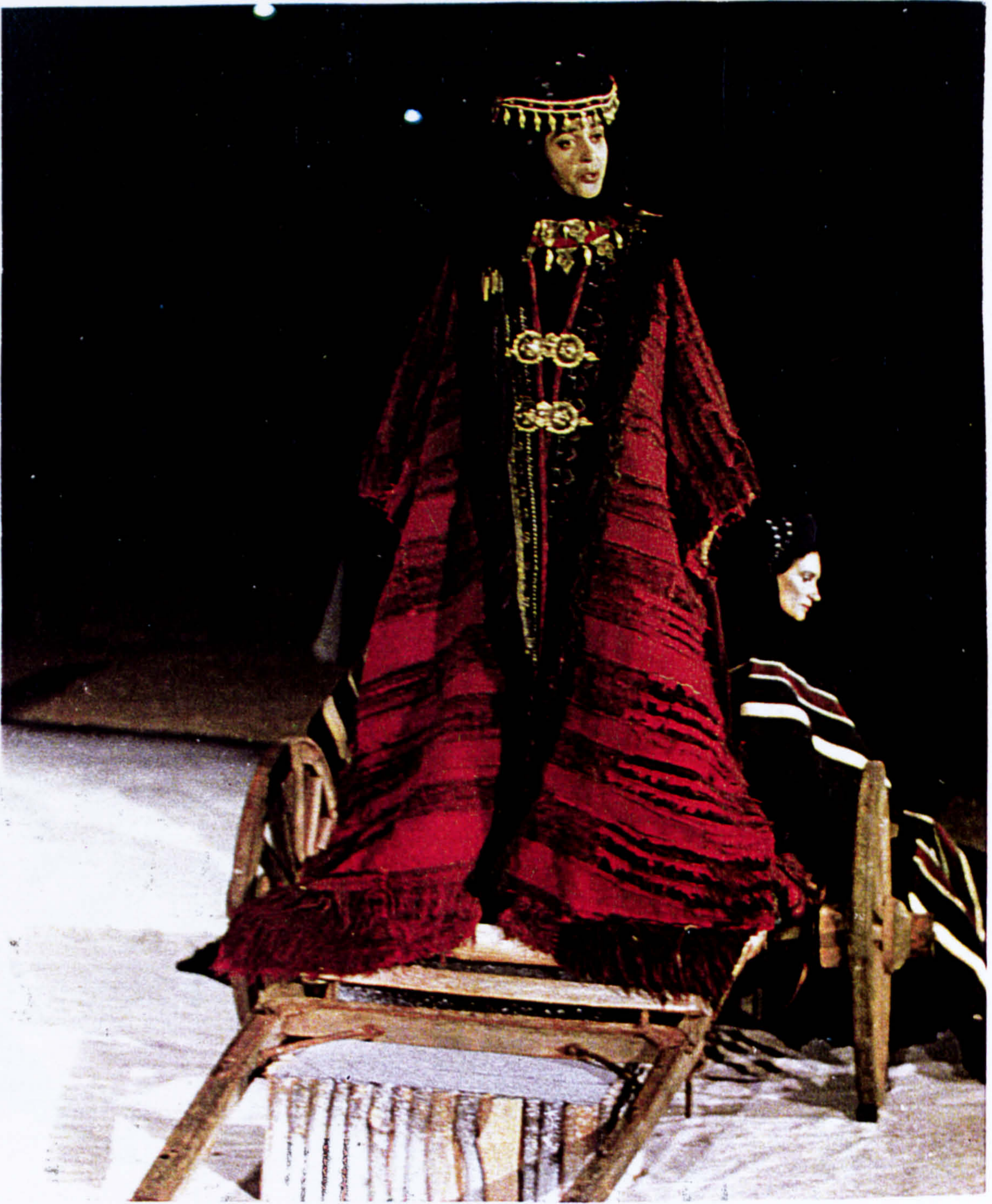


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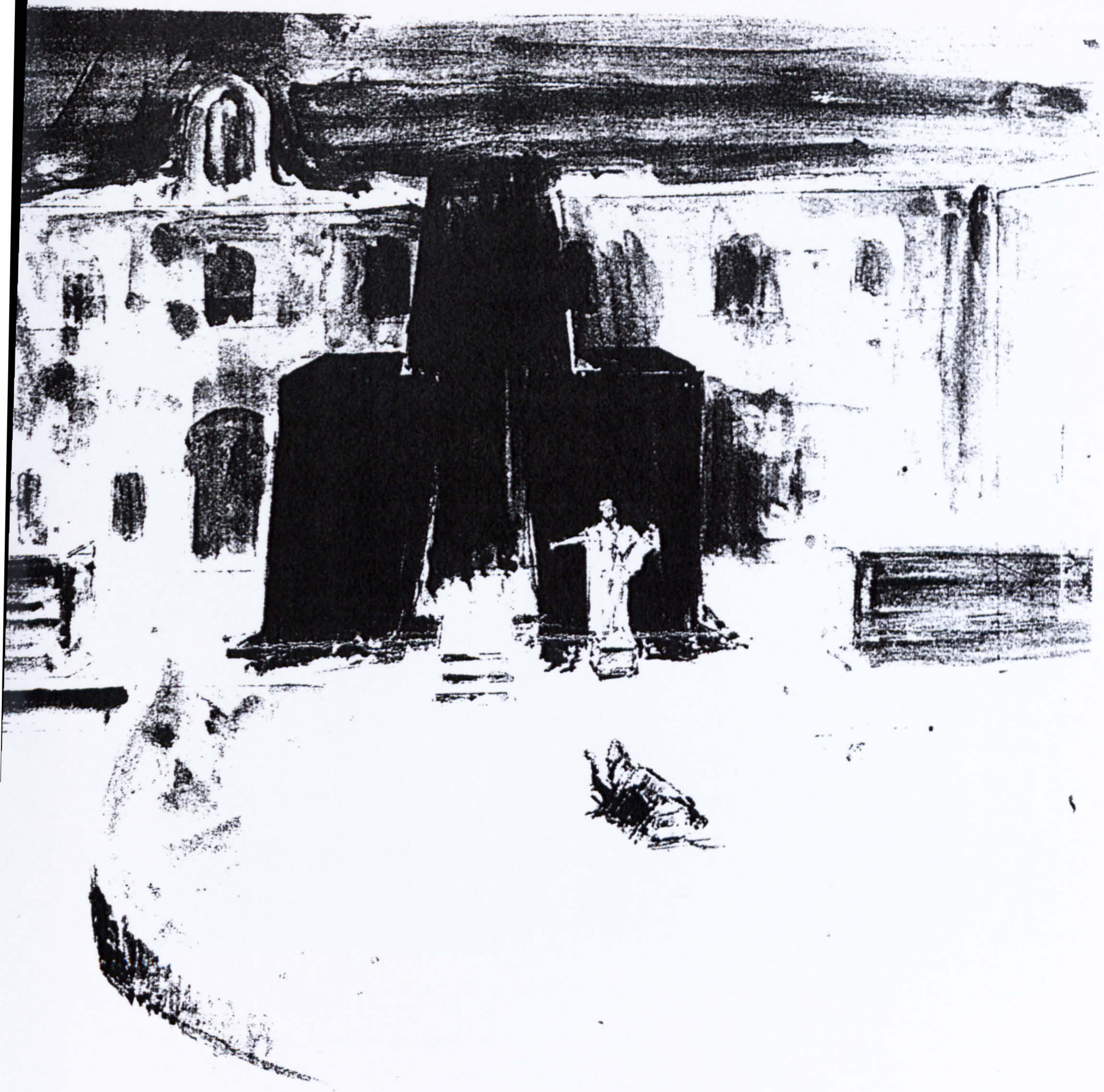




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