

Shakespeare and the Audiences of the Greek Traveling Actors

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The examination of the social and performative fields of the first Greek Shakespearian performances in the nineteenth century reveals the complex process that led to the formation of the first Greek audiences, the aspiring bourgeoisie of the newly formed Greek state. In contrast to the exclusionist European vision of the theater sustained by the ruling elite of Athens, the practices of low class traveling actors and inexperienced Greek audiences generated an alternative popularizing aesthetics. The appropriation of Shakespeare in a semi-literate context of performance and reception at various theatrical spaces located within and outside the prescribed boundaries of new Greece succeeded in promoting an affirmative utopian vision that expressed the collective yearnings of the Greek subjects at large for communal participation and European integration. The dissolution of the hegemonic associations that this position entails makes the social field of the nascent Greek theater a place in which a meaningful transformation of Shakespeare's dramas was possible.

The middle and lower classes of the people offer all they can [to the Greek theater], but the upper class which has a position of authority and superior education, instead of contributing more than anyone else to such projects, is utterly indifferent.¹

Neologos, October 8, 1868

The first translations, imitations and performances of Shakespeare in Greek emerged systematically in the last part of the nineteenth century, during the first phase of the formation of Greece as a free

1. The translation of all excerpts from the nineteenth-century Greek journals and newspapers is mine.

nation/state.² Not surprisingly, all of these cultural texts, along with criticism and theater reviews, patently inscribe the difficulty of a people unprepared to accept solutions imposed forcibly from above. In particular, Shakespeare's appropriations by the educated in Europe ruling elite as well as his parallel recruitment in the just emerging Greek theater by traveling groups of low class actors and a yet powerless nascent middle class audience produced in each case different results on a formal and ideological plane. While the agency of the elite promoted hegemonic ideals of European high art and classicist aesthetics, the practices of the inexperienced actors and spectators privileged less literate forms of culture and a popular aesthetics. The tensions arising from this divisive context actually provide the key for grasping the political significance of Shakespeare's Greek appropriations at large in the nineteenth century.

This paper examines the culturally mediated field of the Greek Shakespearean productions in the nineteenth century, focusing on the dialogic context formed by the reciprocal relationship between the social and performative agencies of the theater.³ It contends that, at a conceptual level, the Greek actors appear to have participated in the cultural project of the official state for the reconstruction of the country, which was essentially informed by the socio-political aims of the Enlightenment. Their performative practices, however, rather than promoting the ideal of a rationally centered subjectivity, addressed instead the expressive and affective components of their Greek audiences. In so doing they promoted a form of popular aesthetics that involved the choices of mixed repertoires of high and low culture plays, an incongruous fusion of tradition and modernity, the popularization of the classics, conflicting interpretations, and indistinguishable boundaries between the stage and the auditorium. Arguably, such practices constituted a form of resistance against the Enlightenment rules and an attempt to embrace the modern subject of European Romanticism the Greek

2. Having been for four centuries a part of the Ottoman Empire, Greece became an autonomous nation state after 1829, under the political surveillance of the foreign superpowers—France, England, Russia, and later Germany. The geographical boundaries of the new state included only Peloponessus, the central part of the mainland, and the islands of Cyclades, leaving out a considerable portion of areas with Greek population in the northern part of the country and the rest of the islands. Moreover, large territories in Asia Minor that were formerly Greek (Constantinople, Smyrna, etc.) remained enslaved within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire.

3. The issues discussed in this paper have appeared in various chapters of my monograph *Shakespeare's Travels: Greek Representations of Hamlet in the Nineteenth Century*.

way. In the context of the present argument, the history of the Greek *Hamlet* is examined as a case study of resistance and surrender to this process of Europeanization. On the whole the “spectacle text” that emerged out of the early Greek Shakespearean productions is the outcome of a complex process involving the polemics of the ideological and material interests of all sectors of the aspiring bourgeois citizens of the newly formed Greek state.⁴

Shakespeare in Athens, Constantinople and Beyond

The presence of the first Greek dramatic companies became prominent after 1860, while the earliest recorded Shakespearean performances are *Othello* and *Hamlet* with the company of Panagiotis Soutsas at the end of 1866 in Athens.⁵ Overall, the period 1866-1880 in Athens is generally distinguished by the scarcity of Shakespearean performances and the indifference of elite audiences. With very few exceptions, the only time members of the upper classes rushed out to fill the theaters in Athens was during the visits of Italian or French melodrama companies, or of various European dramatic companies that provided light musical comedies (vaudeville) and operettas according to fashionable practices in Europe. However, the situation began to change gradually after the arrival of the actor Nicolaos Lekatsas in 1880. His reputation as a Shakespearean actor with a pre-established career in England earned him the approval of the upper classes—especially of the anglophile peers of Prime Minister Harilaos Tricoupis—and thus contributed greatly to the consolidation of both Shakespeare and the Greek theater companies in the elite circles of the establishment in Athens.⁶

It would be too simplistic to think that the appearance of “romantic” Shakespeare on stage at this point—as well as of Schiller, Hugo, or Dumas—was an act of resistance against the dominance of classicist aesthetics without the expectations of material rewards. The integration of Shakespeare and other European authors in the mixed repertoires of the Greek companies was

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4. The term “spectacle text” was used by Marco De Marinis to suggest that, although the interpretations of audiences and actors are essentially interrelated activities, in the making of theatrical experience the readings of the spectators are as important as those of the actors in performance (“Dramaturgy of the Spectator” 100-114). See also his *Semiotica del Teatro*.
 5. Mentioned by Hatzipantazis in *Apo tou Nilou mehri tu Dounaveos* (From Nile to Danube) vol. A1, 222; vol. A2, 583, 585. For a record of all the nineteenth-century Greek Shakespearean performances located during my research, see the appendix in *Shakespeare's Travels*, 235-78.
 6. For the politics behind Lekatsas's reception, see Dimitriadis 69-93.

a statement with a material basis, prescribed by the economic concerns of a theater that was essentially a commercial enterprise. The early efforts of the Greek ruling elite and a minority of intellectuals to integrate Shakespeare in the native literary field as an icon of advanced civilization had not succeeded—at least not in terms of producing immediately large-scale results. Yet, the Greek traveling actors—largely unaffected by the unfruitful debates of the intellectuals about Shakespeare’s neoclassical or romantic status—continued to include his plays in their repertory of foreign classics throughout the last half of the nineteenth century. The survival of the companies necessitated approaches that took into consideration the desires and expectations of varied audiences in as large numbers as possible, rather than the elitist preferences of the educated minority. The situation appears to be a manifestation of an early attempt to enter into the capitalist system of the West, in which functional differentiation prescribes the employment of art as a commodity for the consumption of large masses of people.

In Athens, which was the seat of the government and center of political decisions, the cultured, Europeanized elite despised the “self-taught” Greek actors and their inexperienced audiences as well as the new dramatists who attempted to produce works with native materials. The ideological hostility of the ruling elite and, accordingly, all kinds of material difficulties forced the handful of the first professional companies who were struggling for survival in Athens to travel frequently in search of better luck away from the capital. Necessity brought them to the stages of the urban areas of Asia Minor, that were formerly Greek and remained under Turkish occupation, as well as to other places at the periphery of the Mediterranean and beyond, where still lived and flourished large Greek communities—mainly Constantinople, Smyrna, Cyprus, Egypt, Vienna, Trieste, the Danubian principalities and Russia. Their arrival there fulfilled different needs and expectations. Ethnocentric motives and nostalgia for the lost homeland made the audiences of the Greek communities of the diaspora more responsive toward the efforts of the Greek traveling companies than those of the mainland.

In particular, the movement of the actors between Athens and Constantinople, the two major centers of Hellenism—and from there to the Greek urban areas at the periphery of the Mediterranean, central Europe and the depths of Asia—was not in fact a displacement but a recovery of lost origins in the spirit of the “Great Idea,” the term used by the Greeks to express the expansionist desire for the retrieval of the enslaved Greek territories in Asia Minor. In this sense, the itinerary of the traveling actors from Athens to Constantinople was a symbolic enactment of the vision of Hellenism perceived

beyond state boundaries as culturally enlarged.⁷ Richer and with a larger population which comprised of merchants, bankers, lawyers, scientists, and intellectuals, Constantinople, and not Athens, was the economic capital city of Greece in the last half of the nineteenth century. It was the place where the strongest and most developed part of the Greek bourgeoisie was located, whereas the middle and smaller sectors resided in Athens and other major cities within the prescribed boundaries of the Greek state (Svoronos 12).

Although the arrival of Shakespeare at the theaters of Constantinople was delayed until 1869, after that year it continued steadily to the end of the century through the alternation of several Greek companies that included Shakespeare in their repertoires. In contrast to the initial indifference of the Athenian audiences in 1866, the first Greek Shakespearean performances in the theaters of Constantinople and Smyrna were initiated in an atmosphere charged with emotionalism and assenting energies.⁸ The physical presence of the actors and the sound of the Greek language on stage were of far more importance to the enslaved citizens of Asia Minor than the artlessness of performances, as mentioned earlier. The Greek companies that visited Constantinople enjoyed the sincere support of the bourgeoisie, the working classes, and a part of the upper sector, representing their communal dream of spiritual rebirth and freedom.

The larger numbers of people who went to the Greek theater in Athens came from the middle and lower sectors of the still indefinable Greek bourgeoisie—to these were added a few intellectuals and some students. The absence of the upper classes and women was noticeable, as the latter were not allowed to sit in the middle part of the theater, at least not before 1874.⁹ The mixed repertoires of the professional companies initially satisfied the need of

7. The implications of this enlarged vision of Hellenism are discussed in Leontis.

8. In particular, the performances of *Hamlet* and *Othello* in Smyrna in the months following their first appearance in Athens enjoyed a great deal of success—and the same is true for the first known Greek performance of *Macbeth* (27 Jan. 1867) that also appeared there at that time (*Amalthia*, 27 Jan. 1867). Mentioned also in Hatzipantazis, *Apo tou Nilou*, vol. A1, 222, 605.

9. Permission to sit at the auditorium where men usually sat was issued by the Committee of the Theater in November 1874. Up until that time the few women who went to the theater sat at a special place in the balcony along with other members of their family. Noticeably, they preferred the French and Italian melodramatic productions and avoided Greek performances. The scarcity of women is also noticeable on stage till 1840—the first Greek actresses started appearing in the autumn of that year. Needless to say that prior to this date male performers impersonated female characters in an all-male cast (Hatzipantazis, *Apo tou Nilou*, vol. A1, 43, 65-66).

the larger part of the audience to be entertained by watching native works with patriotic interest or satiric comedies on local weaknesses. Since the middle of the 1870s, however, it became clear that the preferences of middle-class audiences had started to change, succumbing to the general European craze for musical comedies and Italian or French melodramatic versions of novelistic dramas. In doing that, they were following the paradigm of the upper classes as well as their own predilections. For apart from providing entertainment or nourishing the nationalistic impulse with patriotic dramas, the theater was in itself a source of social distinctions and significations: it was the signature of the new bourgeois identity of the insecure, socially unaccommodated though aspiring masses of the new urban citizens of Greece, as Hatzipantazis succinctly argues.¹⁰ Watching performances by a foreign company reinforced the feeling of the Greek spectators that they were actually participating on equal terms in the advanced bourgeois culture of Europe.¹¹

The increasing commodification of the theater during the 1970s and 1980s did not, however, affect Shakespeare's privileged position as an ideologue of European modernization. It is worth noticing that some of the major acting companies even attempted to integrate his plays among performances given in open spaces and addressing mainly the lower classes. These evolved systematically after 1876 and took place on stages constructed for the occasion in public gardens and outdoor coffee shops—a situation suggesting distancing from the idea of a literate performance or audience. These newly discovered open theatrical spaces, which were as a rule used for circus performances and variety shows with magicians or foreign dancing girls, provided occasionally the background for the performance of a play by Shakespeare. The co-existence of Shakespeare's tragedies with shallow versions of novelistic dramas and musical comedies, or his presence in the popular spaces of outdoor stages, was a statement of semi-literate practices that nevertheless expressed accurately the most profound and urgent desires of a people for civic progress and European integration.

The Dislocation of the “Classic”

In his *Memoirs*, the nineteenth-century Shakespearean actor Dionysios Tavoularis refers to a unique moment in Shakespeare's travels around the Mediterranean—the arrival at an intersection of Greek and Arabic cultures:

10. *Apo tou Nilou*, vol. A1, 338. For the preferences of Greek audiences, see 252-54.

11. For later ideological uses of Shakespeare see Krontiris's *O Saikspir se kairo polemou, 1940-1950* (Shakespeare in Wartime).

I have even collaborated alternatively with the self-taught Egyptian acting company of Saleh, who borrowed lyric excerpts—as he watched and listened at performances—and afterwards applied them to parody Shakespeare’s unlucky Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and Lear: he sang of their sufferings, while his Arabic audience applauded ardently with uncontrollable growls and sighs. (141)

As Tavoularis explains, during his tours to Egypt he provided educational material for the instruction of a native group of self-taught actors called Saleh’s company. Saleh, the director of the company, picked up bits and pieces of the Greek version—from what he had heard and could remember—and afterwards attempted to stage the play in Arabic. In spite of Saleh’s serious intentions, the product of this appropriation must indeed have been a curiosity or, rather, a “parody” of Shakespeare, as Tavoularis puts it.

This was not only Shakespeare without his language, but a hybrid text fashioned in Arabic with fragments of a Greek imitation of the play transmitted orally; the product of this intercultural transaction was in turn presented in front of a native audience that participated actively in the event by expressing its emotions with gestures and sounds. Apart from suggesting that the Greek performances in Egypt reinforced the dissemination of Shakespeare’s plays in the Arabic world, the story is interesting as an exemplum that illuminates the process of the transmission of a foreign “classic” in the culturally mediated field of a theater defined by the energies of a largely non-literate indigenous audience.

Being at more than one level removed from Shakespeare’s originals, Saleh’s hybrid representations obviously had only an imaginary connection with the former. The way Tavoularis describes the situation suggests that the distancing and otherness that define the product of this intercultural theatrical transaction were, in this case, further conditioned by a non-literate context of performance and reception. Saleh’s success in terms of audience effect was based on the deconstruction and utter dissolution of Shakespeare’s texts rather than on the appreciation of their formal integrity as objects of true art. According to Theodor Adorno, the process that conditions the popularization of the classics involves the fragmentation of the formal coherence of an authentic artwork and the impossibility of grasping it as a whole:

It blatantly snatches the reified bits and pieces out of their context and sets them up as a pot-pourri. It destroys the multilevel unity of the whole work and brings forward only isolated popular passages.

The “debris” of the classic is thus appropriated by the energies of the popular to function through “the memorability of disconnected parts” in an entirely new context, which is usually related to the aims of mass production and consumption. (36)¹²

The circumstances surrounding the production of Saleh’s Shakespearean performances follow a similarly negating pattern. It is clear that what he actually appropriated from the Greek Shakespearean performances was the emotive effects at the expense of all else. With the bits and pieces he had picked up watching the plays—did he understand Greek?—he reproduced what ended up being a “parody” in Arabic. It is interesting to note that what he tried primarily to convey was the tragic feeling of the Shakespearean plays, because he extrapolated mainly the parts about the predicament of the “unlucky” heroes and “sang of their sufferings.” Ironically enough—and in spite of what Tavoularis thought of the result—he succeeded in moving his Arabic audience to the point of hysteria; indeed, the spectators “applauded ardently with uncontrollable growls and sighs.” Matters such as formal coherence, intellectual depth, or linguistic integrity did not enter his considerations or those of his “self-taught” peers and spectators. From this regressive position, Saleh constructed a performance text in which the only connection to Shakespeare’s original was the hero’s suffering and intensity of passion, which he represented out of context and proportion. The approval of his audience suggests that this feat was a culturally mediated event that reproduced the norms of an indigenous popular conception of drama that privileges the affective over the literary.

The story of Saleh illustrates an extreme case of Shakespearean appropriation; and the fact that Tavoularis sees the Arabic production as a “parody,” surely suggests an implicit critique that places the Greeks in a position of superiority. The overall situation, however, is overtly ironic. For despite differences, the predicament of the Greek actors and audiences resembled that of their Arab peers, namely that they appeared as crude and inexperienced in the eyes of their educated compatriots as Saleh in Tavoularis’s viewpoint. With a difference only in degree, the early viewers of Greek performances, just like Saleh’s audience, participated emotively in the production of Shakespeare’s dramas. The emotional register of actors and audiences gradually developed into a sure measure of success for Greek performances—and that in spite of the persistent protests of those with classicist tastes or

12. Adorno’s essay discusses high and low forms of music but the theoretical principles are the same for all arts.

with a predilection for simplicity and “naturalness,” who refused to accept the romantic emotional hyperboles.

An evaluation of the theatrical experience of the early Shakespearean performances would be deficient without taking into consideration the predisposition of the Greek audiences to traverse the division between the stage and the auditorium. The basis of a form of popular aesthetics, as Pierre Bourdieu has noticed, is a deep-rooted demand for “participation”:

The distance to enter into the game, identifying with the character’s joys and sufferings, worrying about their fate, espousing their hopes and ideals, living their life, is a form of investment, a sort of deliberate “naivety,” ingenuousness, good-natured credulity . . . (32, 33).

Theater reviews of this period testify to the fact that the Greek spectators were active participants in the creation of the dramatic illusion with contributions of vocal commentary, gestures, tears and cries of fear or anger.¹³ The lack of experience in theatrical matters, which was obviously more evident in the spectators from the lower segments of society, furnished them with a special ability to appreciate the play from an emotive or moral perspective rather than an intellectual one.

A good instance of the popularizing dynamics of the Greek auditorium during Shakespearean performances is offered in a current review of an outdoors production of *Hamlet* that Tavoularis gave at the banks of the river Ilissos in 1879. We do not know what exactly the largely plebeian Athenian audience understood from Shakespeare’s play, but the extremity of the situation is a case in point:

And while the waiters from the coffeehouse of Mr. Tsoha served coffee and water over our legs, Ophelia (Sophia Tavoulari), already mad, was running towards the river to drown with heartrending sounds. And before the people had been seated, Hamlet started: “To be or not to be?” Many people discussed the fact that they had overeaten this evening. But in spite of all these, the audience expressed its great enthusiasm. . . . But as long as people gather to watch Hamlet in the middle of the summer in an outdoor theater, the situation has nothing to do with the theater or the appreciation of performances, but with the making of money out of the need of a lot of people who want to spend a cool evening together. (*Efimeris*, June 21, 1879)

13. Hatzipantazis, *Apo tu Nilou*, vol. A1, 278.

The censure of this reviewer is undoubtedly directed mainly against the commodification of the theater. What he could not see from “above,” however, was that the “great enthusiasm” of the Greek plebeian audience suggested the emergence of a novel aesthetics which represented the claims of a new social reality still in the making.

Most importantly, the theatrical experience that emerges out of the mixture of literate and popular elements in this outdoor Shakespearean performance suggests a dynamic context in which the imaginings of the Greek auditorium and those of the stage merge to produce a new composite reality through a singular emotive effect. Historical circumstances are accountable for this dislocation of the “classic” from its pre-eminent position, but it was mainly Shakespeare’s plenitude that helped to make it possible: “the pregnant interplay of varied social and theatrical elements” that are so characteristic of his plays, as Robert Weimann has put it (175). The distance between the auditorium and the stage, which most contemporary theorists regard as a prerequisite for the aesthetic appreciation of an artwork, disappeared, moving closer to “the unity of production and reception,” a relationship that Weimann considers an important constituent of dramatic meaning. For in spite of existing contradictions, the more the distance is diminished, “the more the essence of the play is brought out *in the course of the performance* [sic]” (7).

Place and occasion, Raymond Williams has suggested, are the most common signals of art (131-32). For the middle and lower sectors of people that comprised the main body of the Greek audience, to go to the theater and to be able to watch Shakespeare’s plays was proof of their new European identity. Yet, “*Hamlet* performed to an audience sitting on the grass in a park,” as Susan Bennett has argued, “cannot be the same experience as *Hamlet* performed in a modern theater technologically equipped for the presentation of plays” (136). The European vision of the Greek spectators was invested with greater reality in more formal theatrical spaces that emitted signals closer to their expectations for European integration and identity. Noticeably, the Europeanized upper society of Athens, the run-down and ready to collapse Athens Theater (or Boukoura)—the only major closed-roof theater in existence up to 1888—was one more reason to avoid the performances of the Greek actors.¹⁴ For the majority of the people who saw

14. The newly constructed Municipal Theater of Athens started its operation in this year, along with the theater of Omonia. The construction of the Greek Royal Theater took place between 1895 and 1901. See Sideris’s chapter on the Athenian theatres, 193-205.

the theater as a social event and a source of entertainment, the shabbiness of the surroundings made a sad contrast with the romantic illusion that supported their search for a new European identity. In contrast to that, Constantinople had better theaters, worthy to host famous foreign actors and melodramatic groups; the Greek acting companies had also used them during their visits—Theater Naum, Crystal Palace, and Verdi. The rare occasions on which royalty or important governmental officials went to the theater—as for example, when Lekatsas recited his part in English in an 1883 performance of *Hamlet* in Constantinople—invested the event with additional magic.¹⁵

The co-habitation of popular and high culture elements in the social and performative field of the Greek Shakespearean productions appears to neutralize the function of taste as a designator of social distinctions and differences. Looked upon as cultural texts, these performances became what Fredric Jameson has called “a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic,” as they construct a narrative that represents an imagined resolution of real contradictions in the social order (77). The symbolic significance of this narrative is considerably enriched when the individual plays are viewed in terms of the dynamics of active performance in front of a live audience within the physical reality of the theater. The social and performative energies of the early Greek Shakespearean performances succeeded in rewriting the “classic” as an ideologeme of aspired bourgeois culture shared collectively by all Greek people.

Expectations and Interpretations of Nineteenth-Century Greek “Audiences”: The Case of *Hamlet*

The theatrical reception of *Hamlet* since the initial performance of 1866 in Athens constitutes a case study for understanding the complex process through which the Greek audiences were educated towards European citizenship. As a primary tragedy of subjectivity, *Hamlet* contributed towards strengthening the deficient sense of bourgeois individuality of his Greek spectators more than any other play by Shakespeare. In addition to that, the fact that it raises issues of enormous philosophical and intellectual complexity that have puzzled readers, performers, and spectators diachronically, designates an even more obvious distance from the semi-literate and popularizing conditions of its Greek theatrical reception. In addition to being

15. *Neologos*, Nov. 13, 1883.

a foreign “classic,” *Hamlet* was a genuinely difficult work that challenged the Greek norms and expectations by posing questions about the nature of the tragic dramatic experience.

Hamlet, however, had a strong literary audience in nineteenth-century Greece. It was formally introduced through Ioannis Pervanoglou’s translation (1858), but the knowledge about the existence of its melancholic and tortured romantic hero must have been established earlier within the closed circle of a readership of literati.¹⁶ The latter were informed about current European developments in the areas of literary criticism, translation, and the theater—mainly through German, English, or French sources. The most important Greek critical study of the century was produced by Iacovos Polyklas from Corfu, as an introduction to his 1889 translation of the play, whose late appearance argues against the possibility that it could have influenced theatrical interpretations in specific ways. Actually, in spite of systematic attempts to incorporate materials from the plot of *Hamlet* into the structure of the native historical dramas that were produced in abundance in this period, there are very few critical studies about the play itself. Literary criticism was still regarded as an adjunct practice of philology, rather than as an autonomous field, while the lack of a firmly established theatrical tradition had not prepared adequately the reviewers who attempted to evaluate critically the early performances.

In the case of *Hamlet*, which appeared relatively early on the Greek stage, the help of the reviewers was undoubtedly more than necessary, since it is highly improbable that Pervanoglou’s purist linguistic version of the text was among the favorite readings of the mass of middle-class readers. The role of the professional reviewers was that of a mediator between performances and the new and largely inexperienced spectators. Their task was to impart “enlightened” information to the audience, but the objectivity of their reports is of relative value, being subject to the degree of their education and ideological stance. The most biased, in the opinion of Dionysios Tavoularis, were the Athens reviewers, whose theatrical reports were an extension of their political credo (108-09). Provided that they were written by dispassionate and open-minded persons, the early Greek theatrical reviews played a seminal role in establishing interpretive codes for analyzing both the literary and performative value of plays—especially of the imported ones that required special knowledge of the respective foreign culture. Apart from offering today’s modern researchers a rich depository of information on the realities of the

16. For the Greek translations of Shakespeare’s plays see Douka-Kabitoglou; Karagiorgos; and Krontiris, “Translation as Appropriation.”

theatrical and social fields in Greece, such commentaries functioned as guides for the education of nineteenth-century readers and spectators.¹⁷

Putting aside a great number of occasional reports of the journalistic kind, we may assume that the writers of the fewer but more serious theater reports belonged to an educated group of spectators that was not much different from the “informed” type of readers that Stanley Fish identifies in his classification of various interpretive communities (48; 349). From a position of intellectual superiority and greater expertise in literary matters the professional reviewers did a “second reading” of the performances that was offered to readers and prospective spectators as a guide for a better understanding of the play and the conditions of its performance. This interpretive function appears to suggest a pattern similar to the tripartite hermeneutical process with which Hans Robert Jauss theorizes the act of reading, that is, aesthetic understanding, interpretation, and application. What the reader grasps through perceptual understanding at first, explains Jauss, is “articulated as a theme in the retrospective horizon of interpretation” (142). The interpretation, in turn, is possible to become the foundation of an application because a text from the past is of interest not only with reference to its primary context, but “it is also interpreted to disclose additionally a possible significance for the contemporary situation.” It may be said that the reviewer’s primary understanding of performances takes shape in his reviews as a “second reading,” which aims additionally to reconstruct the performance text in ways that could be meaningful to contemporary audiences.

The underlying aim of the reviews was to fashion a “model spectator,” which did not, however, exist at this time except as an imaginary construct.¹⁸ This means that it is easier to talk about the perceptions and yearnings of the reviewers themselves, which stand for the more learned community of bourgeois spectators, rather than the unidentifiable varieties of the diverse communities or groups of viewers that comprised the larger body of the Greek audience. One assumes, however, that for the most part the horizon of expectations of the entirety of spectators was informed by major cultural assumptions that they all shared. It is possible to deduce from the several commentaries on performances that the most obvious of these were a belief

17. See Hatzipantazis’s relevant article, “I anadisi tis ellinikis theatrikis kritikis ston omogeniako tipo tou 1870” (The Emergence of Greek Theatrical Criticism in the Daily Press of the Diaspora in 1870).

18. Marco De Marinis (*Semiotica del Teatro* 198) uses the term “model spectator” as a variant of the “model reader” that Umberto Eco proposes in his *The Role of the Reader* (7). See also Carlson 94.

in the pedagogical and nationalistic function of the theater, the knowledge of the great significance of Greek classical tragedy, the romantic interest in characters larger than life, or in acting effects that generated intense emotions. The question one is tempted to ask at this point is what a play like *Hamlet* actually meant for the larger and more dynamic part of this audience that represented the rapidly rising middle class of Greece.

Overall, these early commentaries impart information about the repertory of the company and casting, express generalized praise or blame about the acting of the protagonists without any details about setting or costumes and discuss the moral meanings of the dramatic work referring to the author's life and works. However, in the case of *Hamlet* the majority of reviews indicate clearly that it was regarded as a special kind of drama that posed specific difficulties to the understanding. Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that the debate about Shakespeare's works that had started a decade earlier was conducted within the closed circles of a minority of intellectuals who approached his works mainly for their literary value; in point of fact, for the larger part of the theater audiences the performance of *Hamlet* was practically unknown territory. The play must have baffled early Greek reviewers as much as the Greek actors and spectators.

Essentially, the tragedy of *Hamlet* challenged the mainstream expectations of the entirety of the Greek audiences. Although everybody recognized that it was a different kind of tragedy, the absence of firmly established criteria or a vocabulary for defining its difference caused a great deal of confusion. For an age that understood performances as a direct translation of the literary text, the "foreign" experience of the tragedy of *Hamlet* was an obstacle in comprehension. In their pre-established literary knowledge, based mainly on their acquaintance with the genre of Greek classical tragedy, there was no such precedent. It was less the violation of Aristotle's rules that bothered the Greek spectators than it was the alien conception of the tragic hero. The only way to understand Hamlet was through a process of domestication, which aimed towards his transformation to an Orestes or Prometheus, providing an interpretive framework for locating differences and similarities.¹⁹ The discomfort and unease of the Greek spectators is evident in the self-contradictory interpretations offered for the character of Hamlet in several theatrical records throughout this period, which cover the whole range between high praise and severe blame: "excellent nature," "gentle prince," "philosopher," "lunatic," "misanthrope," "coward."

19. See Yanni, "Shakespeare and the Greeks: A Hundred Years of Negotiations" 210-11.

More than anything else, the conflicting interpretations suggest that for the early Greek audiences the performance text of *Hamlet* contained too many “blanks” and “negations” that made its construal difficult. Although Iser—for whom the first term is a fundamental means of communication between text and recipient—avoids offering a satisfactory definition, it is clear that the blanks that the Greek spectators encountered in *Hamlet* belong to the variety he associates with a negating function that calls into question pre-established social norms and expectations. The attempts to correlate the plot or the hero of *Hamlet* with the familiar classicist context of the revenge myth of Orestes actually remained inconclusive, producing indeterminacies and contradictory conclusions. Rather than classical tragedy, the effects generated by the performance text of *Hamlet* suggested a novel and unknown experience that undoubtedly challenged the spectator’s horizon of norms and expectations. The constructive or educational function that Iser attributes to negation is at work here:

[Negations] invoke familiar or determinate elements only to cancel them out. What is cancelled, however, remains in view and thus brings about modifications in the reader’s attitude toward what is familiar or determinate—in other words, he is guided to adopt a position in relation to the text. (280)

As a new play that evoked the circumstances of the tragedy of Orestes or Prometheus but that was not quite like it, *Hamlet* raised a series of questions that the Greek audience felt obliged to answer.

Actually, it is the enlarged distance between the performance text of *Hamlet* and the horizon of its Greek spectators that brings to the vanguard in a more pronounced and self-conscious way the tensions and contradictions that existed in the Greek social field. For the Greek audiences the problems of partial comprehension arising from *Hamlet* had the potential to effect what Jauss terms a “*change of horizons* through a negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated ones to the level of consciousness” (25). In this case, the disintegration of the classic, rather than being a symptom of the reification of society—as Adorno would see it—functioned as a creative act that affirmed the energies of a new understanding of the social condition.²⁰ The difficulties that *Hamlet* posed to its Greek heirs have this special significance.

20. This position echoes the objection of Jauss against Adorno’s theory of negativity. Robert C. Holub notes that Jauss was bothered by it because “it allows a positive

The blanks and negations of *Hamlet* helped shape the new self-consciousness of the emerging Greek bourgeoisie. Regardless of the degree of education or social class, the early Greek spectators watched it as part of an initiation ritual that would bring them closer to the dream of European citizenship. The firmly established fame of Hamlet as the darling of nineteenth-century Europe added to the play a significance that went beyond its importance as a masterpiece created by the genius of Shakespeare. Even at an unconscious level, the status of Hamlet as a model of modern European subjectivity was at this time a potent catalyst in inducing the illusion that watching him in action was for his Greek viewers a way to participate in the advanced culture of Europe.

The history of the nineteenth-century Greek Shakespearean performances registers the process of the gradual maturity of both actors and audiences in theatrical matters in line with current European developments. At the turn of the century it was possible to say: "At last, now we understand Shakespeare."²¹ Looking back at the first attempts to represent Shakespeare at the theaters of Athens, Constantinople and beyond, it becomes obvious that the most potent agency for the institutionalization of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century Greece were actually the flagrant performances of the "self-taught" Greek traveling actors in front of semi-educated audiences that represented the emerging bourgeoisie of the nation grasped imaginatively as an entity. It was the social and performative energies of the Greek theater that released the text of Shakespeare's plays from the confines of literariness and reproduced it in a fresh context defined by unrestrained vitality, dislocation, unresolved tensions and ambiguous significations. The unique fusion of popular, national, and foreign elements in the making of the Greek Shakespearean experience nourished the urgent needs and desires of the Greek spectators for progress and European integration at this time in history. Above anything else, this plenitude generated a utopian sense of com-

social function for art only when the artwork negates the specific society in which it is produced," thus leaving no room for an affirmative and progressive kind of literature (70).

21. *Asty*, 27 Oct. 1897. It refers to a 1897 performance of *Hamlet* with Dionysios Tavoularis, in which the figure of the hero seemed "depleted and a bit passé." The popularization of Shakespeare and in particular the hyperbolic energies of romantic passion in the interpretation of *Hamlet* were no longer considered valid signs of modernity. At the same time, however, this enriched understanding signals the demise of the popular Shakespeare of the traveling actors and the semi-literate audiences and opens up the possibility for the construction of a proper bourgeois theater in the next century.

munal participation and identity among viewers and performers, providing at the same time a serious challenge to the exclusionist European vision of the theater sustained by the official state.

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NOTE: For the purposes of this paper I have also researched the collections of nineteenth-century Greek newspapers housed in the Library of the Greek Parliament. I quote from *Asty* and *Efimeris* of Athens as well as from *Neologos* of Constantinople.