

CONTEMPORARY ANTIGONES, MEDEAS AND TROJAN WOMEN

PERFORM ON STAGES AROUND THE WORLD

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines postmodern theatrical adaptations of *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* to show how they re-define the central female figures of the source texts by creating a new work, or 'hyperplay', that gives the silenced and often silent female figures a voice, and assigns them a political presence in their own right. Using a collection of diverse plays and their performances which occurred in a variety of geographical locations in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, this thesis analyzes adaptive, 'hypertheatrical', strategies employed by the theatre, through which play texts from the past are 're-made' in the here and now of theatrical performances. A close analysis of these performances demonstrates how the historical and cultural identity of contemporary audiences informs the process of re-interpretation of familiar material within new contexts. They evidence how these re-makings reflect the culture, the political moment or the socio-historical coincidence in which they are conceived and performed. Most importantly this thesis shows that without exception these appropriations become entirely new *Antigones*, *Medeas* and *Trojan Women*; they invoke re-configurations or re-inventions of femininity which detect and emphasise individual women's strengths and female solidarity, thus placing the plays firmly within a contemporary feminist discourse.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Chris
and to our three daughters Stella, Danae and Sofia.
Without their constant encouragement, support, understanding, and unconditional love
this project would never have been completed.

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INTRODUCTION

“What, has this thing appeared again tonight?”(I,i,20) asks Horatio in the opening lines of *Hamlet*; an ironic statement if applied to the theatre where ‘things’ do return night after night for new and different audiences, to haunt them like the ghost of Hamlet’s father. In this sense, every new performance is also a return of the previous one and it is ghosted by its own recurring nature. In his book *The Haunted Stage* (2003), Marvin Carlson describes this concept of ghosting as occurring throughout the theatre. The theatre, he argues, is haunted by past performances of famous actors and legendary plays which force current performers and productions to walk in the shadows of their predecessors. This haunting occurs both on the level of the memories of individual members of the audience, and in the form of “recycled” gestures, concepts, sets, and even building designs on the part of the theatre practitioners. Carlson demonstrates how Roland Barthes’ theory of intertextuality can be applied to the theatre, by using it as a premise for his own theory of ‘haunting’ which he describes as occurring more specifically in the theatrical text but also in the theatre in general. He shows how postmodern theatrical theory and practice is particularly concerned with the concept of “recycling” material and re-using it freely “in unexpected and innovative juxtapositions” to create “new relationships, effects and tensions” and to summon up traditional theatrical and historical ghosts (2003, p.168). But the initial haunting, he argues, which is as old as the theatre itself and has developed alongside the theatre up to the present day, is on the level of already familiar narrative material. He illustrates, further, how through the repetition of old familiar myths, past plays, and productions on the stage, each performance event becomes in itself an act of the construction of memory.

It is this concept of ‘haunting’ and of the theatre as a ‘memory machine’ together with what Carlson calls “the case of recycled characters” (p. 45) that initially prompted my interest

in examining plays from the tradition of the ancient Greek canon and looking into how the historical and cultural identity of contemporary audiences informs the process of re-interpretation of familiar material within specific historical and political contexts. Greek tragedy with its continual return and re-examination of fascinating myths and heroic and anti-heroic figures is a perfect example of the continual haunting process that occurs in the theatre. The familiar classic myths were not new even when the Athenian playwrights first wrote the plays we know today, nor did they ever completely disappear over the millennia. They have always been, and still are, an alluring source of inspiration for dramatists and audiences alike and they have stimulated dramatic re-workings in almost every generation to the present day. This practice of adapting the ancient myths to make theatrical works that are culturally relevant and historically significant for specific audiences is not sudden or recent, nor is it unfounded or inexplicable. It has its roots deep in the history of performance and is interconnected with the unfolding of social, cultural, and theatrical history of the last centuries as well as in a complex combination of social, political, and cultural developments which have been explored and documented by numerous scholars in the last two decades both from the field of classics and from the field of drama and theatre studies. (Dillon and Wilmer, 2005; Hall and Macintosh, 2005a; Hall et al., 2000; Hall et al., 2004; Hardwick and Gillespie, 2007; Macintosh, Fiona et al., 2005; McDonald, 1992, 2003; Mee, Erin B. and Foley, 2011; Smith, 1998). Playwrights and directors alike have seen in tragedy its political potential; the many wars, political upheavals, and dictatorial regimes of the last century have inspired the return to Greek tragedy as a form of expressing anti-war sentiments or subverting the establishment. However my own initial and recurring questions were related not just to the why but also to how and to what effect these adaptations have developed in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

With these questions as a driving force I set out, in this thesis, to explore the contemporary relevance of adaptations of three Athenian tragedies, Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Medea* and *The Trojan Women*, and to affirm their significance especially within recent and current socio-political contexts. My aim has been to draw the connections between the social, aesthetic, and intellectual concerns of the playwrights who adapted, the directors who directed and the audiences who experienced these adaptations. I place my focus on the female figures in these plays and explore how they have been centralised and re-invented in the contemporary moment, to open up the wealth of intercultural associations and to identify historical and political implications. I chose to look at adaptations with women as their central agent because I was fascinated by the way the ancient playwrights used the female figure in their work and in how that position has been reconfigured in radical and experimental theatrical adaptations to shift the focus onto novel and intriguing aspects of a woman's place and role in contemporary society.

On the basis of approximately a dozen plays and their performances which occurred in different, diverse and spread out geographical locations which span from East Germany and Georgia in the late nineteen eighties and the nineteen nineties, to the United States and the United Kingdom in the third millennium, this thesis analyzes a number of adaptive strategies employed by the theatre, through which play texts and myths from the past are 'resurrected' in the here and now of theatrical performances. I narrowed my choice of play texts and performances to ones which are radical re-makings; adaptations which use history, myth, and culture as a source to draw upon in order to create dramas which stage and critique crises of our own era. I do not use adaptations which are simply 'poetic translations', or 'versions' of the source texts whose purpose it is to make the classics more accessible to contemporary and/or 'less sophisticated' audiences by making mainly the language or the stage visualisation

more contemporary. I suggest that the latter do not function within a politically charged theoretical framework and therefore are not radical in the way which I utilise the term. The word 'radical' stems from the Latin word *radix* for roots, and has an etymological significance that lends itself to the phrase 'going to the root' or origin of something (Bennett et al., 2005, p. 296-7; Schirmer, 1989; Taylor, 1997; Williams, 1976, pp.251-2). In political terminology it has the connotation of left-oriented political and social reform, often of an extreme kind, and therefore the disruption, transgression and transformation of the status quo. It also has connections to movements championing the emancipation of the oppressed and marginalised classes of society. This study examines how such radical, contemporary adaptations of *Antigone*, *Medea* and *Trojan Women* portray and champion the 'uprooting' of traditional beliefs related to gender, politics and culture which have been embedded in the interpretation of this canonical work and often still remain at the heart of late twentieth and early twenty first century society.

Feminist and Counter Canonical Discourse

In the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties, at the height of the theoretical development of feminist thought, a number of feminist scholars launched a justified critique of the patriarchal values embedded in canonical literature and more specifically in Greek tragedies which they called misogynistic both for their subject matter and for the fact that they were written by men, performed by men, watched by male audiences and were promoting an anti-female agenda (Case, 1985, pp. 317-27; Foley, 2001a, p.12-3; Millett, 1977; Pomeroy, 1975, pp. 97-110; Zeitlin, 1996, pp. 87-119). In the chapters which follow I will argue against the notion that all Greek tragedies were misogynistic male affairs, and while discussing adaptations of these tragedies I would like to argue that far from being texts that have been ignored by

female and male playwrights because of their misogynistic agendas, they are re-read as containing the seeds of subversion which had been ignored and re-made into radical, postmodern adaptations which all converge towards one common concern, that is present in the original: the political presence of the female figure, and the implications of such a presence. They redefine the female presence in the source play by creating a new work that gives the silenced or often silent female figure a voice. They question and re-write the master narrative in order to explore the impact of the subjugation of women. What is more, they do not treat the subjugation of women simply within a particular personal framework, but they explore it within a wider framework of the subjugation of the Other within a national identity remit and even further, related to the oppression of nations which incorporates war and the idea of political resistance. So these plays redefine the female presence by placing women in opposition to patriarchy, in opposition to war, in opposition to the state, in opposition to power; all these ‘oppositions’ involve resisting male driven, patriarchal and oppressive practices by taking political actions and thus making political statements. Though they are varied and different, the adaptations which I explore in this thesis are the ones which have used the radical political elements found within the primary text to create theatre which becomes the voice of the woman rediscovered and frequently takes on the form of self discovery and self-assertion.

All the adaptations which I have explored invoke re-configurations or re-inventions of femininity which detect and emphasise individual women’s strengths but also female solidarity in the form of “shared pleasures and strengths rather than shared vulnerability and pain”(Genz and Brabon, 2009, p. 69), thus placing the plays firmly within a contemporary feminist discourse. As adaptations, these plays have granted the central female figure a strong political presence. Some of the plays take strong women who have traditionally been

presented as being ‘wrong’ and re-invent them as being ‘right’; others have taken women who have traditionally been acknowledged as being ‘right’ but also pitied for being ‘weak’ and given them power and the strength of individual, political choice. Notwithstanding their differences and their varied cultural and political milieus, all of these adaptations have taken on for their women protagonists a form of self discovery and self-assertion in line with Adrienne Rich’s view, who writes:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival ...[it] is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male dominated society, ...[it is a] drive to self-knowledge (1971, p.33).

Furthermore, these re-makings which re-configure the well known female figures of Antigone, Medea, Hecuba and all the women who surround them and with whom they interact, also provide fertile material for exploration between their performance and the creation of new female identities, and concepts with which to analyse the reconfiguration of ethnicities in new versions of canonical texts. The creative and fear-free interplay between canonical dramas of classical antiquity, contemporary and experimental theatrical approaches, radical reconfigurations of stereotypical images of classical females and geographically specific historical, political and cultural moments, contributes to the creation of contemporary theatrical events all of which contradict Audre Lorde’s (1984) famous precept and actually use ‘the master’s tools’ – these plays of classical antiquity – as a means to ‘dismantle the master’s house’ – the patriarchal power base. Surprisingly, while the dramas of classical antiquity come within the cultural consciousness as marking the origins of Western tradition and upholding the conventional patriarchal values of Western civilisation, they have inspired plays which question those traditional values and often work against them.

The above realisation led me to explore these plays as examples of canonical counter-discourse and to interrogate how contemporary adaptations of *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* are re-made into counter-discursive narratives. As such they do not question the canonicity of the ancient texts, or their language as part of a traditional patriarchal or colonial culture which they seek to dismantle. Instead they embrace the original radical, subversive tendencies, and the cultural power of the ancient texts which were written in a dead language well before the cementing of religious, political, and cultural barriers of the current era. On that base the playwrights build a new construct and re-visit these texts, not to divest them of their assumed authority and authenticity. They do not re-invent the characters of Medea, Antigone or Hecuba and the victims of the Trojan War in order to undo the Gordian knots of patriarchal imperialism. Conversely, they question the tradition of their criticism and their reception and urge audiences to re-see them and to re-read their underlying political agendas. They explore the thematic relevance of the plays and the radicality of the characters' actions to "deconstruct significations of authority and power ... and by implication to intervene in social conditioning" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996, p.16). They use political, feminist, anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist discourses to adapt and appropriate the classical texts as protest narratives in globally diverse political contexts and culturally specific moments.

Cultural Materialism, Postmodernism and History

Consequently, the adaptations examined here are not approached as texts or performances whose single purpose is to defy canonical structure by subverting the Athenian dramatists as authorities, or the source texts and the place they hold within the cultural legacy of imperialism. They use, rather, the critical discourse of postmodernism which Philip Auslander

describes as “an elusive and fragile discourse that is always forced to walk between complicity and critique” (1994, p. 31). On the one hand, the playwrights accept the cultural power of the source text and therefore comply with it, while on the other hand, they use the myth they are retelling, to make a subversive political statement and thus critique it. Indeed I would argue that this is one of the characteristics which makes these performances postmodern even though, as Nick Kaye’s study of the relationship between postmodernism and performance suggests, the term evades any definition or categorisation (1994, pp. 1-23), and, as Linda Hutcheon (1988) contends, it also contains a paradox at its core since the word *post* “marks neither a simple and radical break ... nor a straightforward continuity ... it is both and neither” (p.17).

In approaching and assessing the cultural intervention made by these adaptations within their specific cultural, historical, and political moment my thesis takes a cultural materialist stance in its focus on the representations of the female figure in specific cultural, historical and political contexts. When analysing the plays in this thesis I draw more specifically on Jonathan Dollimore’s and Alan Sinfield’s (1994) conceptualisation of cultural materialism which offers “a combination of historical context, theoretical method ... socialist and feminist commitment ... and textual analysis” and does not claim to be politically neutral since “it knows that no cultural practice is ever without political significance” (pp. vii-viii). The multifariousness of this approach validates my argument that the act of adapting, revising, and re-making, whether it uses feminist or political discourse, is also part of the postmodern aesthetic. According to Fredric Jameson (1983-4), the return to older forms of art with a new perspective is integral to the aesthetics of postmodernism. Contemporary artists and writers, he maintains, are no longer able to invent new styles and new worlds because everything has already been invented; only a finite number of combinations are possible and

they have been thought of already, hence artists return to older, or ‘dead’ styles in order to reconstruct a fragmented reality as it posits itself today. This fresh approach which does not involve ‘quoting’ these older styles, but ‘incorporating’ them, aims to highlight the ‘unpresentable’ nature of reality and not to create a new representation of it.

However, though Jameson provides the framework within which I consider adaptation to be part of the postmodern aesthetic, he also maintains that postmodernism is related to the ethics of late consumer society which has become incapable of dealing with its own past and of retaining its sense of history. He writes that we live in a “perpetual present” and have acquired “historical amnesia” (p.20), leaving unanswered the question as to whether and where this mode of thinking contains a strategy for political expression. I will attempt to answer this question by showing that re-visiting and re-making an older form of art can have a distinctly historical and clearly political result and that adaptations of ancient Greek drama *can* be postmodern political narratives, relevant to our contemporary moment. I will indicate that they embody the necessity of returning to past forms of art, which lies in the core of postmodernism but that they also encapsulate the essence of adaptation as a form of expression which is not a passive, conservative, or nostalgic return to the past but an aggressive, new, innovative view of time and history. Such an approach places these adaptations within Hutcheon’s definition of postmodernism as a cultural activity that is “resolutely historical, and inescapably political” (1988, p.4). I will contend in this thesis that postmodernism, politics, mythology and history all co-exist in a dynamic, productive relationship which manifests itself in the theatrical events which I explore here.

During the course of my research I came across the word ‘history’ in a number of contexts and of course I use it myself when I discuss plays that all have some connection to ‘history’, whether that is historical reality, a historical event, a historical moment or the fact

that they are all related in both overt and subtle ways to past plays, therefore in some form ‘historically’ connected to the past. I find it necessary to clarify how I use the term ‘history’ in this thesis and how, as my work progressed, I became aware of it as being interwoven with myth, culture, politics and contemporary events as they unfolded in specific geographical regions globally. As Irish philosopher Richard Kearney argues, when writing about the centrality of mythology in Irish culture, connecting myth and historical reality is not a useless and unproductive exercise but a life preserving, meaningful procedure:

Without mythology, our hopes and memories are hopeless; we capitulate to the mindless conformism of fact. But if revered for its own abstract sake, if totally divorced from the challenge of reality, mythology becomes another kind of conformism, another kind of death. We must never cease to keep our mythological images in dialogue with history; because once we do, we fossilise. That is why we will go on telling stories, inventing and reinventing myths, until we have brought history home to itself. (cited in Etherton, 1989, pp.197-8)

In this very way radical adaptations of Athenian drama of the fifth century BCE use the past and present in a dialectic relationship to create a theatrical “image in the now of its recognizability” which, as Walter Benjamin argues in *The Arcades Project* (1999a), is “dialectical, ... genuinely historical [and] not archaic” (p. 463). The past and the present of these plays become meaningful together not through the acceptance of a concept of “timeless truth” which Benjamin resolutely refuses, but through a radical, contemporary theatrical image. In that way these ancient scripts become legible, as images, for audiences of the twenty-first century because:

It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, [it is an] image ... wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. (p. 463)

By re-visiting ancient myths, re-locating them and re-modelling them to fit the present moment, the playwrights of the adaptations in question turn their work into such an ‘image’. In fact they perform history by connecting the past and the present through the creativity of

the theatre, constantly ‘quoting’ from the past but also simultaneously erasing the archaic traces in order to gain full relevance in the present.

Postmodern Brechtian Performance Theory

It would be inconceivable not to bring Bertolt Brecht and his theoretical work into a discussion of theatre that is politically engaged and significant in terms of history. There are strong links that position the adaptations which I explore within an interpretation of Brechtian performance strategies since they clearly follow a perception of what Brecht termed ‘epic’: they surrender the old characteristic quality of suspense as well as the attempt to lure the audience into identification and emotional release; they oppose any means of representation that would suggest that history cannot be altered; they invite spectator response and shatter the illusion of the world of the play by connecting it to contemporary reality. In fact, in concurrence with Elizabeth Wright (1989) who in her *Postmodern Brecht* co-opts Brecht as a more experimental postmodernist rather than a more ‘certain’ modernist, I approach Brecht’s theories in relation to postmodernism and not to the definitive political solutions of Marxism which his work has more traditionally been associated with.

I approach Brecht’s work in agreement with Wright who suggests that it “dismantles its own ideology, clearly revealing both its mode of production and the ideological positions of the characters” (p. 3). Seen through that perspective, his productions present a postmodern “deliberately decentred view of reality” and “expose the spectator to an onslaught of representation from within its very practice in an attempt to undermine existing discourses, which already embody in their structuring principles the ideological reproductions of the culture they serve” (p. 99). David Barnett also advocates this view by emphasising that Brecht’s “productions opened the plays to dialectical investigation, resisting the temptation to point to a definite synthesis” (Bradley and Leeder, 2011, p. 6).

I would argue that the above strategies are used in the re-makings which I explore in a similar way, to create a theatre which is definitely political but does not provide definitive political and aesthetic solutions and therefore places itself within the uncertainties that postmodernism contains rather than the assumed scientific or objective certainties that modernism professes to embody in order to explain reality. And it is through this multifocal lens of ‘Brechtian postmodernism’ or even ‘postmodern Brechtian theory’ that I approach the theatrical adaptations in this thesis to show how they can be postmodern and political, subversive and counter-canonical, feminist and experimental.

The Chapters

The first two chapters of this thesis establish the theoretical basis on which my exploration of particular adaptations of *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* rests. In Chapter One I lay out the premises against which I then proceed to work. I ask the question why Greek tragedy is of any relevance today and whether indeed tragedy is completely dead or whether it is only dead as an idealist form and very much alive as an active, polemical form of theatre which addresses contemporary issues. I argue that the tragedies which were performed in fifth century Athens were also radical and subsequently stripped of that radicality by Western idealism and cultural imperialism and used as a symbol of the canon, as texts which contained truths and values which were considered the cornerstones of Western liberal thought. Their re-makings, which I explore in subsequent chapters, approach and re-invent these tragedies firstly by acknowledging and drawing upon the radical streak which they originally contained, and secondly – and perhaps more importantly – by questioning and subverting the traditional ways of approaching, reading, interpreting and performing those plays. So while the playwrights who have adapted the originals acknowledge in them a subversive element, they

also work against these texts as tools that were used to disseminate and reinforce traditional, western, patriarchal values and culture globally.

In Chapter Two I proceed to investigate the nature of adaptation and to enquire into how it functions in the theatre – especially in relation to the ancient Greek classics – and to what purpose. I delineate the theory of adaptation as it has evolved since the onset of modernism and describe it as usually either sustaining the authority of the original, overturning the authority of the classic – which would result in a postmodernist approach – or overturning the authority of the classic and the authority of the original political stance – which would result in radical postmodernism. I then clarify my definition with regards to the ‘radical adaptations’ which I use as a model in this thesis: such adaptations are remakings which overturn the authority of the classic as a symbol as well as the authority of the traditional beliefs embedded in the interpretation of the work; and while they retain the authority of the original political stance, they also question the logocentric core of the original structure.

In Chapters Three, Four and Five I offer a close analysis of such radical postmodern adaptations of Sophocles’ and Euripides’ plays which illustrate the validity of my argument hitherto. I begin each of these chapters with a brief overview of the extensive traditional body of scholarship which has developed surrounding the fifth-century texts, and also briefly mention its performance history. It is not my intention within the scope of this thesis to question or challenge the more traditional, well-established approaches, nor am I attempting to project the contemporary theatrical interpretations onto the classical texts. I offer my own reading of the original texts which simply intends to evidence a radicality within the ‘originals’ which I attest is inherent, and to demonstrate the tradition of their conservative interpretation which is challenged by the adaptations which I proceed to present.

In Chapter Three I investigate adaptations of Euripides' *Medea*, the play bearing the name of the woman who became synonymous with the most murderous and heinous of acts, infanticide. Radical adaptations of this classic, with socio-political connections to East Germany, Greece and Georgia, but also Brazil and twenty-first century London, shed an alternative light on Medea's murderous act. They approach it as an act of female defiance against oppressive patriarchal authority, an act of self assertion and a refusal to live in the void between one's own cultural heritage and that of the dominant colonial power. In Chapter Four, I analyze re-makings of Euripides' most unconventional tragedy of female woe and bereavement, *The Trojan Women*. For centuries the play was overlooked, most probably because of its clear anti-war messages which were best ignored when war was so central to the development and definition of the prevailing patriarchy. Understandably it has often been adapted in numerous situations of war in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. However, in the adaptations which I approach in this chapter it has been re-invented as more than an anti-war narrative. It has been re-made in form and content to give its female protagonists power in the battles that they face as individual women who are victimised within certain social stereotypes. Finally, Chapter Five considers radical adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Antigone has always had a voice; over the centuries she has been seen as the defiant female who rightly spoke against stubborn male authority but did so in the wrong manner, allowing herself to be guided by emotions and irrational passion rather than reason, strategy and political expediency. This same woman is appropriated in the adaptations which I explore, as an individual who displays sound political thinking and plays an active role in the politics of present-day Yugoslavia, Argentina and Liberia.

My overall aim in approaching all the plays is not to explore the adaptations in comparison with the classic text but to come to their performance within its contemporary

political, specific geographical framework and explore the life it gives to an old myth, how its roots haunt the contemporary re-making and how the historical reality of the time and place of its reception haunts in turn the cultural and historical reality of the audiences who experience the performance. Furthermore I do not attempt, by any means, to present a comprehensive overview of adaptations related to the three classical plays but to place specific performances within specific geo-political frameworks and examine the role that the female figures take on in that given moment. For that reason, the adaptations I have chosen are at once diverse but also have significant common threads. They are all radical, postmodern, feminist and counter-canonical; they function within a wide and diverse theoretical framework: some of them are more Aristotelian in their arc and others are more fragmented and experimental in form. Some are more overtly political, more or less historically and culturally relevant, more or less text-based; some peripatetic, site-specific, audience-centric or metatheatrical. However, they are all works with a forceful vision at their centre which re-define the conceived notions of classical theatre, and subvert the assumed authority of the ancient text and the conservative approaches embedded in their interpretation over the centuries.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ANCIENT PLAY TEXTS: RADICAL IN THE ORIGINAL

Setting the Scene / Historical Background

Of the estimated three hundred plays that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides wrote two and a half thousand years ago in Athens, only thirty three survived the centuries of neglect and oblivion, to reach the monasteries and courts of Europe in the early modern age and so into the world's libraries and onto our stages today (Garland, 2004; Hall, 2010). And if Shakespeare wondered in England of the Elizabethan era, "What is Hecuba to us, what are we to Hecuba?" (*Hamlet*, I, i, 530), then we have all the more reason to wonder, a further four hundred years later, what the plays written by the Athenian playwrights mean to us today. What strange fascination do stories of mythical wars, gods and ancient religion, larger-than-life heroes and heroines of ancient days hold for us, the active, informed, and involved citizens of the twenty first century? Why, already over ten years into the third millennium do we keep watching drama inspired by the Athenian dramatists on the stages of our theatres? Why do playwrights keep writing new plays that flow from the ancient texts and are still meaningful and relevant to our historical and political moment?

The basis for an answer lies in positioning the ancient plays and their performances within their own social and political context and exploring what they must have meant to the Athenian audiences that watched them. Once placed within the framework of the Athenian Democracy as it functioned in the fifth century BCE and explored within that context, these tragedies acquire a new significance; one which is used as a springboard off which their potential for contemporary political, social, and cultural power resonates. Though the social system which they were part of was a democracy, it was also at the same time a xenophobic

and imperialist patriarchal community which depended on slaves and imperial tribute. It is interesting to note that the content of the plays which this society supported, gave voice – in its overwhelming majority – to the ‘silenced voices’ of Athenian society, namely women, slaves, and outsiders and it is this inherent radicality that challenged the dominant ideology of Athenian society, which also underscores the plays’ radical potential that is being explored today.

The plays were originally written to be performed only once and in that one performance they made a statement and subsequently became part of the cultural and political history of the city which saw them come to life. The theatre received them and has subsequently been ghosted by that one performance to the effect that they survived though centuries of silence following their initial reception. Between their first performance and the latter part of the twentieth century which marked the start of a continuing and unprecedented revival of Greek tragedy on stage, there were long periods either of complete oblivion or of focus on the formal aspects (language and metre) of the genre. The plays were transmitted down the centuries as they passed through the hands of readers, scholars, monks, publishers, translators, actors, theatre directors and playwrights to be performed, copied, taught, analysed, translated, censored, adapted, or just forgotten in monastic libraries to moulder on the musty shelves. (Brockett, 1995; Garland, 2004)

The Greek texts were transmitted into the academic world after the middle ages, excavated out of the dust of monastic libraries where they were rescued by Byzantine scholars in an effort to preserve the spirit of ancient Greece after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. They were subsequently discovered by humanist scholars, printed, studied and imitated, thus fuelling the rebirth of classical ideas and ideals of the Renaissance (Brockett, 1995).¹ Discovering them was like digging up an ancient statue and placing it in one’s garden to

admire and to use as a symbol and status of intellectual and worldly superiority.² Having become such symbols, once the texts were discovered by the Italian humanists of the fifteenth century and then transmitted to the West outside Italy in the sixteenth, they never disappeared again from the literary or dramatic scene. (Bushnell, 2009; Garland, 2004; Hardwick and Stray, 2008).

Until the middle of the seventeenth century, texts of classical drama were valued, and studied at Universities such as Oxford and Cambridge as scholarly texts that were to be treated with reverence and respect. As Frederick Boas (1914) explains, the tradition of studying Greek and Roman Drama at Oxford and Cambridge did not involve dealing with the performance aspect of the plays, at least not as “merely recreative” events (p.14). It formed part of the Renaissance scheme of a gentleman’s education and served as an instrument for the teaching of classics and rhetoric; their role was clearly instructive. Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh (2005a) place the beginning of non-academic performances of Greek Drama in Britain in the 1566 performance at Gray’s Inn of George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmershe’s *Jocasta*, which they call a “descendant” of Euripides’ *Phoenissae* (p. x). However, they also acknowledge that by 1660 very few Greek tragedies had actually been performed, except in Latin and in “pedagogical contexts” (p. x), which clearly reinforces the instructive and educational role explained above. The mainstream approach was to disregard the dramatic aspect of the plays and study them either as a set of grammatical and syntactical rules of the ancient Greek language or as an example of high art, which contained a certain universality and greatness.

The notion which defined the approach towards tragedy and formed the basis of criticism from the second half of the eighteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century sprang from this anachronistic and idealist position which assumed that tragedy

carried some sort of universal significance. The reasoning behind this approach lies in the belief that tragedy appeals to the emotions and not to reason or theory, and therefore cannot be reconciled with social progress and politics. George Steiner, for example, maintains that “tragedy is irreparable” and that no amount of social or political improvement can influence the outcome of tragic plots since they are derived from the timeless moral dilemmas of the human condition. (1961, pp. 8-10) As Jonathan Dollimore (1989) points out, such a humanist view “mystifies suffering and invests man with a quasi-transcendent identity” (p. 190) hence confirming the moral order of the universe and the universal, timeless significance of tragic drama.

In many cases as late as the nineteen eighties, the Greek plays were grouped together into a category called ‘Greek Tragedy’, a unified whole – little more than abstract concepts imprisoned in words on a page, overlooking entirely their overtly political nature as performances which were part of a civic ceremony, a public event.³ The idea stemmed from Aristotle’s *Poetics*⁴ in which he postulates that “poetry is a more philosophical and a more serious thing than history” (1451a36-1451b7), a premise revived by the Romantics and pursued and elaborated by German philosophers such as Hegel, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard⁵ (Felski, 2008; Garland, 2004; Wallace, 2007). Tragedy was conceived by these philosophers as an exalted form of art which presupposes an ageless human condition and somehow transcends the world of politics, of history, and of differences in culture and language while dealing only with the loftiest of concerns, and with ‘eternal truths’ and ‘the inevitable’. Influenced by these thinkers Friedrich Nietzsche wrote his seminal *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872 which laid the foundations of many subsequent critical approaches to tragedy since it advocated a philosophical, anti-historicist and almost poetic interpretation. The above approach also sustained Bertolt Brecht’s view of tragedy which became central to

his influential theories on the nature of theatre and performance. Brecht's suspicion of tragedy as a theatre art form was based on his fear that audiences watching tragedy would use up all their energy identifying with and feeling sorry for the tragic hero and his inescapable fate, and they would leave the theatre satisfied and indifferent to injustices in the world outside the theatre. He therefore rejected tragedy as a form of art that masked what was historically and politically significant, and changeable, therefore irrelevant to the present moment and as a consequence intrinsically supportive of the current dominant ideology. And it was indeed used as such, since it was completely severed from reality and from the theatre. Jasper Griffin (1999) graphically and with some humour depicts the prevailing attitude of the nineteen fifties:

Discussion in the class dealt with grammatical questions, not literary criticism; as for discussing the function of tragedy in the democratic city of Athens, such a thing never crossed the mind of any of us, teacher or pupil. The play was simply *there*. We set about it very much for the same reason, and in the same frame of mind, as climbers tackling Mount Everest: roped together by our shared sessions of translation in class, and with our survival kit in the form of our edition with notes in the back. (p.73)

In more recent years this thesis was voiced most powerfully by George Steiner in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) where he maintains that tragedy is synonymous with the bleakest form of metaphysical pessimism alien to both Christianity and atheism, underscoring essentially the hopelessness of our attempts to remake the world. "More pliant divorce laws could not alter the fate of Agamemnon", he writes, and "social psychiatry is no answer to Oedipus" (p. 8). At best, revival of tragedy in our contemporary world though it exists is, according to Steiner, "a loan from the museum" (2008, p. 44). The effect of these arguments was made more concrete in the decades that followed the publication of Steiner's book, which saw the rise of political criticism and the rejection of tragedy as defeatist in itself, as transcending the world of political reality, and as promoting a sense of hopelessness, inevitability and individual

powerlessness.⁶ As Raymond Williams writes, “the most influential kinds of explicitly social thinking have often rejected tragedy as in itself defeatist. Against what they have known as the idea of tragedy, they have stressed man’s powers to change his condition and to end a major part of the suffering which the tragic ideology seems to ratify” (1966, p.63). He proceeds to argue in his own treatise on tragedy that “tragedy, in our own time, is a response to social disorder” and that it deals with the revolution of its time. Being a Socialist himself, he postulates that traditional views of tragedy are in need of re-examination and re-configures it as potentially political within a social-realist context.

As we have entered the third millennium the debates over the definition of ‘tragedy’ and ‘the tragic’ have entered new and exciting realms. Discussions by social theorists such as Terry Eagleton (2002), Michel Maffesoli (2003) and numerous others (see Felski, 2008; Garland, 2004; Lambropoulos, 2006; Wallace, 2007) have left us with a vision of tragedy that is “no longer a sacramental relic, a safely distanced object of veneration or disdain preserved in past time [but a concern which persists] – against official ideologies of utopian optimism and political perfectability – into the present” (Felski, 2008, pp. 22-3).

Apart from the theoretical debates on tragedy, on the tragic, and on its relevance to the citizens of the twenty first century, Athenian tragedy was given a new life which emanated from theatrical reality as it emerged close to the end of the second millennium; a reality which could not have been further removed from such a view of tragedy, as an obsolete literary form. So completely did the theatre change the approach to Athenian tragedy that we are increasingly asking not whether tragedy is political or theatrical, but how to define its obvious political purpose through performance. Not surprisingly therefore, the first chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Easterling, 1997) is on “theatre as process in Greek civic life” in which Paul Cartledge reveals how the theatrical festivals held in honour of

Dionysus were “a device for defining Athenian civic identity, which meant exploring and confirming but also questioning what it was to be a citizen of a democracy”(p. 6). Playwrights, directors, and actors worldwide began to ‘look back’ at tragedy with a different perspective, searching for new ways to pose questions to contemporary society and to open up the boundaries of theatre. The mythical, malfunctional, disharmonious worlds which Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides portray in their plays became one of the most important cultural and aesthetic lenses through which the real, malfunctional, and disharmonious world of today has been refracting its own image. This novel socio-historical approach has inspired and signalled the beginning of tragedy’s latest and strongest revival to date. Edith Hall writes in *Dionysus Since 69* (2004) that “more tragedy has been performed in the last thirty years than at any point in history since Greco-Roman antiquity” (p. 2), while Jennifer Wallace (2000) maintains that there is a “vogue for Greek tragedy in the West End” which is a response to the post-September 11 “War on Terror”, with its false certainties and underlying doubts, suggesting in that way that tragedy is the art form societies resort to when they want to judge what has brought war about.

This approach completely nullifies the idea held by so many for so long, that the only remaining purpose of all the tragedies and comedies which were written in fifth century Athens, was for them to be read and studied by philosophers, intellectuals or University scholars with a broad understanding of philosophy and literature. It acknowledges that since they were written to be performed and experienced by an audience within a specific historical and cultural moment, they can continue to carry specific historical, cultural and social significance.

Fifth century Athens: Radical state supported theatre

All the tragedies, and indeed the comedies, were without exception originally written to be performed in a competition at a five day festival, known as the Great or City Dionysia. The festival was held annually in the city of Athens in honour of the god Dionysus, and it was a religious and political event, or rather political *because* it was religious, since religion and politics in ancient Greece were fabrics woven of the same thread (Easterling, 1997).⁷ The three playwrights in the competition were chosen by the city-state, or *polis*, which also chose an individual sponsor to provide full financial support for the production. It was a principle that every citizen should attend the festival and that participation was never to be prevented because of financial concerns. With that in mind a fund was set up which paid the cost of the entrance ticket to the citizens in good standing on their records; this fund was protected by law and it was a prosecutable offence even to propose changes to it, so even when the city was in desperate need of finances to support its military operations, the fund which enabled citizens to attend the theatre was to remain intact (Winkler and Zeitlin, 1990). It is plain to see that attendance at the theatre was closely linked to citizenship since it was a citizen's duty, a privilege and a requirement and it was fully supported by the city-state.

But the performances of these plays were also political events in the sense that they were part of the city's official celebration of itself and of its ideology. Ceremony and ritual, processions and sacrifices, were an integral part of the festival, as of course were the actual performances themselves. All of these ceremonies were designed to project and to promote the values of the democratic state and the appropriate ideology of participation in the affairs of the state for the citizens gathered there to observe.

An important connection to make, which foregrounds the validity of the argument regarding the political radicality of Athenian theatre, is that while the plays were presented as

part of a state funded festival which projected, promoted, and celebrated the values which the city of Athens was very proud of, they depict worlds in which these very same values are questioned, scrutinised and criticised. Most of the times these worlds and their values are shown to be shallow and frail and ultimately they collapse. The plays present cities brought to complete destruction by war or torn apart by civil war, families and cities in conflict, families in conflict with each other. They present worlds in which imperial victories lead to horrific results; they construct worlds in which the war's causes and results, its avoidability or unavoidable, its consequences, its futility and its misery are explored, for victors and defeated alike; they expose worlds in which issues such as sanity, madness, responsibility, and revenge are explored but not always resolved. In short, the world represented in the tragic theatre of Athens is marked by extreme social heterogeneity and conflict, which is clearly not a reflection but a transformation or a questioning of the social and political processes of Athens in the fifth century. It is significant to acknowledge, furthermore, that this political radicalism was achieved by the Athenian dramatists, who were also active citizens of their city, in a way which showed acute political awareness. They were careful to transpose the conflicts that the tragedies enacted and the questions that they asked of their audiences to cities other than Athens, which they presented as an example of correct democratic rule. So, while Athenian politics and imperialistic designs *are* questioned, and issues crucial to Athenian democracy, the polis, the self, the family, and society *are* acted out, they are displaced upon other cities which are imagined as either less civilised such as Troy, not democratic, such as Corinth, or Thebes, which seemed to be the mirror image of Athens in almost everything. (Zeitlin, 1986)

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Athenian tragedies which deserves particular consideration in this thesis is the prominence of the female presence within the ancient plays.

In recent years many scholars (Foley, 2001a; Goldhill, 1994; Henderson, 1991; Murnaghan, 2009; Zeitlin, 1996) have tried to make sense of the paradox that although according to Thucydides⁸ women in Athenian society were denied public use of the word and were tied to the protocols of silence and public invisibility, paradoxically in Athenian drama they take centre stage and break both their private and public silence. The plays in question present worlds in which the second-class citizens of Athens, women, acquire a voice and an identity that they could never have in the real world, because in the public life of Athens they were marginalised.

The discrepancy between women's restricted social roles and their portrayal in drama has even led to discussions regarding the presence of women at the dramatic festivals. Some, like Jeffrey Henderson (1991) argue for women's presence at the dramatic festivals on the grounds that the festivals were "exclusively political but also inclusively festive" thereby not simply allowing but possibly requiring the presence of women – however obscure – in honour of the god Dionysus (p.147). Others, like Simon Goldhill (1994) approach the question sceptically and within an account of the dramatic festival as a civic institution which categorically excluded women. Froma Zeitlin (1990) underscores the significance of the female presence on a different level by arguing that since all the female parts were played by men Athenian theatre "uses the feminine for the purpose of imagining a fuller model for the masculine self, and 'playing the other' opens that self to those often banned emotions of fear and pity" (p.85). On whatever level one approaches the issue, it is clear that Athenian dramatists gave women public visibility and a powerful voice, a voice which may not have been welcomed but could not be ignored.

This prominence is evident even if one simply looks at the titles and plots of the plays. Indeed, in gender specific terms, the titles of the extant tragedies in essence question the way

in which men were traditionally supposed to be at the apex in classical tragedy as they were in Athenian society. Out of the thirty three surviving tragedies written by Aeschylus,⁹ Sophocles¹⁰ and Euripides¹¹ all, but one, contain female characters in their plots.¹² And while a staggering twenty one have female characters as central figures,¹³ nineteen have females in their title,¹⁴ as opposed to only twelve whose title is the name of a male hero or a god¹⁵ and three that have other titles.¹⁶

Of the plays listed above, Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Euripides' *Medea* and *The Trojan Women*, which I use as a basis for this thesis, strengthen the argument for the radicality of the ancient texts even further since their plots encompass powerful female figures who operate dynamically and even subversively within conservative, male dominated societies. They act and raise issues often in strong opposition to male characters; their words are spoken out loud and are heard; their deliberate actions boldly challenge and transgress the norms of proper female behaviour: they lie, defy the law, go against orders, incite public unrest, speak out boldly to male characters in power and even kill.

All three of the plays in question show women performing and functioning within the political sphere and though they evolve around and centre on individual female characters, they essentially explore issues that are above and beyond the individual. They present a political position reflected within issues of gender, identity, Otherness, nationhood, and power relations. They explore the subjugation of women and view them in opposition to various forms of patriarchy; they reflect the subjugation of the Other within specific social structures and explore issues of belonging and national identity. Finally, they explore the position of women in opposition to war and power and relate that to the conflict between nations.

All the above point to a clear conclusion: that tragedy – at the time and place of its birth – was not an exercise in the intellectual capacities of the elite, nor was it just a

commentary on state politics and a support for or applause of all the actions that the state had taken. It was a complex and troubling education into the values of citizenship. Audiences were not spoon-fed or drawn in to the representation of an idealistic world, but troubled, shaken, woken up to the reality of what was going on around them. Athenian drama contained an evident public, political seriousness and a strong ideological content. I suggest that it is this political seriousness, this ideology, this radicality and underlying revolutionary thrust which reaches certain playwrights and directors alike today and which inspires them to re-make “tragedies” by “plunging into fresh, contemporary dramatic waters from an identifiably ancient Greek diving board” (Hall, 2010, p.343). These artists are responding to tragedy with an acute sense of the politics and culture of their own time. They are not drawn by its ‘universality’ and ‘greatness’, nor by the ‘genius’ of the playwrights. They are not drawn by its timelessness, but by its timeliness; they are not in awe of the ancient plays as pillars of western civilization, but they uncover their radical political/historical content and appropriate them within their specific socio-historical moment; they keep tragedy alive by making of it the same kind of troubled education that it was for Athenian audiences in the fifth century.

NOTES

1. See Brockett (1995) Chapter Four, 'East and West: Cross-currents of a Thousand Years' and Chapter Five 'Theatre and Drama in the Late Middle Ages'.
2. See Boas (1914) Chapter One, 'From Medievalism to Humanism'
3. I need to clarify here that by using the term 'political', I do not narrowly relate it to political events that are known to have occurred at the time of performance. Instead I use the term in a broader sense which encompasses sexual and cultural politics and investigates the position of the female figure within a male dominated, patriarchal and hegemonic society.
4. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1451a36-1451b7, (1970) written in 350 BCE, in which he *describes* Athenian drama and defines tragedy as exemplified in it almost a century after it was staged in Athens.
5. For a detailed discussion see Rita Felski (2008) Introduction pp. 1-25. Also (2007) Chapter 3, "Tragic History" pp.10-110 and Robert Garland (2004) *Surviving Greek Tragedy*, Chapter 6, "Philologists and Translators", pp. 119-145.
6. He most firmly recounts his initial position more recently in his essay "Tragedy Reconsidered" in Felski (2008) pp. 29-44 in which he declares, "As is, I see not persuasive grounds on which to retract the case put in *The Death of Tragedy*, 1961" (p.44).
7. See Easterling, P.E. (1997), esp. pp. 3-68 and 93-126.
8. In Pericles' Funeral Oration (431BCE) as is recorded by Thucydides, he praises those widows who are not talked about amongst men at all, neither to be praised, nor to be blamed. (Thucydides, 1998, Book 2.45.2) In order to understand this it has been pointed out that for a woman to make her presence neither audible nor visible in the public male space was to act "contrary to nature" (see Otswald et al., 1993, p.129 Chapter by Paul Cartledge, "The Silent Women of Thucydides: 2.45.2 Re-viewed").
9. *Persians*, 472 BCE, *Seven Against Thebes*, 467 BCE, *Suppliant Women* 466 BCE, *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, *Eumenides*, 458 BCE (the Oresteia), *Prometheus Bound* (no agreed date).
10. *Antigone* 443,442? BCE, *Ajax* 442 BCE, *Women of Trachis* 432 BCE, *Oedipus Tyrannos* 427 BCE, *Electra* 413 BCE, *Philoctetes* 409 BCE, *Oedipus at Colonus* 401 BCE.
11. *Alcestis* 438 BCE, *Medea* 431 BCE, *Children of Heracles* 430 BCE, *Hippolytos* 428 BCE, *Andromache* 425 BCE, *Hecuba* 424 BCE, *Suppliant Women* 424 BCE, *Electra* 422 BCE, *Trojan Women* 415 BCE, *Heracles* 415 BCE, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 414 BCE, *Ion* 413 BCE, *Helen* 412 BCE, *Phoenician Women* 409 BCE, *Orestes* 408 BCE, *Iphigeneia in Aulis* 405 BCE, *Bacchae* 405 BCE, *Cyclops*, *Rhesus* date and authorship uncertain.
12. Sophocles' *Philoctetes*
13. *Persians*, *Suppliant Women* (Aeschylus), *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, *Antigone*, *Women of Trachis*, *Electra*, *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hippolytos*, *Electra*, *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *Suppliant Women* (Euripides), *Electra*, *Trojan Women*, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, *Helen*, *Phoenician Women*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, *Bacchae*
14. *Suppliant Women* (Aeschylus), *Libation Bearers*, *Antigone*, *Women of Trachis*, *Electra*, *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Electra*, *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *Suppliant Women*(Euripides), *Electra*, *Trojan Women*, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, *Helen*, *Phoenician Women*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, *Bacchae*
15. *Agamemnon*, *Prometheus Bound*, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Ajax*, *Philoctetes*, *Hippolytos*, *Sisyphus*, *Ion*, *Orestes*, *Cyclops*, *Rhesus*
16. *Persians*, *Seven against Thebes*, *Children of Heracles*

CHAPTER TWO

RADICAL POSTMODERN THEATRICAL ADAPTATION

1948, Brecht adapts *Antigone* – a landmark production

When Bertolt Brecht staged *The Antigone of Sophocles in a version by Bertolt Brecht* (1990) in February 1948 in Switzerland, and also wrote his “Masterful Treatment of a Model” (1964b)¹ in West Berlin that same year, he signalled the beginning of an unprecedented critical return to the very kind of dramatic text against which he constructed and defined his epic theatre. I will assert the premise here that Brecht’s groundbreaking Marxist re-writing and politicised staging functions as a landmark for radical appropriations not only of *Antigone*, but of all canonical Greek drama and signals the starting point for an interventionist engagement with the hitherto revered classic dramatic texts, firmly establishing the beginning of a practice which has been going on for almost seventy years and shows no signs of abating.

There had of course been numerous adaptations of the classics for hundreds of years before Brecht re-wrote *Antigone*. Indeed the adaptations for the stage began ever since the ancient Greek dramatic texts were tentatively re-discovered in the Renaissance and eventually matured as play texts for performance and reached the stages of Europe (Hall and Macintosh, 2005a). In recent years there have been numerous studies which trace the performance history and the reception of Athenian Drama mostly in the western world and they have carefully theorised and contextualised these productions within the social, political and even legislative history of their time. (Easterling, 1997; Fischer-Lichte, 1999; Foley, 1999-2000; Hall and Harrop, 2010; Hall and Macintosh, 2005a; Hall et al., 2000; Hall et al., 2004; Hardwick and Stray, 2008; Macintosh, Fiona et al., 2005; Mee, Erin B. and Foley, 2011; Smith, 1998) This scholarly research, published in the last twenty years, has acknowledged an unprecedented

revival of theatrical adaptations of ancient Greek drama within the second half of the twentieth century, but mostly places the starting point for this revival in the nineteen-seventies.

I suggest, however, that the starting point is Brecht's own radical re-writing and staging of *Antigone*, because it signals the return to tragedy in search of a source of radicality, which is historically relevant and politically significant in a way which had not occurred before. In his play, Brecht explores issues of state terror, partisanship and corrupt politics which are very much part of his own political moment and he transforms the play from one about a woman's duty to obey divine laws, to a play about individual political choice. Brecht's approach to Sophocles' text is landmark in that it is the first staging of the play – which interestingly even bears the ancient tragedian's name in its title – to attempt a radical critique of the ethical and moral concerns with which Sophocles' play has become synonymous over the centuries. It fearlessly breaks apart its codes and then restructures it to give new meaning to an inherently politically radical content.

Brecht's re-negotiation with a past which he considered too un-historicised to be relevant focuses more on making *Antigone* more pertinent to his own historical moment and less on highlighting the femaleness of Antigone's political voice. As such, it becomes a model for any adaptation which simultaneously attaches and detaches itself from its source material and demonstrates how a playwright can re-create a work of art and embed it within a novel, specific political situation. Brecht distances himself from the dramatic theatre, of which *Antigone* is a prime example, from the very title of his appropriation, which reads: *The Antigone of Sophocles, adapted for the stage by Bertolt Brecht, based on the German translation by Fredrich Hölderlin*. In removing himself so openly from the ur-text he defines his own task not as one of re-writing Sophocles' *Antigone*, but of reciting it for and re-siting it

on the modern stage. The title announces his intention to de-contextualize and then re-contextualize words that have a history of their own giving him and his audience the freedom to reflect upon, criticise or reject the contents of the original, since reciting lines that are not one's own is to act. He thereby breaks free of the "tyranny of Greece over Germany"² and gives *Antigone* as a role to a German Antigone and to the German audience of 1948 who witnessed it – experimenting in that way with a canonical text to produce an adaptation which is anchored firmly within the history of the German nation and works within the particulars of a post-war, defeated, (East) Germany. Hence he paves the way for all the adaptations which may spring from but do not seek to re-produce a given past play and which confirm, furthermore, the value of Jacques Derrida's (2006) concept of the 'hauntological': they are simultaneously ghosted by and follow the ghosts of the past, which becomes the present but is also simultaneously the future. The traces of the past plays are felt as being "neither living or dead, present nor absent ... [They do] not belong to ontology, to the discourse on the Being of beings, or to the essence of life or death, [but to] *hauntology*", which is always already there as a spectre. (p. 63) That spectre may manifest itself in the familiar myth they are retelling, the history into which they transpose that myth, or the collective memory of the audience who understand the signification of the political/historical context within which the plays are set.

The play was first staged in Chur, Switzerland on February 15th, 1948 in a production which aimed to reflect the dramatist's essentially political purpose: to sound out a warning to the German people, that just as Hitler's crazed lust for power had brought about the end of pre-war Germany, so would it do the same if it were to manifest itself in a different form in the fragile post war era, when Germany was seeking to redefine itself. The action of Brecht's play opens in April 1945, days of decline for the Third Reich. Two unnamed sisters come out of an air-raid shelter, returning home. While they are in the house they hear screaming from

outside. Twice the Second Sister is ready to go out and see what is going on; twice the First Sister stops her by saying, “If you see, you’ll be seen” (Brecht, 1990, pp.12-3) thus reflecting the atmosphere of the time. When they do go out they find their brother hanging on a meat hook: the fate of a traitor. As the Second Sister is about to cut him down with a knife and try to revive him, an SS soldier appears threatening to label them traitors too – guilty by association. The First Sister denies knowing this man and the action ends in mid-air. The first sister steps out of her role as a performer and asks the audience “Would she now under the penalty of death / try to free her brother? If only he had not died” (p.14).



Fig.2.1 *Picture of the two sisters in the prologue from 1948 edition of Antigonemodell*

In opening his play thus, Brecht re-invests the Sophoclean original with the ethical complexities about treachery, partisanship, loyalty and recrimination. The unnamed Second Sister, who we assume to be Antigone, emerges in her anonymity not as a tragic heroine but as an average person caught up in the terrifying turmoil and destruction following a war. The use of the freeze frame at the moment of indecision also allows the audience their own critical

thinking as they wonder, Who is The Second Sister? What will she do? Will she deny her brother too or maintain her personal integrity and remain true to herself? If the Second Sister had been clearly identified with Antigone, the prologue would hardly have had a purpose. On the other hand to have shown her openly denying her brother, would have indicated abandonment of all hope and consequently despair for the future.

Thus charged with uncertainty but also some hope, the play proceeds with a closer thematic adaptation of Sophocles' text but on a stage designed by Caspar Neher which evokes the horrors of World War Two. The stage is bare, lined by a semicircle of benches on which the actors sit, visible to the audience, waiting for their cue. The acting area is very brilliantly lit and is defined by tall posts on which horse skulls are nailed. Brecht writes that he initially considered having the skulls at the back of the stage between the benches thus indicating the barbaric location of the original text which the actors depart from to act in the adaptation, the "de-totemised version" (Brecht, 2003, p.198) on the brightly lit centre stage. Instead he decides to place the actors among the totem poles, since "we are still living in the totemic state of class war" (p.199).



Fig. 2.2 *Photograph from Antigonemodell 1948. The totems are visible on the left. The horse skulls outline the acting space. The performers who are not acting are sitting on the benches in full view of the audience.*

Antigone and Ismene open the dialogue as they do in Sophocles. A masterful choice of diction places the emphasis where the dramatist wants it. Antigone asks for Ismene's help to bury their brother and Ismene replies, with a horrified question, "He who has been denounced by the city?" Brecht shifts Antigone's answer from the passive to the active voice, thus taking the blame off Polynices and placing it directly on the city and its ruler. "He whom the city has renounced" (Brecht, 1990, p18). Antigone's words throughout the rest of the opening scene are direct and powerful, leaving no doubt about her position in relation to the tyrannical ruler and his laws.

The chorus of Elders enters the stage with comments that show clearly how this play is about the politics and the corrupt motives of war. "Creon", they say, "brings news of the booty and promises us / at last the return of the soldiers" (p.20). We soon suspect and later find out that the war against Argos is not over at all and Creon is only painting "a pretty picture of great power"(p.21). It is a war that was waged against Argos to ravage its rich resources in metal and use them for Theban armaments; and when it is time for the chorus to praise man and his greatness as in the famous Sophoclean ode, Brecht has the elders say "There is much that is *monstrous*. But nothing / more *monstrous* than man" (p.25), highlighting in that way the idea that though monstrously *great* when they subjugate Nature, humans are great *monsters* when they subjugate their fellow humans.

The scene of Antigone's and Creon's confrontation is also central to bringing out the political quality of Brecht's *Antigone*. In the original 1948 production *Antigone*, played by Helene Weigel, walks on stage with a door attached to her back, her hands tied to it crucifixion-style, from the moment that Creon's guards arrest her. This door draws attention to the themes of the play and also signals the relationship between the actress and her

performance since it breaks down the illusion of reality and keeps the performance subordinate to the story.



Fig. 2.3 Helene Weigel as Antigone, with the door attached to her back; Hans Gaugler as Creon; from performance in Chur, Switzerland, 1948

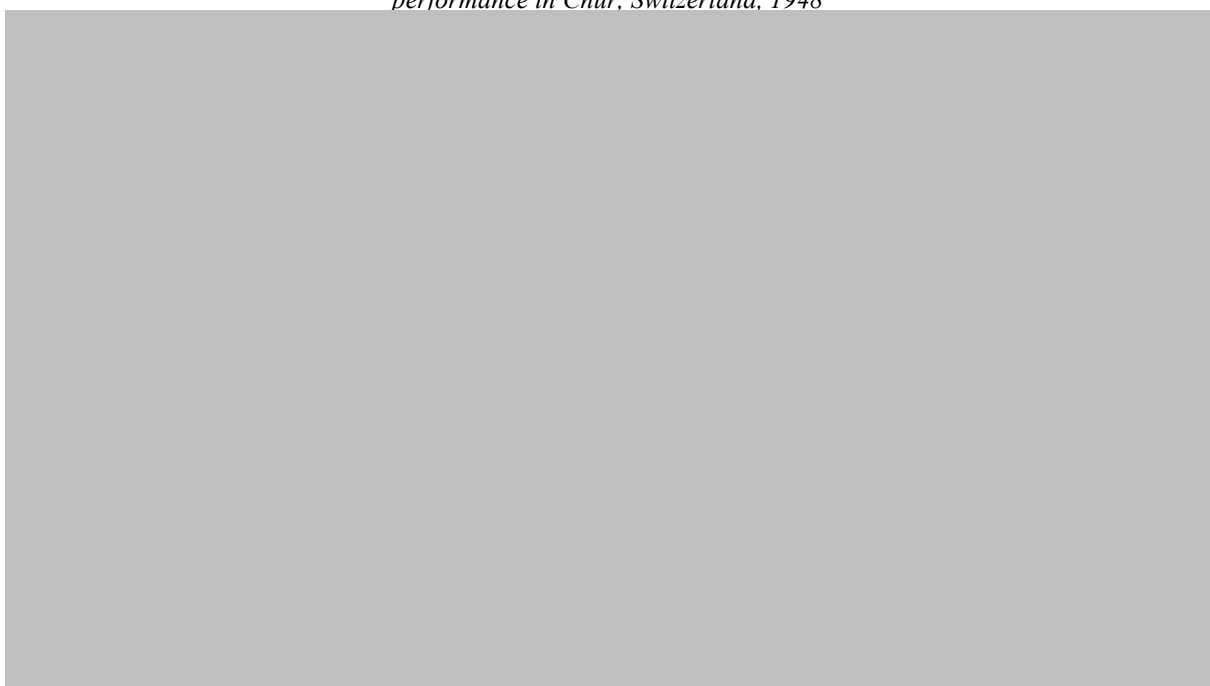


Fig. 2.4 Antigone on the left; Creon and the elders on the right. Photographs from Antigonemodell 1948

This Antigone is a true revolutionary who condemns Creon's war policy as unprovoked aggression and comments on the politics of power: "The man who's after power is / like / the thirsty man who drinks salt-water; he can't hold it in, / but he has to have more" (p.30). She comments on the viciousness of violence: "Anyone who uses violence against his enemy will turn and use violence against his people" (p.32). In her climactic outburst to the tyrant she says, "We would sit more safely / in the ruins of our own city, than with you / in the enemies' houses" (p.34).

Brecht's Creon is a tyrant and a manic manipulator who enlists no sympathy at any point in the play. He is portrayed so closely similar to Hitler that his closing words bring to mind the dictator's own. Before his final exit, and while holding his dead son's shirt, Brecht's Creon maniacally insists: "Just one more battle / and Argos would have surrendered ... so now Thebes falls; and it should fall, should fall with me, should be done with / and left to the vultures. That's how I want it" (p.64). The resonance of Hitler's own words as reported at the Nuremberg trials by Albert Speer is crystal clear: "If the war is lost the nation will also perish. This fate is inevitable. There is no necessity to take into consideration the basis which the people will need, to continue a most primitive existence. On the contrary it will be better to destroy these things ourselves because this nation will be proved to be the weaker one" (cited in Elwood, 1972, p.59).

In this play, just like in Sophocles' original, Creon ends up feeling responsible for Antigone's death and loses not one but two sons. However Brecht is very careful not to enlist our sympathies for him in the least. Whereas in Sophocles he is granted the excuse of doing what he did in order to restore and preserve civic order, in Brecht's version he is given no worthy motive. While in Sophocles, the string of suicides, (Antigone's, Haemon's, Eurydice's) serve as sacrifices for the future and serve to break the pride of the ruler but also

teach him humility and wisdom through suffering, in Brecht's adaptation no such lessons are learned. Even the chorus of Elders, who admit that they "follow him still, [though] it's all downhill", do not give a comforting closing comment. "It *isn't* enough" they regret "just to live unthinking and happy / and patiently bear oppression / and only learn wisdom with age" (Brecht 1990, p.64).

In returning thus to a past form of art in order to provide "a starting point in the general ruin", Brecht embodies his view that instead of embracing anything and everything new in order to "get rid of all moral and intellectual traces of Nazism" (Brecht, 1964, p.209), post-war artists needed to embrace past models in a productive and radical way. In this "treatment of a past model" Brecht approaches the original and appropriates it as an act of remembering and therefore survival, which is connected with his idea of how history ought to be treated. He voices his view through Antigone's warning to Ismene that "when we forget the past the past returns" (Brecht, 1990, p.60) and transforms Sophocles' *Antigone* which "in its entirety belongs with the barbaric horses' skulls" (Brecht, 2003, p.199) into a political play which urges its audience to recognize a situation as historic and proceed to alter the worlds which surround it.

Prior to Brecht's crucial encounter with *Antigone*, adaptations and productions inspired by Athenian Tragedy had approached the source text if not always with religious respect and reverence, then at least with the axiom that this work of art contained some total universal meaning which was hidden beneath sediments of dust that had piled upon it in layers as the centuries went by. These texts were too 'sacred' to be altered. All that could be done was to clear this dust away until the original meaning shone through. Clearing the dust away involved translating, changing characters' names, even using contemporary costumes or filling the stage with anachronistically contemporary props. However, this way of making the

text respectable and acceptable left the theological meaning which allegedly lay at its core, unaltered.

In an elucidating discussion regarding this process of ‘dusting’ Patrice Pavis (1986) explains that the process of ‘cleaning’ and making the classical text more approachable entails the belief that the text is an old object which has been found intact only covered in dust so that its original gloss cannot be perceived. Cleaning away the dust and polishing the discovered object implies a miraculous re-discovery of an essentially unaltered, untouched text. On the contrary the response of a critical *mise-en-scène* or a radical reading would be not to clean the dust away, to ignore it or to cover it up, but to historicise the layers of interpretation that have accumulated over the years, to acknowledge and uncover the original codes of production and bring to the surface their fabricated and artificial character. Approaching a classical text in this way will change a work which would otherwise have had a single, identifiable meaning into one which is complex and intricate and defined on a completely new basis. This way of ‘recycling’ gives the classical text a new life – not one which draws its energy from some re-discovered, perennial meaning, but which springs to life based “on change and adaptation” (p. 7).

This is precisely how Brecht’s *The Antigone of Sophocles* functions: it does not simply invert or modernise the inherited classical play, but it re-invents a critical method through which it judges, re-values and transforms the past. That is why it is the starting point for all the radical re-makings of Greek tragedy. It does not treat Sophocles’ text as a sample of textual or theatrical heritage, but as “memory in the technical sense of that word, as an immediately available and reusable memory bank” (Pavis, 1986, p. 1). And even though Brecht stands to represent the radical avant-garde or late modernism, he also stands on the threshold of the age of postmodernism in which the author “is not the creator of an original

work, but someone who produces from the materials of history” (Wright 1989, p.1). Brecht’s appropriation thus opens the way for what in this thesis I call radical postmodern theatrical adaptations, plays of an era when it is hard to find one, single, identifiable and stable truth to uphold, or a definitive centre to relate to and use as a cornerstone, yet an era in which we still turn to older forms of art not in order to renovate them but in order to re-visit and re-create them.

In this chapter I will argue that radical postmodern adaptations approach the originals they are adapting in a way which contradicts traditional classical scholarship but is also self-contradictory. On the one hand they use the classic text as a powerful source from which they draw material - a source that has not dried up despite the millennia between its first performance and the present moment. Unlike many adaptations of classics, especially in postcolonial contexts, they do not seek to weaken the authority behind the classic which is being re-visited. They do not seek to overthrow a very right wing conservative Greek theatre and subvert its ideology or destabilise the power structures of the original text. On the contrary, they acknowledge the political ethos of the original, they extract the traces of the radical content which lie within the source play and then use them as a springboard from which they reflect the crises of their own era. They accept that there is a trace within the originals which is still alive: their radical politics which were very much present in the latter part of the fifth century BCE.

However, despite the acknowledgement of a trait within the originals which is worth drawing on and adapting to the present moment, the adaptations in question do not treat the originals as texts whose conservative form is to be revered and carried on to reflect an inherent ‘universality’. They do not use the classic tradition as a way of advancing the Western tradition but on the contrary experiment with the tragic form to target the

catastrophic consequences of Western politics. So while they do preserve the radical content, they proceed to profoundly alter the conservative form and question the traditional scholarly approach in order to support the contemporary radicalism which I am bringing into focus in this thesis. They make radical changes to the form and adopt a politically motivated discourse, thereby bringing together a contemporary postmodern ideology and an experimental means of entering the texts which frees them from the centuries-old hegemony of the classical canon as a beacon of the alleged superiority of the western tradition and a tradition of conservative interpretation.

Theatrical adaptation as a radical postmodern process – The beginnings

Each of the terms of this phrase – radical, postmodern, theatrical *and* adaptation – invoke a host of meanings and concepts which need to be traced and defined clearly if they are to be applied effectively and to form a coherent theoretical tool with which I address the performances I examine in the following chapters. I will trace the development of the constituent terms of the phrase in order to explore how the texts and performances which form the case study of this thesis function as “radical, postmodern adaptations” of ancient Greek drama.

It is essential to commence the exploration of these terms at the point where the discussions regarding the authority of text and author brought into question ideas of stable meaning and unquestionable truth. The late 1960s and 1970s were – to use Patrick Ffrench’s term – a “time of theory” (1995). It was a time of intense theoretical activity, mostly in Paris, where seminal intellectual thinkers of our time like Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva developed their theories and challenged existing notions of stability between signifier and signified. These ideas, which signal the beginning of what is known as

poststructuralist thinking, are of central importance to a consideration of radical adaptations of ancient Greek drama, because such adaptations are a result of a seemingly paradoxical practice, which on the one hand, accepts the existence of the author as a signal of cultural classification, but on the other hand, simultaneously questions the authority of the classical work and its function as an ‘original’. The radical adaptations that I explore in this thesis fulfil this paradoxical function: they accept yet they also question, they acknowledge yet they dismantle, they use elements from source material as basic structural components yet they build a new construct; they apply the basic colours, yet they mix them in new and innovative shades, tones and hues; they borrow ancient Greek myths and acknowledge this borrowing, yet they re-make them for our contemporary moment.

Theoretical discussion of adaptation can be traced to when Kristeva first coined the term ‘intertextuality’ in the late 1960s.³ Authors, Kristeva argued, do not create texts from their own original minds, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts so that every text “is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given texts [where] several utterances taken from other texts intersect and neutralize one another” (1980, p. 36). Her observations opened discussions of concepts relating to what constitutes an original text and what relation – overt or covert – every subsequent text bears to this “original”.

Around the same time, Barthes announced “the Death of the Author”,⁴ stating that “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. [It] is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the identity of the very body writing” (1977, p. 142). Removing the author from the scene meant that the text – or the created work of art – was placed centre stage and acquired a life of its own. Its creator was no longer in control of its single, stable, “theological” meaning, therefore the text became a “multi-dimensional space in which a

variety of writings, none of them original, blend[ed] and clash[ed]”, it became “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” which no longer required deciphering but disentanglement (p. 146-7). This concept of intertextuality suggests that all writing, like all cultural production, is an interweaving of already existing cultural material; in thousands of conscious and subconscious ways we draw upon what has come before us and all that exists around us in everything we create. Consequently, “any text [becomes] an intertext”, and while other texts are always present in it they are not always there as acknowledged sources or influences. They are present as a subterranean “general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations” (1981, p. 39).

Barthes’s work challenged and questioned the structuralist idea of a stable signification which tried “to see all the world’s stories ... within a single structure” (1974, p. 3). The attempt to uncover one single structure in a text became in vain because each text possessed a “difference” which was not a unique identity, but a result of inter-textuality itself, since each text referred back differently to the infinite sea of the “always already written”, a concept which lay at the heart of Barthes’ distinction between *lisible* and *scriptible* (the ‘readerly’ and the ‘writerly’). A *lisible* text is a ‘closed’ text which offers limited meaning and which is simply ‘consumed’ by the reader or receiver. A *scriptible* or ‘open’ text results from the open play of intertextual connection, and the reader, or audience who are on the receiving end of the process, become the text’s ‘producers’ and ‘re-write’ it every time they experience it (pp. 3-4).

Following the explosion of the ideas of structuralism signalled by Barthes’s work, Michel Foucault proceeded in his essay “What is an Author?” to enquire further into the empty space created after the death of the author, and to think about the actual work that is

created, and about its puzzling endurance beyond its creator's disappearance. "It is not enough", he writes, "to keep repeating that the author is no longer present – we must locate the space left empty by his disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers" (1979, p. 145). Foucault then claims that the author does exist but not as a distinct individual. He proposes the use of the term "author-function" which is distinct from the author as person or creator of the work. The author's name, he suggests, does not operate purely referentially, but fulfils a "classificatory function" which "serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse ... and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (p. 147). In effect, Foucault recognises that such a thing as an "authored-text" does exist though it is not dependant on "the attribution of a discourse to an individual" (p. 150) but located within a system of institutional and cultural values.

These ideas which liberated texts from the prison of their singular, stable, identifiable and unalterable meaning brought on a wave of implications for everything that had ever been written or created as a work of art. Every new work of art could now be seen as a new construction, made up of material taken from works that preceded it chronologically, and this process was no longer a disadvantage nor did it necessarily assign a subservient relation to this "first" work, for every gesture that was imitated was "always anterior, never original" (Barthes, 1977, p. 146). It is true that this intertextual approach has become quite familiar to us today and almost forty years later this attitude towards the plurality of the text and the absence of an authoritative source or a controlling creator has lead Linda Hutcheon to assert that these past theories have finally taught us a lesson, namely that "to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise to be first is not to be originary or authoritative" (2006, p. xiii). However, though theories of adaptation have been written and discussed extensively in the

last decade as have notions of ‘fidelity’ and dependence on texts which become the life-giving spark for adaptations, most of these discussions are almost exclusively centred on literary texts and not on dramatic texts or on performance where the concept of adaptation is *a fortiori* more relevant since in most cases a dramatic text which is not transposed on to the stage for performance, is an incomplete work.

Towards a definition: Translation, Transposition, Adaptation

Taking the above idea as a starting point I will assert that theatre involves, by definition, an act of adaptation. Though the theatrical event results more often than not from a text, it is the visual and auditory aspect of the play which we call theatre, the one which has been taken from the page and put on to the stage. The verb *to adapt* as defined by the OED means “to make suitable for a new use or purpose, to modify”, and it stems from the Latin word *adaptare* which means to make fit, to make suitable. Similarly, one of the meanings of the word “translate” is “to convert something into another form or medium”; that, in turn, derives from the past participle of the Latin *transferre* which means “to carry or bear across”. I have pointed to the affinity of the two words because I wish to show that the practice of adaptation is another form of translation for the stage which carries notions of the afterlife of a text and its suitability for use in a different form but within the same medium.

In order to define adaptation it is necessary to go back to ideas of translation and the concept of making a text suitable for a new use, a new purpose, within a new context. In 1923 Walter Benjamin writes, in discussing ‘inferior’ and ‘good’ translation, that any effort to sustain and preserve an original text’s ‘essence’ when translating it into a new language, for a new culture, would mean ignoring one of the most powerful historical processes, that of change (1999b, pp. 70-4). He uses the term ‘translatability’ to point to an essential quality of a

work which does not relate to any faithful reproduction of a meaning but to the extension of its boundaries into a new culture. A few years later, in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Benjamin explores the idea of authenticity and reproduction even further. He discusses the significance of the reproduction of a work of art which as a process shatters the object’s ‘aura’ of authenticity, transcends the uniqueness of its reality and shatters the tradition within which it belongs; hence what was to that moment considered authentic, mysterious and unique, loses its false importance and becomes accessible and real (1999c, pp. 214-7).

These ideas which challenge the aura of authenticity of a work of art which exists ‘before’ others, can relate to concepts of ‘adaptation’ as a process of reproduction which seeks to preserve but also to create something new and unique. Using radical adaptations of ancient Greek drama as an example of the reproductive process Benjamin talks about, is particularly relevant. If the ancient Greek texts were not “adapted” for the contemporary stage or indeed for the theatre in any given historical moment other than that of their initial creation and performance, they would have remained as “original” works of art, with their “aura”, that “unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be” intact (p. 216). They would have been left untouched in the sense of unchallenged, unadapted, unaltered, with their uniqueness undestroyed. However in that way they would also have remained beyond our reach, beyond our comprehension, lost to us. Adaptation therefore functions as a means of reproduction which extracts the aura from a unique object – a process which might be considered analogous to sucking away its life giving uniqueness; however, it is also a process which simultaneously breathes life into a fresh, novel, different work of art with a new aura, one of its own.

The above logical conclusion from Benjamin's work comes close to defining adaptation as I would like to approach and explore it in my work. The question 'what is adaptation?' has been approached and extensively discussed by theorists such as Linda Hutcheon (2006), Julie Sanders (2006), and Manuela Perteghella (2008) to mention but a few. However, as I mentioned earlier, these and numerous other studies (see Connor, 2007; Dudley, 2000; Hutcheon, 2007; Naremore, 2000; Shiloh, 2007; Stam, 2000) focus almost exclusively on adaptation as a process of transposing a work from one medium into another, "a transcoding into a different set of conventions" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 33). Scholarly focus has been mainly on how novels have been re-made for other media such as the screen, the stage, the opera, the ballet or even videogames, theme park rides or electronic games. With the exception of a number of very enlightening discussions of theatrical adaptations in introductions to books which deal mostly with theatre related to adaptations of Shakespearean works, (see Cohn, 1976; Cox, 2000; Fischlin and Fortier, 2000; Kidnie, 2008; Zabus, 2002) there have been no full length studies on the theory of adaptation related exclusively to the dramatic script and its transference onto the stage as a process of adaptation. Nor has adaptation been theorised as a process of re-using material from a dramatic text which pre-exists temporally to form a new dramatic text which is then in turn transferred on to the stage. The central issue which has been systematically under-discussed in theories of adaptation is the adaptive process of the theatrical script which first of all is adapted when it is transferred on to the stage and then may be adapted when any act of alteration is performed upon a specific theatrical work of the past to produce a new work which is linked directly or indirectly to it.

Re-making: The Work of Charles L. Mee

Notwithstanding the lack of rigorous theoretical concern with theatrical adaptation, it would be an omission not to mention the work of playwright Charles L. Mee whose practice is inspired by a concern with authorial presence and the issue of authenticity, and whose plays delineate the art of adaptation in the theatre as postmodern appropriation. Mee's view on adaptation is very significant and central to this thesis not only because it embodies the practice of re-making an old text for the theatre, but also because a significant number of Mee's plays are re-makings of Athenian tragedies.

Charles Mee studied art history and literature at Harvard in the late 1950s and then went on to become a professional historian before he became a professional playwright.⁵ However, by his own admission, he felt uncomfortable in his role as a historian because he was expected to write objectively and without emotion about events which made him "want to scream and cry out and weep" (Cummings, 2006, p. 14). So he chose to stop writing historical books and decided to write for the stage because the theatre was a place where he could write without having to pretend that he was being objective and impartial about the world and what was happening around him.

His attitude towards objectivity defines his work and his worldview as it is expressed in it. When asked by Gideon Lester (Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theater 2007- 2009) if he considers himself a political playwright, Mee stated that as a playwright he encourages interpretation which is open and diverse, and that he defies the authority of the original, and the bias of a single interpretation; and he added:

I don't take a specific political position in my plays. I try not to be didactic, because I don't believe that I'm smarter than my audience. My role is to remind all of us of the issues that are important in our lives today ... though we in the West may feel that we successfully defeated communism, it would be naive to assert that we are now travelling an easy path to absolute happiness. The belief that capitalism in its present form will solve all our problems is as naive as

Brecht's belief in the panacea of communism; the next revolution may be just around the corner (2000).

In 1991 following a collaboration with director Robert Woodruff, (also Artistic Director of the ART 2002-2007) Mee produced the first of a series of plays inspired by the Greeks, *Orestes 2.0*. He has said that he used Euripides' text *Orestes* as a "scaffolding" on which he added fragments of other texts indiscriminately. Then he "decided to throw the scaffolding away and call whatever remained the script" (Lester, 2000). His patchwork technique inspired by the collages of Max Ernst (Mee, Erin, 2002, p. 87) is inherently postmodern, since the endless repetition of the already existing, and the absence of anything new or original is one of the main constituent elements of postmodernism. His collages/scripts celebrate the plurality and openness of the written discourse which defies signification and invoke the idea of the palimpsestic, phantom text which functions as a hypoplay. In his work "the play's structure [becomes], in a sense, invisible, but as you watch it performed it seems to cohere because you sense the negative form" (Lester, 2000). Following *Orestes 2.0* Mee returned to the Greeks repeatedly because they created theatre events and not textually focused plays, because they did not provide neatly cut out psychological explanations of the causes of things, and because they "understood human character within a rich context of history and culture" (Mee, Erin, 2002, p. 97). In his 1999 memoir *A Nearly Normal Life*, he writes "I have come again and again to take the text of a classic Greek play, smash it to ruins, and then, atop its ruined structure of plot and character, write a new play, with all-new language, characters of today speaking like people of today, set in the America of my time – so that America today lies, as it were, in a bed of ancient ruins" (Mee, Charles L., 1999, p. 214).

However, the cutting edge of his practice has not been just his radical re-conceptions of the classics but the fact that in the mid-1990s, just as the internet and the World Wide Web began to emerge as an all-engulfing wave, he launched his own website and posted his plays

on it for everyone to access freely. He called this whole enterprise the “(re)making project” and through it he has given a new dimension to the essence of adaptation and to ideas central to adaptation theory such as authenticity, appropriation, and fidelity. He urges those who browse the website:

Please feel free to take the plays from this website and use them freely as a resource for your own work: that is to say, don't just make some cuts or rewrite a few passages or re-arrange them or put in a few texts that you like better, but pillage the plays as I have pillaged the structures and contents of the plays of Euripides and Brecht and stuff out of Soap Opera Digest and the evening news and the internet, and build your own, entirely new, piece--and then, please, put your own name to the work that results. (Mee, Charles L.)

The rationale which lay behind this ground-breaking practice was that the playwrights whose work Mee admired and used as a substructure on which to build his own construct, themselves used material which had belonged to the culture and had produced a new version, relevant to their own cultural moment. So since he had “been taking the plays of Euripides from the public domain, [he] owed it to the culture to return [his] work to the public domain” (Lester, 2000). His ideas spring from the assertion that “there is no such thing as an original play,” and even when we think that we are creating something which is unique and original because it stems from personal experience and our “innermost lives”, it is *still* not new or unique, because “the culture writes us first and then we write our stories”. He believes that “the work we do is both received and created, both an adaptation and an original, at the same time, [therefore] we re-make things as we go”. Consequently he sees his own plays as “appropriated texts” which he thinks of as “historical documents – as evidence of who and how we are and what we do” today (Mee, Charles L.).

Mee embraces postmodern pastiche as a method of creating a new structure, and what he calls “stealing” as a way of filling out that new structure. So though the structure of his plays may come from the Greek canon, his completed text is an assemblage of fragments

from a variety of contemporary sources. It forms part of a larger theatrical collage featuring widely varied thematic and stylistic influences including blog entries, religious texts, political theory textbooks, surrealist writers and magazine articles. Essentially he appropriates material of interest from his own culture and makes of it something new, and a lot more personal.

It is evident that Mee chooses to “play dead” (Mee, Erin, 2002, p. 93) in tune with Roland Barthes’ theories about the plurality of the text and the absence of an authoritative source or a controlling creator. So, while his plays are clearly political, his methods create texts which are pluralistic, subversive and non-definitive. He is known not to “interpret” his work unless he is asked a specific question about it, and does not attend rehearsals unless a director asks him to do so. In that way, he says, “people in the rehearsal room don’t feel bound, in some deadening fashion, to replicate the definitive version of a playwright’s intentions” (p. 93). His work as a playwright and his attitude towards it put Barthes’ theory into practice. Barthes (1977) suggests that “in the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, ‘run’ ... at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath” (p.147). In a similar way Mee invites audiences and theatre practitioners alike to embrace the ‘writerly’ experience and distance the authorial figure of the playwright from the dramatic text by inviting them to appropriate his plays and re-make them freely and then to put their own name down as the creators of the text or the theatrical event, thereby making every adaptation a new, independent work.

Theatrical adaptation: a process and a definition

Taking into consideration all the theories and practices which I have brought together in this chapter I would like to define theatrical adaptation as a cultural and political process which involves a combination of the above processes and to illustrate its distinct characteristics

which provide a differentially based definition, and are therefore determining factors in the categorisation which follows. My definition and categorisations will relate specifically to the adaptation of canonical Greek drama which lends itself as the perfect example of a monument to be toppled, and my examples in the chapters which follow will be of specific adaptations of *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women*.

Firstly I would like to define theatrical adaptation as a practice. Before all else it must be clarified that I regard theatrical adaptation as a process which does not involve any transference from one medium to another: the processes of change occur exclusively within the theatre. However, adaptation in the theatre does involve firstly and foremostly a definitive movement from page to stage – an escape from the text and transposition of the theatrical script onto the theatrical stage, a movement which is not cross-medial but intra-medial since it happens within the theatre as an art form which exists simultaneously in two media – text and performance. I would like to clarify here that even though I am using the terms ‘text’ and ‘performance’ I am not completely disregarding non-text-based theatre, which as I proceed to demonstrate can also be part of the adaptive process and can be haunted by the spectre of a pre-existing theatrical works and the myths surrounding them. There are indeed numerous cases when a work is a radical adaptation of a myth without being the direct result of transference from page to stage. However, even in that case the transference occurs within the theatre since in the process of making theatre there is a movement from more private to more public; from single to shared; from personal to political.

I call this an adaptive process, based on the definition of the term ‘adaptation’ which as I illustrated previously involves the idea of making something suitable for a different kind of use. Therefore the process involves an interpretation by the director whose *mise-en-scène* is a hermeneutic act of intervention into the dramatic text, or its spectre, and a re-working of it

within a different time and space. As such it is a creative process which results in a work of art that aims to make a cultural or political statement. I am hereby suggesting that theatrical adaptation can be the process of taking a dramatic text and making it suitable for performance on the theatrical stage, concluding, in concurrence with Linda Hutcheon, (2006) that in essence, every production is also an act of adaptation of the text for the stage. However, when referring to this process I will not use the term ‘adaptation’ but ‘transposition’ because I want to keep it distinct from the process which involves an interventive assault on an earlier work, an act which can be compared to a surgical operation, in which the earlier narrative or narratives are dissected to have their vital organs exposed, taken apart and re-constructed.

This latter process I will call radical postmodern adaptation – a process in which I include every act of intervention upon an earlier work – in the case of this study a canonical work – which acknowledges the existence of this earlier work, yet which does not seek to preserve, but to dismantle its classical authority and to engage with it in an activist, dialogical way. This process is radical because it uproots traditional beliefs related to gender, politics and culture which are embedded in the canonical work which is being re-visited. Acknowledgement of the existence of the previous work might at first appear to undermine the subversive power of this kind of adaptation, however closer examination reveals that this acknowledgement is an attempt to retain the authority of the radical political stance which lies at the heart of the canonical work and not to preserve an assumed aura of truth and authenticity. It is the appropriation of a dramatic text, and the cultural and historical context of its past performances, which simultaneously performs a critique and offers an authorisation for its distinct ideological purposes. This process is both radical and postmodern since it lies at the heart of Derridean deconstruction which dismantles the hierarchy of “the original” and “the copy” by suggesting that both are caught up in the infinite play of dissemination

(Derrida, 1986, p. 73). One of the main articulations of deconstruction is a refusal to acknowledge as authentic and natural that which is conditioned by history, by institutions, by technology or by society. This deconstructive force lies at the centre of the adaptations under discussion, which refuse to feign naturalness and a universality where one does not exist, or to hail the classical texts as examples of high culture. They identify a political radicality which is already at work within the work to be deconstructed and which lies eccentrically centrally, “in a corner whose eccentricity assures solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction, of what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct” (Derrida and Caputo, 1997; Dick and Kofman, 2005). Jacques Derrida maintains that “since the disruptive force of deconstruction is always already contained within the very architecture of the work, all one would have to do to be able to deconstruct given this always-already is to do memory work” (1986, pp. 64-5). It is with this “memory work” that these adaptations engage. According to Patrice Pavis this is also one of the central characteristics of postmodern theatre which, rather than acknowledge textual or theatrical heritage uses it “as no more than memory in the technical sense of the word, as an immediately available and reusable memory bank” (p. 1).

Hypertheatre-Hypertheatricality

I would like to expand further on the definitions that I have given above by using as a starting point Gérard Genette’s (1997) concept of ‘hypertextuality’ or what he calls ‘literature in the second degree’, and to transfer the applicability of the terms ‘hypertext’ and the ‘hypotext’ to the theatre and the practice of theatrical adaptation in order to refer in the most effective way to the play which derives from a pre-existing play. Genette uses the term ‘hypertext’ to refer to “any text derived from a previous text” (p. 7) and ‘hypotext’ to refer to the earlier text (pp. 1-10). By analogy to Genette’s division I will be using the term ‘hyperplay’ to refer to a play

which has been written and performed bearing some relation to a play which pre-existed it, and I will use the term ‘hypoplay’ to refer to the earlier play. I will use the term ‘hypertheatricality’ to refer to all the active links and connections which set one play in a relationship – whether overt or covert – to a previous play or plays.

Having defined the category in which the adaptations of this study fall, I now need to categorise those plays which are still adaptations of earlier canonical works, but do not qualify as radical postmodern approaches which at the same time authorise and critique the hypoplay. Most of the transpositions and adaptations of ancient Greek drama that have been created since the rediscovery of the texts of the Athenian dramatists in the Renaissance have used the ancient texts as pinnacles of authority and universality and have transposed them to the stage vested in precisely that guise. Playwrights have used the assumed authority of the canonical plays as a source from which their own work can gain authority and status. I consider such approaches to be conservative treatments of the hypoplays which are akin to a textual focus on the ancient script. They present a certain logophilia, a love of words which is reflected in their desire to reflect the conservative form of the hypoplay, to preserve and maintain the original narrative structure and to show a continuing faith in language as truth or as offering a moral, by sustaining its central position.

This kind of adaptive practice is reflected in the ideas of fidelity, originality, interpretation and the production of meaning which have been at the centre of discussions of adaptation theory for many years. Yet, as Walter Benjamin said when speaking of translation, seeking to reproduce the “essence” of the original “would mean denying ... one of the most powerful and fruitful historical processes”, that of change (1999b, p. 74). Thus in seeking to reflect a specific universal meaning which is assumed to have been carried across the

millennia is a futile exercise in capturing something which has inevitably been lost because it existed only within a given cultural, historical, political moment.

There are also adaptations which are created in response to the need for approachability and these are usually, as would be expected, adaptations of ancient or distinctively older plays which are deemed obscure linguistically but very important culturally, to the extent that they need to be made approachable for a wider public. Behind this form of adaptive process lies a belief that language is the main vessel of truth and structure. Susan Bassnett explains the restrictive process of such a belief (especially for the theatre) very succinctly when she writes that “the pre-eminence of the text leads to an assumption that there is a single ‘right’ way of reading and therefore performing the text” (1991, p. 121).⁶ The first step away from this theological approach is achieved by this subcategory of adaptations, which respects the authority and the structure of the original and sustains the narrative structure and form of the text, yet at the same time acknowledges the need to make the play more ‘approachable’. So while by creating such hypertheatrical texts the playwrights do free the plays from their textual prison and explore them as theatrical developments on stage where they become complete, they still approach the canonical work with a fear of the untouchable, in awe of its authority and with a desire to make it approachable, essentially not interrogating its illusion of fixity.

Approachability is not a negatively charged concept as such; however, when its driving force is a desire to make a play easier to understand so that its universal truths can be easily accessible, then it is not serviceable to a theory which questions the existence of high culture but to one which celebrates its presence and perseverance. I would categorise such adaptations, therefore, as attempts to soften the rough edges of a play that might be obscure in terms of language or time but considered formally perfect, to the extent that one forgets or

rather chooses to forget that it is a play situated in history and not a natural, timeless work of art which needs to be polished in order to be made to look ‘prettier’. This form of adaptation falls into the category of ‘dusting’ which I discussed earlier and which involves, according to director, actor and poet Antoine Vitez, approaching a classical text “as an intact object which one has lost and which, after cleaning up and polishing, one can rediscover” (Pavis, 1986, p. 6). However, as Vitez proceeds to point out, a play cannot be compared to a vase which in being preserved is made to look lovely and is consequently displayed in a museum for people to admire. A play is not an object at all, but a living organism which is transformed every time it is experienced in a different historical and cultural moment; it is a dynamic process which evolves over time and space in response to the needs and sensibilities of those who participate in it – be it as director, as performer or as audience. Therefore what would constitute a decisive factor in approaching and transposing or adapting a classical play would not be the ability to dust away the years and polish it up to make the work look more modern, but the conscious choice to “historicize the dust” (p. 6) and to transpose the play into its new socio-political and cultural context.

Discussion of theatrical adaptation and hypertheatricality in the light that I have approached them to this point, sparks questions related to the degree of the hypertheatrical relationship of the hyperplay to the hypoplay. Many theories of adaptation take for granted a knowledge on the part of the reader or spectator of the hypoplay, or assume that such a knowledge is desirable if not necessary when encountering the hyperplay in order to evoke complex webs of similarities and differences (Sanders 2006, Hutcheon 2006, Cox 2000). These theories suggest that full appreciation of the re-making of the hyperplay can be achieved only when those who experience it have prior knowledge of the hypoplay. This debate is especially pertinent to adaptations of Greek drama because the hypoplays are

canonical works which carry the weight of extensive scholarship of hundreds of years mostly related to their language as a vehicle of meaning and the universal truths which they contain – given these facts one would imagine that knowledge of the hypoplay would almost be a given circumstance.

In approaching this issue I found Genette’s hypertextuality theory insightful once again. He uses the terms hypertext and hypotext to discuss “any relationship” uniting the two regardless of the nature and the degree of their hypertextual relation. However, he argues that “there are works that we know or suspect to be hypertextual whose hypotext is missing temporarily or not” (p. 381) and wonders how comprehensible or “grammatical” these works are. The theatrical analogy is clear: there are indeed those adaptations which do not contain an open reference to a hypoplay⁷ and which offer little or no reference in their title – or even overtly in their content – to the fact that they have used another work as a source. There are no obvious signs that certain aspects of a hypoplay have been altered through verbal or theatrical devices so as to invoke that work – to anyone who happens to have knowledge of it – but also to be different from it and autonomous of it in ways that the playwright has chosen as significant. Yet, I would still classify these plays as ‘adaptations’ because it is not the openness or the obviousness of the connection with the hypoplay which makes a hyperplay a postmodern radical adaptation, but the subversive and deconstructive power of its approach, of its purpose and its structure. Even adaptations which contain what Genette calls “intrusive paratextual indices” (p. 471) such as their title, can still be received by an audience as autonomous performances without being “perceptibly agrammatical” (p. 397) or semantically irrelevant. There are, for example, plays which contain reference in their title to a classical work and its assumed use as a hypoplay, yet they do not offer any direct or open reference to that play in their content.⁸

Where does this autonomy or dependence leave Genette's reader, or in the case of theatrical adaptations, where does it leave the audience? How important for an audience is extensive or detailed knowledge of a hypotext or a hypoplay, or even simple acknowledgement of its existence? Is it a pre-requisite in order for them to relate to and experience a performance? As analysis of all the performances which I explore in the following chapters will show, the answer to that question is negative. Each one of the radical postmodern adaptations explored in this study simultaneously and paradoxically refers overtly or covertly to a hypoplay, yet is also invested with an autonomy and a self-sufficiency which allows for the 'detachment' of the hyperplay, which might contain elements of repetition, but is not a replication. The audience's knowledge or ignorance of the hypotheatrical text is not a deciding factor in the play's authenticity, autonomy or comprehensibility. The experience is definitely different and ambiguous, but this difference does not impede the wholeness or completeness of the newer structure. As for its ambiguity, that lies in the fact that the play can be watched either in its relation to the hypoplay as a palimpsest which does not quite conceal the hypoplay but allows it to show through so that they can both be viewed as one text on the same parchment, or for itself since it is invested with an autonomy which gives it a life of its own and makes it in a manner, sufficient.

However, asserting the potential independence and originality of the hyperplay as a performance which can be viewed as deriving from a hypoplay but not being a derivative of it, as a work which in Linda Hutcheon's words "is second without being secondary" (2006, p. 9) does not detract from the strength of Marvin Carlson's (2003) argument related to the element of 'ghosting'. This concept of haunting might at first appear to undermine the radicality of the postmodern adaptations of canonical texts which form the object of this study, especially if it is considered to be an expression of the classical tradition which seeks

to preserve particular artistic models and traditions or is in search of a particular truth in art. However, if we see the hypoplay as a hauntological presence, which according to Derrida (2006) is there in “the untimeliness of its present ... [because to] haunt does not mean to be present” (p. 202) but simply to “spectralize” (p. 63) and not to assert the priority of ontological being, then we can assert the independence of the hyperplay. More specifically, we need to comprehend these adaptations within the framework of postmodern theatrical theory and practice which, as Marvin Carlson demonstrates, is particularly concerned with the concept of “recycling” material and re-using it freely “in unexpected and innovative juxtapositions” to create “new relationships, effects and tensions” which summon up traditional theatrical and historical ghosts in order to reconfigure them (2003, p.168). It is in this light that I selected the adaptations in this thesis as theatrical works which do not seek to reconstruct in a way that will create a haunted replication of the material they are reusing, but to re-construct in a self-conscious way which exposes the fragmented and disunified nature of the contemporary moment which they aim to reflect and of which they are a result.

A very effective example which illustrates this idea of the multiplicity of social, cultural, political, and linguistic layers which underlie any adaptive process and indeed haunt any artistic creation can be seen in the 2009 production of Heiner Müller’s *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscapes with Argonauts* (1984) which I will be analysing in detail in Chapter Two. Müller, who is described by Jonathan Kalb (1998) as “a new kind of master author whose identity is a pastiche of other identities” (p. 118) and whose work clearly exemplifies the “postmodern valuing of fragments” (p. 159), wrote his trilogy as a pastiche of elements derived from a variety of sources: a German translation of Euripides’ *Medea* which was written in ancient Greek and performed in the fifth century BCE, as well as from a German translation of Seneca’s play by the same name, written in Latin in the first century

CE. Apart from the hypoplays which Müller uses to create his hyperplay, and which reach him having been transformed in multiple ways linguistically and culturally, he also makes reference to numerous issues relevant to East Germany of the 1980s where the play was written and first performed. The 2009 production which I am referring to is a *mise-en-scène* staged in Athens, of a translation of Müller's play in Modern Greek from German by Eleni Varopoulou, in which the director Nikos Sakalidis has included choral odes from Euripides in ancient Greek – a language which is linguistically obscure but culturally relevant to a Greek audience. In this intricate web of interrelated and interconnected forces of creative intervention (multiple languages, multiple cultures, multiple histories) we can identify the power of the intercultural web of hauntings which are integral to any adaptation in the theatre and which produce a work of art which is whole but also radically heterogeneous. This process itself is a postmodern deconstructive one since each element which is used is then deconstructed and reused only to be deconstructed again, thus relentlessly pursuing the impossible and endlessly deferring meaning.

New *Antigones*, *Medeas*, *Trojan Women*: Radical Hypertheatrical engagement

It is with a view of adaptation as I have defined and explored it so far that I am hereby attempting to re-visit adaptations of *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* as newly crafted, intertextual, intercultural and hypertheatrical performances with an ultimate aim to recognise their significance as adaptations of ancient Greek theatrical events. The aim of my research is to take three specific theatrical texts, away from the sunny city of Athens where they were first conceived, performed and celebrated to “out there” beyond “monolithic parameters,” (Zabus, 2002, p. 3)⁹ beyond totalistic, unyielding limitations, beyond the prison of the classic text and beyond Sophocles and Euripides, through countless subjectivities and

over multiple spaces, to a postmodern theatre where they overturn the authority of the hypoplay and the long established belief that language is the only way to express meaning or to tell stories, yet they retain the radicality of its original political stance and use it as a scaffold on which they build their own new politically charged construct.

Looking at the way in which theatrical adaptation evolves out of a multitude of interconnected wires of association which endlessly spark off new connections, shows how paradoxical it would be to point to one primary “source” from which a theatrical adaptation draws its life. However, I aim to defy and tackle this difficulty by showing how the three specific plays *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* have been used as the first stepping stone to move from a single ‘readerly’ experience of the plays, to a ‘writerly’ or rather a ‘wrighterly’ one. The term ‘wrighterly’ has evolved from Barthes’ idea of the ‘writerly’ text being transferred to the theatre and alluding to the playwright and his/her crafted construction. It was first used by Chantal Zabus (2002) when she writes that “any writer is a writer in progress, a rewrighter, a re-writer, or a reteller of (his)stories, making imitative, or at best imaginative use of sources harking back atavistically to a point of origin” (p. 3 and note 6 on p. 27). In other words she traces the movement from *writing* (composing, making), to *righting* (reforming, setting right), to *wrighting* (constructing with craft, as in the ‘playwright’). I use the term ‘wrighterly’ to include the playwright in this process of productive re-creation and not just the audience as an active receiver of the performance, and to point to the fact that this wrighterly craft was the process which liberated Greek tragedy from the prison of logophilic classical criticism and which constituted an act of emancipation of Greek drama as theatre and a step towards a performative function and a completeness that had been ignored for centuries.

As I discussed in detail in the first chapter of this thesis, drama in Athens in the fifth century was conceived with the sole purpose of being performed, not to be studied in its textual form in any way, but to provide a political cultural stimulus for the audience who experienced it. Any later purely literary analyses therefore completely ignore the primary purpose of the plays and have had a mutilating effect on their afterlife more than anything.¹⁰ My exploration of adaptations of *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* will show how these texts were liberated from unnatural and undesirable restrictions, based on theories which recognised that more is better than less, plural is better than singular, process is better than product. However I will also show that seeking a multiplicity of structures and coherences, locating a work within a tradition or practice, assigning an author to various texts that transpire in the adaptive process is not synonymous with seeking to identify a single unified structure, a recognisable and reproducible meaning, or with treating history, language or tradition as heritage; nor is it necessarily synonymous with reinstating some bullying authoritarian author who has long been pronounced dead.

NOTES

1. In 1947-1948, upon his return to Europe from exile in the United States Brecht began work on Sophocles' *Antigone* using stage designs by Caspar Neher. Ruth Berlau photographed the designs and together with Brecht's thoughts on the process they formulated the first of the well known Brechtian models: the *AntigoneModell 1948*
2. Phrase taken from the title of the book by E.M. Butler (1935): *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: A study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*.
3. Kristeva's work was first published in 1969 in *Séméiôtiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris: Edition du Seuil.
4. The original essay "*La Mort de l' Auteur*" was published in *Mantela V*. in 1968
5. He also wrote plays in the 1960s and one of them is published in *The Tulane Drama Review*: Mee, C. L., Jr. (1965) 'God Bless Us, Every One'. *The Tulane Drama Review*, 10: (1): 162-206.
6. For a detailed discussion on the incompleteness of the dramatic text see Bassnett (1991) & Pavis (1989).
7. For example Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*, or Edward Bond's *A Window*, which do not contain any reference to the hypoplay even in their title. They can be watched therefore with or without reference to the assumed hypoplay
8. For example plays such as Jose Triana's *Medea in the Mirror* or performances such as *Hotel Medea* which include a reference to the hypoplay in their title but can be read or watched without knowledge of the hypoplay.
9. In her introductory chapter to *Tempests After Shakespeare* (2002), "On Rewriting" Chantal Zabus talks about *The Tempest* being taken away "from the sunny island where it was first conjured", by being adapted to "out there" beyond "monolithic parameters" (pp. 3 and 7).
10. One would have to acknowledge of course that it was due to the preservation of the literary texts that these plays have passed onto us at all in the first place, considering the lack of detailed documentation of the performances in their original form and at the time of their conception. When I speak of a 'mutilating effect' on their afterlife I refer to their afterlife as theatrical events

CHAPTER THREE

MEDEA ADAPTED: THE SUBALTERN BARBARIAN SPEAKS

431 BCE Medea: a barbarian woman defies the powers of a patriarchal and culturally chauvinistic establishment

Medea, arguably Euripides' darkest, most ambiguous and controversial surviving tragedy, was written and performed eleven years after *Antigone* won first prize at the City Dionysia, in 431 BCE. Like many of the fifth century plays it was itself an adaptation of a very old and controversial myth, to which the playwright brought his own historical and cultural moment. As Bernard Knox (1979) points out in his analysis of *Medea*, Euripides re-worked all the variants of the legend available to him and created his own version; "a version more shocking, more physically and psychologically violent than anything he found in the tradition" (p. 296). Knox explains that Euripides' text was an adaptation which "left a deep and lasting impression in the minds of his Athenian audience ... [and] lost none of its power to fascinate and repel as the centuries went by" (p. 295).

The plot of Euripides' play centres on Medea, the barbarian princess from the distant, barbarian land of Colchis. The myth with which the audience would have been familiar was the one of the Princess Medea, granddaughter of Helios, god of the sun, who had abandoned her home in Colchis while helping Jason to steal the Golden Fleece. In doing so she had murdered her own brother and scattered his remains to delay her father's pursuit. Subsequently, she followed Jason to Greece where they had two sons. The action of the play opens in Corinth where Medea finds her position in the Greek world threatened, having been abandoned by Jason who decided to advance his station by re-marrying a local princess this time, the daughter of Creon, King of Corinth. Medea destroys both Creon and his daughter by means of a poisoned robe which clung to the flesh and burned it. Then, despairing for the

safety of her two sons, and wishing through them to injure Jason in every way, she kills them too. Finally, rescued by supernatural means in the chariot of her grandfather, the god Helios, she escapes to the city of Athens to take refuge with the old King Aegeus.

Numerous eminent classicists of the twentieth century have approached *Medea* as a play about the extremes to which sexual jealousy can bring a woman (Gould and Herington, 1977; McDermott, 1989; Murray and Kitto, 1965; Rabinowitz, 1993). However, an alternative reading which focuses on the sense of sexual and cultural difference that permeates the play and relates it to specific cultural and historical details leads us to understand it as more than that. It becomes Euripides' quintessential tragedy of alterity; a radical play which is not simply about a woman mad with jealousy and rage at being rejected. It becomes, rather, a play about the subaltern, the Other, the misfit, the stranger, the woman who is "deserted, a refugee, thought nothing of" (Euripides, 1955, 1.255). It is a play about the barbarian's powerful ability to restore her own dignity and achieve justice and it is a 'radical' play because it uproots traditional beliefs related to gender, politics and culture which lay at the heart of Athenian society of the fifth century BCE. I suggest that it is this attribute of the play that has inspired so many playwrights to approach it in recent years and adapt it as a feminist political allegory. I base my argument on the premise that Medea's actual act of infanticide is in itself extreme and radical too, but I do not view it as the unnatural, abhorrent, counter-intuitive act that it is has traditionally been portrayed (Burnett, 1973, 1998; Hall, 1997; Knox, 1979). I consider it, rather, an act which annihilates traditional hegemonic structures, and which functions inadvertently as a spark to provoke uncompromising, radical remakings of Euripides' play.

The Athenian audience who watched the first performance only awarded it third prize out of three in the Great Dionysia festival. Exploring this first negative reception within the context of the social, political and religious structure of the Great Dionysia and of the city-

state of Athens is an initial step in establishing the play's radicality. Perhaps one of the most shocking and radical acts within the play was Medea's infanticide, which would definitely have been offensive for the audience's sensitivities. To make matters worse, Medea did not only violate in the most drastic way the human laws of appropriateness, but also embodied the shattering of positive ideals and desirable stereotypes of Greek womanhood – sexual restraint, deference first to one's father, then to one's husband and above all devotion to her children. She was, contrary to any sense of appropriateness, a woman with a “deliberately foreign, anti-democratic, anti-moderate, intelligent, and unapologetically passionate” nature (Foley, 2004, p. 92).

It is also very likely that the audience and judges saw in the play a critique of the Athenian ‘imperial dream’ of conquering and civilising the other city-states; after all this was the year that saw the beginning of a thirty-year war with the city of Sparta and feelings of patriotic enthusiasm and military pride were high. Medea was the very embodiment of difference, a ‘barbarian’, a foreigner, and the Athenians’ problem with any barbarian was almost certainly on the level of politics and civic identity. Anyone who was not a free, male resident of the city of Athens, son of a citizen father and born from a woman who was a daughter of a citizen father, was an uncivilised foreigner and could not be considered an equal member of the Athenian democratic Establishment (Davies, 1977). As Edith Hall (1991) maintains, the key distinction which the Athenians drew between themselves and barbarians was political: theirs was a civilised, democratic order whereas the barbarians were tyrannical and supported a system of strict hierarchy. Hall further points out that one function of the tragic performances in Athens was “to provide cultural authorization” (p.2) for the democracy that they were so proud of. Seen in the light of the above, the negative reception of the *Medea* is understandable. The Athenian audience watched a play in which the barbarian heroine

openly questioned the democratic structure and principles of their city, and then also openly insulted and questioned them by seeking – and getting – refuge in this democratic haven. Therefore they must have viewed *Medea* with a lot of scepticism and some reservation.

What must have further troubled the Athenian – predominantly male – audience were the heroine’s words when she talks of herself as being: “Kind to my friends; implacable to foes. / To such as live like me the glory goes” (Euripides, 1988, 1.810-11). These attributes were the epitome of virtue for a male hero: to help his friends and harm his enemies and in doing so acquire honour and glory. For that first Athenian audience of 431 BCE the woman Medea would be the very embodiment of difference, a foreign, outspoken, and ‘barbarian’ female, in contrast to a virtuous, silent, ‘invisible’ Athenian wife and mother. Consequently, Euripides’ depiction of Medea – woman, wife, mother, *and* foreigner – as a heroic figure who lives by the creed by which Homeric heroes lived and died, being merciless to her enemies and benevolent to her friends, must have surprised and shocked this audience beyond description. It must have been almost impossible to empathise with a woman, and a foreign one at that, who embodied the most masculine characteristics, together with every characteristic that made a woman unacceptable within their society.

All of the above may be possible explanations as to the unenthusiastic reception of Euripides’ play in 431 BCE, but they are at the same time, together with certain elements of the myth that the playwright weaves around the princess from Colchis, characteristics which make *Medea* a radical and subversive play, even for its time. It is, of course, almost impossible to know how far the records of Euripides’ personal views are reliable. Therefore, judgements as to his imperatives regarding radical stances on gender, imperialism and other socio-political issues must always be moderated and qualified with awareness of any anachronisms and with respect to the cultural and historical frameworks within which their

original audiences would – as far as we can tell – have responded. However, this tragedy clearly negotiates between the past and the present, the familiar and the alien, the socially acceptable and the unacceptable, and invites us to approach it as a complex cultural document which is the result of the interplay of historical, social and political contexts surrounding its original production.

One would have expected that a forum as public as the Greek theatre which was also state-funded would typically authorise and sustain only traditional, hegemonic social expectations, including patriarchal values. However, *Medea* can also be read as an immensely subversive text that presents the rights, the heroism and the intelligence of the Other, of the outsider, of the woman. Her unexpected triumph at the end of the play, when she is carried away to safety from the scene of her crime without having to face even the slightest punishment, is not only the triumph of a woman wronged by her husband, but also and perhaps more significantly that of the ethnic Other, whom the hegemonic culture always sees as less intelligent, less logical, less civilised. If, as in the case of Medea, the subject is also a woman, then she becomes an even easier target for subjugation and exploitation by a more intelligent, civilised, male, superior society. It is precisely in the way which he portrays Medea within such a society, both in the midst of the women of Corinth and in opposition to Jason, the superior male who represents the Establishment, that Euripides manifests his subversive treatment of the myth.

First of all, he adopts an apparent ‘revolutionary’ take on Medea’s murderous act. As Aristotle explains in his *Politics* (bk.1, ch.1, 1.1252) life beyond the walls of the city was not perceivable for the citizens of Athens since their existence was equated with life within their civic community. Understood within that context, Medea’s state of mind after she is banished

from Corinth is made palpable for the audience, and thus the premeditated murders she plans and commits after she has been told of her banishment may have become more justifiable.

Furthermore, Medea adopts the stance, role and even speech of the public orators which the Athenians knew so well, standing out as a clever, learned, almost wise woman who knows how to argue with logic and clarity and persuade her most resistant listener about a most sensitive subject. When she is talking to the Chorus of Corinthian women for example, she delivers a well structured, persuasive speech of 250 lines in which she outlines her situation and how she has been wronged by her husband, only to ask them “Just to keep silent” when she has devised “any scheme to pay back [her] husband for what he has done to [her]” (Euripides, 1955, ll. 261-3). The fact that she, a barbarian, persuades these respected wives and mothers of Corinth to keep a secret for her, is an indication of their respect and admiration for her effective rhetorical skills, despite her gender and her social status, which in turn subverts the status quo of the society which promoted and supported the performance of this play.

Euripides’ ultimate challenge to the traditional theatrical and social status quo is the moment when, in a morally bleak conclusion, he lets Medea – unpunished and triumphant – leave Corinth born away by the chariot of the god Helios, in the form of a “deus ex machina” – a device reserved exclusively for the gods. In his 1910 translation of *Medea*, Gilbert Murray goes as far as to engender the stage device, to convey the sense of Medea’s assumption of a god-like status and writes that Medea herself is the “deus ex machina” (Euripides, 1906, p. xi) thereby elevating Medea to the status of one of the Greek deities. This triumphant exit, which Aristotle clearly disapproved of in his *Poetics* albeit more for its dramatic structure than its content,¹ turns Medea’s human energy into a relentless force, the ferocious violence of the

oppressed and betrayed which carries everything before it to destruction; even if it also/ultimately destroys what it loves most.

The radicality of *Medea* is also manifest in the depiction of Jason who becomes the ultimate portrait of the arrogant colonizer that embodies two related attitudes: metropolitan arrogance and a male chauvinistic contempt, even fear of women. With an imperialist's tone, Jason argues that Medea is remarkable in her ungratefulness for his having brought her to a civilized country:

Firstly, instead of living among barbarians,
You inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways,
How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force.
And all the Greeks considered you a clever woman.
You were honored for it; while, if you were living at
The ends of the earth, nobody would have heard of you.
(Euripides, 1955, ll. 536-41)

Of course the imperial-centred perspective is always that those Others live at “the ends of the earth”. Consistent with such views is also Jason's thoroughly contemptuous view of women:

But you Women have got into such a state of mind
That, if your life at night is good, you think you have
Everything; but, if in that quarter things go wrong,
You will consider your best and truest interests
Most hateful. It would have been better far for men
To have got their children in some other way, and Women
Not to have existed. Then life would have been good. (ll. 569-75)

Here Euripides directs his satire against Jason and the way he treats Medea, demonstrating how in the mind of the colonial imperialist the second sex and the second-class citizenship of the ethnic outsider easily fused into one. Therefore even in Euripides' play Medea's acts seem to be not primarily against Creon or Jason but against the larger ideas that they embody and the society that they represent. So she does not in essence kill her own sons, sons that belong to her, but Jason's sons; and when he says “having borne me sons, out of your lust and

jealousy, you killed them”(Euripides, 1988, ll. 1335-6), even Jason himself acknowledges that it was *his* sons she killed and not her own.

It becomes clear from the above that on a multiplicity of levels, Euripides’ *Medea* was a subversive, radical text which challenged the status quo of the society in which it was written and performed. It was a political text which explored issues of gender, identity, Otherness and nationhood. It centred on the issue of a foreign woman’s place as an outsider within a traditional patriarchal society and that society’s rejection of her ‘foreignness’ and its inability to accept and embrace her. It is therefore pertinent that Euripides’ play has been adapted and staged so frequently in the contemporary moment as a radical narrative since it was a radical narrative in its original form. It is this radicality which has attracted playwrights and directors to create new feminist, political and postcolonial remakings using *Medea*, the barbarian Colchian princess as a source of radical inspiration.

Medea adapted: performing fragmentation to give Medea a voice

It was most probably this intense inherent radicality and underlying subversive potential of the play which contributed to its almost complete disappearance from scholarly studies, libraries, educational curricula and even theatrical stages for centuries. In fact it was understandably ignored, even concealed for long periods following its initial revival after antiquity. The taboo subject of infanticide, together with the fact that on a very pragmatic level this play glorifies a woman who murders her children and neither regrets, nor is punished for her crime, made *Medea* an unsuitable sample of the revered Greek canon. Clearly, it did not set and promote the high standards of Western European culture which classical Greek literature was meant to advance and it did not contain the desirable stereotypes which respectable, middle class, liberal societies wanted to uphold. As numerous

scholars have pointed out Medea's almost total absence from the educational and up to a certain point from the theatrical scene was due to its subversive content (Hall and Macintosh, 2005a; Hall et al., 2000; McDonald, 2003).

Medea tentatively appeared on the stages of Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and even before, indicating clearly that playwrights were drawn to the Euripidean myth for centuries. However, the play was mostly staged either in operatic form, predominantly in Italian and therefore focused more on the musical, aesthetic aspect and less on the content and any meaning it may have carried, or in radically adapted form which aimed mainly at presenting a more feminine, docile, victimised and thus acceptable side of Medea. One among numerous such examples is Richard Glover's adaptation performed at Drury Lane in 1767, where Medea becomes a saintly mother who temporarily becomes insane. Some productions, closer in content to Euripides' play were staged in order to expose the evil nature of women and promote male superiority (Hall and Macintosh, 2005a, pp. 391-429). In fact, it was not until 1907, amid increasing public interest in the suffrage movement that Euripides' *Medea* was first performed unadapted in English translation at the Savoy Theatre in London. Following that landmark production in England, the play became one of the dramas forming the core of the genre termed 'suffragette plays' which were performed before the British public to champion the suffrage cause. (see Hall and Macintosh, 2005a, pp.511-520). Such was the play's association with women and their cause at the time that Gilbert Murray writes about Euripides in his *Euripides and his Age* (1913): "To us he seems an aggressive champion of women; more aggressive, and certainly more appreciative than Plato. Songs and speeches from the *Medea* are recited today at suffragist meetings." (p. 32) Over the next few decades *Medea* was staged both in Europe and America and was hailed by a number of critics even as early as the 1920s as a "great feminist play" that has inspired "all

plays about forsaken women since the world was young and men have been faithless” (Hartigan, 1995, p. 51).

This association with ideas related to the emancipation of women was the start of a different approach to *Medea*; uncovering varied and intricate aspects of Euripides’ play related not just to female emancipation but also to ethnicity, belonging, and the often conflicting associations with motherhood. And though *Medea* never did become part of the average curriculum in any educational establishment, it has been obsessively haunting the world stages as a hypoplay on which radical re-makings are based to explore political issues related to gender, identity and female Otherness.² Many contemporary playwrights have approached the myth and re-conceived it in adaptations which underscore Medea’s Otherness and make her voice that of the cultural outsider who struggles to be heard in a “civilised”, male centred, western culture and fights against all the forces which seek to silence and eliminate her.

In this chapter I explore three such radical adaptations of *Medea*: Olga Taxidou’s *Medea: A World Apart* (2005), Heiner Müller’s *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscapes with Argonauts* (1984), and the ongoing theatrical event *Hotel Medea* (2008-2012), which is a collaboration between Zecora Ura Theatre and Para Active. All three works treat the protagonist’s murderous act not as the abhorrent act of an unforgivable woman, or an unnatural mother, but as an act of assertion, an act of female defiance against the patriarchy, of political resistance against the status quo of contemporary male-dominated society which would seek to smother the voice and silence the Otherness of the barbarian princess. Hence Medea’s infanticide becomes the vehicle for Medea to regain her voice, while Euripides’ work becomes a hypoplay which provides a stimulus for re-interpretation of a canonical text

that for centuries was read as a text promoting male superiority and exposing the evil nature of woman (Hall et al., 2000, chs.2-5).

Müller, Taxidou and the *Hotel Medea* directors Jorge Lopes Ramos and Persis-Jade Maravala all, in different ways, shift the focus from Jason's betrayal on a personal level to Medea's recognition of her own betrayal of her cultural identity which begins with the murder of her own brother, and her subsequent yielding to Jason, the representative of the dominant culture and civilisation. This contemporary Medea is angry at herself for being seduced by, and for surrendering to, the hegemonic culture. In Taxidou's play she uses her body as a metaphor for a conquered land which "spreads from the heights of Prussa / across the volcanoes of the white islands / to the depths of the red sea" (2005, p.135); In Müller's work she "own[s] the images of those who have been slain" (1984, p.130) in order for Jason to be victorious and in *Hotel Medea* she regains her strength when she sees through the shallowness and superficiality of contemporary western society. Subsequently her revenge against Jason takes on the form of a rebellion against the imperial invader, and the killing of her children becomes an act of defiance against the invader and a rejection of the acquired culture; it becomes the voice of the silenced subaltern.

As re-interpretations, the plays in question perform an act of feminist re-vision as Adrienne Rich defines it (see p. 6 of this thesis), and as theatrical events they extend this act of survival beyond a simple re-visiting of an old text with new eyes. They achieve a radical, subversive re-definition of the female voice as embodied in Medea the woman, the wife, the mother, the sister, the Other. They empower Medea to regain her identity as a woman who can speak in her own, distinctly different voice and be heard, by questioning the hegemony of Western culture and decentring male authority and its traditionally upheld ideals of womanhood. This is effected not only on the level of Medea as a character and her actions,

but through a deconstruction of the classical linear form and the unified narrative whole thereby transforming the theatrical events into reflections of the postmodern which according to Jean-François Lyotard (1984) “denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable ... [and] searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.” (p. 81) So, while these re-makings do appropriate Medea’s act as a political and cultural statement, they do not claim ownership of the hypoplay as a coherent political manifesto in the same way that adaptations of *Antigone* may do.³ They function more on the level of postmodern experimentation in form which reflects Medea’s fragmented identity and her non-belonging.

In Müller’s and Taxidou’s plays we can identify the fragmentation within the texts themselves and then assess their interpretation and presentation on stage. In *Hotel Medea*, which offers no text, we witness a visual dramaturgy which is not regulated by the written word but by the presence of the performers and their interaction with high-tech multimedia in the theatrical space and with the participators during the event. In all three pieces Medea’s signature act of murdering her children which is the central, focal point of Euripides’ play is extracted from its vessel of tragic, causal implications and presented as a symptomatic event in isolation which forms part of Medea’s experiences on her road to self-assertion. Medea herself loses her place as a “fictive figure” in its “imaginary eternity” and becomes the real “body of a performer in its temporality” (Lehmann, 2006, p.181), thus giving these performances a tangible, political dimension beyond the more defined and rational politics of Brecht’s theatre and within the illusive space opened up by Hans Thies Lehmann’s postdramatic theatre. Within that space, although they deal with the actions of an individual woman, they also interrogate “the action of a causal logic with its inherent attribution of

events to the decisions of individuals” (p.181). This focus on the individual but also away from the dramatic causality is especially pertinent to a play like *Medea*, in which the woman whose actions are the catalyst to every occurrence on stage acts beyond the average logic and outside the average social norm.

Lehmann contends that while the dramatic is characterised by narrative and dialectics, postdramatic theatre occurs “when the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre, [and] when composition is no longer experienced as an organizing quality but as an artificially imposed 'manufacture', as a mere sham of a logic of action that only serves clichés” (p.26). This theatre, he argues, materialises “only when the theatrical means beyond language are positioned equally alongside the text and are systematically thinkable without it” (p.55). I suggest that radical adaptations, such as the ones I explore in this chapter, fit within Lehmann’s category of postdramatic theatre since they present an increasingly elusive and unstable fictional universe and clearly rupture the linguistic coherence and the narrative line. However, they also resist the strict binary categorisation of dramatic and non-dramatic based on their textuality because they are not in total fracture with *Medea* as a hypotext. They are all in hypertheatrical engagement with a text whether they are more or less text based or indeed text-driven.

So, while they do put an end to “the primacy of the text” (p.21), they do not ignore it completely. These are plays in which as Karen Jürs-Munby (2009) would argue “‘the no longer dramatic theatre text’ assumes such importance that no director can avoid it ... [They are] theatre beyond drama, i.e. beyond the imitation of a dramatic plot in a fictional world, [which] is not by definition theatre beyond the use of text” (p. 47). They belong to a category which is more fluid and open and in which according to Liz Tomlin (2009) “the written text’s originary position in the artistic process does not, of itself, constitute a compliance with

teleology on those occasions when the text-world may only appear to be ‘complete in itself’ but, on closer reading, is seen to be merely one, albeit significant, element of the performance text” (p. 60).

This concept of the “no longer dramatic theatre” is central to understanding the function of adapting a classic to subvert the very ideology from which it springs because as Lehmann himself emphatically states, the

‘other’ of classical theatre was already present in its most thorough philosophical interrogation namely as a hidden possibility of rupture within the frame of the work of reconciliation strained to its maximum. Thus, *postdramatic* theatre, again and most definitely, does *not* mean a theatre that exists ‘beyond’ drama, without any relation to it. It should rather be understood as the unfolding and blossoming of a potential of disintegration, dismantling and deconstruction within drama itself. (2006, p. 44)

Therefore the transformation of a classic into a hyperplay which is given a new, disruptive form is not a privileging of the dramatic qualities of the hypoplay, but a fruitful use of its existing logos to subvert its logocentric core. The hyperplay presents itself in a fragmented, self deconstructive form which exists to subvert and question the logocentrism upheld by the hypoplay and the classical scholarship which surrounds it. These radical adaptations therefore, assert what Lehmann himself affirms when he says that postdramatic theatre does not exist in isolation from drama. They function as hyperplays which manifest this “disintegration, dismantling and deconstruction” which was latent in Euripides’ hypoplay. They bear hypertheatrical links to a text which is logocentric and dramatically whole and in that hypertheatrical reference lies their inherent subversion of its authority. By making plays that contain this dual function, Müller, Taxidou and Ramos and Maravala create theatre which as Jürs-Munby graphically explains “has not given up on relating to the world but crucially no longer *represents* the world as a surveyable whole ... [i]t does not add up to an Aristotelian dramatic fictional *whole* but instead is full of *holes*.” (Lehmann, 2006, p.12) By providing

frequent inter-textual, inter-cultural and inter-temporal references, by using decontextualisation, separation and repetition these plays do not “supply reality but [invent] allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented” (Lyotard, 1984, p.81) and become essentially postmodern plays which subvert the traditional reception of the classic and also function within the postdramatic model.

The three plays and their performances, which span over three decades and two continents, all have one clear referent: Medea the outsider, who fights to regain her identity. Taxidou’s potentially postdramatic text, as I will discuss, is notably performed more as a cultural, political appropriation in post-civil war Georgia; Müller’s fragmented postmodern text materializes as an experimental postdramatic performance in the city which saw *Medea*’s first performance two and a half millennia ago; Ramos and Maravala’s theatrical event takes their audience on a journey of defiance together with Euripides’ heroine, in London of the twenty-first century. All three function with one intent: to fearlessly subvert the traditional reception of the classic and empower the silent woman to speak against the male hegemony.

Medea: A World Apart; Medea and the Women of Troy become refugees in the 20th century

Olga Taxidou’s *Medea: A World Apart* (2005) fuses two of Euripides’ plays: it is an adaptation of *Medea* in which the plot is a collage of mythological past and historical present, and a contemporary sequel of the *Trojan Women* in which the women of Troy find themselves in the form of a chorus in present-day Greece, refugees of war struggling to survive in a culturally and financially hostile environment. For Taxidou, Medea functions as the ‘subaltern’ Other, a colonized and peripheral subject whose voice has been silenced by colonialism and its patriarchy (Spivak, 1988). By placing her in juxtaposition with the women of Troy, another group of exiled and displaced women, transposed to Athens of the twentieth

century, Taxidou explores the issues of political refugees and reflects, more specifically, the plight of women refugees suspended “in transit” between the East and the West, between “barbarian lawlessness” and “the civilization of progress”. In this play we encounter a Medea who has “no country, no city, no home ... a refugee [in her] own body” (Taxidou, 2005, p.133)⁴. She is a barbarian sorceress princess who ends up being flown to Athens in a plane to get a job as a talk show host; she becomes a performer in monologue who philosophises and engages the audience by triggering their critical thinking. Medea, as the title of the play suggests, remains the central figure of Taxidou’s adaptation. She is a very angry woman but the source of her anger is not simply Jason’s marital infidelity. Though her rejection by Jason on a personal level is present as a catalyst, it is her oppression and the annihilation of her cultural identity which is identified as the major source of her anger.

The play unfolds within a tangible and very real framework which was historically and culturally significant for Taxidou on a personal level, because as she explains, her adaptation had been triggered by her response to the refugee problem in Greece and more specifically the plight of the Pontic Greeks (2000, p.220).⁵ Taxidou historicises Euripides’ plays by transposing the myths of Medea and the first colonisers the Argonauts as well as the first imperial war, that of Troy, to modern-day Greece. She uses the discourse of gender and power to address the pressing contemporary issues of cultural borders and boundaries, belonging and being an outsider, assimilation and rejection, civilisation and “barbarism”. In her adaptation the ancient princess of Colchis and the Trojan women are caught, like their descendents from the Black Sea, in the void between civilisations and history, struggling to identify and assert themselves. They embody the sense of “not belonging”, of struggling for self definition in the empty space created by the clash of cultures and history, which Taxidou identifies with the struggle of Pontic-Greek refugees. Despite the specific cultural and historical embedding of

the play, Taxidou writes a text which does not openly exhibit political certainties. It is an open, experimental text that demonstrates Brechtian influences and invites a potentially postdramatic performance, but in its one staging which I analyse in the following section, has been submitted to a more ideologically charged, and culturally specific production.

Medea: A World Apart is set against a diverse ethnic and complex cultural-historical background. Its characters move through time and space to and from the Black Sea, Troy, Iolkos, Corinth, and modern-day Athens. It contrasts images of the East with its richness in colours, scents, lush nature, passion, and magic, to the bleak, colourless smells and noise of Athens, a modern metropolis where immigrants and refugees have flocked seeking the idealised western way of life, only to be tragically disillusioned. This pastiche of time, myth and historical reality makes Taxidou's version of *Medea* a critique of a contemporary version of Hellenism, but also of Western imperialism and its victimisation of innocent individuals, especially women. Throughout her adaptation Taxidou successfully evidences what she argues in her book *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* (2004), by putting her theory into practice. Contrary to claims that tragedy is associated with an obsolete idealist view of a fundamental society and is therefore meaningless to contemporary audiences and readers, she upholds its contemporary relevance by relating to the past that it embodies as "ruin and fragment". She explains:

Allegory allows us to do this. Rather than identifying with the 'characters' in these plays, as if they were us in some form of collective delusion, allegory sets up a relationship of critical negativity which allows for the reading of the tragic as both theatricality and myth, and as speculative philosophy (p. 88).

To this end she divides the play into two parts. The first part opens when an unnamed woman, a cleaner, who is "*old fashioned but smart, [wearing] jeans, tucked in medium heeled boots*". She walks on to the stage smoking and carrying the tools of her trade and identifies herself as a refugee in a modern unnamed city but also as Medea's servant. Contrary to the Nurse who

opens Euripides' tragedy she does not enlist the audience's sympathy for "her poor princess" but distances herself by presenting their class difference as a barrier to sharing their experiences as women grieving the loss of their homeland and being outsiders in a foreign land. "No, don't expect me / to build up your sympathy for the Queen", she tells the audience, "she is entitled to her pain and I to mine"(p.127). She expresses antipathy for Medea for having the luxury to "mourn her destiny" while she, as a hard working refugee, has not even had the time to mourn for the loss of her child who drowned on the way. She sets herself apart from Medea by pointing to their most significant difference, that while Medea *chose* to betray her family, her country, and her cultural identity only to be tragically betrayed and disillusioned, she, and the other refugee women were "uprooted" and "dragged by the hair" (p.127) to be brought to this hostile land to be ignored, abused or at best treated as "precious commodities" (p.172). She leaves the stage in a hurry before Medea walks in, because she has "mouths to feed" and "work to do" (p.128) in contrast to Medea who enjoys the luxury of roaming "the chambers every day / dragging her dirge with her" (p.126).

The remainder of the first part is all Medea in monologue. The basic plot elements of Euripides' tragedy are not performed but related; the story is not acted but told. Medea unfolds the events of her life by exposing them in a detailed, passionate narrative which relates to the well known myth and connects it to the present with numerous contemporary cultural references. In that way she is not only configured as a woman but also set out as an actress performing a monologue. She distinguishes herself from the character of Medea to become a refugee herself, "one of them" when she says:

...the chorus gets on my nerves,
...But I must show some understanding.
Most of these women resent
serving me, resent being a chorus altogether.
...No, I mustn't alienate the chorus.
I don't want to turn into

one of those solipsistic,
soul-searching characters.
No, I am a woman of action.
I need the chorus of women.
They are the only ones
who will understand my pain and my rage
...After all I am one of them.(pp.140-1)

By standing out as a performer and blurring her roles and her identity she becomes more of a postdramatic “text bearer” than a dramatic “character” (Barnett, 2008, p.18). So on the one hand Taxidou achieves Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* by preventing the audience from identifying with Medea and her emotional world, and on the other she places the play within a postdramatic framework which offers a formal radicalisation of Brecht’s technique: Medea’s fragmented, non temporal, non linear and non-coherent monologue does not lead us to believe that there is a social solution to the problem exposed in the text which she delivers, and which contains her reality.

Through such formal experimentation the nature of the performance is brought to the forefront of the audience’s experience and their critical participation is engaged on a level beyond that of the myth of Medea, the murderous mother or the wronged wife. In Taxidou’s adaptation she becomes the subaltern Other whose voice and freedom have been denied but who gains it through the play’s experimental form. As Medea’s monologue unfolds Taxidou inserts a series of ‘sequences’ which in a Brechtian fashion are signalled with specific headings, and in which Medea tells of her encounters with Kreon, Aegeus and Jason. So while her confrontations with the men are related, the male characters are present only as personae in the myth which is being referred to and the male presence is completely eradicated from the stage, for there is no male part to be performed. In this way Taxidou silences the male voice completely and privileges only the female characters of the mythological plots – the chorus of Trojan Women – by giving them a role in the play. These women ‘encase’ Medea’s

monologue, as they appear before and after her on stage. By giving sole priority to the female voice and point of view Taxidou empowers the women in her play to acquire a voice within a predominantly male, hostile hegemonic environment.

Taxidou also uses a variety of other techniques which have been identified as central to postmodern practice and which all contribute to a challenging theatre text. There is evident use of pastiche which takes on a variety of forms such as intertextuality, parody and ironic quotation.⁶ Her parody is, as Linda Hutcheon defines it, a “repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling at the very heart of similarity” (2004, p.26). It is critical and problematizing and lies mainly in the obvious intertwining of ‘ancient’ with ‘modern’, which she presents in surprising juxtapositions. The effect of this double process of installing and subverting through comic illustration disrupts the enchanted gaze of the spectator as well as the identification of the actor with the character she is performing and invites a critical look at prevailing power structures and historical and political representations.

In Taxidou’s use of parody as well as in her dramaturgical practice of setting the plot in distinctly different historical moments, we can clearly see the Brechtian influence according to which the ‘desired’ effect of the theatre is to historicise the incidents it portrays and ultimately to ensure a political reading or viewing. This historically intertextual framework contributes to defining the play in historically relevant terms and simultaneously ensures the audience’s increased awareness of the theatricality of the action.

Taxidou also uses metatheatricality, theatre’s capacity to reflect and comment on itself and its own nature, as a most obvious *Verfremdungseffekt* with double significance. Like Brecht she uses this theatrical device so that the actor can make him or herself the object of renewed attentiveness by not submerging him or herself in a character. However, while Brecht intended to demystify the dominant ideology of his time in order to posit the truth of

his own ideology, Taxidou uses the technique as a strategy which is still de-mystifying a reality but does not offer us an alternative truth, or a solution to the problems that are exposed. Her use of the effect is closer to what David Barnett (2008) calls “postdramatic *Verfremdung*”:

Clichés, repeated motifs, or less formulaic phrases are all exposed to a form of presentation which makes them strange and disjunctive. The undoubtedly contemporary settings and formulations historicize the material and turn what at times can seem little more than idle banter into political exchanges by virtue of the fundamental interrogation that the language is exposed to. (p.22)

So while the audience are required to remain critically active, they are no longer led to a specific ideological conclusion; lines are left “in conversation with themselves and the contexts of their spectators” (p.22) thereby representing the fragmented nature of contemporary reality and pointing towards a non-ideologically fixed manifestation of Brecht’s techniques. Essentially Taxidou’s play can be categorised as “post-Brechtian theatre” in that it is clearly informed by enquiries opened up by Brecht’s aesthetics and theory but functions beyond “the authoritative validity of Brecht’s theatre concept ... [its] emphasis on the rational ... [and its] authoritative validity” (Lehmann, 2006, p.33).

In one of the play’s images related to the nature of theatre, Medea talks of her children as being the strings that Jason uses to play her like a puppet when she calls them “the thread that starts / from [her] womb / and is tied in a complicated knot / around Jason’s little finger”(p.140). Ultimately, her act of infanticide becomes an event, which in turn becomes theatre, a performance in itself. It is in other words distanced from its emotional charge, freed from its usual connotations, and therefore viewed as a socially significant act. Elsewhere in her narrative Medea discordantly mixes mythological references, such as that of Aphrodite sending Eros to shoot his arrows at the unsuspecting Colchian Princess, with contemporary references to military imperialism:

As I watched these deals being struck
at Olympus...the whole world
was about to change
with a force that had no
historical precedent.
After all,
they had the army, and the boats,
and the markets.
...I didn't think the Greeks would go this far.
But they did (pp.131-2).

She mourns for the life she left behind and mixes images of poetic nostalgia, reminiscent of the language that refugees would use, with words of bitter, harsh regret:

I came to this country
already an invalid by the time
the Argo pulled in.
A stranger in a strange land
...I want my land back, my soil,
my rivers.
I want to wet my toes
on the froth of the Black sea (pp. 132-3)

She accepts her guilt for what she has done using crude language and laments her present state: "I sold my country / for a Greek fuck. / Now I have no country, no city, / no home. I am a refugee in my own body"(p.133). Medea tells in detail of how the fake civilised society which Jason brought her into, with its veneer of manners and appearances, refused to let her integrate. She remained an outsider despite her attempts for the opposite. She mentions in a self-sarcastic, humorous way all the telling signs of a refugee or an immigrant in a foreign land. She speaks about Jason filling her house with all the modern electrical appliances, which she could not understand, and of popping "some magical device" out of his pocket to impress her every time he would come home:

I was so amazed [she says, addressing the absent Jason]
My magic seemed so primitive
compared to all this progress.
The last thing you brought home
was a WALKMAN
so I could hear your tapes – you said –

without bothering you (p.134).

Thus Medea parodically describes her situation, but also makes an indirect statement about the lack of communication and the isolation of the individual which is typical of our technologically advanced contemporary society.

She talks about her inability to understand the strange customs and social interactions of the Greeks as well as their strange accents and their different clothes. She calls Greece “a strange land ... where wives say, yes darling, / is there anything I can get you, my love. / Oh that was the best ever” (p.133). These women would “attend ceremonies / wearing jeans and T-shirts” or wear “woollen leggings and long wide jumpers, as if to hide their breasts” (p.138) and “chew gum / as though it were caviar”(p.136). She explains the different habits which her husband was once attracted to and which have become the traits he sneers at. “We don’t do that here” (p.134), he would tell her, or feel embarrassed when he took her to cocktail parties of the “nouveaux riche” and she would wear “real silk, layers and layers of it, / in yellow, and red, and blue, and black” (p.136) which branded her “with a thirdworldliness / that makes everyone / uncomfortable at dinner parties” (p.137).

Despite the fact that she now sneers at this civilisation, Medea put her clothes away, symbols of who she had been and what she represented, and became a non-entity in this foreign land “that has forgotten magic, / that relies only on what is written”. She once was “a sacred woman” – only to become a housewife. “Confined indoors. / The fields, the valleys, the mountains / and the seas are no longer mine” she laments, “You can keep your cities. Just give me back my sea” (p.139). Medea associates herself with images of nature and instinctive passions whereas all that is proper, polished and “civilised” but also shallow and fake is associated with Jason and his “civilization of progress” (p.133).

Throughout her long monologue Medea attempts to survive in an agonising search for her lost identity by re-defining herself through memory and asserting that space as her topos of existence. However, she does not emerge triumphant as she does in Euripides, carried away in the chariot of the Sun God. Once she has killed her children she feels “transparent”; and as she speaks, she can watch her own body disappear, bringing forth a sense of alienation and de-personalisation. She releases memories of her fatherland and leaves “the longing in [her] body. She no longer belongs to herself, because the “superior” civilisation “of a Hellenism that superficially represents itself as homogeneous, all-pervasive, unitary and universal” has swallowed her up, has devoured her (Taxidou, 2000, p.220). This is the situation that Taxidou sees the refugees from the Black Sea in; this is how the hegemonic culture of the motherland has left them without an identity in a place where they do not belong.

Medea presents her children as seeds of the corrupt and decadent culture which has produced them. “They are not my children”, she says, “they are Jason’s bastards. / They have no mother... / They belong to the city that bred them”(p.140). This is the culture which has disempowered her and which she does not manage to defeat and conquer in order to redefine herself in her own terms. The hegemonic culture has broken her will to such an extent that she cannot return to Colchis and both she and the Trojan women admit that there’s no home to go back to any more since the Greeks, symbols of the imperialistic, hegemonic forces have infiltrated the system. The women let go of their past and “get on with their lives”. Medea lets go of the traumatic memory of her homeland which still stains her brain, wipes out every emotional connection with the colonizer by killing her children, and hopes to subvert the establishment from within, by accepting an identifiable role within the system itself:

I know I am a pawn in their games.
The Athenian press is already after me.
They want my story.
They say I might even host a chat show.

To talk of women who share my plight.
I leave the last memory of my country behind me.
I leave the longing in my body.
I am no longer my own. (p.154)

Taxidou's message is clear; a refugee's path is a road of no return. The borders are not open both ways. Medea leaves Corinth but not triumphantly on a blazing chariot. She simply goes to a bigger city in the hope of getting a job. Her only step ahead will be achieved through sharing her experiences with other women refugees. Her hope for empowerment therefore lies in bonding with members of her own sex and sharing their plight as they share hers.

Finally, before leaving for Athens in a "private plane that awaits [her] in the outskirts of the city"(p.153), she leaves a brief, cynical note to Jason, where she simply announces that she has killed the children:

Jason,
I have killed the children.
I hope that has opened a hole in your heart
that is as fierce, and as hollow, and as dry,
as the one in mine. (p.154)
As for me.
I want you to hate me.
Go and bury your wife. (p.154)

Medea's last words constitute a final ironic inter-cultural and inter-temporal reference; before the second part of this adaptation which incorporates the Medea myth and Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Medea, the subaltern barbarian can speak and be heard, especially when she assumes the discourse of the oppressing colonizer: she writes him a note, dictated by the practices of his culture and leaves him to deal with his own pain.

Part two opens with the unnamed cleaner of the first part and the chorus on stage after Medea has left for Athens. They are in some kind of temporary accommodation, watching the funerals of Medea's children, of Kreon, and of his daughter on television. They comment on the media coverage of the events and offer their views about Medea and her murderous acts.

They smoke and squabble, reminisce and gossip and as any displaced refugees, await their fate. But they are not just any group of refugee women; they are Euripides' *Trojan Women*, who all found themselves on the wrong side of another war inspired by male imperial dreams, the war of Troy.

The choice of chorus is of considerable significance for this adaptation. If they had been Corinthian women like Euripides' chorus in *Medea* is, they would be members of the society that shuns Medea, and part of the oppressing hegemonic culture. Therefore their identification with Medea's displacement would not be as powerful, nor would the historical connection and the subsequent comment on the contemporary refugee problem be as evident. Being Trojan however, they are women in exile, just like Medea, who all lost a home, a city, a man or a child of their own in a vicious war that was supposedly waged in the name of fairness and justice but whose true motive was imperial expansion. Foremost among these women of the chorus are four women of royal descent whose losses are just as great and whose fall from their aristocratic position to being refugees matches that of Medea's. They are Hecuba⁷ – now identified as the cleaner from the beginning of the play – Cassandra, Helen, and Andromache. Their mythological, royal descent contrasted to their contemporary surroundings and their clothes reinforces the lamentable state they find themselves in. They who were all queens and princesses are now “*slightly battered and run down ... their make-up is exaggerated and slightly faded. They wear jewellery, lots of polyester, tight jeans and patent leather shoes*” (p.155).

They are “stuck” in Corinth, “waiting for the VISAS / to come through”(p.156), and cynically mourn for their losses and their present reality. Most of them waste their time waiting; they are unemployed and without hope, “an embarrassment to Gods and kings alike”(p.164). When they first got to Corinth some of them got jobs as cleaners, but now

people won't hire them anymore. They felt "awkward / when they realised that their / cooks and cleaners and childminders / were teachers and doctors and engineers / just like themselves"(p.164). Taxidou once again juxtaposes the 'ancient' and the 'modern' in a series of shocking contradictions which foreground the image of a typical displaced immigrant who tries to be assimilated in the receiving culture but who only manages to look "exaggerated and slightly faded".

Each of the named women of the chorus laments her own loss and bemoans her displacement as it is known to the audience through mythology, but also makes it contemporary in the mode of postmodern pastiche. Helen who "was hatched like an animal through an egg shell ... born of rape, shaped through rape, / hostage of rape"(p.159), suffers from optimistic delusions and admires Medea because she has become a star for the Athenian media. Cassandra whose "words come from the spit of a God / [who] spat in her mouth / ...sperm that makes words / [and] not babies", suffers from "False Memory Syndrome"(p.168). Hecuba, the mother figure, is a cynical realist: "Get your acts together"(p.177), she tells her 'daughters' as she looks for sleeping pills to give Cassandra to stop her prophetic rambling. Andromache, who describes her son's horrific death and her lamentations over it, squabbles with Helen, in a clichéd sister-in-law relationship and silences her by saying "...once a tart always a tart"(p.177). The other women, members of the chorus attempt to put an end to their tense relationships, reminding them of their common status as refugees, one which disregards any social distinctions:

Mothers, daughters, queens and slaves.
Blood bonds or those drawn up by law.
All disappear.
This horror breaks down the lines that show
who I am and who is she. (p.159)

It is with this final feeling of the common ‘non-future’ of these women that the play ends as well as with a sense of things left ‘unfinished’. Cassandra continues her ramblings and speaks of “the horror. / Of not knowing who, what, where, or why ... where your body ends, / where it opens, where it closes” (p.176), while Hecuba ushers them all away and cynically announces that they have been moved and cannot stay in their present location any longer. The end of the play therefore defies every sense of closure or resolution and representation of the world as a comprehensive entirety and defies Aristotle’s definition of the theatrical event as being ‘whole’ with an identifiable beginning, a middle and an end (XI, 7, 1.24-36).

Clearly, Taxidou writes a play which revolves around issues brought to light by Brecht’s epic dramaturgy, but unlike Brecht she does not aim to reveal ideological structures which inform the process of representation, nor does she assign the same all pervasive importance to the ‘story’ and to chronological linearity in its presentation. So while Brecht’s work is based upon the ‘great truth’ of historical materialism, Taxidou’s truth is a version of Brecht’s opened onto questions of race and gender. And while Brecht aims to distance his audience and point to one stable, political truth, Taxidou uses non-linear time sequences, lack of climactic plot development, absence of language coherence and fragmented form to point to the insecurities of her own historical and political moment in the late twentieth century.

A potentially postdramatic text in a Brechtian performance

Taxidou’s play has only been performed in Georgian translation from English, directed by Nana Kvashavadze in 1997 in Tbilisi, Georgia and again in 1998 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival but never since.⁸ The specific production focuses on the more explicitly political undertones of the text and ignores the postdramatic qualities of the play; it highlights a melancholic, eerie aspect which brings forward the sense of entrapment that Medea and the

chorus feel as refugees caught in between cultures, and the political, inter-cultural facet of the play. In the performance, the two parts of the play are fused into one so that Medea and Hecuba, Cassandra, Helen and Andromache all interact on stage throughout the performance.

The performance opens to the sound of howling wind, with the scene flooded in blue light; the setting is clearly a storm at sea.



Fig. 3.1 The refugees caught in the storm. Photographs from video recording of performance.

We can discern four figures draped in transparent white cloths suggestive of ships' sails, standing on what we later realise are caryatid columns whose heads are stuck to the ceiling and their bases to the floor. The storm eventually dies down and the figures, who are the Trojan Women, step off the columns. Light floods the scene and we see the stage, a beach, littered with broken reminders of those ancient military campaigns, and of cultures long destroyed - a half-buried shield and sword, a shattered mirror, an old chest with ancient books and old photographs, jagged stumps of classic columns.



Fig. 3.2 *The broken Caryatids*

In her account of the production Taxidou explains that the Trojan Women stand on these columns and reach up, trying to connect the top to the bottom part in an attempt to “make whole again the shattered image”(2000, p.226). Indeed these women are trying – without success – to put back together the shattered pieces of their existence, and reassemble their fragmented identity. At the front of the stage, lit by a spotlight, stands another prop around which the whole production seems to revolve. It is a tripod holding a large glass bowl half full with water which gives the impression of a transparent globe. On the top of this glass ball there is a small replica of the Argo, Jason’s ship. The women come to it repeatedly and, using a beaker, drink water from it. On several occasions Medea speaks to it, seemingly addressing the Argo as a signifier for Jason.



Fig. 3.3 *Drinking from the fountain*

While Taxidou writes, “This is clearly the Aegean”(2000, p.226), I would suggest it represents much more than that. It is the Mediterranean, it is the Black Sea, it is the sea as a life giving force for any civilisation and the sea which brought the women refugees to this foreign land but also a symbol of their desire to return to the homeland. The Argo on it is clearly a symbol of the colonial power structure and social hierarchy which has trapped these women ‘in transit’ between cultures and civilisations.

Interestingly, the same stage which functions as a sea and as a beach where the women land after the storm also functions as a confined space, a small room with a dungeon-like feeling to it. When the tops of the columns are lit with a cold blue light they give the impression of being small windows, high up on a wall which let through the cold light of daybreak or dusk. From time to time the ear-piercing sound of a train clanking across over the stage can be heard, further emphasising the sense of entrapment and the impossibility of escape from what one critic calls this “permanent celestial transit camp”(Dawson Scott, 1998). Every time one of these trains passes overhead one gets the sense that the ruins and

shattered pieces crumble even further, reinforcing the feeling of decay and corrosion. This image of a crumbling world out of which there is no apparent exit, would have made a very lasting and significant impression on an audience who had just been through the experience of a civil war and the disintegration of a political system.



Fig. 3.4 *A dungeon-like transit camp*

The end of the performance leaves the spectator with an overall feeling of melancholia and also with a sense of an impasse, a dead-end situation out of which there is no chance of escape. Understandably to a Georgian audience there is a strong political significance in this outcome of the play. However, what is left out of the performance, at least in visual terms, is the text's postmodern collage of past and present, which are central to the overall effect of the play. Together with that, disappears the parodic discourse which was so powerful in the text through the juxtaposition of 'ancient' and 'modern', 'mythological' and 'historical' and which invited a more open, less certain approach to the play.

The director focuses her attention instead, on making use of specific *gestic* actions which give the performance its political tone. *Gestus* for Brecht "means both gist and gesture;

an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions” (Brecht, 1964a, p.42) which can be easily codified and understood. This gestic concept functions particularly well for a spectator of *Medea: A World Apart* that is a non-speaker of Georgian, who may not understand the words that the actors are speaking but can still ‘read’ their performance. These *gesti* would also be identifiable and clearly recognisable to a Georgian audience and for them they would connect the wars of the past, which the myth of the play is based on, with their present historical and political reality.

During the performance all five women wave about large white scarves which function as powerful visual representations, recognisable to the audience as symbols of a medieval Georgian tradition: The White Scarf Movement.



Fig. 3.5 *The white scarf*

This was a custom whereby, in an attempt to stop war women would lay white scarves in between the fighting lines. During the war with Abkhazia, the ancient custom resurfaced in a different form:

At the height of the civil war in 1992 and amidst heated nationalist feelings Ketiv Dolidze [who played Medea in the performance] made a plea on national television for the women of Tbilisi to join her in the city's central square. More than 5,000 women did so. She led them all onto a train that was heading straight for the front line. Once there, the women stood and held hands in front of the troops in an attempt to end the madness that the war had created. Various nationalist groups threatened to blow up the train, but the women all returned safely. (Taxidou, 2000, p.230)

It is this recognisable *gestus* that the Georgian audience applaud so passionately at the end of the performance in Tbilisi, and which gives the play specific historic significance within the specific historical moment of this performance.

Another *gestus* which adds an emblematic and parabolic quality to the performance is related to an hourglass which one of the Trojan women holds in repeated instances through the play and which becomes symbolic of the inter-cultural, inter-historical and intertextual nucleus of the performance.



Fig. 3.6 *The hour-glass*

When discussing a theory of culture and intercultural performance in contemporary theatre practice, Patrice Pavis (1992) imagines an “hourglass of cultures” in which the upper bowl is the foreign culture and the lower bowl is the target culture, our culture. The grains of sand are

the grains of culture that flow slowly but steadily from the upper bowl to the lower and though they are the same grains, they arrange themselves differently when they pass from one bowl to the other. It is such an hourglass which features prominently in the performance of *Medea: A World Apart*. It becomes an emblem not only of the slow, hard passage of the refugees from one culture to the other, but also of the play as a twentieth century adaptation of a two thousand year-old text with references to mythology, nineteenth and twentieth century history, about legendary women who find themselves in modern-day Corinth and Athens and is performed in present-day Colchis. This is indeed theatre at the crossroads of history, or to borrow the term from Pavis, “theatre at the crossroads of culture”.

One central aspect of the play text which remains unaltered in the performance is that Medea’s killing of her children is not centralised. Her act is presented as a radical uprooting of her children as seeds of the corrupt and decadent culture which has produced them. “They are not my children”, she says, “they are Jason’s bastards. / They have no mother... / They belong to the city that bred them”(p.140). The children are killed but their deaths are only witnessed by the audience as items on the television news. Thus Medea returns the children to the society that they are a product of and disassociates herself from their killing. However this is the hegemonic culture which has disempowered her as a refugee and has broken her will to such an extent that she cannot return to Colchis. She lets go of its traumatic memory which still stains her brain and comes to terms with the fact that a refugee’s path is a road of no return; the borders are not open both ways. So while Medea leaves Corinth as an independent woman who has regained her voice, she does not return home triumphantly on a blazing chariot. She simply goes to a bigger city in the hope of getting a job. Her only step ahead is achieved through erasing all traces of the hegemonic culture from within her and sharing her

experiences with other women refugees. Her hope for empowerment therefore lies in bonding with members of her own sex and sharing their plight as they share hers.

In conclusion, Taxidou's text, and its Georgian performance, work together to bring to life a new Medea, one who does not agonise over the imminent slaughter of her children, but brings to the heart of the performance her search for an identity, following her past betrayal of her own family and homeland which haunts her persistently. Together with the refugees from Troy, and through the use of feminist and political discourse, she transforms this quest into a search for a political voice, and urges the audience to read a contemporary message into her actions by bringing onto the stage the agonising plight of women refugees caught up between civilisations.

Medea, Contemporary Material in East Berlin Suburbia

The Medea which East German playwright Heiner Müller creates is not a woman who remains a victim of patriarchal, imperialist society like her mythical counterpart. She shatters the confines of barbarian Otherness which that society had placed her in, and radically re-defines herself. Her act of infanticide acquires a socio-political significance since she does not recognise her sons as her own offspring:

Who are you [she wonders] Who has dressed
You in the bodies of my little children
What animal is hiding in your eyes
Do you play dead You don't deceive the mother
You're actors nothing but liars and traitors (Müller, 1984, p.132)⁹

She sees her children as an expression of the corrupt society that has victimised her, since they are "products" of her union with Jason who represents that society. Therefore in killing them she does not murder her own flesh and blood; instead, she strikes a blow against the system which has produced them and which they would help preserve if they remained alive.

Müller uses the myth of Medea to critique western colonialism and to expose the destructiveness of consumer society. His adaptation is composed of a sequence of narratives which take the form of poetic theatrical representations in verse and visual landscapes. *Medeaplay* (1974), together with *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscapes with Argonauts* (1984) formulate a provocative, politicised vision of reality, characterised by a multitude of dense allusions and parallels to Euripides' *Medea*.

In these theatrical texts Müller goes beyond the confines of a simple adaptation of the myth of Medea. He digs deep into the classic narrative to get to its radical core and reconstructs it into an entirely new fragmented text, which posits a challenge to readers and directors alike. His intervention in the ancient epic can be compared to a radical surgical operation, in which he dissects the linear, well structured narrative, to get to its meaning and to connect it to the world he lives in. In his 're-making' he does not only layer the text intertextually but also subverts its linear form in order to deliberately take apart and subvert the illusion of coherent socio-historic trends and then investigate them to their final, if lethal, consequence in order to produce a work of contemporary concern. His work is a daring theatrical re-interpretation of the *Medea* of Euripides but also that of Seneca, a postmodern collage that infuses the classics with an unsettlingly familiar feeling of desolation and fragmentation. It is scattered with the intertextual history of the myth, while at the same time making contemporary historical and political allusions.

Müller's style of writing is a conscious focus away from a mimetic representation of reality, which he found 'non-photographable' in the East Germany of the seventies and early eighties, and towards a reflection of a fragmented, political reality as he saw it in the late cold war society of the GDR. In an interview with Carl Weber (1984) he explains that he moved away from photographic representations of reality in his works because realism was not an

adequate form of representation for East German audiences. I would interpret his turn to a classic like *Medea* as a way of maintaining the stability of the known narrative, which he then proceeds to dissect and interrogate, whilst abandoning the representational nature of realism.

Medeaplay (1974) became his first published exploration of a dramaturgical vision that he called “the theatre of images”. It is a refinement of his use of poetic language for the stage which takes the form of a paragraph-long, descriptive literary sketch. Despite its brevity, however, it is dense with meaning. A woman, dressed as a bride, is shown tied to a bed, which is placed upright on the stage, by two male figures with death masks. The bridegroom enters and “takes his place with the bride” before a female audience, and the phrase “The Sexual Act” is projected on a screen. Shreds of the woman’s wedding dress are used to gag her while her “belly swells until it bursts” and “The Act of Birth” is projected. The final projection is “The Act of Killing”. In the nightmarish concluding vision, “the woman takes off her face, rips up the child, and hurls the parts in the direction of the man. Debris, limbs, intestines fall from the flies on the man”(p.47).

This “mimodrama” as Fiona Macintosh calls it (Hall et al., 2000, p.25), is Müller’s initial attempt to exploit the act of Medea’s infanticide as a radical act of defiance against the male oppressor and coloniser in the form of her violator. “The Sexual Act”, “The Act of Birth”, “The Act of Killing” are all part of the assault and degradation of the female figure that is used as a sexual object, tied to her bed, and silenced. The mute quality of the play text simultaneously suggests the silencing of the female voice and the suppression of the colonised subject. However it might also imply the woman’s *refusal* to ‘use the master’s tools’, to speak the master’s language; because as Audre Lorde famously said, “the master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house”(1984, p.112). By speaking the language of the imperial coloniser Medea would be reifying his authority, his ability to determine which tools are

effective. In that way the act of ‘dismantling’ would simultaneously be rebuilding his power. Instead she prefers to act by using her own tools, by asserting her own authority. In that way she brings about genuine change. Therefore we witness the reciprocal return of the violent act onto the violator who presents the oppressor and coloniser: the child that he has fathered, the result of his oppression, is ‘thrown back’ at him in shattered pieces.

Müller’s experimental piece which followed *Medeaplay* is a more obvious reworking of the Medea myth. The complete absence of punctuation, not only in the text, but also in the title *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscapes with Argonauts* immediately strikes the reader. Absence of punctuation suggests a total absence of world order. At the same time the three titles fuse into one another inviting us to see this text as a whole that is made up of three inseparable parts, and that the ‘material’ provided by the myth of Medea for the central part can best be comprehended within the context and framework of the barren wasteland described in *Despoiled Shore* and the dreamlike horror which permeates *Landscape with Argonauts*.

The Medea trilogy is a play about alienated humanity, sexual inequality, betrayal, the destruction of a civilisation, and the end of an era. But it is also more importantly a reworking of Euripides’ text to turn the myth of Medea ‘the colonised’ into an allegory about political corruption, hypocrisy, imperialism, colonialism and environmental degradation. It is an attempt to turn the focus away from Medea’s act of infanticide as an abhorrent act of murder and focus on it as a political gesture of the trapped female subject of imperialism against her oppressor. Medea is not held responsible for murder. In fact she is justified in not wanting to let her children live in this world of political and environmental degradation. Babies are either the product of rape as seen in *Medeaplay*, or the product of advanced capitalism’s inhumanity, ejected in mass-production “in batches” as a defence “against the advance of

maggots”(p.127). If in Euripides Medea is a “hateful woman” a “monster” and “a murderess of children”(Euripides, 1955, 1.1407), in Müller she is the product of an equally perverse capitalist society which is guilty of similar odious crimes.

The first part, *Despoiled Shore*, was written thirty years prior to the play’s completion in 1982. Here Müller was clearly influenced by the atrocities of the Second World War, but also by the severed political reality of East Berlin, and he paints the image of a deserted, bare, polluted landscape, littered with symbols of a corrupt, consumer society. In an uninterrupted politically charged discourse, he exposes a list of images that are representative of a wasteland. Weber points out that this first part of the trilogy “evokes East Berlin suburbia...a polluted landscape swarming with people whose minds are just as polluted” (1984, p. 124). The scene is set in a “lake near Straussberg” which Ivar Kvistad (2008) claims possibly refers to Strasbourg, the industrialised city in the east of France as a symbol of modern industrialisation. The lake is polluted by products of consumer capitalism which are clearly destroying the environment: empty boxes from used condoms, cigarettes, and cookies litter the scene. Death is present everywhere: “Dead branches”, “Dead fish”, “Women smeared with blood”, dead in the morgues, and corpses “HANGING FROM LAMPPOSTS THEIR TONGUES PROTRUDING” (pp.127-8), in a reference to the way deserters were hanged at the end of the Second World War. Taboo images of rejected human fluids (menstrual blood, semen, spit, vomit, urine, faeces) render this place contaminated, indicating that humans are killing themselves by destroying their environment.

In a masterful way the Medea myth is interwoven in this text of environmental destruction and death. On this “Despoiled shore ... flatheaded Argonauts”, soldiers of the colonisation forces, leave their footsteps on the wet soil, marking the civilisation that they have conquered. On this same barren landscape, this wasteland, the women of Colchis have

shed their blood in the form of their “torn menstrual napkins” (p.127) invoking Medea’s first entrance in Euripides’ play when she addresses the women of Corinth and enlists their sympathy and support as members of the same sex who will understand her plight of citylessness, homelessness, and landlessness. Furthermore the symbolism of menstrual blood invokes a further stronger feminine bond, since women, unlike men, can bleed profusely every month and not weaken or wane as a result. This ‘shared bleeding’ therefore, far from disempowering the women, functions as empowerment and a symbolic subversion of patriarchal society.

Meanwhile, the Argo waits in a hangar to crush Jason’s skull. The Argo is a symbol of Jason’s colonial conquest which according to the myth will become the vehicle of his ultimate destruction. The image is a direct reference to the prophecy that the Euripidean Medea makes, as she is being carried away in the chariot of Helios. Jason will die, Medea prophecies, not as a hero, but as he deserves “like any slave, / crushed by the falling timber / from [his] rotting ship the ‘Argo’” (Euripides, 1988, l.1387). In an interview on the sequence of his *Medea* pieces Müller explains that

[t]he end signifies the threshold where myth turns into history: Jason is slain by his boat ... European history began with colonisation ... That the vehicle of colonisation strikes the colonizer dead anticipates the end of it. That’s the threat of the end we’re facing, the ‘end of growth’ (Müller, 1984, p.124).

Müller’s idea is better understood if we hold it up against Ania Loomba’s premise that “colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism, [and] that without colonial expansion the transition to capitalism would not have taken place in Europe”(1998 p.4). The Argo becomes a symbol of the coloniser’s weapon which ultimately, like the colonised that he seduced, turns against him.

On another level, Müller’s narrative becomes one which tells the history of European imperialism whose mythological beginnings take us back to ancient Colchis. But it also

suggests that the same European imperialism, with which Europe dominated other nations all around the globe, was ultimately self-destructive since it created the very conditions that brought about its demise. Furthermore, it is a reflection of a different kind of imperialism which is more relevant to Müller's reality, namely the imperialist expansion of particular European nations upon their close relatives. Thus Müller's *Medea* adaptation also clearly alludes to the violent, tense relationship between eastern and western Germany after the arbitrary division of the nation following its defeat in the Second World War. As Müller himself argues, in different and varied ways the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s brought to the surface a fraught relationship between the so-called 'authentic' West German identity and the identity of the 'East German Other'. "Germany", he writes, "is in the throes of an identity crisis, though there never has been a national identity encompassing *one* Germany" (1993, p.16). To comprehend that better one has only to think of Petra Fachinger's assertion that while "the unified Germany has officially been a 'post-colonial' nation since it was granted full sovereignty by the occupying powers, German unification is often perceived as an act of Western colonization of the East" (2001, p.12).

Müller epitomises all these theoretical ideas in the short yet prophetic closing image of *Despoiled Shore*: Medea is shown in a final and contradictory image, "cradling The brother hacked up to pieces She expert / in poisons" (p.128). The image is shocking yet poetic, and the careful choice of diction highlights the inherent contradiction in Medea and everything that she represents. On the one hand there is reference to the myth which has her hack her own brother to pieces in order to assist Jason in his escape with the Golden Fleece from Colchis. Jason's mission to seek and bring home the treasure from the Barbarians can be seen as the ultimate symbol of the imperial dream which lasted throughout the centuries to the present day: to go forth and conquer the so-called under civilised and bring home the treasures

from their land. On the other hand she shows her tenderness by “cradling” the body of the brother that she herself had slain. This unusual association places her and her brother together as victims of imperialism, facing Jason as the appropriator of the cultural heritage of Colchis and therefore the imperialist coloniser. Medea has served Jason in his quest for power, fame and posterity, in other words she has succumbed to the attractions of the culture of the coloniser and has betrayed her own native culture. When he disposes of her, showing disrespect and indifference she turns her expertise in poisons against him, just like mother earth turns against her inhabitants (thus the “despoiled shore”), just like the colonised turns against the coloniser. The image alludes to the inherent guilt of the colonised that has at some point been seduced by the coloniser’s culture and has betrayed her own; the subsequent realisation of this betrayal may turn the colonised subject forcefully against the coloniser.

The centrepiece of the play, *Medeamaterial*, is a more direct reflection on aspects of and events from Euripides’ play, placing them within the social and political reality of the GDR. It opens with Medea proclaiming Jason to be her first and last love. Yet in her two dialogues with him, which encase her central monologue, she shows herself to be aware of the present situation and prepared to accept it, but not without making Jason pay a price. Medea takes her revenge not only through denying Jason his status as a father by killing his male offspring, but also – and perhaps more significantly – by reasserting her self and her identity and by nullifying his very existence when at the end of the piece she refuses to recognize him. By not naming him she negates his existence and refuses to be his reflective Other, so Jason ceases to exist:

Jason: Medea.

Medea: Nurse Do you know this man (p.133)

Throughout this section of the play the theme of identity is recurrent. Medea indicates that she is well aware of the fact that she doesn’t belong, when she says that she is at the mercy of

King Creon, who “can grant [her] the right to live in Corinth or drive [her] out to other foreign shores” (p.128). She asks the Nurse to bring her a mirror, and upon looking into it proclaims, “This is not Medea”. Her rejection of her own reflection in the mirror as an image of her true self is a confirmation of the fact that she has no identity; she is a non-entity in this land. On the contrary, when Jason tries to undermine her by implying that she was nothing before he brought her to civilization, and asks her “What were you before I came woman”, she replies “Medea” (p.129). Therefore before being conquered by the coloniser Jason, Medea did have an identity, which the forces of capitalist, imperialist society represented by Jason have nullified.

The repeated reference to death and birth and to human life as a commodity further resonates the anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist symbolism of Müller’s narrative: Medea voices a most harshly vivid plea to Jason, not once, not twice, but three times in a relatively short speech: “You owe me a brother Jason...You still owe me a brother Jason... You still owe me a brother Jason” to which Jason readily replies “Two sons I gave you for one brother” (p. 129). This dialogue is a direct criticism of the way contemporary capitalist society assigns value arbitrarily even on human lives, deciding to equate two sons to one brother.

Medea’s monologue follows. Its first few lines are most striking in highlighting this theme of human life as a war-time commodity, whether it be a personal war, a political war, or a “war” between civilisations:

You Me Do you love them Jason your sons
Do you then want them back your sons
They’re yours What can be mine being your slave
All of me is your tool and all things from me
For you I killed for you I did give birth
I’ve been your bitch your whore is what I was
I but a rung in your ladder of fame...
And my brother oh my brother Jason...
You’d robbed his father and mine Do you love
Your sons You want to have them back your sons

You still owe me a brother Jason (p.129)

There is a polarity in the relationship of these two people brought forward by the repeated use of the words ‘you’, ‘me’, ‘yours’, ‘mine’. Medea is desperate to understand how she, who was a powerful, almost superhuman sorceress who freely and so easily took away and gave the gift of life, was only an object, a rung in Jason’s ladder of fame. However, once she has managed to regain her strength and her identity she is able once again to give her “gift” to Jason in the form of the debt that has to be collected:

Today is payday Jason Your Medea
Will collect her debts today
Can you laugh now Death is but a present
And from my hands you shall receive the gift (p.132)

Müller’s Medea emerges triumphant from her struggle to accept the past and to look her present and her future in the eye. She relives the horror of the slaying of her own people, the destruction of her own land and manages to come to terms with that reality through accepting Jason’s betrayal. She even thanks him for it. Her love for him, her desire to be part of the dominant culture and whatever that stood for, had previously blinded her to the atrocities that had been committed. Her ears were deafened to the screams of the people tortured in Colchis before she left with Jason and the Golden Fleece, having betrayed her homeland and her identity. Now she can hear the screams, she can see the atrocities, she “owns” them, and that liberates her:

...Thanks for your treason
That gives me back both of my eyes again
To see what I saw once the images
You’ve painted with the boots of your crew Jason
Unto my Colchis ears to hear again
The music you once played upon the corpses
The bones the graves of those who were my people (p.130)

Accepting her past frees her, opening her eyes to the future that will be gained through the death of her children who are the results of her “infiltration” by the coloniser; they are “the

fruits of treason that grew from [his] seed” (p.130) and she asks him to do the impossible: “take Jason what you gave me...And stuff it into your whore’s eager womb” (p.131). She calls her own children actors who are “nothing but liars and traitors” (p132) and asks them to give her back her blood out of her veins and return to her womb. The fact that she decides to kill them proves her acceptance of the irreversibility of history, and of her shame for her own treason.

The final piece of Müller’s ‘synthetic fragment’, *Landscapes with Argonauts*, fuses the myth of Jason as a coloniser with the horrific reality of the contemporary world into an even more terrifying future. Here the dramatist paints a bleak picture of the world in which the ‘I’, presumably in the voice of Jason, seems to be thrown around as in a whirlwind. It is of course, as Müller himself points out in an introductory comment to the play, a collective ‘I’ that is speaking and struggling to comprehend the traumas of mankind – from antiquity to the modern day. The text is full of allusions, complex yet powerful and beautiful images, scattered, seemingly unconnected memories, and a dreamlike quality. It is a poetic composition which challenges the reader’s imagination and knowledge of history. The future of mankind is painted in the dark colours of uncertainty: “Thin between the I and the No more I ... FUTURE in rusty armour travels along” (pp.133-4). This ambivalence of existence is connected to Medea’s own indeterminate presence “between the empty middle” of mankind.

Medea previously denied Jason his identity, stripped him of his identity as a father, and as a man. Now Müller has him wander in the landscape of despair agonizingly searching for himself, trying to define his existence:

Shall I speak of me I who
Of whom are they speaking when
They do speak of me I Who is it
In the rain of bird droppings In the hide of lime
Or else I a banner a
Bloody rag hung out A fluttering

‘Tween nothing and no one provided there is wind
I scum of a man I scum of
A woman ... I my death (p.133)

Just like Medea before him, this character is on an agonising search for a non-gendered identity which he ultimately finds in his death. He has an anchor for an umbilical cord which ties him to the horizon of memory yet his voyage in this memory dream is destroyed, it has no point of arrival. “DO YOU REMEMBER DO YOU NO I DON’T”, he asks himself and answers his own question, as he travels in the landscape of catastrophe which he observes. Contrary to Medea who regains her identity through memory, the persona in *Landscapes with Argonauts* seeks salvation in remembering but does not manage to redeem himself through cultural memory – and therefore defines himself only as the landscape of his own death.

Throughout *Landscapes with Argonauts*, Müller conveys a sense of an imminent catastrophic invasion of the technological on modern civilisation by portraying images of humans like “Zombies / perforated by TV spots” and the television as a medium which “vomit[s] world into the living room” (p. 134). It is only a change of attitudes, and perhaps of consciousness itself, which stands on the way of complete destruction. He sees this change as possibly occurring through the dramatic medium because he believes that the theatre’s function at a crisis point in history is to represent new alternatives to such attitudes. To use his own words once again, *Landscapes with Argonauts* “presumes the catastrophes which mankind is working toward. The theatre’s contribution to their prevention can only be their representation” (p. 126).

A lot has been written about the density of Müller’s texts, their resistant quality, and the difficulties that their representation on stage posits.¹⁰ One of the central challenges which directors and performers are faced with concerns the appointment of dialogue to specific characters/figures on stage. In this chapter I will be investigating one specific production

staged in Athens in May 2009 by Greek director Nikos Sakalidis and the Aktis Aeliou Art Theatre Company to show how the performance takes on the challenge of successfully addressing the multiple complexity of Müller's *Medea* sequence, and manages to explore its political quality and give a voice to the silenced Medea by bringing into focus its postdramatic qualities. The play was performed at Teatro Simeio, a small theatre which stages experimental productions, away from the mainstream theatrical world of Athens.

This performance displays its obvious connections to Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" where the director, actor and spectator all 'make' theatre together and emphatic focus is placed on the human body as a theme but also as a tool for aesthetic expression. The theatre that Artaud envisages is one that would awaken, organise and present the latent dream images of our mind, and would grip us with its power and amaze us with its spectacular presentation. This theatre, Artaud writes, "is a powerful appeal through illustration to those powers which return the mind to the origins of its inner struggles ... it arouses deep echoes within us and predominates over our unsettled period" (1993, pp. 20 & 64). In a performance which adopts this theoretical approach "the spectator will be shaken and set on edge by the internal dynamism of the spectacle" (Innes, 1993, p. 65). Through stimulation of the physical and emotional senses, the audience is to be maintained in a constant state of uncertainty leading to overwhelming emotional release (catharsis).

This staging by Aktis Aeliou was the third and final version of a performance in progress, generated through a series of workshops aimed at reflecting the openness and multi-dimensionality of Müller's text. According to the director, this performance is "an attempt to illuminate aspects of a work which is dense, mature, entirely contemporary, intensely relevant and wholly dark and obscure, like to age we live in" (Sakalidis, 2009). Thus in an Artaudian fashion the audience participates in an immersion on the multiple levels of meaning which are

present. The spectator embarks on a journey of discovery in a production which does not function as a defined, static system but as a fertile and ever evolving variable. Inspired by the raw quality of Müller's writing Sakalidis directs a performance which is informed by dramatic tension and intense theatricality. Intense atmosphere is created through the use of props and costumes that fluctuate in an eloquent symbolism between red and black which is also befitting of the worlds Müller represents. Special mention should be made of the exceptionally intense musical composition of Paris Paraschopoulos which comes to compliment the intense theatrical images. His music ranges from vocal compositions that sound like Gregorian chants and sombre solo piano pieces, to imposing atmospheric electronic music reminiscent of Philip Glass's composition *Koyaanisqatsi*, which conjures images of vast ecological destructions.

The audience walks into the theatre, to face a dark set, in keeping with the dark view of reality that the play reflects. The core of the production focuses on the theme of alienation, human degradation, and loss of identity in the world it depicts. The theatre space is small and feels very personal, and the actors try to maintain eye contact with the audience members continuously which is at once unsettling and challenging, since it draws those who are attending the event into the dark world of uncertainty that is being performed before them. Though they do not actively participate in the performance, yet the inconclusiveness and fragmented nature of Müller's dramatic narrative requires them to become what Jürs Munby calls "active co-writers of the (performance) text [because they] are no longer just filling in the predictable gaps in a dramatic narrative but are asked to become active witnesses who reflect on their own meaning-making and who are also willing to tolerate gaps and suspend the assignment of meaning" (Lehmann, 2006, p.6). Sakalidis opens the interpretative doors of this performance by having three Medeas, two Nurses and two Jasons present on stage

alternating their speeches randomly. By blurring the distinction among the performers he urges the spectators to look more closely at the mechanism of acting and demands their attentiveness and awareness of the non-representational nature of the spectacle they are witnessing.

The performance opens with a choral extract from Euripides' text in ancient Greek which, together with three more such extracts interspersed within the performance, serves according to the director, to elucidate the play's narrative structures and obscure density, and to determine its relation to its most obvious source text. (Sakalidis, 2009) However, it simultaneously dismantles the authority of the classic since it is delivered in a language which is incomprehensible to a Modern Greek audience. The first extract is followed by the appearance on stage of a male actor, who will later be one of the two Jasons, speaking as Müller about this theatre text and some of his reasoning behind the writing of it. Later in the performance, the persona of the playwright will appear again, to speak a short text which is included as a preface to the published version of the play. Müller's presence on stage is an interesting directorial choice since it suggests that the performance is not only a dramatisation of Müller's text, but also of its hermeneutic frame, in other words the theory behind it as suggested both by the playwright, and those who study and stage his work. Furthermore, and more importantly it dismantles the authority of a single voice as well as the authority of the playwright as originator of the text, and the director as 'interpreter'.

After the Jason/Müller speech, the audience view a silent staging of *Medeaplay* which begins with an intensely physical, long-drawn bodily combat between the two Jasons whose doubling reinforces the agonising struggle of one person to gain a coherent identity. This visualisation of one person's struggle with himself embodies a desperate attempt at self-definition as well as an effort to position himself within the centre of his world as a sole victor

and survivor. The scene is strewn with debris of any modern city. One of the Medeas is led onto the stage by the other two, tied to a red table which serves as a bed, and is raped by both Jasons in turn. She produces a baby which she dismembers and hurls at them, after the other Medeas untie her from the bed.



Fig. 3.7 *Medeaplay*: Medea rises from the bed on which she was tied

At the beginning of *Despoiled Shore*, which follows *Medeaplay*, there is one female figure on stage in the attire of a prostitute, and the two Jasons who speak of the polluted landscape of contemporary civilisation. The lighting and colours change from red and warm to black, gray and cold. Humanity is shown at its worse. The end of the scene finds all the actors on stage: the prostitute, the Nurse, the three Medeas and the two Jasons. One Medea holds up a mirror to the two Jasons. They do not appear to see themselves. One of them is dressed in a suit with a blood-stained bandage around his forehead, suggesting the bloody mission of the coloniser. The other Jason sits in a wheelchair, evoking the disabling effect contemporary industrialised, over-consuming society has on an individual's existence. However, the most obvious comment is gender-related since this disabled Jason is wearing a long purple velvet dress. On the one hand this symbolises his lack of contact with a more feminine side of himself, since

he is the typical male, patriarchal figure; on the other it also resonates Medea's words when she says:

I want to break mankind apart in two
And live between the empty middle I
No woman and no man (p.132)



Fig. 3.8 *multiple characters, multiple identities*

Müller's Medea is a woman who re-defines herself as negation. She wants to tear apart the foundation of our civilisation and the structures which have informed it, in an attempt to rediscover her self in the empty space between genders and cultures. She is neither a woman nor a man, she is neither a "barbarian" nor a member of "civilised" society; she seeks to define herself within this void and manages to regain her female identity through her radical act of infanticide. The disabled Jason in his purple dress however, does not manage to assert a meaningful identity. Medea's radical act of infanticide traps him in a genderless, incapacitated existence out of which there is no way and so she, the subaltern Other triumphs over him, the imperial coloniser.

In *Medeamaterial* the three Medeas dominate the scene and mirrors are used extensively to play with the idea of multiple identity. Sakalidis' use of mirrors echoes with Lacan's theory of "the mirror stage" (1977) which casts doubt on any attempt to establish one single, meaningful, authentic identity. Identity, for Lacan, is always an alienating Other and the process of identifying even with the image of our own body in the mirror establishes an alienated, divided subjective life. Thus when all of the three Medeas, at some point in the performance hold up a mirror in front of Jason they are inviting him and also challenging him to establish a meaningful identity. His apparent inability to see himself or to identify with what he does see proves all identifications, including those of gender and race, to be false and meaningless. Medea on the other hand, does establish her identity but not by looking at her reflection in the mirror. She becomes Medea again by uprooting, like a true revolutionary, any traces of the coloniser from within her, and through the harmonious union with the other Medeas on stage which are all different expressions of the same person.

In this piece there is only one silent Jason, leaning on the wall at the far side of the stage, smoking a cigarette throughout Medea's monologue. The three actresses take turns in speaking parts of the monologue, in what seems like a random manner but some of the most powerful lines of the text are spoken by all three Medeas in chorus. One such speech is at the end of *Medeamaterial* when Medea asserts her identity and, while two of the women hold the docile Jason down on the same table where Medea had previously been raped in *Medeaplay*, she places her foot on his head assuming the typical position of a conquering soldier. All three together say "O I am wise I am Medea I"(p.133). The roles are reversed and the conquered becomes the conqueror, the silenced becomes the speaker, the victim becomes the aggressor.



Fig. 3.9 *Medeamaterial: three Medeas, one Jason*

In *Landscapes with Argonauts* the voice is given to the two Jasons who manage to convey a visual image of the despairing cry of a man in search of himself in a physically and morally desolate world, bereft of human values. This is a world where “The youth of today [are] ghosts of / The dead of the war that is to happen tomorrow”(p.134). It is a world in which our everyday life is polluted by filth that the media bombard us with and which Müller describes in a dense metaphor as the “tube vomit[ing] world into the livingroom”(p.134). In a final “tableau”, after the two Jasons have spoken their part, they become their own destructive force: using a replica of a gun, made of a few pieces of scrap wood, one of them points it to the other’s face and the latter holds his arms back in a gesture of surrender. The feeling that is evoked in the audience is one of unresolved helplessness in the face of the self-destructive nature of mankind as Müller wishes to represent it.

In this production, Müller’s use of ellipsis, textual deconstruction and simultaneous density are interpreted in a way which addresses the question “What is civilisation?” and the binary opposition between the personal and the collective. Just like the text itself, this

performance does not offer any ready answers; but it does clearly suggest that what is personal lies within what is political and that in turn lies in what is historical.



Fig. 3.10 *The self-destructive nature of mankind*

Müller adapts the myth of Medea and Sakalidis stages his adaptation, not to show a woman who commits murder blinded with “lust and jealousy”(Euripides, 1988, l.1336), but a “no woman and no man” who seeks his or her identity within what is history, within what is political, within what is now. Medea’s act of infanticide is transformed from a personal act of revenge into a political act of self assertion and defiance against the system.

Hotel Medea: Medea and the audience defy the night

Hotel Medea (2012)¹¹ is a joint project, developed through the collaboration of Brazilian Zecora Ura Theatre Network, and the London-based Para Active / Urban Dolls Project. It is devised by the company and directed by Jorge Lopes Ramos and Persis Jade Maravala, both of whom also participate in the event as performers. Ramos and Maravala approach the myth of Medea and Euripides’ writing of it in a groundbreaking way which aims to create a connection between the audiences who experience it and the performers who participate in it.

When the performance ends, as dawn is breaking, the audiences emerge into the day having defied the night, together with Medea who has defied the establishment.

Hotel Medea was first performed in the UK in February 2009, at the Arcola Theatre in London as an all night event, in which Medea is shown to hang in limbo between her homeland and exile and – like the performance itself – to be “suspended in time, between the cruelty of the night and the sobriety of the day”.¹² The play returned a year later, in July 2010 and was performed once again as an all night event, but this time it materialised as a site-specific project at Trinity Buoy Wharf, a complex of empty dock buildings opposite the imposing O2 Arena, on the north banks of the river Thames.

Ramos has said that the decision to stage the event through the night aimed at establishing some kind of contract with their audience, in an attempt to involve them in the performance as it unfolded and to embark on a shared journey through the night which would liberate the audience and the actors as performers from the stifling restrictions imposed by the proscenium stage and the clear cut division between the auditorium and the stage, between the actor and the spectator, between the character and the actor.¹³ I will argue here that this involvement extends beyond a simple “contract”, an agreement to stay up through the darkest and hardest hours of a twenty-four hour day in order to “watch” a performance. It is directly related to the hypoplay which *Hotel Medea* uses in order to re-invent the myth and re-interpret it to make it relevant as a twenty first century experience which will give Medea, the silenced woman, a voice to speak against the establishment.

Hotel Medea functions as an autonomous work which is also in a hypertheatrical relationship with Euripides’ *Medea* even though it does not depend on the hypoplay as a text. It follows what Hans-Thies Lehmann has described as a “visual dramaturgy” which “is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic” (2006, p.93) but

simultaneously uses the myth of *Medea* as a clear referent. It can be experienced equally by a spectator who is not aware of Euripides' hypoplay, as a shared experience of the theatrical event and a challenging immersion in the dramaturgical act as it unfolds, and by someone who also sees it as a re-making of *Medea* that radicalises her infanticide and makes her a survivor in a culturally hostile world. So while the spectators are freed from the stronghold of a text, they are also empowered by being given the freedom to bring their own experience into what they are watching, hearing, and participating in. The audience of *Hotel Medea* become the "emancipated spectators" that Jacques Rancière (2009) theorises about in his seminal essay, whose involvement does not come from their participation in a collective body but from "the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other" (pp.16-17).

The performance merges tribal ritual practices from Brazil and twenty-first century visual communication technology to produce a melange of cultures and realities. The stark contrast of the two worlds in which the performance oscillates, serves on the one hand to underscore their differences and on the other to highlight an obvious misconception, namely that contemporary technology enhances communication. The directors' decision to place the second part of the performance, which traces Medea's life in the civilised, western, modern technological world of Jason, foregrounds the fact that the technologically advanced world we live in enhances the illusion of intimacy and communication whilst defining absence and lack of communication. Any real communication between Medea and Jason is achieved only in the first part of the performance in which the focus is towards ritual and bodily presence and away from the virtual presence aimed at by contemporary technology.

It is also more through ritual and less through technology that any connection is achieved amongst members of the audience, and between them and the performers. In multiple ways the audience members are lured into an all night adventure which urges them to challenge their physical limits and to question theatrical boundaries. Ultimately they are hurled into a parallel journey with Medea herself and become involved in her trek of self exploration, her agonising struggle to come to terms with what is acceptable for and expected of a woman in the society we live in, and the painful acceptance of what it means to be a mother and a woman at the same time. Together with Medea and all the other performers they defy her symbolic night as well as the night around them, and ask what being a woman entails, and what the consequences of being a woman and an outsider are.

However, the exploration is not linear or exclusively related to Medea as a character and her role as a woman and an outsider. The performance is also, and perhaps equally, an exploration into the nature of the theatrical encounter between those who perform and those who experience the performance – in fact it asks the very basic question, “What does it mean to be an audience?” Tracing the word ‘audience’ to its Latin roots makes clear the implication that being an audience involves listening, while looking at the roots of the Greek word, ‘theatis’ we are guided towards the visual aspect of attending a theatrical event. However, neither of the words implies any form of participation. *Hotel Medea* challenges this concept of the audience’s audio-visual experience of the theatrical event by implicating them in the performance and asking them to listen, watch, and also take part with the performers in the actions as they unfold. Throughout the evening the boundaries between those who act and those who experience are continuously crossed, transforming the audience from a collective ‘it’ to a participatory ‘they’, therefore making them active ‘participators’ or participatory facilitators of the event rather than a collective body of silent viewers and listeners.

The choice of venue, as well as the involvement that the would-be-participants agree to, once they buy tickets for the event, are both fundamental to achieving the above and to making the experience one which evolves not from digesting a finished, polished product, but from participating in an ongoing, creative, combinatory process. The location at which the directors have chosen to make the performance happen does not hold any historical or cultural significance per se. However when combined with a series of stages through which the participants go to reach the actual venue, it becomes evocative of the issues explored in Euripides' tragedy. Their 'journey' from a vaguely specified meeting point on the banks of the river Thames to the seemingly deserted Trinity Buoy Wharf in the middle of the night invokes parallels between Medea's voyage and the audience's voyage, their transition from would-be-members of an audience to participants in an event which takes them through the night and into a new day in the same way that Medea's radical act of infanticide takes her through the rites of her life and experience into a new day where she reclaims her voice and her cultural identity.

The company's innovative interaction with their audience begins days before the performance, when they e-mail ticket-holders asking them for their mobile telephone number and permission to contact them via text for reasons related to the performance. On the evening of the event, several hours before it is scheduled to begin, members-to-be of the audience receive a text which reads: "We look forward to receiving you at hotel medea come prepared to defy the night".¹⁴ This communication immediately signals the singularity of the forthcoming experience and is the first of a series of signs which relate this experience to Medea's journey from Colchis to Greece, from the security of her own home to the insecurity and hostility of the unknown. As a female member of an audience of a performance that I had yet to see, I already felt connections with this journey because I, like Medea, was embarking

on an unknown venture which seemed alluring yet also daunting in its difference. The very title of the performance offers a challenge, because it provides fewer clues as to the nature of the performance than it asks questions about it. It simultaneously includes the ideas of hospitality and refuge invoked by the use of the word 'hotel', yet also suggests a defiance, an Otherness and a violent passion, all of which are traditionally associated with Medea.

The event was advertised as starting at 11pm on a pier of the Thames where those holding tickets were asked to meet without having been given details of what would follow arrival at the meeting point. Everything that followed arrival at the dock, evolved as part of the performance experience yet was not part of the spectacle. The evening's journey began on one of the river boats that ferried the participants to an unknown location which was really just on the opposite bank of the river.



Fig. 3.11 *Midnight; arriving at the dock*

Despite its brevity, the trip across a body of water conjured images of Medea's long sea voyage to the unknown and as such evoked feelings of insecurity, exposure and vulnerability. It was also a signification of a liminal space, a transition from one world to another, from the

world of reality to the world of make believe, from the world of the brightly lit 21st century city to a world where there were no lights – just empty, dark ghost-like buildings, from the world of conventional theatre attendance, where the would-be-audience had arrived with their tickets in hand, to the world of the phenomenological experience of the participator.

The unique situation on the boat, whose destination and function the audience were uncertain of, generated a collective uncertainty and some apprehension for what was to follow. It also encouraged an aura of openness and togetherness which was the complete reverse of the atmosphere that usually prevails in a theatre foyer, while the audience are waiting for a performance to begin. In the latter case there are clear signifiers which we all know and follow, while the absence of any such signs on the boat encouraged people to break out of ‘audience mode’ and into conversation with strangers and served the dual purpose of separating them from the ‘outside’ world and bringing them together towards what would become a shared experience. Communication amongst the members of the audience is enhanced not only during the boat trip but also during the intervals between each of the sections as well as the breakfast at dawn, all of which are landmarks signalling a bonding that would have been impossible in a conventional performance setting.¹⁵

By immersing the members of the audience into unique and irreversible situations such as the ones described above, the directors challenge and question theatrical boundaries and preconceived notions of theatre. They remove their audiences from the spatial and temporal limits of the auditorium and turn a usual audio-visual encounter into a sensory adventure which defies time-related restrictions. By insisting that their audiences can only defy the night by participating in a performance all night they subscribe to the “postdramatic aesthetic of real time ... [and] turn *time as such* into an object of the aesthetic experience” (Lehmann, 2006, p.156).

For the actual spectacle, the directors use the vast empty halls at Trinity Buoy Wharf but also the outside areas of the dockland where the audience run away to hide from Medea's wrath in the early hours of the morning. Since the performance does not occur in the auditorium it can be classified as "site-specific" but it is definitely not "site-exclusive", (Wilkie, 2002, p.149) since it has toured extensively and therefore needs to be re-contextualised for each new site.¹⁶ The site does not "operate simply as a space or place" for the directors, but "it incorporates a set of productive special metaphors [which] allow for ambiguity and multiplicity" (Wilkie, 2008, p.100). The emphasis is placed onto the phenomenological experience of the participators and their interactive relationship with the performers as well as onto the challenges that they are faced with away from a conventional evening at the theatre with its restraints of time and space.¹⁷ The nightly participation of the audience members accentuates the non-repetitive nature of the performance which according to Mike Pearson (2010, p.17) is one of the defining characteristics of site-specific theatre and underscores its aim to make this a non-reproducible, shared experience between performers and participators.

This primacy of the phenomenological and sensory aspect of the performance and the predominance of the visual dramaturgy rather than any textual privileging is underscored by the fact that six months after the performance the company decided to make available a recording of the event on *vimeo* where it can be freely accessed and viewed almost in its entirety.¹⁸ This decision carries a host of significances and implications. First of all, similarly to Charles Mee's practice of making his texts available on the internet, it challenges any sense of ownership, exclusivity and originality. Furthermore, it takes Mee's groundbreaking practice a step further, by challenging the performance's subordination to the dramatic text as well as the adaptation's subordination to an 'original'. So while it *is* an adaptation and it *does*

refer to a classical text as a hypoplay, it breaks the bonds with the dramatic tradition completely and proves that it is not strictly necessary for a theatrical event to “create the theatrical equivalent of the text” (Puchner, 2011, p.305) in order to be an effective adaptation, but it can focus mainly on the visual dramaturgy. Furthermore by making the event accessible to the public, even while performances are still going on the directors and the company imply that theatre is physical presence and not the virtual replication of one of the performance events; they privilege the participators’ experience over a spectator’s audio-visual perception through the visual media. In fact they may even be implying that watching the event on *vimeo* might urge people to want to experience the event in person.

The main body of the play, which relates more overtly to Euripides’ *Medea* as a hypoplay, is divided into three parts, or chapters. Chapter I, *The Zero-Hour Market*, begins when the audience are shown into one of the large empty halls of the deserted docks. This part of the event presents what Lehmann (2006) calls an “auto-sufficient physicality” which completely replaces the need for linguistic signs and contains all the “intensity, gestic potential, auratic ‘presence’ and internally, as well as externally, transmitted tensions” which make up the event (p. 95). With loud, live Brazilian music, lights and colourful fabrics hanging off tent-like contraptions which the performers carry on their backs, the space turns into an oriental market. The space becomes dark, hot, and filled with intensity. Through a dramaturgy which is not only visual but also sensory the participators are transported somewhere foreign, magical, mythical, surreptitious and suspicious. There is very little language, but there is very little need for it. Language as a flowing, comprehensible form of communication, as a symbol of cohesion and coherence, and as a conveyor of meaning, is displaced and “the dominant role [is assigned] to elements other than dramatic logos and language” (Lehmann, 2006, p.93). Most of what unfolds happens with the movement of the

performers' bodies, with their presence in the space and their interaction with the participators: there is a lot of ritualistic dancing, sweating bodies, fumbling and feeling one's way in and out of the moving tent-like contraptions, bargaining for unknown commodities in unknown languages and chanting incomprehensible chants. When language is used by the performers it is either Portuguese, or heavily accented English which is barely intelligible, thereby stressing the foreignness of the culture and the ritual customs which we witness and take part in.

There is an orchestrator to whatever action takes place in this first part, who acts as narrator-manipulator-controller-referee of the whole event. While he interacts with the performers as characters, he also encourages the audience to amble, urges them to explore and experience the atmosphere of the busy market or later take part in ritual preparations and subsequent celebrations for Medea's wedding to Jason. It is the same man, with a barely intelligible, heavy Brazilian accent who also meets the audience on the bank of the Thames earlier on in the evening, and brings them across the waters to the mythical land of the Golden Fleece. It is the same man who a little later will turn into Cupid, strike a deal with Jason and shoot an arrow into Medea's heart, to secure the princess for the invader and make her forsake all the splendour and glory which she clearly holds in The Zero Hour Market. His multiple roles and multi-faceted function acquires even more significance when we discover over breakfast at the break of dawn that he is also the director of the performance, therefore an orchestrator of what unfolds around us in even more, yet very different ways. With his loudspeaker in hand he announces the entrance of Jason, who invades the space with his army of Amazonian bodyguards, in search of the Golden Fleece, demanding to know "Who's in charge of this fucking shit hole?" In answer to his question the entrance of Medea is announced.



Fig. 3.12 *Medea in her tribal glory*

In this first part Medea appears in all her glory and strength. She is powerful and independent, calm, collected, confident and fearless. Her slightest gesture is acknowledged and she is instantly obeyed. She is dressed in ceremonial robes, all golds and oranges, and exhibits Amazon-like posture and strength invoking her regal and divine ancestry.

The two worlds of Jason and Medea are in clear juxtaposition and in contest. Jason's is a dark, male dominated, war-thirsty, violent and aggression-driven world where rifles have the first word. Medea's is a passionate and fierce world where female power is paramount and Medea's femininity is revered; ritual and ceremony are at its core yet there is no evident aggression or tendency for destruction. Any exhibition of power is self-contained and any aggression is defensive. It is clearly superior in strength and therefore has no need to flaunt its power pretentiously.

Jason only manages to win the princess over because he strikes a deal with the performance's orchestrator who turns into Cupid and shoots his arrow straight at Medea's heart. After a long ceremonial wedding and a subsequent celebration Jason announces: "My

wife and I, and the golden fleece are leaving for another destination”. Medea kills all her men and her brother, defender of the Golden Fleece by giving them each a poisoned, bloody kiss, amid a frenzy of music and dancing which turns into the final battle at Colchis. The body of the brother is stuffed into a chest and Medea leaves with Jason and the fleece for her long journey westwards, to civilisation and isolation.

Part Two of the *Hotel Medea* trilogy is called *Drylands: A Postmodern Wasteland*. When we meet Medea again in this ‘civilised’, contemporary, western world, she is a different person. She is subdued, she has lost her powerful, commanding voice, she has lost her accent, she has lost her identity. Gone are the colours, the ritual, the loud voices, the loud music, the public presence, the confidence. The participators move from an open, public, shared world to a world where everything seems public but emotions are essentially bottled up and appearances are deceitful. There is a stark contrast between these two worlds – the east, the Other, ritual, passion, warm colours, loud music and voices, inarticulate sounds, strength of feeling, foreign accents, foreign tongues, bare bodies juxtaposed against the west, civilisation, grey colours, soft voices, standard English accents, bodies covered from head to toe, subdued sounds. In *Zero-Hour Market* Medea speaks very few words – none of them in English – yet she has a voice which is heard and acknowledged by all. It is the voice of a woman in power who does not need to speak to be heard, her presence is commanding enough to make speech unnecessary. In *Drylands* she speaks eloquently, but she has lost her voice. She speaks quietly, in hushed tones and in a perfect English accent. Only once, when Jason’s name slips out in a Portuguese accent, he corrects her immediately. She is alone, in her bedroom, yet all around her there are reporters, TV cameras, microphones, laptop computers and mobile phones. Amid this haven of assisted communication, she stands alone and isolated. She is neither seen nor heard by Jason or anyone else.



Fig. 3.12 *Medea acknowledges the painful passing of time in her sterile bedroom*

The only person who hears her, and acknowledges her is the Nurse. Nurse acquires an increasingly significant role as the night wears on, turning from servant, to Medea's inner self. She becomes her mirror image which always reflects the harsh reality that Medea may choose to ignore, or asks the questions which Medea would wish not to answer. She remains the same in appearance throughout the changes that occur within, around and on Medea's person. She is an older woman, who looks experienced and wise. She wears nineteenth century maid's clothes and always holds her shawl tightly wrapped around her. She first appears in Zero-Hour Market at the wedding celebrations and like the blind prophet who appears in numerous Greek tragedies, foresees the doom that will come of Jason and Medea's union. Back then, amid the celebrations and the feelings of passion that were running high, she was ignored. In part two Medea has to face her because she is the only person who is effectively present and with whom she has any meaningful exchange – not through any technological means, but in person. When the Nurse urges Medea to face the reality of Jason's betrayal, Medea asks her, "How can you endure a life inside the ruins that are your body with

the ghosts of your youth?” To which Nurse replies “How can *you* endure a life inside the ruins that are *your* body with the ghosts of *your* youth?” essentially shocking Medea into acknowledging what is happening around her as well as what has happened inside her.

Though part two of the *Hotel Medea* trilogy is infused with all the technological paraphernalia which parade in our digitised world, its core concern is not communication, but the absence of it. Digital technology is used to create an intermedial performance which underscores the multiple layers of the perception of reality and the effective absence of communication in this ‘postmodern wasteland’ where everyone seems intent on communicating more effectively, but fails miserably to communicate at all. This inherent contradiction exposes the illusion of communication which is allegedly enhanced by digital technology and exposes the essential silence and isolation of the contemporary technological world which is embodied by Jason.

In Drylands, the different levels of the perception of reality materialise through the layered participation of the audience in the core events which unfold during the performance. The directors suspend the linear flow of time in the event and adopt Lehmann’s procedures of “parataxis” and “simultaneity of signs”, in which the events in a postdramatic performance are presented simultaneously and in non-hierarchical order (2006, pp. 86-88). In order to explain the effect that this has on the spectator, Lehmann uses a term which he borrows from Freud’s psychoanalytical theory, *gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit*, which is translated as ‘evenly hovering attention’. In the same way that Freud’s analyst listens to his/her patient without forming instant judgment, but by listening on in order to continuously make connections and unceasingly reach conclusions, thus essentially infinitely suspending meaning, “the spectator of postmodern theatre is not prompted to process the perceived

instantaneously but to postpone the production of meaning (semiosis) and to store the sensory impressions with ‘evenly hovering attention’” (p. 87).

The participators in *Hotel Medea* are divided into three groups which rotate through the same scene but each time adopting a different perspective, thereby achieving a cumulative and intensified perception of the events as they occur in a non-linear and repetitive way. One group is led into Medea’s bedroom where they become her guests and friends who listen to her agonising battle with her inner voices and witness her ultimate betrayal by Jason, a callous, unemotional, deceitful politician whose only genuine concern is his public persona. He and Medea do not achieve any form of communication since Jason violates every sense of privacy which would be expected between man and woman. He answers his phone while he is making love to her, he brings the camera crews into their bedroom, he exploits his own children to enhance his image, and uses his wife’s foreign origins to promote his political views on immigration.

While one group watch Medea’s agonising struggle to breathe in a world which is suffocating her and a relationship which has effectively annihilated her, another group of participators get to know Jason the politician, and become engulfed in his struggle to impress the world. They are propelled into political media frenzy; they take part in his campaign and watch live feeds and false propaganda play on the screens in a CCTV control booth with Jason and his entourage. The third group become Medea’s powerless, innocent children who are taken to bed, are given pyjamas, a soft toy and hot chocolate and are read a story.¹⁹ That part of the performance which happens between two and three o’clock in the morning is literally suspended between wakefulness and sleep. In a slumber, those who are curled up in a bunk bed, experience the fearfulness of a young child who is eavesdropping on his parents’ loud and painful arguments. They are compelled to close their eyes and hear some – though

not all – of what is going on, which either they had already taken part in earlier or would take part in later.



Fig. 3.14 03:00 am, safely snuggled up in bed

This unique experience of encountering three different facets of the same events intensifies each individual's involvement in the performance as a participator and not as a passive audience member, and leaves no doubt as to the state of the postmodern wasteland which is our contemporary technologically advanced world. We might have superior communication technology, but interpersonal communication and emotions are absent. This message is reflected in Medea's final words to Jason, written on his laptop, and projected on a large, white wall, "Sorry Jason, how stupid of me. I forgot love comes and goes. Where do I go now? Disappear into my own wasteland?" Medea fills the screen with question marks and signals her failed attempts at understanding, being understood, speaking and being heard in the postmodern wasteland which is Jason's world.

Part Three of the *Hotel Medea* trilogy, *The Feast of Dawn*, follows the trajectory of Medea's triumphant reclaiming of her lost identity and her suppressed voice. The first part of

this chapter is set in Club Exile, a club exclusively for women, where the women enjoy a shot of vodka while they watch Medea perform her first act, “Sounds of the Body”.²⁰



Fig. 3.15 Medea, landscaping the sounds of her body

As she trails a sensitive microphone over her whole body, from toe to crown, she picks up telling sounds. Over her abdomen the microphone picks up the sound of howling storm winds, over her heart it picks up an Elvis Presley love song, over her temple the sound of a firing machinegun and when the microphone reaches her mouth we hear the sound of shattering glass. It is these millions of broken pieces which she seeks to put back together in *The Feast of Dawn* and to undergo a transformation in reverse which will give her a voice to stand up to her oppressors. Medea re-writes her own story by revisiting her ancestral past and returning to her roots. In her second act, “*The Resurrection*”, she summons her brother back from the dead and he returns, naked and innocent, to take revenge for Medea and the world she betrayed and left behind.



Fig. 3.16 *Club Exile: A club for women with a broken heart*

It is her resurrected brother and not the children who carry death in the form of the poisoned robe to Jason's new wife, while the spectators watch "The Bride Burning" from CCTV cameras in the press room. Following the harrowing events Medea is sent into exile. The club goes dark and a deep, solemn voice announces over the loudspeakers: "Go back to your land. Find a man of your race, a barbarian like yourself. And leave us in this rational land on the shore of this even sea which has no need of your frenzied passion and your screaming. By order of the king, this club where evil has taken place is now closed. Everybody must leave now. Out, out, out." Together with the participators who by now follow her with encroaching tiredness but with increased fascination and intensity, Medea leaves. However, she has gained the strength to fight back. She will not passively endure the aggression and the insults which Jason and the forces that he represents have enforced. She defies the forces of the establishment and becomes the Amazonian woman who was the dominant force in Zero Hour Market. The killing of her children is not privileged as a violent event but it functions as a liberation from the forces that kept Medea silent, and is explored as an occasion to mourn

what she had lost. In the final moments of the performance she finds her voice again through the ritual of burial and reads out the events as they happened speaking of herself in the third person. She then leaves the space.

For Medea as a woman, *Hotel Medea* functions as a vehicle through which she, the barbarian outsider from the East, triumphs against the dark forces of the establishment and of male dominated society which demand that she be silent and obedient, supportive and submissive. She survives through the night which was her life, to the break of dawn where she reclaims her voice and her identity as a woman but also as a performer who breaks free from her character by sitting down to breakfast with all the other actors and participators in the event and discusses the performance which has just finished.

Having participated in the mourning for the children, and having heard Medea's story, the tired participators stumble out of the warehouse at six o'clock in the morning into the breaking dawn of a London summer morning. The river breeze clears away the drowsiness and enhances a feeling of true achievement for each and every one of those who participated in the all-night event and managed to make it through the night and into the day. The directors of *Hotel Medea* call this a triumph against the night. "By choosing to stay awake," they tell us, "we insist on life and resist death",²¹ an insistence which is parallel to Medea's insistence on life through the death of her offspring. Together with her, the people who take on the challenge of participating in this performance equally triumph over the personal struggle against the night and emerge into the London morning as the barriers of illusion are completely broken and the performance morphs into reality over a banquet table laid for breakfast.



Figs. 3.16 & 3.17 *coming out into the breaking morning after an all night experience*

Ben Brantley, chief theatre critic of the New York Times wrote that “it used to be easy being an audience member, when all that was demanded of you was to sit quietly and (if possible) pay attention” (2010). It is this complacent and smug easiness that the participators in *Hotel Medea* have triumphed against. They have agreed to accept the challenge of staying up all night, and with the support and guidance of the performers, have united against the rest of the sleeping world to break the barrier imposed by the edge of the stage between audience and

actors. They participate in creating a unique *Hotel Medea* out of each performance and in confirming the validity of Derrida's assertion that *hauntology* occurs when "what seems to be out front, the future, comes back in advance: from the past, from the back ... Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time since the singularity of any *first time* makes it also a *last time*." (2006, p.10)

NOTES

1. In his Poetics (Ch.15 bk.8.1 54b) Aristotle criticises *Medea's* resolution not only because he believes that resolution which is achieved through the interference of a *deus ex machina* is evidence of a badly conceived plot, but also because Medea's escape "by means of a theatrical device" makes her character "inconsistent" and an "example of unnecessary badness of character" (Aristotle, 1996, p.24-5)
2. For an overview of the performance history of *Medea* since 1500 see *Medea in Performance* (2000) edited by Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh and Oliver Taplin, especially chapters 1 to 5.
3. See Chapter 5 of this thesis.
4. Taxidou, O. (2005). *Medea: A World Apart in Theatron* 3 (Spring 2005): 125-177. All subsequent references to the play will appear in brackets after the citation.
5. Being a Greek of Pontic descent herself, Taxidou was interested in the history of the Greeks of the Black Sea, (also known as Pontic Greeks from the term Pontos derived from the Greek name of the Black Sea: *Pontos Euxeinus* "Hospitable Sea"). These people had arrived in the area as colonisers in the Archaic Period and remained there throughout Classical Antiquity, and the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. The beginning of the end for these "colonies" of two and a half thousand years, which had retained their Hellenic identity to a significant degree, came in the late nineteenth century which brought a series of calamitous – for Greek history – historical events, most significant of which is what in Greek common parlance is known as "the Catastrophe" of 1922. In that year the Greeks, in an imperial venture supported by Britain and driven by a "great idea" to reconstruct a "greater Greece" out of the ruins of the Ottoman empire, invaded Asia Minor only to have their imperial dream smashed by Kemal Ataturk. The following year brought the Treaty of Lausanne and an exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey which saw almost a million Pontic Greeks deported to mainland Greece. That was the start of a series of prosecutions followed by deportations and transportations of these people from the land of ancient Colchis which they had inhabited for almost three millennia, to a "motherland" which was not a homeland at all. They moved to Greece as immigrants in waves and ever increasing numbers throughout the 1980s, when Mikhail Gorbachev began to lift the ban on mass emigration. Their numbers rose by the thousands in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some who remained in Georgia were finally evacuated by the Greek government in an operation appropriately called "Operation Golden Fleece" when a ship brought them off from Sukhum harbour in the middle of the war with Abkhazia in 1992. For study and a history of Pontic Greeks see Ascherson, N. (1996) *Black Sea*. London: Vintage, esp. pp. 244-56.
6. I use the term "pastiche" to mean an open imitation of older styles, texts and techniques, an incongruous combination of forms, motifs and language. Through such an inharmonious mixture Taxidou reproduces the past parodically, but does not revisit it nostalgically.
7. In her script Taxidou uses the Greek form of the name, *Hecabe*, rather than the Latinised version, *Hecuba*.
8. The play premiered at the Georgian International Festival of Theatre (GIFT) in Tbilisi, Georgia in October 1997. This was a symbolically significant time and location for its performance both in mythological and in socio-political terms. On a symbolic level Medea returns to Colchis triumphant in performance and that in itself is an act of assertion. Georgia is the ancient site of Colchis, Medea's homeland of the mythical Golden Fleece which Jason and his Argonauts were the first to colonise. On a socio-political level the performance was significant since it was performed at the first GIFT festival to be held after the end of the civil war between Georgia and Abkhazia, one of the bloodiest conflicts in the post-Soviet era. The festival itself, as Taxidou explains and the indicative acronym suggests, was a series of multi-cultural theatrical events, meant as "peace offerings" in an attempt to heal the rupture created by the war. In an account which the playwright gives of the performance, entitled "Medea comes Home"(2000), she presents the event as Medea's symbolic homecoming to the Black Sea area and reflects on how it was not only one of political significance, but also a renegotiation of the relationship between historical and mythological space. The same company performed the play again the following year at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.
9. Müller, H. (1984) *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscapes with Argonauts*. trans. Carl Weber, in Weber, C. (ed.) *Hamletmachine and other texts for the stage*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications. All subsequent references to the play will appear in brackets after the citation.
10. Among numerous articles, see two book length studies on Müller's theatre Kalb, J. (1998) *The Theatre of Heiner Müller*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press. (Kalb, 1998) and

- Barnett, D. (1998) *Literature Versus Theatre : Textual Problems and Theatrical Realization in the Later Plays of Heiner Müller*. Bern ; New York: P. Lang.
11. In this chapter I will be referring to the performance of *Hotel Medea* which took place on the night of July 16th – 17th 2010 at Trinity Buoy Wharf in London. I am not aware of the exact sequence of events that may have been different on any other night of the event being performed. Quotations from the performance are from mental recall and may not be precise.
 12. Accessed on 6 July 2011, through Arcola Theatre's archive on line at: <http://www.arcolatheatre.com/?action=showtemplate&sid=322>
 13. The ideas were presented during a presentation entitled *Hotel Medea: Hosting the Spectator*, given by Jorge Lopes Ramos at the IFTR Annual World Conference in Munich, 25-31 July 2010.
 14. The text I received contained no full stops, capitals or other punctuation marks.
 15. One critic writes that the intervals in between each section “feel like church hall tea parties and ruin any sense of cohesive tension during the performance” (Bayes, 2010). If they do feel like church hall parties, it is a positive attribute because they encourage an open communication among complete strangers and that is what empowers the audience as participators in the event rather than leaving them outside as observers. These conversations make the participation in the sections that follow each time, more intense and I would suggest that they contribute to the performance's cohesion rather than detract from it.
 16. Since I watched it, the performance has toured internationally from London to Rio and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and currently (August 2012) it is back in London at the Southbank Centre. It always takes place in spaces outside the theatre auditoria of wherever it is staged, challenging the notion that the theatre is an adequate place of representation and choosing instead to completely eradicate the distances between spectators and spectacle.
 17. For a comprehensive analysis of the term “site-specific” and all its variants see Fiona Wilkie (2002) “Mapping the Terrain: A survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain”, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18: (02): 140-160; Wilkie also maps out the possible reasons behind choosing to move out of the theatre auditorium, prominent among which is the desire to subvert the dominant ideology of large cities, theatres and cultural centres. See also Mike Pearson (2010) *Site-Specific Performance*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, esp. pp. 7-46.
 18. Available on <http://vimeo.com/18161739> <http://vimeo.com/18224931> and <http://vimeo.com/18360422>
 19. It is interesting to note once again the absence of linguistic communication. The stories that are read to the audience who are put to bed are not read in English and even if they were I don't think it would make much difference because they are whispered. However, it is the tone and intonation in which the reading is done which has the soothing effect which transports the participator to the world of children and dreams.
 20. Meanwhile the male members of the audience are led away, because access is strictly for women only. They return shortly after when they have assumed a female identity by wearing wigs and putting on lipstick, implying in that way that it is as a woman that Medea feels exiled, an outsider, and an Other in this male dominated world. As men they do not partake in this feeling of otherness which only women can experience. One male member of the audience that I subsequently discussed this with, told me that he experienced feelings of exclusion and discrimination as well as humiliation such as the ones that women have for centuries been traditionally put through.
 21. cited on <http://www.arcolacinema.com/?action=pasttemplate&pid=322>

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WOMEN OF TROY ADAPTED: VICTIMS OF WARS RECLAIM THEIR BROKEN BODIES

415 BCE *Women of Troy*: royalty and commoners interrogate Athenian imperialist ventures

Sixteen years after shocking his audiences with Medea's deified departure from Corinth, Euripides wrote *The Trojan Women*, thereby presenting an equal challenge to a hegemony which was essentially involved with the existing patriarchy. The play interrogates the idea that women were the inferior gender, while it also questions the barbaric treatment of conquered peoples. The play's inherent radicality is displayed in its very title which according to Clifford Leech "indicates a collective doom" (1969, p.45). By placing the women of Troy at the centre of this play Euripides invites an examination of a different gender perspective on the barbarity of war, subversively reassesses the role of women in the Trojan wars, and invites a postcolonial reading of the treatment of subjugation under the expansion of empire. His audience must have been deeply disturbed by the play, thereby not surprisingly once again, not awarding it first prize in the Great Dionysia of 415 BCE. The play contains little that can be called either plot or action in Aristotelian terminology. If we have to find a 'tragic hero' it would be the Greek army; their sin would be the desecration of the temples of the gods and the murder of innocent people; the catastrophe is the storm promised by Poseidon at the opening of the play, to shatter the returning fleet of the victors. But the main body of the play consists of the heartbreaking lament of Troy's Queen, her daughters and the other women of Troy as they wait by the ruins of their city to be taken into slavery by the victorious Greek conquerors.

Gilbert Murray, one of the earliest translators and admirers of Euripides' *Trojan Women* has called it "the most unspeakably tragic, [and] one of the most exquisitely written of Euripides' plays", though he also acknowledges that its exquisite quality lies in "the profoundly tragic conception which it embodies of life as a whole" and not in "any startling catastrophes in the story" (1946, p.127). Jean Paul Sartre who wrote a version of the play himself said that "it is not a tragedy in the sense that *Antigone* is: it is more of an oratorio" (1969, p. 288). Indeed if it were judged against Aristotle's ideal play which would contain a tightly knit plot, an exposition, great heroic acts, scenes of recognition, and catharsis at the end, then it would fail miserably.

However, its strength as a play does not lie in how it measures up to a "great tragedy" like *Antigone* or *Oedipus*, but in its inherent political radicality. Even though the play refers to a war that happened seven centuries before its first performance in Athens, Euripides must have re-awoken his audience's consciousness to the in-between victims of any devastating war, especially ones that were happening at the time. It is not difficult to view Euripides' play as politically relevant within its own historical moment since its performance was roughly contemporary with the Peloponnesian War, which began in 431 BCE, and has frequently been seen as a reflection on the capture of Melos, in 416 BCE by the Athenians. This is a justifiable connection since, like the defeated citizens of Troy, the people of Melos were cruelly and unjustifiably slaughtered and then Melos was colonised. It was also timely since not only did it coincide with the subjugation of Melos but also with an increasingly brutal generic stance towards war captives. (see Hall, 2008, p.ix-xlii; Wiles, 1997, ch.10) This is particularly important in the context of *The Trojan Women* because the women simultaneously mourn the loss of their husbands and their own subjugation, which reflects a contemporary aspect of the treatment of war captives. Therefore, Euripides is adopting, in *The Trojan Women*, a directly

radical posture with regard to the usual practice in the aftermath of war. In addition, in a gender-specific sense, he is depicting the agony of women in mourning, divided up amongst the victors as spoils of war, which had increasingly become the way in which the conquered peoples of the Athenians were being treated (Hall, 2008; Segal, 1993, pp.3-13). Within a postcolonial framework, the imperialist policy of the Athenians can be located both in this portrayal of the treatment of the conquered, and the disregard of the 'same' as essentially 'other' and thus inferior.

When speaking of the revival of Greek tragedy during the Renaissance, Edward Said (1994) has stated that the Europeans conveniently re-imagined the Greek texts as ideals of commonwealth, thus ignoring the acknowledged hybridity of the ancient civilisations. As a result, they became a deceptive argument for colonialism and an erroneous semiotic of the imperialist ethos. Plays such as *The Trojan Women*, however, present, even in their original form, a far from exemplary image of the effects of colonialism and the subjugation of indigenous peoples. Hence, when the women mourn the loss of their men and their own subjugation by the victors, they are also mourning the loss of their home and, in postcolonial terms, their culture. Indeed, in a cultural sense, the image of the murdered child, Astyanax, son of Hector and Andromache, who will not grow into adulthood can be taken as a postcolonial semiotic of a civilisation that is annihilated in the same manner. This is particularly challenging to the existing hegemony since according to the myth Hector himself had been murdered and refused appropriate burial rites while Priam, his father, had begged the Greeks to give him back his son's body. Therefore, the Greeks are portrayed as destroyers of a dynasty and a civilization, with a complete lack of appropriate regard for either. This was, indeed, a radical presentation of the Trojan War, which, especially in the light of the destruction of Melos, invited the Athenian audience to go into great depths of scrutiny and

self-questioning. It is hard not to conclude that Euripides was giving his fellow citizens a vivid picture of what they had done to Melos and possibly sounding out a warning, in the words of Cassandra, about the absurdity of unjustifiable aggression.

It would be justifiable to say that there is even a self-reflexive aspect to *The Trojan Women* since, as Pat Easterling has pointed out, it deals with the destruction of a city and creates the impression that the victors' brutal actions against the Trojan women will recoil onto them (1997, pp. 173-77). The possibility of a Greek city being annihilated at the time of the play's performance was not such a remote one for the audience. The narrative background to the play would have been extremely familiar to the contemporary audience and Euripides' treatment opens at a particularly poignant moment in the fall of Troy, when the men have been slaughtered and the women are waiting to be allotted to the victors. Thus, at the opening of the play the audience is compelled to confront the uncomfortable reality of the pain of war not only in terms of death but also in terms of enslavement and gender specific subjugation, both imperatives which connect with the postcolonial interpretation of the result of imperialist ambitions. The women of Troy, like Antigone and Medea, are faced with the spectre of social death, anonymity, and ethnic difference, and by engaging with their fears Euripides invites his audience to take a potentially subversive stance. In addition, because women are the central protagonists, gender issues are brought to the forefront.

The audience were part of a culture who assigned status to its women only in terms of what was 'gifted' to them either by birth or by marriage and the women which they saw on the stage of Euripides' play have just been stripped of both, bereft of any status they may have had. The "howl from female captives as they are allotted their masters" (Euripides, 2008, p. 39, l. 29) is therefore poignantly indicative of the situation in which these women find themselves now that they have been deprived of their husbands, their sons, and consequently

of their referents to any social status. The way in which Euripides likens their suffering to the cry of an animal in pain conveys the depth of emotion and its primal nature, suggesting chaos instead of civilisation. This is the antithesis of the imperialist belief that, in postcolonial terms, the conquering of a people brought with it an element of benefit to the indigenous population, since the imperialists believed that their way of life was inherently superior. Euripides' approach to the issue of defeating and conquering the 'barbarians' is that there was at best an equivocal nature to it, which was in itself a radical suggestion.

The erroneous nature of the established concept of beneficial conquest connects to the idea that is proposed by Poseidon in his opening speech where he describes the devastation of the city as an act of desecration which inverts the natural order and emphasises a hubristic aspect to the sacking of Troy which lies "stripped, sacked and smouldering" (Euripides, 2008, l. 8), "the sanctuaries of the gods ... awash with blood" (l. 14-15) It is interesting to note that Euripides departs from Homer's presentation of the relationship between Poseidon and the Trojans, by making him their friend rather than their enemy (Euripides, 2008, p. 130). Presentation of the gods as hostile to the Greeks and their imperialist ventures might also be regarded as an act of radicality since the eulogy for the city is delivered by a god, compelling the audience to believe that the destruction of Troy is impious. As a consequence, the women's lamentation which follows this 'divine' opening would also have had a sense of divine approbation.

This divine disapproval of the invaders is further emphasised by the fact that Athena, who had actually helped the Greeks win the war and conquer Troy is disgusted by their behaviour as conquerors and now wishes to "give the Achaean army a bitter journey home" (l. 66). The desecration of the city, its people and its altars has caused Athena to feel very differently about the initial attack on Troy since it appears that the Greeks have behaved badly

in their triumph and, as Poseidon says, “The mortal who sacks cities and temples and tombs, the holy places of the dead, is a fool” (ll. 96-7). Athena even asks for Poseidon’s help to punish them:

...Zeus will send rain and vast hailstones and dark gusting blasts of wind. He says that he will give me the fire of his thunderbolt to strike the Achaeans and burn their ships with its flames. And you for your part must make the Aegean sea roar with huge waves and whirlpools and fill the hollow bay of Euboea with corpses so that for the future the Achaeans may learn to revere my sanctuaries and respect the other gods. (ll.79-85)

This condemnation was particularly politically sensitive since Poseidon goes on to state that the same fate as has been meted out to the Trojans will be visited upon the Athenians possibly implying, as I mentioned earlier, a vengeance which the Greeks might suffer for their behaviour at Melos. Euripides cannot have been unaware that by using the myth in this way, he was making such a comment on the behaviour of the Athenians towards the devastation of Melos, or at least that his work could be interpreted in this radical and pejorative manner. This inferred imperative supports the idea that Euripides’ work might justifiably be said to have been perceived as radical in his own time and is thus amenable to adaptation as such by contemporary productions.

Euripides was criticised by many for his liberal attitude, which was far from typical in a citizen of fifth century Athens. He gave a voice to women and slaves as well as “endowing barbarian women and slave girls with philosophical opinions” (Foley, 2001a, p. 13). Hecuba’s opening speech, which follows the departure of the gods, where she voices her public and private agony, is a pertinent example of this attitude. Hecuba emphasises the debasement which she has suffered in her titular status but her inherent resilience and dignity are not compromised, since she urges herself though miserable to lift her head from the dust and “Endure it!” (l. 101). As the deposed Queen of Troy, Hecuba has to face a dual bereavement

and this involves striking a balance between her public and her private persona. In presenting this struggle, Euripides is engaging with a further socio-political dilemma in a gender specific sense which has the potential to be read as subversive. Hecuba is empowered as a woman on an equal basis with commoners and since her speech does not stint in the recounting of the agony she and her fellow Trojans have endured, the public and the personal unite in her lament:

What is there here that I do not mourn in my misery?
Country, children, husband – all are gone.
O the surpassing grandeur of my ancestors
now cast down – so you were nothing then!
Why should I be silent? Why should I not be silent?
Why should I lament? (l. 106-11)

Hecuba's paradoxical cry of the denial of silence and of speech is emblematic of the way in which freedom is either given to or withheld from women; it is equally abhorrent to be told to speak as to be told not to speak, just as it is equally appalling to mourn and not to do so. This identifies the dichotomy of the public and private persona, as well as the way in which by annihilating the Trojans, the Greeks have also destroyed the history of a people, who are now as nothing. In postcolonial terms, this connects directly with the way in which imperialist ambition wiped out civilisations, as though they had indeed, as Hecuba asks rhetorically, been "nothing". Therefore, by having Hecuba, once the proud Queen of Troy and now "a poor old slave-woman" (l. 140), speak at once of present and historic loss, of personal and public bereavement, Euripides is making the postcolonial and the proto-feminist imperative fully viable.

Indeed, one of the most subversive elements of *The Trojan Women* is the way in which Euripides challenges his society and gender stereotypes not, as would have been expected, through a more conventional plot development, but through the women's interaction. As Edith Hall (2010) has written of Helen's defence of her own behaviour, for

example, “Euripides makes Helen deliver her own Gorgianic defence through pre-emptive prosecution” (p.37). The fact that Helen is countered not by a man but by Hecuba, again gives the authority to the woman. Helen speaks in “opposing arguments” (l. 916) of the guilt of everyone but herself but she is soundly put down by Hecuba who says, “Don’t try to give respectability to your crime by making the goddesses out to be fools” (l. 980-81). There is, here as elsewhere, a “confrontation of words with the deeds” (Meagher, 2002, p.26) and it is certainly true that “the sufferings of the Trojan Women at Greek hands were informed with pathos” (Hall, 1991, p. 35) but this does not, in the hands of Euripides, make them by any means weak, since they are all given the ability to speak out against their fate. For example, Hecuba, “the matriarch of the disintegrating royal family of Troy, the mother who watches as her family dissolves before her eyes” (Anderson, 1997, p. 158), is a strong woman who feels and inspires deep emotion. However, this does not detract from her ability to argue rationally, as in her dispute with Helen over her part in the Trojan War, nor does it lessen her vital voice for her devastated country. It is difficult not to see this as a radical posture, especially considering the position of women in Athenian society. Another example is the character of Andromache, who, seen in connection to the sacrifice of her infant son, Astyanax, is emblematic of the women’s enforced role in the ending of the dynasty of Troy. Her character clearly resonates with the idea of cultural extinction taking place. In postcolonial terms, this is allied to the fact that imperialist ambition contained the Greeks’ contemporary ethos of ethnic superiority. In fact, many scholars have pointed out that “particularly hideous crimes in Greek tragedy tend to be committed by foreigners” (Arnott, 1989, p.10). However, in *The Trojan Women*, Euripides departs from this, making the Greeks the perpetrators of the crimes which the women witness and suffer by. Clearly this underscores his radical approach to his own

historical moment and potentially singles him out as a forerunner of the postcolonial ethos related to the destruction of otherness, of the conquered, and of the female.

Additionally, it must be emphasised that “much of the evidence for the dramatic representation of Trojans comes from the plays of Euripides” (Erskine, 2001, p.26), and the fact that in *The Trojan Women* this is viewed from both an indigenous and a female perspective, with the men largely on the periphery, is important. The play is primarily directed towards the way in which the women react to their fate at the hands of the victors and this is radical since it questions the ethos of the male Greeks. “For the chorus of *The Trojan Women*, the aftermath of war is an interstice between marriage and concubinage” (Cooper et al., 1989, p.27), and this again would involve an audience in radical questioning of the way women achieved and held – or couldn’t hold – status. Hecuba and her family do not lose their status solely due to their gender but it makes their subjugation more painful as they are literally portioned out as the spoils of war. Cassandra, Hecuba’s daughter, has been driven out of her mind by her gift of prophecy which has become a curse since her prophecies are not believed. Nevertheless, it is a blessing to her in that she knows that by being given to Agamemnon her life with him will soon be over as she is aware that Clytemnestra will kill them both when they arrive back in Argos, in revenge for the murder of their daughter Iphigenia. It does not matter that she is not believed in this case because it gives her a strange comfort to have the knowledge. Moreover, the myth here is cyclical, since sacrifice of the innocent begins and ends the war, while depth of knowledge is redundant. In some ways, Cassandra is a semiotic resonator of this, since she both knows, and has no power to act on her knowledge. A gender specific reading of this might suggest that the wisdom of women, such as Euripides displays in the female characters of *The Trojan Women*, was largely useless since it was not heeded, as with Cassandra’s prophecies.

The aspect of sacrifice which can be seen to be demonstrated by this cyclical reading of the myths is fully connected to a radical reading of Euripides since once again it offers criticism of the imperial designs of Athenian society and foregrounds the plight and ultimate strength and dignity of women, traditionally regarded as the weaker sex. There is perhaps no better example of this than the way in which the murder of Astyanax, the infant son of Hector, is treated by Euripides. The burial of the child on the shield of his father heightens the pathos of the long scene of Hecuba's ritual lamentation and becomes an emblem of Trojan glory and of Greek imperialism. Astyanax is the heir of the dynasty, emblematically the last hope of the royal house of Troy. His murder is the ultimate act of obliteration in postcolonial terms since the line is broken forever. Euripides' decision to have the child buried on his father's shield, carefully arranged by his grandmother, Hecuba, also gifts her with the ability to pay tribute to the family's dignity as opposed to the degradation to which they have been subjected:

Set the round shield of Hector on the ground. It gives me no joy to look upon this painful sight. You Achaeans, who swell with greater pride in your spears than your wits, why were you so frightened of this boy that you committed a murder that has no precedent? Was it in case he might some day restore our fallen city? Your strength amounted to nothing then. Even when Hector and our numberless army triumphed with the spear, we used to fall in battle. But now that the city has been taken and the Phrygians are wiped out, you are still frightened of this little boy. I cannot praise a man when his fear is irrational. (Euripides, 2008, p. 70, l. 1156-66)

The shield upon the ground is an inversion of place and stature, since it is implied that Hector does not need the false pomp that the world attributes to the so-called heroes, i.e. the murdering victors. Moreover, the child, the ultimate image of fragility and innocence, combined with the image of war in the protection of the self, the shield, produces a powerful semiotic of the triumph and the tragedy of war. Hecuba reduces and shames the victorious armies by suggesting their cowardice in murdering the boy. This is, however, also presented

with the reason for the deed, in other words that the child might one day attempt to restore the glory of his family. Euripides is, then, radically challenging, through his use of the myth, the barbaric behaviour of his own contemporaries and suggesting that this is demeaning to their stature as men and as a people. This is uniquely conveyed by the child's burial upon the shield, as if it is an altar upon which the entire, lost people of Troy are placed honourably by their mother, Hecuba. Thus, there can be little doubt that Euripides intends a condemnation here of the way in which war causes the innocent to suffer, especially the women and children. In postcolonial terms, the obliteration of the Trojans, even in the sense of hope for the future, is clearly an indication of the inherent evil of imperialism and a subsequent criticism about the imperialist ambitions of the Athenians.

All of the above make clear that in his own time Euripides would have been asking his audience to conceptualise their views on war and other socio-political differences in a way which was radical and beyond the expected concerns of the dramatic festivals of Athens. Although *The Trojan Women* was set in mythical times and non-Athenian locations, it contains some subtle but also some bolder references to contemporary Athenian issues, events and institutions which must have unsettled and disturbed Athenian audiences.

As I have argued above, the play was not traditional either in form or content even at its birth and original performance. It was, rather, a representation of a series of events that unfolds on stage whose causes and conclusions we know even as the play starts. So rather than keep us in suspense with the unfolding of events and the anticipation of discovering a certain 'truth', Euripides aims directly and solely at his audience's emotional and rational response since he dramatises the sufferings of women whose country has been defeated and foregrounds the vanity of the male victors in war. According to Euripides, the Greek king Menelaus undertook the siege of Troy out of sheer, bloody pride; Helen was his possession

and he wanted her back, not so much because he loved her but because she was his to own. Furthermore, Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek army, together with all the other generals was keen to take one of the Trojan princesses as a prize to show off as a spoil from the war and use upon his return to Greece. In portraying such attitudes Euripides unequivocally and equally criticises two fundamental tenets of the Athenian so-called democracy as expressed and represented by the soldiers and their leaders: their brutal warrior culture and their dehumanising, racist, imperialist behaviour not only towards their enemies – both the women and the men – but also towards their own Greek women. It is these unorthodox, radical, subversive and also pressingly contemporary qualities of the play which, as I will proceed to argue, have inspired re-makings and hyperplays that aim to articulate concerns related to gender, nationhood and power relations on our war-littered globe.

The Trojan Women in Performance On The Modern Stage: A Cry Against All Wars

Attitudes towards the play were hardly of the kind described above or indeed favourable in any way until after the Second World War. A.W. Schlegel, one of the most influential classical scholars of the nineteenth century, whose work on and views about the Athenian dramatists influenced scholars well into the twentieth century wrote about Euripides' play:

It is impossible ... for a piece to have less action, in the energetical sense of the word: it is a series of situations and events, which have no other connection than that they are all derived from the conquest of Troy, but they have in no respect a common aim. The accumulation of helpless suffering, without even an opposition of sentiment, at last wearies us, and exhausts our compassion. (1815, pp.176-77)¹

His views were embraced by many, and as Edith Hall (2010) writes, they only started to change when this “most unpleasant play to read” began to be performed. For it is only in performance on stage, she argues, that it is possible to experience and comprehend the full extent of the annihilating and totally devastating effects that war has on the women of the

defeated city of Troy (pp. 268-9). I would suggest, further, that the centuries of silence on the stage were not due just to the fact that *The Trojan Women* did not fit into the formalistic model which was for centuries upheld as the epitome of dramatic form, but also because of its inherent radical anti-war message. It must have seemed inappropriate and too subversive to promote and stage a play that resonated with anti-war messages, in societies which based their very existence on the waging of aggressive wars. The beginning of the play's acceptance therefore and its exploration as a text for performance with an anti-war agenda, coincides with the emergence of an era which began to accept the idea that maybe imperialist wars were not the irrefutable sign of cultural and political superiority.

Most classical scholars would agree that it was Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripides' play which was instrumental in freeing it from its textual prison and its low critical reputation and making it the common property of theatre audiences mostly in Europe but also to a lesser extent in America (see Garland, 2004; Hall, 2010; Macintosh, Fiona, 1997). Murray's translation demonstrated the principle that a Greek tragedy could be invested with a political agenda, and need not be read or performed in a cultural, historical and political vacuum. The actress Sybil Thorndike wrote in praise of Murray that "to him the Greek plays were never mere archaeological studies. They were living, burning thoughts, giving us inspiration and guidance for our own time." (1960, p. 153) The 1905 production of his translation of *The Trojan Women* at the Royal Court Theatre in London is cited as the first performance of the play in contemporary translation and according to Hall and Macintosh (2005b) it was written by Murray as a way of voicing his views and protesting against the concentration camps that the British had used to imprison native women and children during the South African Boer war.²

Following that production the play continued to be performed intermittently until World War II, with productions in America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Murray's English translation and performances of it clearly brought to light the play's painful resonance of the devastating consequences of war as audiences were experiencing the horrors of world conflicts which shocked and devastated whole nations from East to West. Audiences and directors were quick to read *The Trojan Women* as a commentary upon current events and to discover in it painfully contemporary resonances. Fiona Macintosh (1997) cites a number of productions charged with specific political resonance such as the one staged in Oxford while the Treaty of Versailles negotiations were taking place, the matinee performances put on at the Old Vic in the immediate post-war period, or the one at the Alhambra Theatre in 1920 to mark the formation of the League of Nations Union. Gilbert Murray who was president of the Union at the time was present at this event himself, and when at the end of the performance the audience called for the playwright, he rose from his seat and said, "The author is not here, he has been dead for many centuries, but I am sure he will be gratified by your reception of his great tragedy" (Thorndike, 1960, p. 166). The incident, which is related by the actress Sybil Thorndike shows how direct the impact of the play was on the audiences but also Murray's contribution to bringing it to life not as a scholarly study, but as a dramatic event appropriated by the mainstream, theatre-going audience.

The trend continued with politically charged productions, as societies the world over became increasingly preoccupied with the futility of armed conflict following the World Wars. Playwrights began to approach Euripides' work not with the primacy of the text in mind that was Murray's beacon, but as a hypoplay which they used as a stimulus and a stepping stone towards creating new, independent theatrical works. Hence adaptations of *The Trojan Women* came to prominence following western imperialist expeditions, the dropping

of the atomic bomb, French abuses in Algeria, the Vietnam War and the bombing of Libya in the 1980s. The play became a means of protest against the ruling parties when staged in the former Eastern bloc (East Germany, Romania), a protest against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1983, a tribute to peace in an interpretation by Suzuki Tadashi performed at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984, or even a protest against the imminent war in Iraq in January 2003 when it was staged in Australia, set in the Persian Gulf.³ Indeed, it has been argued by many scholars, that in the twentieth century the Trojan myth, as dramatised in contemporary adaptations, ceased to belong exclusively to the West and there is hardly any political agenda, whether of the left or of the right that has not at some time been promoted through its performance on stage (Foley, 2001b; Garland, 2004; Hall et al., 2004, pp.145-242; Macintosh, Fiona, 1997; Taplin, 1989).

Radical adaptations of *The Trojan Women*: a female “writ of *habeas corpus*”

In this chapter I will be exploring three contemporary re-makings of *The Trojan Women*: Charles Mee’s *Trojan Women: A Love Story* (1996), Katie O’Reilly’s *Peeling* (2002), and Christine Evans’ *Trojan Barbie* (Evans, 2010c). As I have already illustrated, Euripides’ play has had an anti-war agenda not only in modern times but also in antiquity. However, what I intend to show by looking at the specific hyperplays of the ancient text is that they do not just promote gender-specific issues related to the atrocities that war situations conceal and condone. In these adaptations the “women of Troy” are totally re-configured; they are not just victims of war who lament their fate as it has been meted out to them, like their mythical counterparts. The women in Euripides’ play are written as being right and their cause is championed, but they remain powerless to act against the male dominated society which victimises them. The women in Mee’s, O’Reilly’s and Evans’ hyperplays on the other hand,

speak up against the societies which allow and sustain injustices against them and re-define themselves on their own terms: they are not just right, they are also powerful. They use Euripides' work as a hypoplay on which they build their agenda of politics whether it is politics of gender, of disability or their exposure of cultural prejudices. The defining radicality of these adaptations lies in that the defeated women attain a voice to speak against those that victimise them, and ultimately manage to re-gain control of their own bodies and therefore their own existence. The focus of the playwrights is on the brokenness of the female body and the women's attempt to piece it back together to a meaningful state. Referring to Euripides' text Robert Scanlan (2009) writes that it "was like a writ of *habeas corpus*: a demand that the bodies be produced and that they be accounted for" (p. 27).⁴ The adaptations in question function as a "female writ of habeas corpus" which is drawn up and made public by the women themselves who demand and get control of their own fate. Though they are victimised for varied reasons (their gender, their disability, their culture), they all essentially overturn the same idea which has been central to the understanding of *Trojan Women* and which seems to have been a common stimulus for creative hypertheatrical engagement: at the end of Euripides' play the women of Troy are dragged away and the play ends, implying therefore a state of helplessness. In these adaptations the women act; they do not accept their fate in lamentation – they reject it and re-define themselves.

The radicality of these plays is also achieved through extended experimentation in form and content that is articulated differently in each of the performances. Interestingly, an overview of negative critical comments shows a convergence of opinion as to what makes these performances 'bad'. So similar are the negative comments that they could be referring to all or any one of the plays.⁵ Criticism centres on two elements. The first is the plays' relation to the source material which is treated *a priori* as superior, and the radical break from the

latter which is seen as positively disrespectful. The second point of criticism relates to the absence of linear narrative and conventional exposition of plot and character development, which clearly points to the postmodern nature of these plays. Both of these points are common to all three plays and inform their radical relationship with Euripides' hypoplay: they do not pay lip service to Euripides' text as if to support and celebrate a universal value which it has somehow carried through the centuries; instead they engage with it in a playful, critical, hypertheatrical manner in order to produce a completely new theatrical event which is radical in its own content and in form.

In discussing *Trojan Women: A Love Story*, Scott Cummings (2006) writes that the myths behind the play which we all know (or don't as the case may be) are only used by Charles Mee "as bulletin boards on which he pins a myriad of texts and songs" that address the issues the play explores (p. 71). This holds true for all three plays discussed in this chapter. They do not aim to fill us in on any myth or background story, or give us an overview of the Greek tragedy they allude to. Instead, they engage with specific and very detailed aspects of the wider body of work in which Greek tragedy has been categorised and which is too broad and vague to be of any pressing significance to a contemporary audience.

All three plays revisit the war at Troy not simply as a major world conflict, but as a stimulus to reflect on varied and different kinds of wars that women today are caught up in and on how they fight in these wars. The male, imperialist, authoritative and aggressive world in which we live is always there as an overarching umbrella under which "smaller" but more urgent and personally relevant sub-conflicts are exposed. The war at Troy is used as an expression of a contemporary destruction of the foundations of the lives of women as individuals and as members of a male centred society in which they struggle to survive with dignity. Charles Mee directs his attention to the male/female struggle for domination; Katie

O'Reilly's efforts converge towards highlighting the disabled/able-bodied conflict; while Christine Evans aims her attention to the shock encounter of us/them, west/east, here/there, fake/real. Central to all these conflicts are the women of Troy, which are essentially the women of the world today, three millennia after the conflict in Troy, two millennia after Euripides revisited that event in his play.

As Christine Evans (2009) points out, Euripides' work already speaks very successfully of the suffering of women in war. These plays do not attempt to do the same thing in an updated form. They have something new and significant to add to that specific suffering. The women in these hyperplays, caught like the women of Troy within wars of their own, also bear their suffering, but, in diverse and significant ways, some of them win their battles and survive in a world where the integrity of their bodies was destroyed and the integrity of their souls was assaulted. The playwrights shift their focus from the helplessness of female mourning to the politics of the female body. In his play, Mee turns Helen, Hecuba and Andromache but also Dido, another legendary sufferer, into irrefutable victors in the battle between women and men. O'Reilly transforms three women, Alfa, Beaty and Coral into clear survivors as women and as performers by turning the backstage of a theatre into the main stage of her play and by giving them the leading roles which they have been traditionally denied. Evans may end her play with the sacrificial death of the young Polly X but by making this death the central final image of the performance and the provocation for the completion of Polly's work of art, she simultaneously celebrates the voice and creativity of a young woman who defies the system and also alludes to the idea of the artist who "dies" once her work is not private anymore and it becomes public property.

All of the above point to the diversity of the plays discussed in this chapter but also to their one strong converging point, that they are all explorations of conflicts stimulated by a

radical approach to Euripides' *Trojan Women* and they place women in the spotlight of a theatrical stage which becomes a platform on which they perform, show, speak and are heard speaking against, a system that ignites and sustains the wars they are caught up in. They reappear, reborn in the twenty first century to reclaim their place in the contemporary world, on the contemporary stage.

Trojan Women: A Love Story; A Gender Battle In A World Of Wreckage

True to his theories of adaptation and appropriation and his views on authorial presence and authenticity,⁶ Charles Mee draws together elements of Greek tragedy, the opera, contemporary music, philosophical ideas, theological treatises and scraps of modern popular culture to create his *Trojan Women: A Love Story* (1996).⁷ Euripides' *Trojan Women* was the fourth Greek "scaffold" that Mee used on which to mould his own structure.⁸ The play was developed and staged for the first time following a collaboration between the playwright and the director Tina Landau at the University of Washington in Seattle in the spring of 1996, and again in the summer of the same year by the same director and En Garde theatre company in New York.

Since Charles Mee has always written with the spectacle in mind, and has always also denied any definitive structure to the plays he writes, a textual approach to his work is definitely limited. Each one of his plays becomes a new work of art in production every time it is staged. But his fragmented text can be fruitfully analysed if the approach is attempted within the spirit he advises actors to approximate his work. "Trust your instincts and thoughts" he tells them (and us):

If you try to apply one set of standards to understanding it, that's reductionist; ... if you try to work intellectually, you'll lose; if you try to understand it psychologically, you'll lose; if you try to understand it as a political argument, you'll lose. But if you throw yourself into the middle of all those things that

are at play, then your intelligence – which includes your head and your heart and your neurons and your cells – will work it through for you. (Mee, Erin, 2002, p. 90)

It is true that by plunging into the centre of *The Trojan Women: A Love Story*, one is immersed in the fragmented and unstable reality of Mee's creative work. However this fragmentation does not result in an incomprehensive distancing from the world as we see and feel it around us. His play is profoundly political and deeply subversive and it interrogates political and cultural structures whose atrocities and barbarity we often choose to ignore. In fact I would agree with Kara Reilly who says that "Mee (re)makes the debris and wreckage of civilization into postmodern American drama, which continues to ask the most difficult questions about civilization" (2005, pp. 68-9). I would add that his re-making of *The Trojan Women* asks the most difficult questions about the power relations between men and women and leaves his audiences with the difficult task of formulating an answer – if there is one – for themselves.

Mee's text fuses Euripides' fifth-century play with interviews from survivors of the Holocaust, Hiroshima, the Vietnam War and the wars in the Balkans, the Kama Sutra, extracts from magazines, political tracts and newspapers. In performance it is all tied into a combination of music which ranges from Berlioz's romantic opera *Les Troyens*, to Billie Holiday and Bow Wow. Not surprisingly, the characters/performers in *The Trojan Women* are not well-rounded, psychologically motivated individuals, but the jagged products of surprising combinations of politics, philosophy, history, economics, and a multiplicity of other cultural forces. They are, just like the play itself, people of excess "through whom the culture speaks often without the speakers knowing it" (Mee, Charles L., 1998, p. vii). This play, like all the final products of Mee's (re)making project is not a psychologically based, narrative drama but a "blueprint for events" (Mee, Erin, 2002, p. 83) which the director and

performers can disentangle, elaborate on, bring their own cultural moment to, and breathe a new life into. Essentially they all become co-writers of the theatrical event for which Mee's text provides but "a fraction of the total experience" (p. 87).

Mee's *Trojan Women* is not just about the women of Troy and their head on collision with the victorious imperialists of Greece, but an examination of the complex nature of pain and violence that human beings inflict on each other or, to be more precise, that men inflict upon women, and also the reverse. By juxtaposing the bloodiness of war with love songs Mee ventures into an exploration of love and war, and the differences between men and women as they are brought to the surface in times of intense pressure both external and internal. The bits and pieces of heterogeneous cultures coalesce into a contemporary portrait of a war-thirsty, male driven society. Though the men and their reaction to situations of war and imperialistic designs are explored in parallel to the women's voice on stage, it is mainly the women who are the victims but who also finally hold the reigns and make their statement in this play. Mee projects this double approach in the form of his play which is divided into two parts, presenting two worlds: Act One is set in Troy, in the immediate aftermath of the Trojan defeat by the imperialist Greeks, who resemble the US military. This is a world of a bleak, apocalyptic post-war devastation. The 'other' world is in Act Two and it is set in Carthage, which is depicted as a kind of paradisiacal sexual utopia in which Aeneas and his weary Trojan warriors seek oblivion.

Tina Landau reflects this striking division in both of her productions of the play in a way which invites the audiences to look at the traditional myths which are retold in a fresh light. In the production at the University of Washington, Act One is staged in a University canteen space littered with items collected from the site over the period of rehearsals, graffiti covering the concrete walls, and items of discarded clothing, shoes, and eyeglasses scattered

over the floor, creating the impression of a place of mass death and destruction. For Act Two, the audience members were led by ushers to another larger room which had been turned into “an expensive, cool, whisper-quiet, sound-absorbing health club containing exercise machines, a round Jacuzzi in the middle of the room, soft music [which] piped in, ... and a large, slowly rotating crystal ball above the whole scene” (Bryant-Bertail, 2000, pp. 42-43). Similarly, in the New York production, Act One is staged in the backstage interior of the long-abandoned East River Park Amphitheatre, a site which is “crumbling and overgrown”(p. 49).

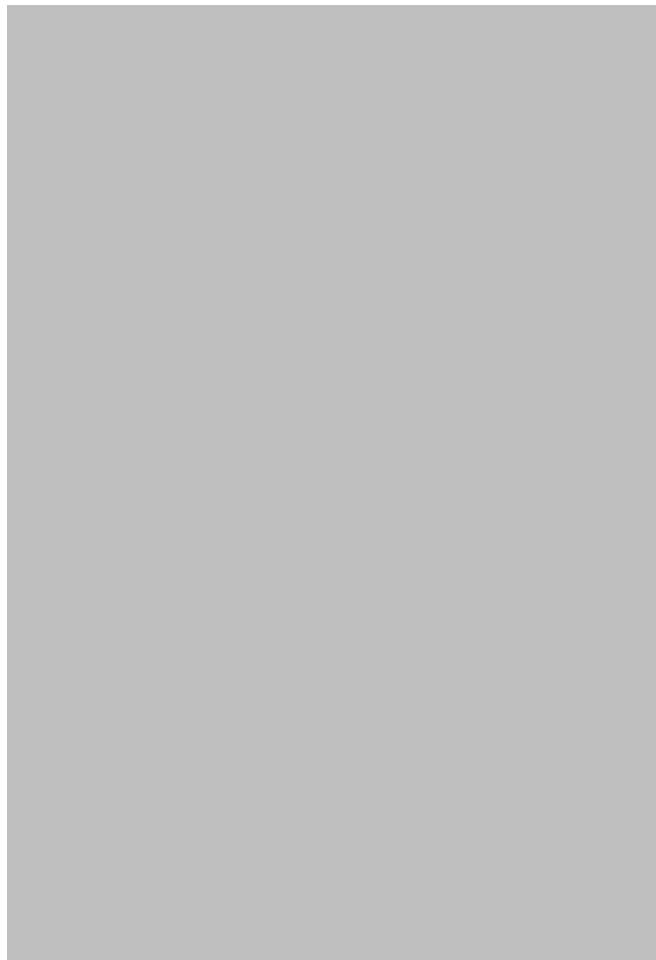


Fig. 4.1 *The hellish representation of the contemporary world of Act One. Photos from the New York performance by William Rivelli*

According to theatre critic Ben Brantley, Landau turns the site into a “hellish” space with “a lot of standard war-is-hell stuff ... apocalyptic noises and catalogues of atrocities”. For Act

Two the audience are moved to the open-air theatre “which has been dazzlingly dolled up with white paint and galactic staircases” to become an outdoor paradise: Dido’s “Carthage as feminine utopia” (Brantley, 1996).

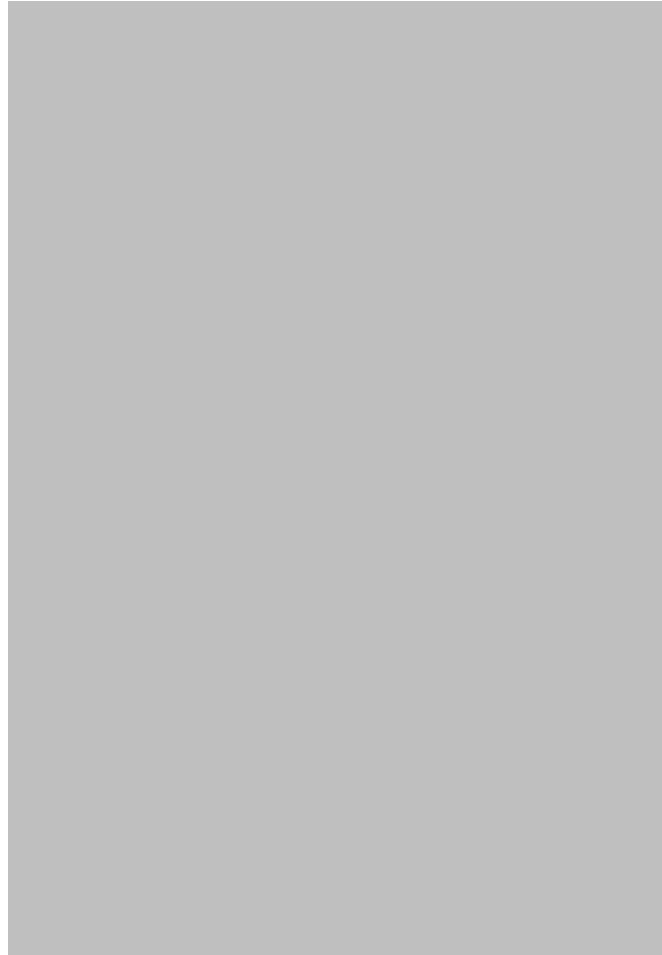


Fig. 4.1 *The white outdoor paradise of Dido’s Carthage. Photos from the New York performance by William Rivelli*

The audiences are thus invited to experience the stark and shocking difference between two worlds, one of war and destruction and one of love and light. The stark difference however is on an external level, because in both of these worlds it is the men who appear to be the controlling force. Ultimately, though, and herein lies the radicality of Mee’s re-definition of the women of Troy as helpless victims, the familiar female figures of the ancient plays reclaim this controlling power and turn from victims, to agents for action and change.

The first part is set in a male dominated, capitalist world, where the women of Troy are a chorus of “100 dark-skinned ‘3rd world’ women making computer components at little work tables” (p.1).



Fig. 4.3 “‘3rd world’ women making computer components at little work tables” Photos from the New York performance by William Rivelli

Clearly these women are the victims of western capitalism and its practices of exploitation; they are not just labouring away in the anonymity implied by their number but while black ashes rain down onto the stage, it becomes clear that they are in a state of shock, they are impoverished and they have been raped. While they speak of the horrors of war by reciting verbatim texts from the victims of Hiroshima and the Holocaust, Hecuba speaks in the voice of a woman who is caught up in a war zone and is asking the eternal question: Why?

Why was this done?
This is beyond knowing.
I pray that I could
pull it all inside my body
all the murder
all the cruelty
the ruin
the fire
the wounds
broken limbs

bleeding children
my city
bring it all deep inside me
so that I could understand (p. 3)

But comprehension or logic does not provide any sense of comfort, security or closure for Hecuba or any of the women in the first part of the play which Mee calls “The Prologue”. The women ask, the men speak, answers are not given, the war does not end. Andromache attempts repeatedly to speak into a microphone at the front of the stage and only puts it down and “retreats upstage” in silence; the culture has silenced her. The women of the chorus all have a story to tell which triggers serious discussions about revenge, betrayal, gender differences, social inequities and the personal costs of war. But they also speak of the future and tell the men about feminist utopias where “egalitarian, consensual and cooperative relationships flourish and where both sexes are able to engage in meaningful work. They are based on the notion that the key to a satisfying life is opportunity for love and work where the two are compatible.” (p. 22). But they are only utopias, not the real world. The two soldiers from Special Forces, who are on stage with Talthybius the Greek messenger, simply do not hear what the women are saying. They are caught up in their own web of aggression and power. Their explanation is presented in really simple words and sounds like the universal ‘excuse’ for all war: they are men and that is how men are:

The war ended?
You say this to the men:
The war is not ended, they say,
we are the war,
we ourselves are the war...
Men act.
We know this.
Attach no value to it,
particularly.
To act is to be
No more no less...
This is how men are. (p. 9)

The script is clearly not fluid or always comprehensible, nor is it a dialogue between characters that interact meaningfully. That is why the questions asked are not heard and the answers given are not effective. The characters are not well-rounded, psychological entities, in fact they are not in dialogue, or even always in meaningful monologue, instead they “speechify” (Mee, Erin, 2002, p. 86), they each make their own speech on stage as performers, which does not necessarily relate to a series of causally linked unfolding events. They do not occupy a meaningful centre, instead they inhabit the non-space that Elinor Fuchs (1996) announces where there is “no longer anything ‘out there’, or anyone ‘in here’ to imitate” and which essentially means that they are “dead” as characters (p.170). Thus they are clear markers of our postmodern “condition” in which “the interior space known as ‘the subject’ [is] no longer an essence, an in-dwelling human endowment, but [has been] flattened into a social construction or marker in language, the unoccupied occupant of the subject position” (Mee, Charles L., 1996, p. 3). These human beings, who are a melange of history, culture and politics perform on stage in a theatrical event which is “broken, jagged, filled with sharp edges, filled with things that take sudden turns, careen into each other, smash up, veer off in sickening turns” (Mee, Charles L.). This, according to the playwright, is the world we live in. And in his explanation of the postmodern fragmentation which his work exhibits as a mirror image of this world, Mee states that his plays are “shattered and fucked up and full of wreckage and stumbling and awkwardness and making some effort not to be civilised” (Mee, Erin, 2002, p. 97) .

This uncivilised, broken world that the playwright creates in “The Prologue” seems beyond repair. All those who inhabit it are equally “shattered and fucked up”. The men seem to be more in control of their own fate and of the fate of the women, since as they keep saying they act, they are the policy makers and the decision takers. But their status as non-characters

and their fragmented monologues or disjointed dialogues all point to a complete absence of communication and reason. However, this devastation is reversed by Hecuba, who ultimately takes away the men's only strength and takes action herself. Though she seems crushed⁹ – she is not annihilated. Her voice and her strength do not lie in failing words – she has had “enough of speaking” (p. 45) – but in her surprising power for renewed action; she will not bow her head and suffer it all, as the mother of all suffering, but she will do what men do, she will make her statement, she will act:

Now I am no longer who I was...
I myself
finally feel
this rage of war
deep deep within me
I would myself have vengeance
How can I live now
silently accepting what they have done
thinking I shall understand
if I
but draw
this pain
inside myself
as though my understanding
would make it right
as though this pain would be erased
if only I could understand
as though the world's suffering
were only meant to assist me
to attain an understanding
as though some human empathy
could contain it and so make it right
no
this pain must be answered with pain
this savagery with savagery in kind (pp. 43-4)

Hecuba orchestrates her revenge through a man, the legendary Trojan warrior Aeneas, who is brought to her “in shock...almost carried, by chorus members...disoriented [and] terrified” (p. 44). She accuses him of “cowering, / while all the other men were murdered / and all the women beaten, raped, / murdered, taken into slavery” (p. 44). In presenting him in this light

she shatters the familiar image of the legendary brave hearted hero and reinvents him as a coward and a traitor, subverting in that way the ideological layers behind such a heroic figure. Sarah Bryant-Bertail (2000, p. 45) writes that in the Washington University performance, while Hecuba is talking to Aeneas, she is desperately looking through the debris littering the floor of the performance space seeming to look for a specific item. When she finds a baby shoe, she holds it up to him and lifts the dead body of her murdered daughter Polyxena in her other arm and delivers her accusations but also her commands:

Now, you see,
here is Polyxena in my arms,
a child,
who did not shrink from death as you did.
Look at her.
Look.
Remember her.

[Aeneas goes to his knees,
weeping,
puts his head down on the lifeless body of Polyxena.]

Now your time has come
to be as brave as she has been
Your time has come to avenge her death.
Will human beings be caught forever
in a cycle of hatred, violence, and war?
A world without compassion.
Murdering men
and women who urge them to it.
So be it...
Learn from this.
Harbor no more illusions.
See the world
and the men and women who live in it
for what they are.
Turn away from love
compassion...

Give up hope.

Your time has come
to find all those who have survived,
take them to a new country

build a home.
Make it strong.
Put your trust in power alone.

Make a nation that can endure.

And when you have,
come back,
reduce these Greeks and their world
to ruins.
Destroy their cities.
Burn them.
Pull down their homes.
Leave them wounded and alone,
abandoned.
Let them bleed to death on their own graves. (pp. 44-6)

So Aeneas departs obediently to fulfil his mission, bringing the first part of the play to an end. Once Hecuba has acted, she sits back seemingly to wait for the results of her action. The last image of this part is of her rocking back and forth with Polyxena's dead body in her arms to the sound of Sinead O'Connor's *Scarlet Ribbons*. Hecuba's action paves the way for the second half of the performance, which is called "The Play". The title, when contrasted to the title of Act One which was "The Prologue" suggests that this is the core part of the work. It is the place where the action occurs, instigated by the eternal victim, Hecuba and carried out by another legendary female victim Dido, Queen of Carthage. This is the place where the balance has reversed: women have power and are in total control of the men; this is the feminist utopia which upturns the traditional view of the women of Troy as helpless victims. As Mee writes in his directions "the dramaturgical rules have shifted". Aeneas and his men, "beaten", enter a peaceful, relaxing health spa in Carthage, a woman's world which is described as a "dreamland, a world of drift, heaven" (p. 48).

Aeneas and his platoon of refugee Trojan soldiers shatter the silence and the white monochrome quality of this world by breaking into it, wearing the same blood stained clothes they wore in Act One. So thirsty are these men for peace and female physical contact that they

would have gladly remained and constructed a meaningful life there. Aeneas and Dido fall in love at first sight. The female spa attendants explain sexual positions from the Kama Sutra to the soldiers, while Dido and Aeneas weave the web of their passionate love amid frequent romantic and melancholy songs and music which contribute to an Edenic atmosphere.



Fig. 4.4 *Aeneas and his men enjoy the ministrations of the women of Carthage. Photos from the New York performance by William Rivelli*

Queen Dido urges him to stay but quickly the eternal clash of expectations between men and women comes prominently to the surface and the question arises: can Aeneas, the man, stay on in a woman's world? How far into a relationship will a man let himself enter? Dido speaks the words that Aeneas is too weak to pronounce. Her world is "So different / Such another world. / Such a foreign country / to settle down in and feel at home / So unfamiliar. / Such a different landscape" (p. 74). Aeneas has to leave, he cannot stay because if he does it will be a sign of weakness and his upbringing as a man will not allow him weaknesses. He can only function in a "world not built on sentiment" (p. 71), and cannot function unless he "does", echoing in that way the male view voiced in Act One, that "men act". Also and more importantly, he has to follow Hecuba's commands and find the strength to keep his word.

Once more it seems like the man will make the final decision, as in the myth of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas abandons Dido in order to fulfil his male dream of conquering, and Dido, in despair, takes her own life.

However at the end of the second act of this play, as at the end of the first, it is not a man who acts, it is a woman. Like Hecuba who finds her voice in revenge, Mee's Dido takes the situation literally in her own hands. She does not commit suicide like the legendary Queen of Carthage by laying herself on a pyre while mourning for Aeneas's departure. As Aeneas makes to leave, she grabs him violently by the hair and pushes his head underwater in the hot tub where they had previously been love making. She plunges his head under the water over and over again violently until "finally she leaves him submerged" (p. 76). So with one swift motion, the agent of revenge becomes the subject of revenge, and Dido as a woman in a woman's world, is one step further from Hecuba who needed someone else to carry out the revenge she felt "deep, deep within" her. Dido is an executor; she does not need an "actor" to act for her, she does not need a man to become her voice in the world. While the chorus sings Frank Sinatra's *All the Way*, the playwright decides to leave us with an inconclusiveness which is typical of the openness of his scripts and proof of his insistence that they contain a range of possible interpretations for production. "Aeneas drags himself from the hot tub", writes Mee, "He is nearly dead – or else he doesn't drag himself from the tub, and he is dead" (p. 76). For Mee it does not matter what happens to Aeneas. He believes that "our lives are more rich and complex than can be reduced to a single source of human motivation ... we are creatures of our history and culture and gender and politics – [and] our beings and actions arise from that complex of influences and forces and motivations" (Mee, Charles L.). What happens to Aeneas is of no significance because the world we live in is a broken world. There

is no right answer because there is no right question; there is no single solution because there is no single problem.

However, while in *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* Mee stages the wreckage and the jagged nature of the world as we live in it today, as well as the inconclusiveness and the elusiveness of our postmodern existence, at the same time he also gives power to the women in his play whose voice can be heard among the debris when they reclaim their broken bodies. The traditional gender roles of Euripides' hypoplay are irreversibly inverted. The legendary female victims of Troy and Carthage become the enforcers of action and the instigators of change; the legendary victimisers of the myths surrounding Troy become pliable creatures in the hands of the one-time victims, who are given the freedom to decide on their fates. The female voice in this play is both personal and collective. It is not just the voice of Hecuba or Dido; it is the voice of the individual women who 'speechify' their experiences and perform their political presence on stage. They make a political statement not through any direct cultural or socio-historical references, but as products of the culture that produces them and speaks through them. They speak the politics of women in the work force, women who are wives, sisters, children, mothers, women in power, women in relationships, women alone. They speak the politics of the woman who owns her own body and is in control of her own existence.

Peeling: A Painful Striptease of Clothes and Souls Peels off Layers of Misconception

The Graeae Theatre Company was founded in 1980 and is Europe's leading theatre company of people with physical and sensory impairments.¹⁰ The aim of the company is "to redress the exclusion of people with physical and sensory impairments from performance and to create high quality, genuinely pioneering theatre in both aesthetic and content" (www.graeae.org). In

2002 Kaite O'Reilly was commissioned by the Graeae to write a play addressing and reflecting the company's concerns. The result of that commission was *Peeling* (2002),¹¹ which was developed collaboratively with the director Jenny Sealey and the original performers and which engages hypertheatrically with *The Trojan Women* and metadramatically with the nature of its own performance and the presence of the performers on stage as actresses and as characters. It premiered in February of the same year at The Door of the Birmingham Rep and was revived in March 2011 by Forest Forge Theatre Company who took it on a rural tour in village halls and community centres in Hampshire.

O'Reilly's agreement to write this play for Graeae is connected to her observation that the canon of western theatrical tradition is abundant with disabled bodies which are frequently used to portray otherness and as a metaphor for the human condition. However, seldom are the plays which portray such individuals written or performed by disabled actors even in parts written specifically for them.

I wanted to write an edgy, inventive, and humorous play specifically for deaf and disabled actors, which used Sign performance (theatricalised British Sign Language), and reflected the experience of disabled and Deaf women. Unfortunately so often in the media, we are portrayed as the victim or the villain – the object of sympathy, or charity, or superhuman inspiration. In *Peeling* I wanted to create women who were witty, sexy, complex human beings who made difficult decisions about their fertility and potential offspring; women whose lives didn't necessarily differ so much from non-disabled, hearing women's lives. (<http://www.forestforge.co.uk/posts/45>)

In order to do so O'Reilly chose to engage with Euripides' *Trojan Women* in a radical way which focuses on the issue of women with 'broken' bodies and their position in the face of personal and social warfare, but also challenges and questions the way performances of classics have been staged throughout the centuries, as the archetype of the ultimately well-written plays to be performed by and for the physically and mentally able elite. The playwright eloquently draws a parallel between the metaphorical peeling of the layers of

clothes that the performers are wearing, and the painful revelation of their souls to each other as they peel off the layers of social conventions that restrict them as women and as actresses who are disabled. Finally on a formal level, the structure of O'Reilly's play peels off the layers of interpretation which the classical tradition has attached to the classical text, to reveal a new construct which gives the women of Troy unprecedented strength.

The play is written for three characters that are given a very specific profile and have specific disabilities. Alfa, 38, is "fiercely independent, eccentric and slightly puritanical. She is Deaf and uses sign language." Beaty, 26, is "fierce, feisty, sexy and four feet tall." Coral, 30, "is small and looks very fragile, but has a ferocious, inquiring mind. She uses an electric wheelchair" (p. 5). The playwright has been steadfast in her insistence that the play never be performed by anyone other than deaf and disabled performers and that has been the case both in the 2002 premier and in the 2011 revival. In the latter production, Alfa (Ali Briggs) is deaf, Beaty (Kiruna Stamell) is a four-foot tall woman and Coral (Nicola Miles-Wildin) is confined to a wheelchair.

The interesting paradox which needs to be explored in this play is that while the most significant aspect of the play stems from the fact that the characters and the actresses are disabled, simultaneously the least important element of this theatrical melange is that very disability. By laying bare their souls as the performance evolves, these three women who are visibly impaired show the audience their strength and essentially their lack of otherness. They are just like any other women, feeling sexy or feeling low, feeling weak or strong, emotional or cold, being angry or cynical, mean to each other or plain sarcastic. And just like the women of Troy, Hecuba or Andromache, they are victims of prejudice but also survivors on stage and in life. Director Jenny Sealey, who is also the Artistic Director of Graeae, says that one of the main focuses of the play was to try and dispel the myth that all disabled women are lovely,

that they all love each other and they all share the same politics. So they created three very different women, three complex characters, who found it liberating to express negativity in the same way as anybody else, without the fear that we were going to be invalidated (www.graeae.org).

Alfa, Beaty and Coral, whose very names point towards their centrality and primary importance as characters in this play, are the three disabled actresses cast as the chorus in a mainstream postmodern production of *The Trojan Women*, called *Trojan Women – Then and Now*. They are, as Coral bitterly points out the ticks “on an equal opportunities monitoring form” (p. 45) commenting on the action, watching the play, but never taking part: “shoved at the back, unlit, onstage” (p 14). They are three bickering women, kept tucked away somewhere upstage, away from the limelight and the leading roles. Just like the women of Troy who are cast aside as insignificant entities who cannot make decisions related to their own existence, so the three actresses are confined to the margins of theatre and society. However in this dense, complicated play, they take centre stage metaphorically and literally and assume full responsibility of the choices they make as women.

Throughout the performance the three women are stranded on stage, looking like cake decorations in three absurd, oversized, metal-framed crinolines formed in the shape of ball gowns which take up the whole stage. Strewn on the stage are relics of war, like ammunition boxes and all sorts of items found back stage in a theatre. The action is mostly static. It happens on and off stage of the play within the play, but exclusively on stage in *Peeling*. When *The Trojan Women* is on, the women speak their parts, commenting on the action and the situation that the war victims find themselves in. The rest of the time they are waiting, bickering, chatting and sharing stories of sex, deception and recipes in their absurd isolation. Gradually, as the narrative weaves in and out between the production of the play and the

realities of the women's lives they help each other peel off the layers of the preposterous costumes which have been masking the metal frames they were perched on, and strip themselves of all pretence to reveal their own dark and devastating truths. As the parallel unseen production of *The Trojan Women* becomes more contemporary and relevant to their own lives, so their stories become more personal, more confessional and more painful. Finally, they strip right down to simple underclothes, bearing themselves inside and out to each other and to the audience. And as *Peeling* begins to do exactly as its title promises, stripping away layer after layer of hopes and secrets, and metres and metres of colourful fabric, the audience may discover it's not just theatre directors who keep Alfa, Beaty, and Coral tucked away from the limelight and the leading roles. It might be all of us – men and women alike – who constantly push them to one side, deeming them unsuitable for certain roles and opportunities, making them “the right-on extras stuck at the back whilst the *real* actors continue with the *real* play” (p.45).

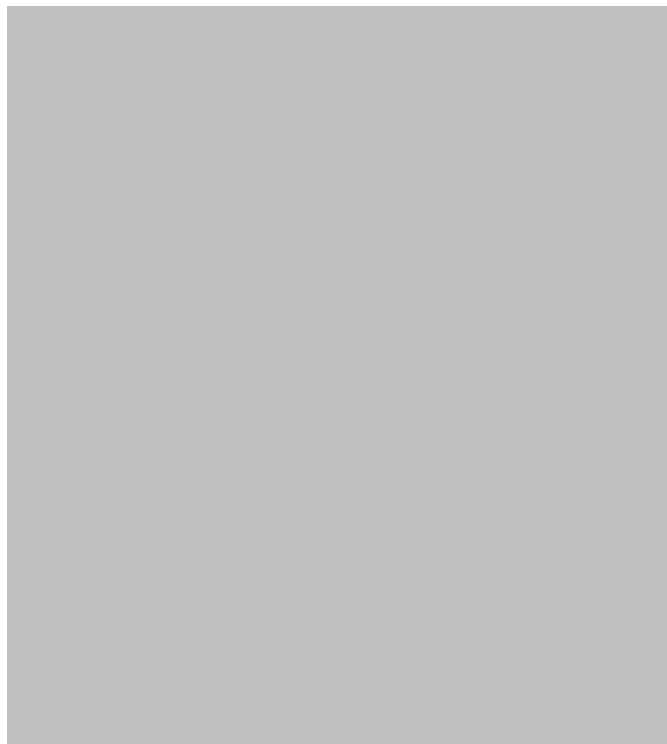


Fig. 4.5 *Beaty, Coral and Alfa on stage.*



Fig.4.6 Original costume ideas by David Haworth. Photographs from performance programme



Fig. 4.7 Kiruna Stamell, Nicola Miles-Wildin and Ali Briggs in rehearsal

Kirstie Davis's deeply perceptive production has Kaite O'Reilly's entire text together with stage directions projected as surtitles while at the same time the actors audio-describe what they are doing. Of course on one level, this is done for the benefit of those members of the audience who don't see or hear, but it is also a comment on the self-reflexivity of the performance and the messages it communicates. Language and communication therefore become a complex, multi-faceted process which underscores the multiple layers of theatrical adaptation. On one level we have the formal English (which of course is a translation) of the

Trojan Women text, on another we have the colloquial language of the women's informal interaction. On top of that there's audio description, text on screen, British Sign Language and Sign-Supported English which are all integrated into the production. We therefore have a 'story' told, retold and untold on many different levels and in many different ways. Is it done only for the benefit of the deaf, for the blind, or is it done to draw attention to the multiple layers of reality of which our world is constructed, and the absence of one universal meaning which is communicated in one universally acceptable and comprehensible way? Regardless of the answer, or the original intention, this multiplicity of layers strips the layers of respectability that the hypoplay holds as a classic and adds on layers of interpretation that make it a hyperplay of *The Trojan Women* which gives the power to 'broken' women to piece their existence back together.

In his review of the 2002 performance, David Cavendish (2002) astutely points out that "the spirits of Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett hover over *Peeling* ... in a teasing, provocative combination". Indeed, the central image of the play, of the three women being stuck within their huge, ludicrous gowns, with their heads sticking out like toppings to a decorated cup-cake is one which alludes to Beckettian characters who are at once profoundly tragic and darkly comic, stranded within the confines of a bleak, inflexible structure, caught in an existential anxiety, and seeking to fly from the 'iron cage' of reason. Furthermore the existence of strategies such as the use of projections, sign language and directorial/authorial comments interspersed within the theatrical performance, all bear affinities to what Cavendish calls Brecht's "alienation-effect sloganising". However, the pastiche of epic drama and petty daily chit-chat, the fusion of formal language with swearing and daily slang, the parallel discussion of genocide and recipes, the evident fragmentation, and the non-linear, self-reflective, a-temporal unfolding of 'action' on stage, all make *Peeling* a play that resists

categorisation as a work which is primarily existential, philosophical or epic. This a play that does not provide a single answer to the issues it explores, or any philosophy as panacea to the world's problems. Rather than being purely philosophical or polemically political it seems to rest more comfortably in the space of "post-Brechtian" theatre which Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) conceives as created "by the Brechtian enquiries into the presence and consciousness of the process of representation within the represented" (p. 33) and which goes beyond the certainties and the rational socialist solutions supported by epic theatre.

The play is, I would add, deliberately complicated on all levels to point towards the postmodern layering of multiple realities, or, to use Fredric Jameson's words, the search for "breaks" rather than a flowing continuity, and for "shifts and irrevocable changes in the representation of things and of the way they change" (1991, p. ix). The action – or better the in-action – opens with the chorus speaking their parts from the ancient text and lamenting the loss of Troy. Soon there is a pause, the intense lights fade, and the women are "off", therefore "themselves", professional actresses who have been performing as chorus members of the play. As such they are not initially that bothered by the words of the Trojan widows. They focus on their own mundane reality and comment on the conventions of theatre. "Every night this play", Beaty complains, "Every bloody night this play. / Every night this bloody play. / It gives me a headache" (p. 12). They pour themselves a cup of hot chocolate but then discuss how the "wardrobe mistress" will "kill them" if she catches them drinking in costume, "these frocks cost a fortune". Again, however, they question the very reason behind what they are doing when they wonder about the significance of all of these conventions and confound the many and complex layers of reality, which are unfolding in front of the audience of *Peeling*:

Coral: ... quite what significance [these frocks] have to wars ancient and modern is quite beyond me.

Beaty: Oh, I dunno ... Every day's a little battle ... it helps if you face it correctly attired.

Alfa: And a bit of luxury can't do any harm. Life's hard enough as it is. I quite like the touch of sumptuous padding

Coral: I feel more like a clothes-horse than a commentator on war.

Beaty: It's probably meant to be ironic. (*She takes out a performance programme and studies it.*) That's what they usually say when they bodge together classic texts with contemporary stuff. Post-modern and ironic.

Alfa: (*audio describes*) < Beaty refers to a theatre programme for *The Trojan Women – Then and Now* which she handily has under her skirts. >

Beaty: (*reading*) Apparently, according to the director's notes, we've all been deconstructed.

Alfa: I thought I was being a metaphor.

Coral: For what?

Alfa: I don't know. I didn't think to ask what the motivation for my metaphor was. (pp. 12-13)

In their very informal, chatty way Coral, Alfa and Beaty question the nature of representation in theatre, the conventions of realism on stage and the place and motivation of "character" in a dramatic script. Their parodic discourse underscores the openness of experimental staging practices, challenges every traditional staging, especially of classic texts, and sarcastically defies all theatre which constructs a world irrelevant to those experiencing it.

Their apparent distance from everything which is unfolding on or off stage, however, changes as the unseen performance of *The Trojan Women* becomes more 'now' than 'then'. It becomes an image of a world we all know, where "Men [are] marching forward with their uniforms and their machetes and their orders: To rape To pillage To conquer Destroy ... Woman's body as battlefield. Rape as a war tactic. Mutilation as a reminder" (pp. 22-3). These images make Coral say "I don't think I like this play very much" (p. 24). A story about the mothers who decided to dance a suicidal dance off the cliffs with their children rather than be caught by the enemy triggers painful revelations in Alfa, Coral and Beaty's own lives but not always invoking the stereotype of a selfless mother figure. It is the story which forges obvious links between the horrific war stories narrated by the actresses as chorus and the bitter reality of their own lives as women, as well as their traumatic experiences related to motherhood.

Beaty recalls with powerful vindictiveness the day she buried her mother, who had projected her own sense of guilt, failure and fear of death onto her disabled daughter. “There’s not many with ‘reduced life expectancy’ can ... press the earth down on their mother’s face. Stamp on the grave. Put a layer of concrete over so she can’t rise again” she says, before adding sarcastically, “I joke of course” (pp. 29-30). So while on the one hand the women of Troy in a classic text promote the image of idealised mothers, the three women question the traditional assumption that all mothers are loving and caring individuals. Later still, Coral admits that she had had a baby herself but she was forced to give it up for adoption to “a nice non-disabled family with a life expectancy much longer than the biological mother’s” (p. 57). As for herself she “received a special operation, without consent or knowledge” (p. 57), to ensure no further babies were conceived by a woman who is a “freaky damaged sick chick [with] an interesting and increasingly rare genetic conjunction” (p. 56). She brings a closure to her account by using words which evoke the killing of Astyanax in an attempt by the Greeks to kill off the line of heroic Trojans – an act which our society would so readily condemn. “The last of my line,” she says of herself aggressively, “A full stop. / The blank page following the final chapter in a book” (p. 57).



Fig. 4.8 *Coral in red*

Alfa signing

*Beaty thinking about her “gorg”
boyfriend*

As the women watch Andromache lamenting when her son is dragged from her arms Coral's attention wanders. And when as a member of the chorus Beaty says "I should have crushed you in the womb – folded you back inside myself rather than let you die by suicide bomb in a crowded discotheque" (p. 50), evoking images of contemporary wars as well as her own traumatic experience, Coral breaks down and tells the other women that she is pregnant but is terrified of bringing a child into this world for fear of turning into her own mum, of making the same mistakes, or simply because this earth is not "an ok place to take a baby" (p. 51). But Beaty wants her to fight on, like she did not manage to: "Have the bloody baby." she urges her matter-of-factly, "To make up for what we've lost" (p. 70). As for Alfa's tale of secret pain, it surfaces when after Beaty, as the chorus, talks about women being strong and killing their babies to prevent them from suffering, she repeats Coral's earlier words, "I don't like this play very much" (p. 66). She reveals that following an amniocentesis test which showed a missing chromosome, she had had an abortion and since then has been punishing herself and "serving time".

All these interweaving images of women as mothers, ancient or modern, abled or disabled, melodramatic or cynical, young or old, self-punishing or liberating, stimulate Alfa, Beaty and Coral to share with each other and with their audience their own versions of loss which have been served to them as sanitised solutions, backed up by politically correct justifications reflecting, ultimately, our society's discomfort with disability especially in relation to womanhood and motherhood.

Yet, even though they get an opportunity to be heard on stage I do not see a breakthrough for these women who remain, I suggest, trapped in more ways than one at the end of the performance. They search for a "happy ending", to life, to this performance, to any performance that they may act in, but they cynically conclude that anything "positive",

“uplifting” or with a “happy ending” is a “fantasy” (p. 26). They look to their audience in the theatre on the night of the performance in search of an answer, but they find the same impasse reflected on their faces:

Coral: I watch them – the audience – their heads sleek in the dark – furtive – secretive, with their little habits, tics, inappropriate coughs, gaze. I watch them – but it’s transgressive – I’m to be stared at, not them. But I look and I want to ask, who are you? Why are you here? What do you think of me? Am I just another performer? What am I? My mother could never even find the *exact* word for me – even though she is still searching. (*as her mother*) ‘What are you like Coral? I’ll tell you what you’re like: a disappointment. A let-down. And after all my sacrifices ...’ (*to audience as self*) I’m watching you. (p. 48)

They step out of their massive dresses which constrict them and even shed their clothes as they share their painful dark secrets with each other and with the audience, but the metal frames that held their clothing, so like cages when they are stripped of material, remain on stage and indeed continue to take up the whole space even after the end of the final blackout. These metal cage-like frames, create an image of entrapment which leaves the audience feeling that these women may have “confessed their way out” of their own constrictions but the power structures which keep them restricted as women, as mothers, as lovers, as daughters, possibly remain.



Fig. 4.9 *Caroline Parker, Lisa Hammond and Sophie Partridge: stripped to the bare essentials. From the 2002 production / photos Patrick Baldwin*



Fig. 4.10 Nicola Miles-Wildin and Kiruna Stamell in rehearsal, in their vast cage-like frames

As “characters” which have been “deconstructed” in a contemporary version of *The Trojan Women*, they interrogate their role as performers and are in playful interaction with the contemporary resonances of the hypoplay. But as women who seek liberation from all the clichés that society has placed on them, they seem to have a long battle to fight before their final victory.

The above contradiction lies in a further catch-22 situation in which women especially in the western world found themselves, in the latter half of the twentieth century. On the one hand we gained the right to control our bodies in a way which has had no precedent in history. On the other hand society has often remained conservative and hesitant in sanctioning that right. Therefore women have, even to this day, found themselves alone and unsupported in decisions which relate to their right to govern their own body especially their choices related to motherhood – and even today many still silently carry solitary burdens of guilt or responsibility related to these choices. By engaging hypertheatrically with *The Trojan Women*, *Peeling* seeks to break this silence and to provide a coherent link between the experience of contemporary women, disabled or able bodied and that of women of other times or different societies – all “complex human beings who make difficult decisions about their

fertility and potential offspring” (www.forestforge.co.uk/posts/45). The strength of this play as a hyperplay, therefore, lies in its boldness to address and reflect on the issue of disability and performance, the ethics and aesthetics of appearance, and the right of women to have a political voice of their own concerning their own fertility. In a radical way it reaches a new theatre audience and asks an old theatre audience to peel off layers and layers of prejudices and to experience ideas emanating from a very old play in a very new way.

Trojan Barbie: “A dream with a hard core of truth inside.” (Evans, 2010b)

Christine Evans wrote *Trojan Barbie* (2010c)¹² as a “modern car-crash encounter with Euripides’ *Trojan Women*” (2010b), a play that would address the many layers of time, history and culture that have accumulated and collide between two works of art crafted with two millennia between them. The play began its life as a commission by the University of San Francisco to adapt Euripides’ *Trojan Women* for a student project. Evans continued to work on the play after the initial commission was over until it reached its final form and eventually captured the attention of the American Repertory Theatre in Boston. For Gideon Lester, who was artistic director of the theatre’s 2008-09 season, choosing the play was an easy decision:

I loved this play as soon as I read it ... I responded to the story as a war play that isn't a documentary or politically correct or obsessed about how to represent war. It doesn't have a time stamp. It takes a very long view of history ... It has a dreamlike quality, and somehow it's quite real. (Evans, 2009)

So in its final form the play had its world premiere at the Zero Arrow Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts in March 2009, presented by the American Repertory Theatre and directed by Carmel O’Reilly.

Evans felt she needed to develop the project further after the initial commission, because she believed it was not enough to simply “modernise” the dialogue in the hypoplay, and assume that the same words and ideas presented with a contemporary polish could reflect

in a better way the sufferings of women in war. She wanted to re-invent a new dialogue between our own time and that of *The Trojan Women*. She wanted to focus on the false sense of distance that we in the Western world feel exists between our reality and the suffering of countries and people who are in a war situation. Her idea of a “collision” between the past and the present was an attempt to explore the concept of cyclical traumatic memory and her observation that in a very paradoxical way we seem comfortable living in many different times and places at once. By looking at the reality of the world around her she realised that “the violent simultaneity of past and present is our everyday white noise”(Evans, 2009). We might for example be sitting in our living room watching digital channels on the television where news is delivered of wars in faraway places, where people on the screen could have walked out of the bible were it not for a modern technological assault rifle or some other arsenal of modern war that is pictured right next to them. This multiplicity of layers gave Evans a sense “of time collapsing, from modernity to ancient society [that] seemed true of our own strange postmodern moment” (2010a), and provided a starting point for [her] play’s collision of times. It is interesting that she calls it a collision and not a fusion which would seem to imply some seamless blending because clearly the different layers of reality – be it mythological, historical, personal or political – in *Trojan Barbie* are juxtaposed in a way which highlights their incompatibility as the past increasingly intrudes into the present until they smash and shatter with increasing violence in the final moments of the play. To achieve this monumental collision Evans uses Euripides’ women, struggling against male violence, but also a woman of today who gets caught up in a form of violence which is not quite in the present but has eerie contemporary resonances.

Trojan Barbie tells the story of Lotte Jones, a middle aged doll-repair expert from Reading, who decides to go on “a cultural tour for singles” (p.26) to the site of Ancient Troy

in Turkey, advertised in her brochure as “Tragedy in Troy”. Lotte packs her dreams of romantic love and cultured adventures into her suitcase and leaves her safe haven in peaceful western Europe to travel to “the city that has been razed and re-built nine times” (p. 9).



Fig.4.11 *Lotte (Karen MacDonald) checks her supply of doll parts before setting off on her “cultural trip for singles” Photo by Michael Lutch / American Repertory Theatre*

When she arrives there she is impressed by how “sad and quite lovely” the place is, and observes that “history is all around [her], in a shopworn and dusty silence” (p. 26). But very suddenly her naive, tourist observations as well as the surrounding silence, are shattered. Her cultural space bubble is violated by the entrance of Andromache who comes on stage and into Lotte’s reality, lost and devastated by what has been happening to her family and to her country. Lotte has somehow landed back in time in an ancient war zone – among the ruins of Troy, during the last days of the Trojan War, as the city is being burnt to the ground and the world's endless war is still being fought. From that moment on the two worlds – of Lotte, the woman who can mend and replace the limbs of broken dolls, and of the tormented women of Troy, who cannot get their “broken” children, or husbands, or homes repaired and fixed – are presented in forceful juxtaposition, shattering the constructs of time and reality and

identifying the harsh pain that violence and “other people’s” wars bring to those who did not invite it.

Trojan Barbie encompasses the two colliding worlds in its very title. While ‘Trojan’ refers us back in time to a mythological reality which invokes images of war, pain and loss, ‘Barbie’ pushes us into a present which is plastic, playful, colourful and related negatively to an uncomfortable re-imagining of the ideal female body. However Evans manages to evade this familiar image of the un-ageing Barbie doll.¹³ In fact she uses it as a kind of distancing device which reverses our expectations and our habitual perception of it. The only figure in her play which could be called Barbie-like, in the familiar sense of the word, is Helen, who uses all her feminine wiles to try to escape from the terrifying reality of the war.



Fig. 4.12 *Helen (Careena Melia) is enjoying the attentions of the Greek soldier, Mica (Renzo Ampuero). Photo by Michael Lutch / American Repertory Theatre*

However, she does not promote the image of the brainless beauty, because she is the one who does actually manage to escape and in that way promotes an image of active resistance, fierce practicality and clever persuasiveness rather than what she calls the “Wailing Women

routine” (p. 18). Her versatility and ability to “manoeuvre” other human beings, especially men, is regarded as one of the ways that women in war situations manage to regain the voice that has been taken away from them and make a political statement.

But the central re-invented image of Barbie comes from Hecuba’s teenage daughter Polly X who conceives of a sculpture which she calls the Trojan Barbie.¹⁴ She is inspired by what she sees in the only museum exhibition which has not been looted by the invading soldiers: works fashioned out of found objects - mostly things that have been broken in battle and are completely useless. In a similar fashion she decides to make a sculpture out of her own “broken stuff”: mostly old, dismembered Barbie dolls. In an outbreak of childish excitement she says: “I am going to get a big piece of pink cardboard ... and then I am going to get all my dolls and nail them onto it. In the shape of a heart. So when it’s finished it will be this huge heart, made of smashed up dolls ... It will be very, very scary” (p. 11).



Fig. 4.13 *Polly X* (Kaaron Briscoe) imagining her Trojan Barbie sculpture.
Photo by Michael Lutch / American Repertory Theatre

Polly X's creative fantasy is interrupted by the Greek soldiers who have come to take her away to "Achilles' tomb for the purposes of ritual sacrifice" (p. 11), and her work will not be completed until at the end of the play when she becomes one of those dolls, nailed crucifixion-like and dead to the huge heart. This final image of the play, with all the implications it carries, is indeed "very scary", but it is also a celebration of a young woman's defiant attitude, of her fierce desire to live, rebel and be creative, and of her ability to redefine her role in society not as that of the Barbie doll but on the contrary as a girl "who'd rather invent something than be [an] icon" (p. 8). "I don't care about History", she says before she is sacrificed, "It's full of dead people. I just wanted to live" (p. 68).

Her defiant attitude is directly related to the re-invented image of the Barbie which I have been discussing but also to dolls as lifeless-objects-that-could-be-living-people, which are the central recurring image of the play. As Evans experiments with the dolls as a central image running throughout her text, director Carmel O'Reilly together with designer David Reynoso translate this effectively into theatrical space at the Zero Hour Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts (March-April 2009). As the audience walk into the theatre they are greeted by the gruesome image of a string of mutilated dolls which hangs over the middle of the stage. Some are without arms, some without legs, some even without heads – it is just a collection of body parts. These dolls which are garishly real, yet also obviously plastic become for the playwright a chance to explore the tension between the doll as replica of a human and the human as real. Though the two look alike there is one main fracture between them. In a replica the trauma can be erased completely, in a human it cannot.

Christine Evans has said that she became fascinated with before-and-after images of dolls on doll hospital websites which look disturbingly like real bodies as we see them on television reports from war zones, or in the newspapers – except that dolls can be mended to

look as good as new, whereas human beings cannot. These images gave her a line of comparison between broken dolls' bodies and broken women's bodies which went on to become the political core of the play that questions our western culture of complacency and smugness as well as our false sense of security. Thus in this play the dolls are constantly on a borderline between the living and the dead. Lotte, in her doll hospital in Reading, talks to them as if they are human, but when she goes to the refugee camp in Troy she sees the broken dolls there as only dolls, whereas the women see them as real corpses. In a shocking parallel speech, before the world of Lotte and of the Trojan Women actually collides, Lotte is taking inventory of all the doll parts so that she can stock up while Hecuba is looking for her children among the dead bodies that are strewn, dismembered on the ground:

HECUBA: I'm sorting through the bodies again
they're heaped in the corridor.
I am always here when I dream
LOTTE: (*to dolls, taking inventory*) And as for you lot...
HECUBA: but this time there aren't even bodies, just limbs
hopelessly mixed up –
An old man's ear, a girl's left hand –
LOTE & HECUBA: – Hair, heads, legs, fingers –
HECUBA: – I can't find her.
LOTTE: I can't find anything. *Eyes.* I must reorder eyes.

When Andromache breaks into Lotte's world, at the café in Turkey, she is covered in ragged clothing, and fresh bruises. In her arms she carries a toddler sized doll. To Andromache this is her son, to Lotte it is "a precious little doll. And in such good condition" (p. 28). Evans poignantly highlights the naiveté of Lotte as the average inhabitant of the western world who cannot see beyond the glass bubble that we live in. Dead bodies are corpses which have a name, and they matter only when they come home in coffins covered in flags; they are not corpses when they are strewn by their hundreds in dusty, dry places on the other side of the world, without a name, a face or a personal history. When we read or hear about them we can, with a haughty compassion say, like Lotte, when she is writing home about her tourist

experience: “It’s so dusty and dry here. History’s fascinating – but bits of it stick in your throat” (p. 25).

Furthermore while Lotte acknowledges the inevitability of history and the fact that truly terrible wars do happen, she can only see them happening elsewhere, not in her safe sterilised suburban part of the world. When Andromache laments, looking at the destruction around her, “My broken city. Raped by the sword and flame. Ash and dust your shroud,” Lotte coolly comments: “It is sad to think of the city being obliterated so many times. But on the other hand, if it wasn’t, it wouldn’t have got into history, would it, and we wouldn’t be here” (p. 27). The horror of Lotte’s world does not lie in the things that are done *to* her, such as rape or killing of her people or burning of her city, but in things that happen *inside* her, like her loneliness, her despair, her disillusionment or even her childlessness, which is projected in her desire to fix dolls and bring them back to life. In their lifeless bodies, which feel like they are alive after she spends hours repairing them, she sees the potential for new life, because as she says, “they might become somebody, whereas we actually are, and that’s inevitably disappointing” (p. 28). Andromache talks about the same disillusionment, emptiness and fear of a childless future which bring them so close though they are worlds apart. And Lotte is drawn into her world as if to experience the other woman’s horror, that different “external” pain which goes even deeper than what she has ever felt.

Yet Evans does not present a world which is all-impossible. There is some hope in the bonding between the women in this play which does occur though their worlds collide and smash. In a re-imagining of the scene which is the culmination point for Euripides’ play, the moment when the Greek soldiers hand over Astyanax’s dead body to Hecuba for burial, Talthybius enters, covered in blood, holding the broken body of the doll that Andromache was carrying earlier in the play. He hands it over to Hecuba and she mourns over her dead

grandson. At that point, Lotte who has all along remained emotionally unaffected by the broken dolls lying around the stage, because for her they are clearly not human bodies, approaches Hecuba and says:

LOTTE: I do hope I'm not intruding. But, as it happens – I have quite extensive experience with this kind of repair work.

– May I...?

(LOTTE starts to put the limbs together gently and expertly)

HECUBA: The last, the last child of Troy –

LOTTE: – He'll be as good as new in no time, won't you angel?

HECUBA: The future crumples up like a wet paper bag in our hands.

LOTTE: – Oh, he *has* been torn about. We can't do much about the skull, but the torso...

HECUBA: Well, my darling we'll do the best we can.

Not that I think the dead care what we do for them.

But it's terrible for the living, to throw the dead away as if their lives had meant nothing.

LOTTE: Why don't you try to fit the feet back in, it's a simple ball socket – the ankle's a bit

tricky, you have to push ... there ... and I'll do what I can for the face. At least his Mama's going to recognise him now, that's something. (p. 62)

Evans writes in her stage directions that the women bend over the doll/corpse together and present an image of collaboration and solidarity, an image of the two disparate worlds finding a point of contact, "*a moment of ritual – women working together as they have done for thousands of years*" (p. 62). She paints in this way the only glimpse of hope that can possibly come through the bleak horror of war. If there is ever any chance for the wrongs of this world to be fixed, then it can only be achieved through joint efforts.

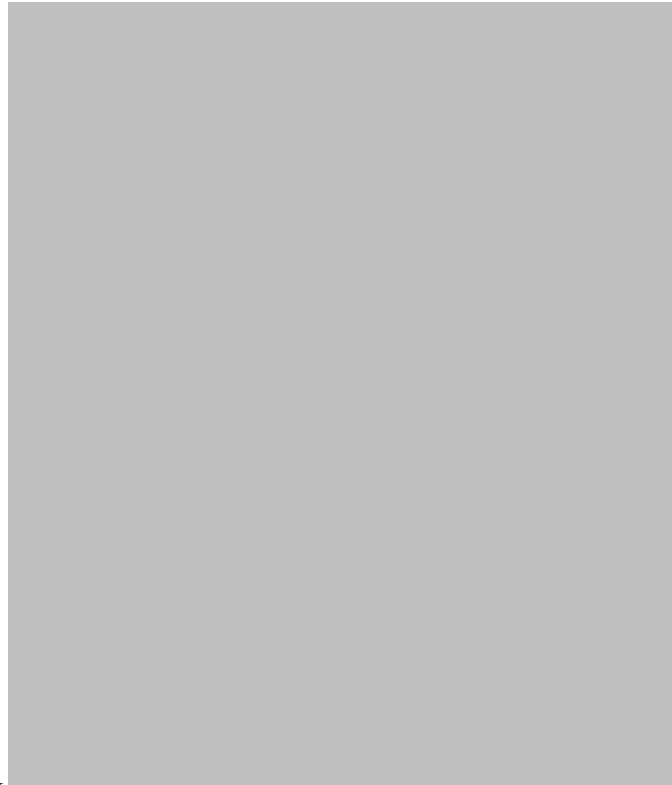


Fig. 4.14 *Lotte (Karen MacDonald) is fixing Astyanax for Hecuba (Paula Langton).*
Photo by Michael Lutch / American Repertory Theatre

This moment of proximity becomes all the more powerful if it is contrasted to the image of men and how they are projected in this play. *Trojan Barbie* is clearly about women – not just women from Troy, or any contemporary war zone, but women in every corner of the world – and how they are trapped in situations of war within their own bodies but also around them; how they lose their voice and place due to war but also how they find it in courageous, creative and versatile ways. The perpetrators of all these horrors are clearly the men, and in this play they are very distinctly modelled against the stereotype of the average American soldier of today. Yet though Evans depicts the horrors of imperialistic political designs she takes care not to identify these policies with the soldiers as individuals. She portrays the soldiers as being neither wholly good, not wholly bad, but caught, rather, within a mechanism of expected macho, imperialistic, aggressive behaviour. In fact she seems to assign some form of victimhood to the individual soldier when Mica (one of the three men in the play) says, “They tell you you’ll see the world. / They put you in sealed planes / and tell you you’re

travelling, / but somehow you always end up in Troy (p. 16) ... [Then] after ten years away, you're like a ghost, haunting the streets of your own fucking life"(p. 50). Yet it is these same men that are victims of a certain system, who in turn victimise the women of the world. This of course brings on the question of who is the ultimate victimiser, and turns *Trojan Barbie* into a political play.

When the playwright was asked whether *Trojan Barbie* was a political act (Evans, 2010a) she said that she did not like it to be thought of as political theatre which conveys a specific message or aims to convert people's opinions, but as a play to make people feel for others and think for themselves. In writing it, she was attempting to wrestle with recurring political questions but did not aspire to give the answers, or use her art in the form of propaganda. She hoped rather to draw her audience into a dream world which contained the core of a political question and to bring them face to face with the complexity of our realities, and the contradictory worlds in which we live.

Trojan Barbie does indeed explore political questions and simultaneously avoids being didactic or polemical. It brings women face to face with their past, their history, their culture, their present and their future. Lotte expresses her desire to explore culture and history in the very act of booking to go on a holiday to Troy, a city which has "resurrect[ed] itself over the bones of its previous lives and deaths" (p. 9). But her view of what culture and history are is superficial and naive or maybe it is just socially and historically conditioned since essentially she wishes to go to Troy not because she genuinely desires to delve into the history of an ancient people but because she wishes to bestow her "tourist gaze" upon a mythological site (Urry and Larsen, 2011). When she actually does get to Troy, however, the "pseudo-event" and history collide with reality (Eco, 1987). The earth cracks under her feet and she is thrown into the catastrophic events which actually *make* history. Past and present

fuse into one apocalyptic reality which brings forth an equally hellish future. In her characteristic prophetic revelations Cassandra depicts this painful collision of past, present and future, myth, fantasy and reality: “The present is pregnant with death. / Because the past fucked it already... [Now] I can taste blood on my tongue. That means the future is being born.” (pp. 19-20).

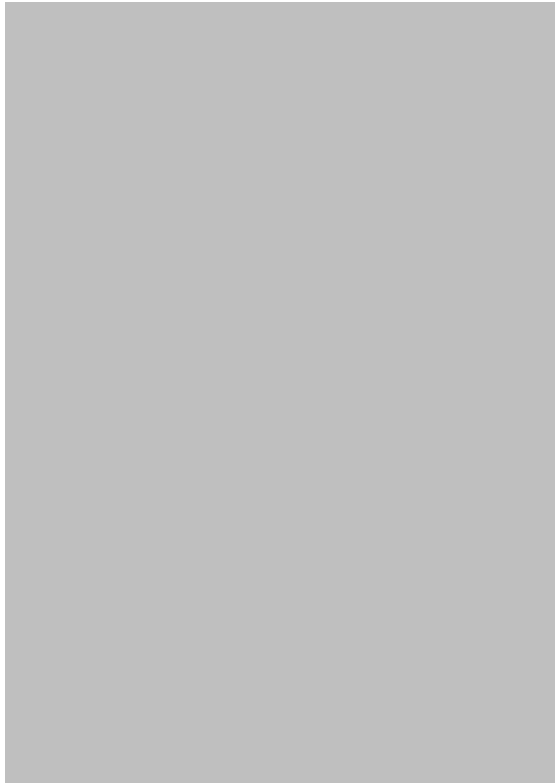


Fig. 4.15 *Cassandra (Nina Kassa)*
Photo by Michael Lutch / American Repertory Theatre

Lotte, the women of Troy, and with them all the women who are caught in the throes of war and destruction the world over, are swept by the tidal wave of history which Cassandra speaks about: “I think history’s a wave,” she says, “I think that’s it. / It rolls and sucks at you and drags you under. / It smashes you into the future / right when you think you’re on solid ground. Like stepping on a landmine” (p. 30). All the women in this play are trapped in this insecure, liminal space that history has hurled them into, “ghosts in the dead zone of immigration,” hostages in their own bodies, refugees in their own countries. “There’s a black

hole now, where I used to think ‘future’” says Esme, one of the chorus, “But now / it’s like someone tore up a map / and that map was my body” (p. 37).

Evans shows no ray of light in the penultimate scene of the play. The women realise that “the only fertile seed is hate” and their only comfort lies in them forming a strong support system for each other. They are raped, beaten and taken away. Astyanax is killed by having a tank driven over his skull (on auto pilot so that no man would bear his blood on their hands); Polly X’s throat is slit at Achilles’ grave so that the sand storm can cease and the trucks can set off – her sculpture left half-finished; Hecuba is not even allowed to bury Astyanax who is grabbed from her and thrown into a “pit”; the city is torched and the oil tanks are about to explode; Lotte is saved at the last minute by a *deus ex machina* British officer and whisked safely “home, back to piles of bills and the terrible English weather”; (p. 65).

This ruthless re-telling of the familiar myth will leave an audience with an uncomfortable feeling that in this world we value the life of some, more than the life of others; that what for one person is a dismembered corpse for another person is just an image of a broken doll; and that one person’s apocalyptic war is another person’s holiday-gone-wrong. In the last scene of *Trojan Barbie*, Lotte is back in Reading. Still “a little bruised and band-aided”, but confident that “soon everything will feel normal ... and the memories will fade” (p. 66) since this hideous tragedy only happened to some foreigners and not to anybody with a name and a face that she/we can identify. It is a bleak revelation to see how easily Lotte forgets what happened “out there” and finds comfort within her culturally defined space bubble again. However, Christine Evans will not leave her audience with this smug feeling of false safety and security which they feel in front of their television sets – not without reminding them that the real world is still out there, whichever safe little bubble we choose to hide in. As Lotte sets to fixing a very fragile and precious porcelain doll – the very same one

that was Astyanax in previous scenes – Hecuba appears in the form of a bag lady, dressed in contemporary rags and looking frantic. Lotte does not recognise her. Hecuba has survived the centuries, “the deserts and the seas” (p. 66) to look for her dead children’s bodies. She cannot rest unless she buries them. She starts rummaging through Lotte’s bags of doll parts and starts flinging them to the floor as she searches and then sees the broken porcelain body of Astyanax and moves towards it transfixed.



Fig. 4.16 *Hecuba* (Paula Langton) looking for her dead children in *Lotte’s* (Karen MacDonald) doll hospital.
Photo by Michael Lutch / American Repertory Theatre

The episode ends swiftly and cleanly for Lotte. A hospital worker, alias Talhybius, rushes in, restrains Hecuba and takes her away as he did in Troy. Lotte, visibly shaken stares as they leave “like the last fragment of a dream” (p. 67), but quickly snaps herself out of it and starts picking up the doll parts that Hecuba scattered on the floor. However, while Lotte continues to be ignorant of the reality surrounding her, the audience see a final image of Polly X, as the soldiers are ready to sacrifice her in front of her unfinished Trojan Barbie sculpture. Her work of art becomes complete only after they tie a red ribbon around her neck, killing her in a very stylised and unrealistic way, and she becomes just another one of those broken doll parts that

make up Trojan Barbie. Her sculpture is finished, and, as she had promised, is now “very very scary” (p. 11), because it evidences that there is another world out there which exists whether we choose to turn a blind eye to it or not.

Christine Evans (2009) has said that in writing *Trojan Barbie* she was not aiming to make “a modern paean to Euripides” because *The Trojan Women* still speak very eloquently of the suffering of women in situations of war. She was aiming for a radical adaptation that would take apart Euripides’ work as a hypoplay and build a new contemporary construct that would interrogate many of the assumptions that the ancient work carried. She wanted to dramatise “the illusion of our contemporary Western distance” from the many and horrific problems faced by women in war ridden zones of this world. She wanted to write a palimpsestic work that would redefine the romantic image of the young virgin who stoically accepts her sacrifice. She wanted to show that behind that image, throughout the layers and layers of history there always have been strong, resilient, creative women who make a statement and re-define themselves, like Polly X’s sculpture, out of the “the scavenged scraps” of whatever is left in their lives. Whether we choose to ignore them or acknowledge them – Evans leaves it up to her audience to reflect and ponder.

NOTES

1. Schlegel (1815) writes in detail about all of Euripides' works and indeed sees him as "inferior in many ways to the other two Athenian dramatists" since his work does not contain either "the sublime seriousness of mind, nor the severe wisdom which we revere in Aeschylus and Sophocles" (p. 138) For more details see Lecture V, pp. 138-190.
2. For a detailed account of *The Trojan Women's* performance history see Garland 2004, ch. 7; Hall 2010, pp. 268-9; Hall and Macintosh 2005a, pp.508-11 and Macintosh 1997, pp.302-9.
3. For an exhaustive list of translations and adaptations of *The Trojan Women* with a political/anti-war agenda see (Garland, 2004, pp. 147-186 and 207-232; Macintosh, Fiona, 1997; McDonald, 1992, pp.21-44; Taplin, 1989)
4. In Latin the phrase 'habeas corpus' literally means 'you have the body'. A 'writ' is a legal procedure to which you have an undeniable right. In law 'a writ of habeas corpus' it is a judicial mandate ordering that a prisoner be brought to the court so it can be determined whether or not that person is imprisoned lawfully and to show cause why the liberty of that person is being restrained. Should it become obvious that the person is restrained without reason, then the court is duty bound to order the restraint eliminated the person is immediately released from custody. Accessed from <http://www.lectlaw.com/def/h001.htm> and <http://www.habeascorpus.net/hcwrit.html>
5. To list but a few:
 - because we do not have this background knowledge, it makes little sense to jumble the stories up particularly if it is to point out that wars are silly and that men should live at peace with each other
 - Why doesn't the play just use the "A-level-Troy" we hazily remember?
 - If scholars are thus baffled one can only guess at the bewilderment of those first nighters who lacked the real training in the classics
 - a bleak and often unintelligible play
 - pretentious
 - an intimidating business
 - one of the silliest plays I have ever seen
 - When it was all over, a woman in the audience blurted out, "I didn't understand that at all."
 - It's hard to see how this fits with the rest of the show
 - the connection seemed strained to me
 - a minor theatrical tragedy in its own right
 - the playwright's bold stride away from realism is less original than it seems.
 - a clever but over-complicated play
 - Between symbolism on one hand and banality on the other, the lives of real people have got lost in the middle.
 - At best, this play is a pastiche that just doesn't come together in a manner that offers fresh insights to a very old story
 - got the audience confused and disoriented rather than capturing our hearts and minds.
 - At the end the play leaves us challenged, curious, and just a little too confused.
 - I thought maybe it was the most elaborate April Fools' joke ever.
 - the playwright manages to sterilize one of history's most emotionally wrenching plays.
 - There's no shortage of wailing women or tragic soliloquies, but there's sure nothing behind them.
6. See Chapter Two of this thesis, pp 46-50.
7. Mee, Charles L. (1996) *Trojan Women: A Love Story* [online]. www.charlesmee.org [Accessed August 2009]. All subsequent references to the play will appear as page references to a printed version of the text available on-line, in brackets after the citation.
8. *Orestes 2.0* in 1991, *The Bacchae 2.0* in 1993 and *Agamemnon 2.0* in 1994
9. All her fellow citizens and her family members have been handed out as trophies to the Greek men, her grandson Astyanax is murdered in front of her eyes, Cassandra is defeated and lost in her frenzy, a teenage Polyxena is sacrificed at the grave of Achilles, and her arch-enemy Helen uses her irresistible feminine wiles to persuade Menelaus to take her back.
10. Their name comes from Greek mythology. The Graeae (literally meaning 'the old ones') were three sisters with just one tooth and one eye among them, who guarded the Gorgons (Medusa and two more female monsters). The hero Perseus robs them of these essential body parts in order to track down and kill Medusa but then breaks his promise and does not return their only life source. The founders of the company saw the

myth as an inspiration to begin focusing on disabled performers whose vulnerability has been exploited by the able-bodied and stronger “heros” in the world of theatre. The use of the name is a witty but also caustic joke, which essentially reclaims the mythological sisters from mockery and victimisation and indicates a company with attitude. The company use the logo below on their website www.graeae.org.uk



11. O'Reilly, K. (2002) *Peeling*. London: Faber and Faber. All subsequent references to the play will appear as a page reference to this edition, in brackets after the citation.
12. Evans, C. (2010c) *Trojan Barbie*. New York: Samuel French. All subsequent references to the play will appear as a page reference to this edition, in brackets after the citation
13. Out of pure coincidence (as the playwright confirms), the world's premiere of the play coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Barbie Doll. (see interview with Georgeann Murphy)
14. After all, as she writes in the credits for the play, she dedicates it to “all girls who’d rather invent something than be icons” (p. 8)

CHAPTER FIVE

WHO DOES *ANTIGONE* BELONG TO? WHO DOES ANTIGONE SPEAK TO?

442 BCE *Antigone*: A Female Citizen Breaks the Protocol of Silence and Invisibility

Sophocles' *Antigone* was probably performed in 442 BCE in a competition at the Great Dionysia, and won first place.¹ From the very title of the play which is the name of Oedipus's daughter, the audience would have been expecting a subversive content. Antigone means 'born to oppose' or 'she who opposes her forebears', acting in that way 'unnaturally' for a woman. The play is set in Thebes, a city-state north of Athens which the Athenian dramatists portray as an anti-democratic place where political conflict, tyranny and domestic chaos seemed to rule. (Zeitlin, 1986) The action of the play opens at the moment of political crisis caused directly by war within the family of King Oedipus, and involves the four children of the now dead king, Antigone, Ismene, Polyneices and Eteocles. The latter two quarrelled over who would rule Thebes after their father's death and Polyneices was driven into exile. Eteocles was left to rule the state with the help of his maternal uncle, Creon. Polyneices meanwhile formed an alliance with the King of Argos and raised an army with which he attacked his own city. The attack was unsuccessful but in the battle outside the city gates the two brothers died at each other's hands. The action begins at dawn after the Theban victory. Creon has now assumed power and has ordered a glorious burial with full military honours for Eteocles who died defending his home city. For Polyneices, on the other hand, as punishment for insurgence against Thebes, burial is denied by proclamation. Antigone expresses a passionate loyalty to her unburied brother, considers it her duty to bury him, and attempts to do so on repeated occasions. Creon opposes her efforts with firm and steadfast loyalty to the city and its laws, condemning her actions as traitorous, and sentencing her to

death. His autocratic and inflexible rule results not only in the death of Antigone but also of his son Haemon, and his wife Eurydice.

Regardless of whether the radicality of Sophocles' text has been acknowledged or not, *Antigone* has been adapted for centuries, even millennia, and not only as a theatrical text that has been studied, translated, adapted and performed, but also as a source of philosophical thinking, literary and linguistic analysis, or inspiration for all conceivable forms of art from Hegel (2000) to Kierkegaard (1959, pp. 137-162; Steiner, 1984, pp. 51-64) and from Jacques Lacan (1992), to Luce Irigaray (Jacobs, 1996) and Judith Butler (2000).

Sophocles has always been hailed as the tragedian who "celebrates the hero", in contrast to Euripides who "laments the victim" (McDonald, 2003, p.46). The Sophoclean hero has been seen a person who pursues their goals with single-minded purpose regardless of the potential self-destruction along with the destruction of others that this pursuit often entails. As Bernard Knox (1964) says, "Sophocles creates a tragic universe in which man's heroic action, free and responsible, brings him sometimes through suffering to victory but more often to a fall which is more defeat and victory at once; the suffering and glory are fused in an indissoluble unity"(p.6). The exploration of this duality in *Antigone*, is the reason why there have been so many varied and even conflicting interpretations of this work.

To date, the theoretical debate has focused mostly on Antigone's challenge of the authority of Creon within the concerns of family, kinship and also sexual difference. Western philosophical and psychoanalytic tradition have been determined and inspired by Hegel's own understanding of the play as the paradigmatic tragedy of collision. This view is justified within the German philosopher's dialectic model, since Tragedy arises when a hero courageously supports a just position, but in doing so simultaneously violates an equally just but contrasting other position. Both these just positions are at the same time also wrong to the

extent that they fail to recognise the validity of the other position. Understandably, Sophocles' *Antigone*, which for Hegel presents the conflict between the equally valid claims of Antigone (who represents the ethics of the family) and Creon (who represents the law of the state and maintains that it must be held in respect), is the ultimate manifestation of the clash between two equally valid moral claims but also of resolution and reconciliation through death and punishment. As for Antigone as a woman, she becomes the exemplar of femaleness not through her relationship with Haemon, or her city or even Ismene, but through her identity as a sister to Polyneices. Inside the family, argues Hegel, there is only one relationship that is privileged among others as immediate and pure in its ethical substance: the one between brother and sister. Indeed femininity itself reaches its moral peak in the condition of sisterhood and Antigone is revealed as the paradigmatic figure of womanhood and family life. Hegel demonstrates that familial ethical life is the woman's unique responsibility as it is the man's, to leave the sphere of the family for the world of the *polis* and thus realise his manhood. (Hegel, 2000, pp.260-284; Mills, 1996; Roche, 2009; Steiner, 1984, pp.19-42)

Most philosophical renditions which spring from the dialectical foundation on which Hegel places Antigone define her in conjunction with the idea of family and kinship, and do not view her as a woman with a political presence whose actions and words have political implications. (Chanter, 2011, pp.1-55) Many eminent classical scholars have also perceived *Antigone* as a drama about sisterly love, adherence to divine laws and romantic rebellion against a sinfully proud ruler who learns his lesson in the end. (Kitto, 1939; Knox, 1964; Wiltshire, 1976) Yet to see it only as such is to see it outside its socio-historical context, to overlook its radical qualities and consequently to possibly misinterpret its contemporary relevance. Interestingly, it is as early as 1853, well before the beginning of the century which produced *Antigones* in the hundreds, that Matthew Arnold voiced his concern about

Antigone's 'timelessness' and 'universality'. In the Preface to the first edition of his *Poems* he writes: "An action like the action of the *Antigone* of Sophocles, which turns upon the conflict between the heroine's duty to her brother's corpse and that to the laws of her country, is no longer one in which it is possible that we should feel a deep interest"(1853, pp. xxv-xxvi). His point was very valid, since classical criticism had until then, and has continued even to the present day in some cases, to perceive *Antigone* as a drama about sisterly love, adherence to divine laws and romantic rebellion against a sinfully proud, yet ethically correct ruler.

However, perceiving the divine powers as only one constituent element of Antigone's resolve and her actions, transforms the play into one which interrogates the private and public choices of a politically responsible individual but also the political choices of a ruler. *Antigone* turns into a play in which a woman who would have been expected to be silent, compliant and invisible decides to act independently, and to defy powerful male authority in order to assert her beliefs and stand up for her principles. It is a radical, political play which focuses on the corruption of political leaders and the fact that family, friendship and integrity comes second to the thirst for power and sole rule. This is a play in which all the principles of democracy, which would be valued by the original audience as the cornerstones of their system of government, were not simply disregarded but completely violated.

It was common for Athenians in the fifth century to perceive the individual as a naturally 'political animal' who lived and flourished in the *polis*. For Aristotle's political being there are no persons beyond the walls of the city; to *be* a person means to be part of the corporate whole of the *polis*. The essence of a person is not intrinsic to the individual; it does not emerge in the development of the solitary self, nor in the development of the self within a family as child, brother, or father – let alone as sister. Only in the *polis* can there be persons, for the nature of the person is political, and the worst sin which one can commit is one which

introduces disruption, disharmony and corruption into the *polis* (Aristotle, 1995, bk.1, ch.1, l.1252). This *polis* was not just an abstract idea, and loyalty to it was not simply an abstract cause, but a practical necessity. It provided the Athenians with a sanctuary to which they owed their civilization after a long history of violence, anarchy and tyranny – and they certainly did not want to return to such a state.

Conceiving Antigone's and Creon's actions in terms of this political reality leads to a clear-cut interpretation of the actions in the play: even though Antigone acts honourably in wanting to bury her brother, in doing so she also violates the laws of the city which are above and beyond the individual and family ties, and thus she goes against justice. There is no higher articulation of natural or divine order than that of the *polis* and if Polyneices had won, there would be no *polis*. It would appear therefore, that Creon has a valid reason to name him a traitor and to punish Antigone. However the reason for which the play would have been less straightforward for its audience and more of a radical challenge to their sensibilities lies in *how* Creon defends the *polis* and where he stands as its defender. Does he stand behind it as a supporter, or does he stand above it and use it to expediently consolidate and legitimise the enforcement of his own law?

In a speech where Haemon defends Antigone and challenges his father, he cautions Creon by saying:

A man who thinks he has the monopoly
Of wisdom, that only what he says
And what he thinks is of any relevance,
Reveals his own shallowness of mind
With every word he says. The man of judgement
Knows that it is a sign of strength,
Not weakness, to value other opinions,
And to learn from them: and when he is wrong,
To admit it openly and change his mind (Sophocles, 1998, p. 162)

Ironically the audience would have heard these words as applying equally to Antigone as they do to Creon. While she *is* being honourable in wanting to observe the rites of burial which will lay her brother's soul at peace, she too thinks that she has the monopoly of wisdom. It is the same gods, whose laws she is upholding, who also proclaim that the polis must exist if men are to live at all. If Polyneices had not been stopped, if the laws are not observed, then the polis will not exist.

So where does Creon go wrong? While defending his own actions he says that there is no greater affliction for mankind than “indiscipline, anarchy [and] disobedience” (p. 160) – he is right. But earlier in the same speech he said that “unquestioning obedience to whomsoever the State / appoints to be its ruler, is the law” and that “applies / to small things as well as great ones, / *just or unjust, right or wrong*” (my italics, p. 160). It is precisely these last words which make Creon a dictatorial ruler and this play one of political conflict. They are the consequence of the belief in the *polis* as absolute, and “Justice” as being secondary to obedience. We are therefore presented with a conflict between a ruler who thinks he must be obeyed, be he right or wrong, and a citizen who openly challenges him and disobeys him when she believes he *is* wrong.

In the same speech Creon shows himself to be a shallow and insecure man, terrified of his newfound rule being undermined, especially by a woman. Instead of using a sound argument to support his decisions he repeatedly refers to Antigone's gender as being the main reason for which he has to paradigmatically crush her: “We must stand on the side of what is orderly”, he maintains, but immediately proceeds to add, “we cannot give victory to a woman, / If we must accept defeat, let it be from a man; / we must not let people say that a woman beat us” (Sophocles, 1954, ll. 676-80). Creon wants to punish her and make an example of this punishment, above because she is a woman and her opposition outrages and humiliates

his male authority. Not to punish Antigone, the woman, would “unman” him he thinks (l. 484) and unleash anarchy in the city (l. 672). It is evident therefore that Creon’s male conceit intensifies his desire to punish and get rid of Antigone and the threat that she presents to his continued reign.

At the onset of the play it seems that Sophocles is going to develop this play along the lines of a philosophical conflict – that between the claims of the family and the claims of the city. Antigone’s opening remarks concentrate narrowly upon the family and are utterly indifferent to the city. Similarly, in his first speech Creon is shown to be the champion of the *polis* when he praises those who subordinate personal attachments to the public interest and hails the existence of the *polis* as the safeguard of every citizen’s security, something to which an Athenian audience would have responded favourably. However, Sophocles proceeds to steadily undermine the moral position of Creon, while strengthening Antigone’s powerful stance and making her a commendable champion of the city which Creon is shown unable – despite his grand words – to govern. The issues on which the action turns are political and ethical issues which relate to governing a city. In Creon’s own words, “there is no art that teaches us to know / The temper, mind and spirit of any man, / Until he has been proved by government / and lawgiving.” (Sophocles, 2008, ll.175-8) Through the course of the play Creon puts himself to the test of “government and lawgiving” – and he fails. The whole of his first speech (ll. 162-210) is full of hints and ambiguities which give a superficial impression of political wisdom. However, he subsequently fails to actualize his own wise proclamations when he clearly becomes obsessed with the fact that it is a woman who is opposing him and challenging his authority: “Now she would be the man, not I, if she / Defeated me and did not pay for it.” (l. 484) He becomes so obsessed with the fact that a woman would dare defy him that he fails to see what is politically correct and just, confusing what is good for his city

(which he supported in his opening speech) and what has challenged his manhood and undermined his authority, culminating in his sentence which terminates his dialogue with Antigone: “While I am living, no woman shall have rule.” (l. 525)

As for Antigone, many critics have argued in agreement with Bernard Knox that she “does the right thing for the wrong reason” (1964, p. 161). I argue that she does the right thing for the right reason and thus must have surprised and unsettled Athenian audiences who watched the play. An approach such as Knox’s to Antigone’s actions presupposes that Antigone acts in a specific gender restricted way, based on the binary opposition of male/female, domestic/public, intuition/reason, divine duties/civic duties. In other words that she acts as a sister to Polyneices, and performs her duty to a family member by burying him and her duty to the gods by upholding their divine laws. And though she does appear to do just that on an initial level, a more radical approach to the play which would disregard these gender defined binary oppositions and scrutinise her actions as an independent citizen, reveals that Antigone possesses a political self-understanding of her relation to fellow citizens and has a fundamental awareness of the difference between proper and corrupt rule. Therefore she acts not simply in obedience to the divine law of proper burial, but in accordance with the collective of the city and the cultural order which would have seen Polyneices’ non-burial as an act of irrational rule. The Athenians knew very well that it was wrong to refuse burial to the dead of even one’s worst enemy, let alone to a man who was a citizen and a son to the former ruler of the city.²

Seen in that light, Antigone and Creon’s conflict epitomizes not the battle between human and divine law, but a political struggle on multiple levels that would also have made sense to the original audience of the play. First of all they would recognise the Homeric struggle between Achilles and Agamemnon over who is “the kinglier man” which of course

focused on the struggle of two *male* figures for excellence (see Whitman, 1958, pp. 183-7). In fifth century democratic Athens, this struggle was being perceived within a new context since the Athenians were concerned with what qualities constituted the ‘man of measure’³ in ruling and politics. In this play Antigone is proved to be this ‘man’. She is the ‘kinglier’ of the two, the more ‘measured’ or ‘wiser’, the exemplary human being, because she sticks to her personal beliefs as well as to the principles of her family, her culture and her city. She provides an example of civic excellence regardless of her gender. In fact she proceeds with firm determination based on her principles of justice despite the fact that all those surrounding her do not take her seriously or even warn her against her proposed action because she is a woman.⁴ And while she acknowledges her gender, she does not defer to the common notion of appropriate female behaviour. She repeatedly explains herself not only as a female family member whose duty it is to bury the dead but as a woman acting upon the principles of citizenship *and* kinship.

Antigone pursues civic excellence alone. Maybe she has no allies *because* she is a woman. And one cannot help but wonder if it was only Ismene, Creon and the elders of Thebes who were deaf to her arguments, or if the Athenian audience were also unable to hear or see beyond the male actor who they knew played Antigone. Of course it may be that Sophocles was trying to show his audience that *even* a woman may be better able to understand civic principles than a corrupt ruler; and that would be in keeping with the didactic nature of Athenian drama as well as with the obsession that the Athenians had with their ‘ideal’ form of government of which Thebes was, as I mentioned earlier, a mirror reflection. If that was the case then Ismene’s, Creon’s, the Chorus’s, even Haemon’s reaction to Antigone’s action could have been in anticipation of the collective response of an overwhelmingly male audience which anyway recognised only male actors. Or it could have

been a reflection of the overwhelmingly conventional masculine bias of the culture: this audience would not be able to comprehend a political ‘actress’ who assumes extraordinary levels of responsibility as a citizen, therefore Sophocles would be challenging and shocking them by presenting a woman who ‘acts’ rather than ‘re-acts’, and not only acts more wisely than a man, but also refuses to perform within the expected confines of her gender.

Antigone’s superiority over Creon is reflected in yet another comparison between the two of them as if they were equal citizens in the *polis*. Creon personifies many of the stereotypical features Athenians would have attributed to tyrants. He completely disregards the advice of the chorus and thus breaks the political tradition of consultation with the city elders who are – by definition – wise. Creon, as he is presented in *Antigone*, is an insecure man, a ruler overcome by fear and personal ambition. His ambition and autocratic tendencies are revealed even in the form of his speech and his overuse of the first person singular, while his insecurity is reflected in his unease about the firmness of his newly bestowed power and in his fear of the people and their potential to harm him or take away the authority which he seems to be thriving on. His erratic behaviour further reflects this insecurity and his inadequacy as a ruler when he defends his rash decisions with characteristic male obstinacy thereby inevitably bringing about his own downfall. He had decreed that whoever buried Polyneices would be “put to death / By public stoning in the streets of Thebes.” (l. 35) Yet when Antigone is caught he changes his mind and threatens to have her killed in the palace “At once, before her bridegroom’s very eyes” (l. 761), and later still decides to “imprison her alive” (l. 774), until at the end he revokes his decision altogether. At the beginning he believed Ismene to be guilty, and then changes his mind about that too. As for the end of the play, he once again acts rashly when he decides to sort out Polyneices’ burial first, before attending to the still living Antigone, triggering by this reversal of a more expected order to

his actions, a series of related deaths which would be his ultimate “punishment, great as his pride was great” (l. 1351). He is the perfect example of what Aristotle (1996, p. 24) calls a “consistently inconsistent” character, who, not surprisingly, does not achieve heroic stature.

Creon’s failure as a ruler, as a relative, as a father and a husband finds a sharp contrast – and here lies the radicality of Sophocles’ play – not in another man, a ruler, a hero or an elder, but in a young woman, who would be a non-citizen of the Athenian society, members of which are watching and judging this play. Creon decides to send Antigone to a living tomb, but it is he who ends the play as a living dead person because nothing that he values is alive and he sees no point in continuing to live; he is therefore morally, ethically and emotionally dead. On the other hand Antigone achieves the stature of a hero/heroine because in contrast to Creon she is consistent and follows her original decision without falter or hesitation. She is a champion of *philia* which she, and the audience, understood to be the foundation of public life since it meant ‘friendship’ that included the love between members of families, the favourable attitudes of business partners and associates, and of fellow citizens to each other (Aristotle, 1985; Urmson, 1988). Creon’s actions negate this *philia*, and lack of proper respect towards it has catastrophic consequences for him as a man and as a ruler. He does not comprehend that *philia* comes above and beyond his desire for sole rule both within his family and within his city and if he embodied it he would have secured peace and stability for himself and for his people. Antigone, on the other hand, acts and speaks with an understanding of these concepts and a ‘civic wisdom’.

Even when she is led away to her living tomb, Antigone is steadfast in her belief that what she did was just, and that she has exposed Creon’s corrupt rule. Traditional scholarship has used her final speech before she exits, under armed guard, to point to her weakness as a woman and to the fact that she acted within the duties of a woman of noble descent (Cropp,

1997; Wiltshire, 1976). I contend, however, that she acts more as a citizen of the *polis*; a citizen who is politically and socially aware of the reasoning behind her actions. So when she says “So with rude hands he drags me to my death, / No chanted wedding hymn, no bridal joy, / No tender care of children can be mine” (l. 917-8), she acknowledges her gender and laments two promises of a woman’s life which she will be denied through the sentence that has been placed upon her: marriage and motherhood. However, her lament is not a weakness in her resolve but a further strengthening of her position as a woman who breaks the restrictions of her gender, for she does not act as a man – and therefore as an unnatural woman – like all the other characters in the play see her doing. She acknowledges her identity as a woman by stating that she regrets her husbandless and childless fate but she also implicates herself as a woman in her social actions, as a sister and friend or political comrade to Polyneices, as a worthy daughter of her father and heir to the house of Oedipus and as a preserver of the established ways of her city. Therefore she is the woman who is the ‘kinglier man’ of the city of Thebes and by being so breaks through conventional gender-based limitations to champion the civic principles of ancestry, pride and *philia*.

Furthermore, perceived as a symbolic image and approached from a feminist perspective, Antigone’s live entombment can even be interpreted as emblematic of the situation in which women, some of who may have been watching this play, found themselves in Athenian society. Encased in their family homes, away from public view and participation, they would be experiencing a form of death as Creon describes it for Antigone: “alone, in solitude. / Her home shall be her tomb” (l. 888). By giving Antigone a voice against the male patriarchal establishment, but then not giving her the choice to live, Sophocles is indicating the gender impasse in which the *polis* itself is entangled. Her forced choice could be symbolic of the actual situation that Athenian women found themselves in: they were not given the

choice to speak, therefore they were not given a legitimate choice to live, having their lives turned into a form of living death, similar to the one Antigone is led to.

Far from highlighting her weakness as a female then, Antigone's speech and her entombment contribute to the radicality of this play. By using Antigone as a figure who acknowledges her gender, but still acts in the way a man would have acted while being a woman, Sophocles challenges traditional male stereotypes and transforms the typical male understanding of the feminine as an expression of domestic traditions and duties such as burial of the dead and keeper of family traditions. Antigone is given the status of a woman who champions and guards traditions that are not limited to the family sphere, but include the entire *polis*, the entire state. And this woman, acting from the basis of her womanly identity, radically and subversively breaks the protocol of silence and invisibility.

Antigone Now: Why Antigone and Whose Antigone?

Adaptations of *Antigone* as a theatrical work have been performed the world-over from Africa to Australia and from Alaska to Argentina; from Ireland to India and Japan, and from Helsinki to China.⁵ Examples of adaptations and re-makings of *Antigone* are simply too numerous to recount. George Steiner (1984) admits in his monograph *Antigones*, a definitive discussion of the play's continuing existence since antiquity, that he is unable to provide an authoritative inventory of *Antigone's* presence in literature, theatre and the arts over the ages, simply because "the field is too vast" (p. 194). Steiner ends his extensive study by saying that even as he is finishing his work, "new 'Antigones' are being imagined, thought, lived now; and will be tomorrow" (p.304). So rich and extensive is *Antigone's* afterlife, he argues, that "no *Ur-Antigone* can exist for us" and it is almost impossible for anyone to approach any *Antigone*

“wholly unprepared” (p.296), completely innocent of bringing to it prior and varied experiences of Sophocles’ work.

When Steiner says that we come prepared to any *Antigone*, he means mainly as readers or spectators who have some prior knowledge of Sophocles’ *Antigone* and its polarization of “primary elements in the discourse on man and society as it has been conducted in the West.” (p. 108) The reasons behind the play’s continuing afterlife lie, according to Steiner, in the fact that it encapsulates the “principal constants of conflict in the condition of man ... [namely] the confrontation of men and of women; of age and of youth; of society and the individual; of the living and the dead; of men and of god(s)” (p.231). What he fails to acknowledge however, is that though for centuries the focus of “Antigone study” has been centred on Western philosophical thought, *Antigone* has not been appropriated exclusively by the West. Exploration of Sophocles’ play has also developed beyond the broader binary oppositions on which Steiner focuses, such as good versus evil, ethical versus unethical or the human versus the divine. Many contemporary adaptations of *Antigone* have emerged as a result of present re-negotiations with Sophocles’ play as a past model, a hypoplay, in a productively radical way. They do not replicate the ‘universal values’ on which Steiner’s analysis is founded and simply place them within a topical context, but they actively negotiate with them and appropriate the play within new cultural and historical contexts.

Such appropriations by cultures foreign to the western hegemonic canon have transformed *Antigone* from a reverential monument to western philosophical thought, into a performance text which functions as a reworking that divests the canonical text of its assumed authority and authenticity and becomes part of what Helen Tiffin (1987) calls the project of “canonical counter-discourse” (p. 22). This is the process whereby the re-working of a canonical text interrogates the cultural legacy of its hegemonic source and offers culturally

and politically relevant insights into the new tradition from which it springs. According to Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996) “[c]ounter-discourse seeks to deconstruct significations of authority and power exercised in the canonical text, to release its stranglehold on representation and, by implication, to intervene in social conditioning” (p. 16, and pp. 15-8, 38-43; Tiffin, 1987). It is through this very process that *Antigone* comes to belong to whichever culture re-makes it and not exclusively to the western hegemonic culture which produced it in the first place. And it is through this process also that *Antigone* becomes a culturally relevant and politically urgent text rather than just “one of the enduring and canonic acts” of Western thought which Steiner claims it to be (1984, p. 300-1). I suggest further that *Antigone* is appropriated by so many diverse cultures *because* it carries the potential for distinct and sometimes even conflicting interpretations – while it always also provides the impetus for action and resistance even against the western hegemonic culture from which it has emerged. As a result most adaptations of *Antigone* become plays of committed political purpose as opposed to opportunities for formal experimentation with the hypoplay and its underlying agendas. They become cultural, political appropriations which can then be claimed by the culture which appropriated them rather than performed as radical postmodern experimentations that simply challenge the idea of ownership and finiteness. So while they continue to challenge and subvert the traditional reception of the hypoplay, they also make explicit political statements within specific political, cultural and historical moments.

Thus adaptations which take the raw material from *Antigone* and re-cast it into a new mould extend even beyond the concept of appropriation; the new plays may become assimilated by the culture which appropriates them to the extent that, as Jill Lane (2007) argues, calling one of these new *Antigones* adaptations of Sophocles’ tragedy would be telling

“the theatrical story the wrong way around – or ... cast[ing] the play in a progressive historical genealogy that necessarily obscures the more radical relation emergent between the two texts” (p.523). Repeatedly these new *Antigones* have been given an epithet which localises and charges the play with specific geo-political implications. In fact in Erin Mee and Helene Foley’s recent book *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage* (2011) Moira Fradinger makes a case for *Antigone* being ‘Argentinean’ by stating that it is Argentina’s “national play”,⁶ while in the same book Fiona Macintosh makes the same claim for Ireland.⁷ Likewise, much has been written about ‘African’ *Antigones* and their emergence from specific cultures and socio-political situations,⁸ while Tina Chanter (2011) says, in answer to her own question “Who owns Antigone?” that

despite her multifarious births, she resists definitive appropriation. ... [And though] philosophy, psychoanalysis, and imperialism have initiated competing claims for Antigone, yet her spirit remains irrepressible. With each rebirth of Antigone ... she is configured anew. No one owns her; Antigone rises again and again. Antigone’s rising is not attributable to some universal appeal that a play about fundamental competing visions of justice has for all time; Antigone’s continual re-inscription articulates the ever-changing fears of each epoch, and her reconfiguration in racially combustible scenarios ... redresses the obfuscation of a tradition that has perhaps been too hyperbolic in its recuperation of Antigone as an uncomplicated freedom fighter, who could be championed with too much ease as a hero of sexual difference – or even as an aberrant, transgressive figure ... who lent herself to the project of regenerating familial kinship groups. (p.145)

In such adaptations, where the hyperplay becomes the primary force of the theatrical performance, care is taken to underscore its independence from the fifth century hypoplay that it may (or may not) openly or covertly allude to. Because, as Lane (2007) asserts when writing about a Peruvian production of José Watanabe’s *Antígona*,⁹

[w]hile rightfully admired, Sophocles’ drama does not mean much in contemporary Ayacucho or Lima itself – or in contemporary London or Chicago or Prague, for that matter. The story of Antigone that Sophocles premiered is relevant to the present not because its story, structure and narrative are “timeless” or “universal”, as though the play existed outside of time or had transcended its own history to be bestowed upon Lima as a kind of

literary gift. No. If the story of Antigone is told again, it is because certain human, social struggles repeat themselves at intervals in history, and a complex, rich structure like the narrative of Antigone becomes – sadly – meaningful again and again, to express the horror of the unburied dead, the costs of civil war, the wrack of atrocity, and the work of the survivors, so often women, who come after, looking to bury the dead (p. 523).

A pertinent example of how Antigone's otherness can be assimilated in a re-making of the classical text which at once turns towards and away from Sophocles can be found in Femi Osofisan's *Tegonni, an African Antigone* (1999) where the playwright masterfully manages to show how his Nigerian Antigone is and is not the same as the virgin princess from Thebes, by putting them both into the same play and bringing their differences into focus. While the Theban Antigone is there, she clearly sets herself apart from the action of the play, "It's not our story," she tells one of the soldiers who arrive with her, "we're from other times. It's just history about to repeat itself again" (p.28). When she comes on stage, a public square of a Yoruba town, she announces herself by saying "My name is Antigone [I have come] a very long way, through the channels of history ... I heard you were acting my story. And I was so excited I decided to come and participate." Yemisi, one of Tegonni's sisters present on stage curtly replies, "Your story! Sorry you are mistaken. This is the story of Tegonni, our sister. Funny, the names sound the same, but –" (p.25). When Antigone manages to catch their attention by saying that she is *the* mythological Antigone, they seriously doubt her as "an impostor" because she is black, to which she again replies with a question that haunts the whole production, "And so? What colour is mythology?"(p.27).

It is this question opened up to multiple dimensions that I will focus on in this chapter. I will ask what 'colour' and what nationality are the many, diverse re-makings of *Antigone* which embed the play firmly within different cultures and histories. I will explore how Antigone becomes King Creon's political prisoner in Yugoslavia of the 1980s (Gavran, 1983), a furious Madre of the Plaza del Mayo refusing to forget the dead in Argentina of the

1980s (Gambaro, 1992), and a black princess in Liberia of the twenty first century, (Buffini, 2010). I will illustrate the ways in which this different, contemporary woman, her actions and her ideas, do not belong to Sophocles or to the ancient Greeks, but to the culture that appropriates them. Similarly, the plays in which Antigone acts exist in hypertheatrical relationship with Sophocles' play, but are open to varied interpretations, brought on by audiences who 'read' something culturally and historically specific when they watch these performances of adapted *Antigones*, which may or may not bear the same title as the ancient play and which will have a different significance each time they are performed in a different context. I will ask, in turn, my own question about who *Antigone* belongs to and what Antigone's actions imply, infer, or ultimately 'mean' to the audiences who experience these plays and bring to them their own political and historical realities.

With George Steiner's assertion in mind, that even as I write new Antigones are being made because politics are evolving as we speak and history is happening around us, I have chosen to explore radical *Antigones* that very clearly belong to the culture that created them and received them, or to the culture that they have sprung from, and are not necessarily the most recent or radically experimental productions. In fact I would like to suggest that as these adaptations become more engaged with specific political events and embedded in socio-political situations, they become less experimental in form and more reliant on direct cultural and historical textual references which are more meaningful to a specific audience and which subvert political systems from within, or more openly criticise, expose, explore, demonstrate against, question, or debate over issues that concern specific communities, political leadership or challenging political and historical moments. They all explore the issue of power, which according to Brecht's post-war German Antigone is like "salt water ... he who seeks [it] ... cannot keep it down, yet has to drink more" (1990, p.3); they investigate the nature of

violence, its seemingly endless circularity, its centrality to human history and human nature and map the response of the female figures in the myth of Antigone to that realisation; they grapple with the awareness that, as Buffini's African Antigone says more than half a century later, "Power is never peace, it is barbarity" (Buffini, 2010, p. 44), and challenge this statement by handing this power to women who fight to turn barbarity into peace.

Furthermore, while all the adaptations in question do look towards Sophocles' work as a hypoplay, they also look away from it and avoid the more rigid, conventional appreciation of the ancient text, by introducing the energy of an entirely novel perception. These appropriations become contemporary, politically urgent works which do not just focus on Antigone's defiant gestures and their political meaning but simultaneously give a voice to Ismene and Eurydice who are the usually silenced female figures of the hypoplay. So while Antigone's act of defiance in burying a dead brother underlies the action of the plays, the focus shifts on how powerful her voice is against the establishment, and on how other female figures from the myth also find a voice of their own and stand on a par next to Antigone in confrontation with the male, patriarchal status quo. In fact, I suggest that the purpose of these adaptations is to showcase the unusual strength of the female voice in situations where it would have been traditionally silenced and I would agree with Holledge and Tompkins who argue that "the initial impetus to re-work [narratives such as *Antigone*] is tied to the recognition by artists that women are challenging conventional gender norms within their societies" (2000, p.53), and a desire to acknowledge this challenge publically.

Finally the adaptations explored in this chapter are all self-referential pieces of theatre whose emphasis is more on political and less on philosophical concerns. They do not focus on states of being, but grow out of the belief that the human condition can change, and therefore they focus on the potential for action. They are pieces of combative theatre which echo a

Brechtian metatheatricality, containing a clearly political motivation. Using the myth of *Antigone* as a basis on which to work through metatheatre, they contextualise it historically and explore its political urgency.

Creon's Antigone: Metatheatre as a political act

In the 1980s, a decade marked by the apotheosis of 'one-man iron rule' in Yugoslavia, which also saw the beginning of the country's violent breakup, Croatian playwright Miro Gavran used Sophocles' *Antigone* as a backdrop against which to dramatise tyranny and corruption in the Balkans. Gavran's play *Creon's Antigone* (1983) opened on December 22, 1983 at the Gavella Drama Theatre in Zagreb, directed by Damir Madariæ and was received very well by Yugoslavian audiences who clearly saw in it reflections of their own political reality.¹⁰



Fig. 5.1 Poster from the 1998 performance at the Avignon Festival in France

As its title openly suggests, the play is about possession. It is concerned with exploring not just who owns the play *Antigone* and who is in control of the action, the characters and the outcome, but also who owns and manipulates the political truth, and who owns power, where the reality of theatre lies and where the reality of politics. The play's title itself subverts *Antigone* as a hypoplay because it takes away the authority of ownership which is associated

with the classic. This *Antigone* does not belong to Sophocles and the classic canon; it belongs to Miro Gavran, who thanks “Sophocles, Anouilh and Smole¹¹ for their kind co-operation” (p. 1); thereafter it belongs to Creon who attempts to manipulate the narrative, to found a text, to write a classic of his own that will give him the absolute power that he craves. The result of this interweaving authorship is a script which uses metatheatre to explore the relationship between theatre and power to investigate the manipulation of the truth by authoritarian regimes and corrupt, power thirsty politicians through the deliberate fabrication and presentation of events to serve self-centred and egomaniacal purposes.

The use of theatre that is self-referential to explore the duality of human existence and life's uncanny likeness to art or illusion has been long and celebrated (Abel, 1963, 2003; Hornby, 1986). However *Creon's Antigone* extends beyond such existential experimentation and unfolds on several levels, fusing the categories which Richard Hornby identifies as “varieties of the metadramatic” and which include ceremony within a play, role-playing within a role, reference to reality, self-reference of the drama, and play within a play (1986, p. 32). Gavran's adaptation uses metatheatre both to subvert the classic reception of a ‘literary masterpiece’ and to reference the lies and manipulations involved in political power games. In his article on the use of metatheatricality in African theatre, Brian Crow (2002) reasserts the well established fact that metatheatre has been used as a device within the Western theatrical tradition primarily as a means of reflecting on the philosophical and existential aspect of the human existence. However, he also proceeds to investigate the way in which dramatists have used metatheatrical experimentation on the African theatrical scene not as a way of introspectively assessing the individual's place within a social reality, but intending “to expose and condemn social and political conditions that are deeply repugnant to them, ... [to]

anatomize oppression and injustice and to celebrate the capacity of theater and the theatrical to function as modes of survival, [and] resistance” (p. 134).

Though Crow refers specifically to theatre by African dramatists, I suggest that it is the same deep desire to question and expose a political regime that is the driving force behind Gavran’s exploration of the metatheatrical in *Creon’s Antigone*, which was written and first performed in Yugoslavia at a time when political freedom of speech was denied to the people and political and economical subjugation were an inherent part of the government. Gavran uses Sophocles’ *Antigone* as a hypoplay and as a play within a play to metamorphose *Creon’s Antigone* into a script of defiance against authoritarian and totalitarian rule, though the resistance it offers is covert and implied rather than blatantly defiant. This is evidently the reason why the play survived Yugoslav censorship when it was first performed despite the fact that it explored an individual woman’s fight for survival in a state of dictatorship and secret policing.¹²

In *Creon’s Antigone* there is no chorus, no Haemon and no Teiresias. In fact, there are no other characters apart from an Antigone and a Creon in a battle of political survival which revolves around the performance of a theatrical script. The action of the play unfolds in a dungeon where King Creon, a tyrannical, maniacal ruler holds his niece Antigone as a political prisoner whom he is planning to have executed. The opening words belong to a young, timid, and confused Antigone, wondering why her Uncle Creon has had her imprisoned without reason, lamenting her helplessness and defencelessness and praying to the Lord to forgive her sins and give her back her life of carefree innocence. Creon walks onto the stage “*carrying two scripts under his arm*” (p.1) and presents Antigone with the bare facts: in collaboration with his secret police, he has plotted to annihilate everyone who has a legitimate claim to his throne: his son, his wife, Antigone, and her two brothers. Ismene, who is

Antigone's identical twin – at least in appearance – Creon plans to let live simply because “Ismene is the least dangerous and the most stupid” (p. 5).¹³ As he explains to Antigone while justifying his decision, for him “the world is divided into kings and those who cannot be king” (p. 4) but who are defiant and fearless enough to aspire to leadership; this automatically makes them a threat to be removed. His plan and the reasoning behind it are paranoically devious and fiendishly perfect: he has written a play which effectively orchestrates the deaths of all the members of his family and in which he has written his own version of the Antigone myth, Creon's *Antigone*. There is a part for him to play and a part for Antigone, so that while he will have her and all the other members of his family killed, he will not come out as a tyrannical ruler but as a “blind, stubborn villain, who in the end will suffer” (p.5), securing in that way the people's sympathy rather than their hatred which would potentially trigger a rebellion. Creon offers Antigone a chance to survive in the memories of people through performing a part, playing a role: “the most sublime, the most noble of roles in the history of human society and theatre”(p. 5). This version of his is the *Antigone* of Sophocles we all know, which does indeed make a heroine of Antigone and a miserable wretch of Creon.



Fig. 5.2 images from advertising poster for the October 2005 production at the Teatar Gavran, Zagreb (kindly supplied by Miro Gavran)

Gavran's Yugoslavian audience, however, are not presented with a Sophoclean Creon. Throughout the course of the play Antigone realises that Creon's version of events is a perversion of reality, a stubborn allegiance to the belief that the force of authoritarian rule can determine everything and manipulate the truth. While reading his script, she becomes inspired by the bravery of her fictional counterpart and finds the strength to discredit Creon's word by taking action against his authority and not succumbing to his manipulations. She identifies more with her ascribed role than her 'real' self, and tells the delusional Creon,

Other kings have been cautious too, and yet all of them have erred. Even those who hoped to rule to the end. All of you are intoxicated with power, and in your drunkenness, you lose your hold of it (p.15) ... Your life has turned into fearfulness, you no longer live. You quake with terror, and when you've killed us all, you'll fear again, and you'll kill, and again you'll fear, and you'll never have respite – no serenity – you kings enjoy the least of life's joys. (p. 17)

Antigone's words and Creon's single-minded obsession to secure his rule reflect the political reality of the Eastern Bloc in the decades following the division of Europe after the Second World War, which saw the rise to power and long reign of notorious dictators. Their fear and obsession with power reverberates throughout a play which on the one hand shows the impossibility of escape from the claws of dictatorial rule, but also foresees the inevitable toppling of such men from power.

However, the action of Gavran's play is not without its pessimistic overtones. At the end of the play Antigone performs the ultimate act of defiance which she is capable of: she commits suicide and thus refuses to accept and perform the role that Creon has assigned for her. But Creon's last words before she dies chillingly remind the audience that a ruler such as himself usually has all eventualities covered:

ANTIGONE: (*She suddenly gulps down the poison*) Yes, Creon, yes – I shall be dead in a minute – I shall be beyond your intrigues. Your little play will not go on, Creon. – My suicide you did not foresee.
(Silence.)

CREON: (*Chuckling*): Oh yes I did, I foresaw it all. Your sister Ismene is your twin – she will play the role. She will acquiesce because she loves life. My play will never be threatened. Never.

ANTIGONE: You monster! (*She collapses, dead.*)

CREON: Farewell, you who could not be king.

(CURTAIN) (p.18).

Though Creon's exit may have left a Yugoslavian audience with a horrifying sense of foreboding that there is no escaping the iron rule of a power-obsessed man, his triumph over Antigone is debatable since he has also admitted that he is afraid of his own shadow; he is "nothing but a tight-rope walker whom everyone watches and whose fall everyone desires" (p.8), therefore his position would always remain precarious. Questions hence arise: who is the winner in the end? Is it Creon, sole autocrat with Antigone safely out of the way and his devious plan unthreatened? Or is it Antigone, who gains insight into a tyrant's way of thinking and the endless fear which engulfs him before vocally disrupting his scheming by committing suicide? Where is Antigone's voice? Where is her political entity? Where is the substance of her resistance? And where does the hope of survival and new life lie within a state of terror?

For Gavran's original audience it must lie in the performance of a play which subverts the establishment yet survives its censorship; a performance which is made possible through a piece of theatre that foregrounds the act of performance itself and explores its status. This is a play about the representation of acts and not the acts themselves - as Creon tells Antigone, his concern is "not a question of the way you die, but how I intend to represent it" (p.5). Likewise the core of Gavran's play is presented as a string of adaptations that belong to different "creators", inevitably asking the question "where does authorship lie and therefore where does responsibility lie"? There is the *Antigone* of Sophocles which the audience may or may not know. There is the *Antigone* of Creon which the Machiavellian ruler has written with his own ends in mind. There is the *Antigone* which Antigone herself writes/wrights by choosing to act

her own part and there is of course Gavran's *Antigone* which is performed on the stage of the Gavella Theatre. Antigone's resistance is therefore achieved through the play's continued life as a string of adaptations which subvert the establishment by not belonging to it. Furthermore it is achieved by the playwright's task of de-contextualising and then re-contextualising the actions of the heroine within the socio-political moment of the specific production.



Fig. 5.3 Poster from the 2012 performance of the play in Grenoble, France.

Furthermore, Gavran's experimentation with metatheatre in his appropriation subverts the very notion of *Antigone* as a classic, if by classic we mean an ur-text that inscribes a history of universally accepted meanings. *Creon's Antigone* thus becomes a refusal, on the part of a woman called Antigone, to acquiesce to the interpretations imposed by a tyrannical ruler on the script of her own life. Creon attempts to manipulate that narrative, to found a text in which he will ascribe a single theological meaning and impose it on those who act in his play, and

on his subjects. Consequently Antigone becomes the force which disrupts Creon's attempts and radicalises the classical text and its status as a classic by breaking the narrative apart.

Antigone, Antígona and Argentina: An Ongoing Political Relationship

For the many scholars who have written about *Antigone* and its relationship to the political and cultural history of Argentina, the discussion does not centre on whether such a relationship exists, but on the degree to which Argentina has appropriated Sophocles' play to explore it as a reflection of, and even an intervention on, the various stages of the country's political evolution (Feitlowitz, 1992, 1998; Fradinger, 2011; Taylor, 1992, 1997). Moira Fradinger (2011) asserts that Argentina was the first country on the American continent to appropriate Sophocles' play in order to reflect specific political and cultural struggles and has had a long history of appropriations which justifiably make *Antigone* an Argentinean "national tradition" (p. 68).¹⁴ She argues that the re-makings of *Antigone* have not emerged just as a response to Argentina's recent history of military dictatorship and state generated terrorism but constitute a body of work which also explores the numerous revolutions in that country during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

It is Griselda Gambaro's *Antígona Furiosa* (1992) which remains the best known¹⁵ among the numerous Argentinean adaptations of *Antigone*, and attempting to comprehend its reception in conjunction with the political events related to the military dictatorship of 1976-1983 illuminates its power to activate specific connotations in an Argentine audience. The play premiered at the Goethe Institute in Buenos Aires in 1986, a year which marked the end of the historical trials of the junta, directed by Laura Yusem and with the dancer Bettina Muraña as Antigone, in her first acting role. Coryphaeous was played by Norberto Vieyra and Antinous by Ivan Moschner. Unlike Gavran's play which was staged within the political

situation which it aims to subvert and thus contains implicit signs which the playwright hopes will be undetectable by those in power but understood by the audience, Gambaro's work is an overtly radical re-making of its hypoplay, which contains clear and obvious references to the playwright's historical and cultural moment.¹⁶ While writing about her experience of adapting *Antigone*, Gambaro admits that she only managed to create her own text, separated from Sophocles by her "history and gender", when she managed to work "beyond respect, the fear of quotes and of comparisons" (Gambaro, 1995, pp. 78-9). In her play there are numerous intertextual allusions to Shakespeare, to Faulkner and to Kierkegaard, but most importantly there is Gambaro's voice as an Argentinean woman together with the voices of all the women in Argentina who tried to do the same as Antigone, i.e. to disobey the decree of the dictators Videla, Viola and Galtieri, and to recover and bury their dead, thus respectfully preserving their memory. Gambaro openly claims Antigone as belonging to her country:

Antigone belongs to us through a painfully acquired right. Antigone has lived and still lives in Argentina, a country that repeated with undisguisable parallel, the ancient history of a single-minded power that exacts revenge, assassinates those it considers enemies and denies them not only burial and a grave but also the right to collective memory.

For myself, I realised that I finished telling the story, not so much of this Antigone about whom so much has been written, but of those Antigones that every Thursday during the harshest years of the military dictatorship, covered with white headscarves and bearing the photos of their children, went around the square, the Plaza de Mayo, overcome with fear and stronger than the fear, to demand justice – with fury – and to bury [their] Polynices. (Gambaro, 1995, p. 80)

The playwright is here referring to the period of Argentinean politics termed the 'Dirty War' and the weekly marches of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, 'Mothers of the May Square' also known as 'Mothers of the "Disappeared"' Soon after the military seized power in 1976, led by Jorge Rafael Videla, repression and violence followed. All civil and political rights were retracted and all dissenting voices were silenced. This period resulted in countless deaths and exiles as well as approximately thirty thousand people going missing; these people

became known as the ‘Disappeared’.¹⁷ The dictators’ preferred way of silencing anyone who was remotely suspicious and who would threaten the country’s Christian values, usually “students, Communists and dissident labour activists” (Brysk, 1994, p.29), was abduction by special military task forces, torture in secret detention centres and finally murder and ‘disappearance’. The term was used by the president of the country himself at the time, who said that when someone is officially missing, they are simply absent, neither dead or alive, therefore the government were not in any way responsible for them (Brysk, 1994; Schirmer, 1989; Taylor, 1997, pp.182-222). As Jennifer Schirmer (1989) explains, disappearance “is the perfect crime, as the crime itself is invisible, except to those who are victims or relatives. Both are meant to suffer silently, individually and alone. The victim is denied martyrdom; those left behind are prohibited the final ritual of bereavement. Disappearance then is a form of censorship of memory by the state” (p.5).

In response to this silent and excruciating pain which could not find expression either in a funeral as an ending ritual, or in a grave as a landmark for memory, and refusing to accept the unexplained disappearance of their children as well as the elimination of their memory, the mothers of those who were declared ‘disappeared’ gathered at the Plaza de Mayo, the most central and political public space in Buenos Aires on the morning of April 13th 1977, carrying placards which demanded that their children be brought back alive, ‘*Aparición con vida*’. Their march became a weekly performative ritual which extended well beyond the end of the military dictatorship in Argentina¹⁸ and which epitomises the political event as a theatrical spectacle.¹⁹ It is against these political events as a backdrop that Gambaro wrote *Antígona Furiosa*.

However, it is also worth placing the play within the political moment of its performance too, because 1986 was on the one hand a time of democratic government but

also a time when the citizens of Argentina were faced with a major dilemma: to accept the general amnesty proposed for all those involved in the military dictatorship of 1976-1983, and ‘forget’? Or to insist on those who were responsible being brought to justice and by remembering keep the Disappeared alive?²⁰ Was forgetting the way to put an end to the past? Or was remembering the only way forward? It is these questions which Antígona and the audience of the 1986 performance ask and which Antígona battles with by equating forgetting to indifference and political oblivion.

The cast of the play consists of three performers. There is Antígona and two members of a multi-functional ‘chorus’ Coryphaeus and Antinous who are ‘*porteños*’ or men from Buenos Aires, sitting at a café. Coryphaeus doubles as Creon who, in Yusem’s production, is represented by a stiff shell-like costume. In the specific production this shell, made of a torso, a helmet and arms, was used in a variety of ways: it was either worn by the actor, held as a shield, or manipulated like a puppet. Toward the end of the production it was abandoned in an old wheelbarrow. When Coryphaeus assumes the role of Creon he puts on that ‘armour’, embodying the authority of the tyrant. While the two *porteños* act as enforcers of Creon’s violence they also assume the role of innocent but complicit citizens who witness the violence happening around them, unsure what to do and whose side to take. They stay outside the cage that imprisons Antígona passing the time in conversation, banter and coffee. Their tone when they are in dialogue is one of mockery and sarcasm, in contrast to Antígona’s solemnity. Their stiffness is also apparent in their body movements, in sharp contrast with Antígona’s fluid, dance like movements which are a result of Bettina Muraña’s background as a dancer. Antígona also plays the parts of Ismene and Haemon, thus embodying simultaneously the more traditional, expected side of her femininity but also the more masculine aspect of her character. Teiresias is not represented on stage but his presence and his prophecies materialise

in the form of filth that falls on the *porteños*, and the wings of an enormous bird that to Antígona represents death.

Throughout the performance there is a large pyramid-shaped cage centre-stage which Antígona never exits, surrounded by a floor with two coffee tables where the two men sit. The play begins where Sophocles' *Antigone* ends, with Antígona already dead – hanged and motionless. Moments later she comes to life, removes the rope from her neck and sways on her cage, humming a paraphrase of Ophelia's song, thus manifesting her association with the disturbed mind of Shakespeare's character but also with the *Madres* of the Plaza who were also publically dismissed as the madwomen, or '*las locas*' of the Plaza.²¹



Fig. 5.4 *Antígona hanging* Fig. 5.5 *The two porteños*
photos from the 1986 production, by Graciela Yentel, reproduced from Taylor (1997, pp.214-5)

In this way, from the onset Gambaro disrupts mimesis in favour of a critical re-telling of a story and establishes the circularity of the play which also suggests that repression is cyclical and seemingly never-ending and that the political situation in which the performance is

embedded is open-ended. The play's lack of closure clearly refers to the impossibility of putting an end to the mourning of the Mothers of the Disappeared. The circularity of the narrative and the blending of past, present and future is connected to the marches of the Mothers not only visually – because of the circular marching round the Plaza – but also because of their demands and mourning, which does not end with the performance but continues for as long as it will take to recover every last one of the missing bodies.



Fig. 5.6 *Antígona's cage and Coryphaeus as Creon*
photo from the 1986 production, by Graciela Yentel, reproduced from Taylor (1997, p.215)

Antígona's actions, unlike her sister's from the fifth century but very like the *Madres* of Buenos Aires are performed in public. The audience, who in Yusem's production surrounded the performance space forming an open space in the middle, were in full view of Antígona mourning over and burying the empty shroud that is Polynices and they also witness her death twice, once at the opening and once at the end of the play.²² Antígona chooses to communicate what she has to say openly, there is nothing implied and nothing kept secret,

reflecting the desire of the *Madres* who left their traditional role of women and mothers who were supposed to stay in the house and mourn their losses in private, and took to the streets making womanhood, motherhood and sisterhood a political issue. Like them Antígona “walks among the dead, in a strange gait in which she falls and recovers, falls and recovers” (p.140).

The play is a collage on temporal, cultural and mythological levels. Thus the plot of Sophocles’ play is broadly used but the events from it are related as past events, enacted in the present time and place, or even foretold as future occurrences which are yet to happen. This non-time embedded aspect of the play contributes to a sense of the ‘already done’ which is at once undoable, irreversible and also without suspense or any focus on action. It leaves unanswered the question of whether anything can be done to reverse the effects of violent death or permanent absence and if indeed it is worth doing anything at all or if it is better to let go of the past in order to embrace the future with some optimism. Indeed this dilemma is what the audience of the play’s first production would have understood very well because even though the dictatorship had ended, feelings were still running high in Argentina from the trials of the members of the junta and people were being led to believe that it would be better to turn a blind eye to what had happened and embrace a new future for their country. This oscillation is reflected in one of Coryphaeus’s and Antinous’s first exchanges when they reflect both the feelings of the Argentine people and the attitudes of the rulers – past and present – who preferred that the past be forgotten:

CORYPHEUS: Remembering the dead is like drinking water with a mortar and pestle – useless.

ANTINOUS: (*timid*) It didn’t happen very long ago.

CORYPHEUS: (*ferocious*) It happened. Now on to something else. (p.140)

These words are but the beginning of one of the play’s central concerns, that of the memory of the dead and the significance and relevance of such a remembrance. Antígona “furiously” and stubbornly insists that the dead should become more than an abstract, absent idea; she

insists on their corporeality and on their tangible existence. Polynices' body, when she discovers it, is represented by a shroud. Yet she throws herself upon this absent/present object and performs, like the *Madres* of the Disappeared, a public act of memory by defying the male/dictatorial directive:

ANTIGONE: Brother, brother. I will be your body, your coffin, your earth!

CORYPHEAEUS: Creon's law forbids it!

ANTIGONE: Neither God nor justice made the law. (She laughs.) The living are the great sepulchre of the dead! This is what Creon does not know! Nor his law!

CORYPHEAEUS (softly): As though he could know.

ANTINOUS (softly): What?

CORYPHEAEUS: Except for Polynices, whose death he redoubles, Creon kills only the living.

ANTINOUS: The sepulchres are linked! (laughs) One to the other.

CORYPHEAEUS: Wisely. In a chain.

ANTIGONE: Memory also makes a chain. Neither Creon nor his law knows this. Polynices, I will be sod and stone. (pp. 141–2)

Her insistence on performing Argentina's political struggle as unceasing, with all relevant issues still unresolved is also embodied, following the playwright's stage directions, in the physical manifestation in her own body of the battle between her two brothers:

The battle. An eruption of metallic clanging of swords, stamping of horses, screams and cries. Antigona moves away. Watches from the palace. She falls to the ground, hitting her legs, rolling from one side to the other, in a rhythm that builds to a paroxysmic crescendo, as though she endures the suffering of the battle in her own flesh. (p. 139)

Her female body becomes that of Argentina, and the two warring parts which she simultaneously performs become the nation's internal struggle. The two *porteños*, representing the unconcerned middle-class citizen who becomes compliant with those in power, continue to mock and scorn her as she shouts out the names of her two brothers, dead and disappeared like the sons, daughters and husbands of the *Madres*:

ANTÍGONA: (*screams*) Eteocles. Polynices, my brothers, my brothers!

CORYPHEAEUS: (*approaching her*) Such grieving can only come to grief. What is this crazy girl trying to do? (p. 139)

And again, just like the *Madres*, Antígona ignores the comments, disregards the threats, slights the labels that she is stigmatised with, and continues to shout both of her brothers' names and insist that they be given a name, a body and a grave – a return to life through memory. The unbroken circle of her resistance is reflected equally in her words, in her performance and in the play's structure.

Unlike Sophocles' Antigone who goes to her death and disappears well before the end of the play, thus giving the male authoritative voice space to be heard, repent, and subsequently seek redemption, Gambaro's Antígona remains on stage every minute of the performance and so completely silences the voice of male dictatorial authority. Like a defying counterpart to the 'disappeared', she refuses to disappear from the public view. She regains life and furiously stays alive as long as is necessary before going to a death which she chooses and which she performs publicly and "with fury" (p. 159). She explains that she went to her death the first time because she was "afraid of hunger and thirst. Afraid [she] would weaken ignobly. At the last moment crawl and beg" (p. 158). But after she has performed her grief and shouted out her pain, she is no longer afraid. She embodies the Disappeared and the *Madres* at the same time, alternating fearlessly between the two roles.

When she is relating the fate of the mythological Antigone approaching death, she becomes a "disappeared one" herself and addresses the "fortunate citizens" of Buenos Aires: "I will be separated from both humans and those who died, uncounted among the living and among the dead. I will disappear from the world alive" (p. 152). Coryphaeus then mirrors the familiar excuse of the military during the Dirty War and their preferred slogan at the time of the dictatorship that blamed the disappeared for their fate.²³ "Punishment always presupposes crime ... there are no innocents ... And if punishment comes down on you, you did something you shouldn't have done" (p. 152).

But her real strength, her loudest voice, comes before she commits suicide as an Argentine Antígona who speaks to an Argentine audience agonising over the same dilemmas that she is faced with: Would she not die if she knew she was pardoned? If she is pardoned can she forget everything that happened? Can she forgive those involved in the slaughter that she condemns? Can she live in a society that pardons those responsible for genocide? The scene before her suicide is replayed, and Antinous gets to her in time to announce Creon's softening of heart and his granting of pardon. But for an Argentine audience, Creon the tyrannical ruler cannot be shown to learn his lesson like in Sophocles. "No", Antígona retorts without hesitation to this offering of forgetting, "I still want to bury Polynices. I will always want to bury Polynices. Though I a thousand times will live, and he a thousand times will die" (p.158). The Disappeared are still disappeared in Argentina of 1986 and the closure has not been achieved. Antigone will "a thousand times" bury her brother, until the dead come "back alive", if not literally, at least in memory.

The last image of Antígona is the same as the first: Antígona hangs herself. The act would seem to close the circle of violence, but only temporarily. This is a circle that reflects not only the *Madres'* endless quest for justice but also the circular, repetitive, seemingly endless manifestations of violence itself. Antígona's death at the end of the play, echoing the first scene, suggests that this 'end' is only a pause, because she does not die in peace. The disappeared are not dead and buried. Order and harmony has not been restored. Despite President Alfonsín's Full Stop Law, there is no full stop for Argentina's disappeared. Antígona "refuse[s] this bowl of mercy that masks their cruelty" and kills herself "with fury" because "hate rules. The rest is silence" (p.159). In the same way that she first appears on the stage dead, then comes to life, performs her rite of memory and then kills herself again, we know that she will keep coming back to perform the same ritual. Antigone, for Argentina, is

always there, present on the country's political stage just like she is present on the stage of *Antígona Furiosa*. When she dies, she comes back to life, so effectively she will never die, never forget and never forgive – unless a closure is achieved.

A *Welcome to Thebes* by Eurydice, its democratically elected leader

From the cover of the National Theatre Programme for Moira Buffini's play *Welcome to Thebes* (2010) a child soldier stares at prospective audience members brandishing a modern hand gun, and looking painfully innocent and simultaneously deeply scarred by the experience of war.

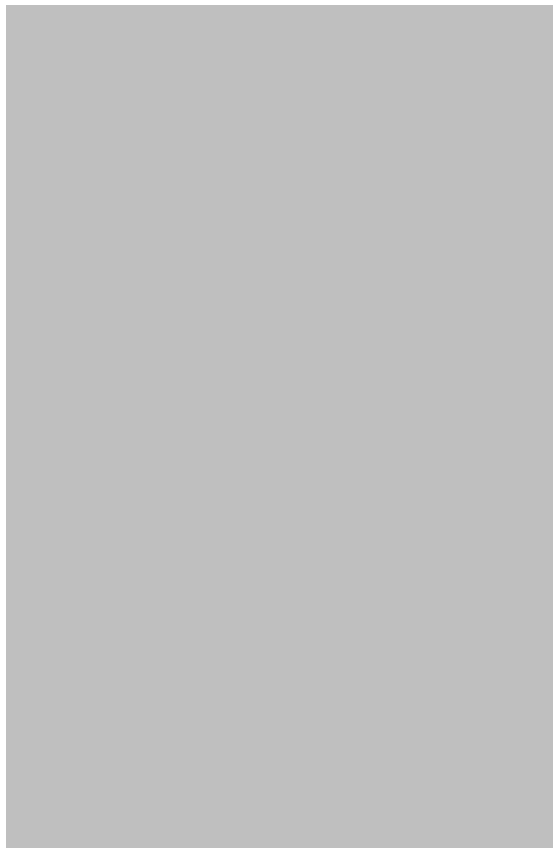


Fig. 5.7 *Child soldier. From the cover of the National Theatre programme of *Welcome to Thebes**

The foreboding background scene clashes with the all embracing title, and even though the action of the play opens with three soldiers storming into the auditorium, shocking the audience out of their usual calm security, this is not a play about child soldiers in Africa. Nor

is it a play about being welcomed to Antigone's mythical home town of Thebes. As the playwright, Moira Buffini says, her writing of *Welcome to Thebes* sprung "from the desire to reprieve a mythical suicide and give an almost mute character a voice" (Performance Programme *Welcome to Thebes*, 2010, np.), which is exactly what she expertly does in this play while also exploring many other complex issues related to war, women and politics and embedding the play within specific political situations in present day Africa and more specifically Liberia.

Eurydice, as Creon's wife and Haemon's mother, is another silent woman in Sophocles' *Antigone*. She appears once near the end of the play, where she speaks but eight lines, begging the Chorus of Elders to give her the details of the calamitous events that have been happening in Thebes. "Please, speak it out / Plainly", she entreats them, "whatever it is. I can bear it. / We are bred to stoicism in this family" (Sophocles, 1998, p.182). They have barely finished their account when she disappears "without a word: giving no indication / of her own feelings, one way or another" (p.184) and very soon the messenger announces her suicide. In his re-making of *Antigone* Bertolt Brecht does not even include Eurydice as a character, being too caught up with the more significant political connotations of Antigone's and Creon's actions. As for Jean Anouilh (1960), in his 1943 version, he has Eurydice sit on a step knitting in silence while the other characters 'act'. Her presence is almost ghost like, possibly in order to reinforce the power of the suffering that Creon is finally a victim of and to contrast her to Antigone's loud, bold, 'unwomanly' actions.²⁴ Even her suicide is, according to the messenger who relates it to Creon, as dignified as would be expected of an 'angel in the house', as innocent as if she were a virgin:

When the Queen was told of her son's death, she waited carefully until she had finished her row, then put down her knitting calmly – as she did everything. She went up to her room, her lavender-scented room, with its embroidered doilies and its pictures framed in plush; and there, Creon, she cut her throat.

She is laid out now in one of those two old-fashioned twin beds, exactly where you went to her one night when she was still a maiden. Her smile is still the same, scarcely a shade more melancholy. (p. 70)

Buffini takes this woman that Sophocles, Brecht, Anouilh and numerous others have kept in the shadows of more powerful characters and “grand” ideas, and turns her into a “female democrat” who replaces Thebes’ notorious “male autocrat” (Performance Programme, *Welcome to Thebes*, 2010, np). Buffini’s Eurydice is no virgin/angel-like queen. She is a powerful woman who takes control of her own life and a whole nation’s future in her own two hands. She is faced with difficult decisions and she makes brave choices. She does not hesitate, she does not hide and she certainly does not commit suicide. She stays on to fight in this world and to shape the fate and future of her country.

Though Buffini situates her city of Thebes in a non-defined “somewhere”, in the twenty-first century, the references to West Africa and more specifically Liberia are clear and sometimes even direct. Buffini’s Thebes has just come through a civil war; a democratic election has shown Eurydice to be the elected leader and the first ever female president. Similarly, Liberia’s current president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, is Africa’s first – and at present the only – democratically elected female head of state, with a substantial number of women holding key roles in her government. Liberia went through a particularly brutal and bloody civil war (1989-2003) involving seven militias and a series of leaders notorious for being vicious gangster-style warlords. During the leadership of Charles Taylor, the last and possibly most formidable of these men, the women of Liberia, led by Leymah Gbowee, formed a peace movement and mobilized a network of over 2,000 women in 15 provinces in Liberia, but also in Ghana and Sierra Leone, to protest against the war and the violence forcing Taylor to agree to a peace conference.²⁵ In November 2003 several hundred women led by Gbowee staged a demonstration outside the building where the conference was held to protest against the

continuing war, and violence, and to demand the disarmament of fighters who were continuing to rape women and girls of all ages. They dressed in white and threatened to strip themselves naked unless a democratic settlement was reached, an act that in their country would have brought utter disgrace upon the men. Their non-violent struggle against war and violence was instrumental in bringing the talks to a fruitful conclusion and as a result, Liberian women were able to achieve peace in their country after a fourteen-year-long civil war.²⁶ Later they assisted in bringing to power the country's first female head of state in elections which are considered to be the most free and fair elections in Liberian history.²⁷ Since being elected in 2005 Johnson-Sirleaf has strived to govern in a way which is marked by the total absence of armed violence and by gender-sensitive reforms.²⁸



Fig. 5.8 *President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on the day of her historic inauguration in Monrovia, capital of Liberia*

Motivated by this female inspired, female led and female centred model of government, Buffini set off to write a “big brave play” about women and politics, a task which by her own admission was at once daunting, inspiring and challenging.²⁹ Buffini was commissioned by Jeanie O’Hare, dramaturg at the RSC, to write “the play that she was most afraid to write” and she knew straight away that it was “that big brave play about women and politics”. Buffini

was excited about writing it but was also dreading the process because, as she has admitted, she thought it would be very difficult to write about the current issues of the day and not get caught up in the pettiness and disillusionment of party politics. After lengthy research she decided to re-write an *Antigone* which wasn't an *Antigone* at all, but a re-framing of current situations within a mythological framework, that also included Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *The Bacchae*. While reading extensively on women and politics within world-wide contexts she became drawn to the exceptional female figures who have been involved in the peace struggles in Africa, most of all Liberia but also in other countries such as The Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, and Somalia. She decided to mesh the past mythological worlds with the present political world of history as it unfolds and involves women in its evolution. This unusual coupling of past myth and present reality freed her from any obligation to document facts and to keep a realistic time frame, even though she was writing about contemporary politics.



Fig. 5.9 Nikki Amuka Bird as Eurydice addresses the citizens of Thebes on the day of her inauguration
(image by Nobby Clark)

Welcome to Thebes premiered at the National Theatre in London on 15 June 2010, directed by Richard Eyre and it was very well received but also criticised for oscillating too obviously

between ancient drama and contemporary sexual and international politics (reviews accessed through www.nexis.co.uk). However, it is this disjointed quality of the play which does indeed move from allusions to Sophocles and Euripides to contemporary politics and from shocking, gruesome war references to comic and sarcastic anachronisms that make it powerful but also daring in its approach. And while it is true that Buffini is clearly comfortably distanced from the political situation in which her play is embedded, she also writes as a twenty first century feminist, celebrating the strength and resolve of the female figures in her play. Unlike Gavran and Gambaro she does not use *Antigone* as a hypoplay to subvert the political establishment from within, but as a springboard from which to comment on politics in developing and warring countries of the African continent. In that respect it could be argued that her play is not an appropriation which submerges itself into the socio-political world in which it unfolds. However, I would contest that while *Welcome to Thebes* does not perform as a cultural appropriation, it still functions as a postmodern radical adaptation of Sophocles' play within the structure that I have outlined in this thesis. It subverts the traditional reception of the play as a 'classic' by fragmenting what is perceived as its traditional structure and by re-building it as a collage of contemporary political references which the audience are acutely aware of. It also operates within the framework of the intensely political metatheatricity that is exhibited by the two plays previously analysed in this chapter, through constantly referring to the hypoplays and myths which it springs from and highlighting their fictionality while also underscoring their chillingly contemporary historical and political relevance.

The action of the performance at the National opens with three Theban soldiers (a twenty-year old woman, a thirteen year old boy, and their AWOL sergeant) storming into the Olivier auditorium before the lights are off or the audience have settled in their seats, shouting

threats and holding AK47s to the ceiling, bullet chains hanging from their shoulders. These three soldiers are at once catalytic to the action but also represent the unnamed casualties of a war that has turned young women into violated, hardened, unfeeling machines, boys into confused soldiers who are unsure who the enemy is, and men into animals. “The only politics in Thebes is this” says Megaera, brandishing her Kalashnikov at the audience, before explaining how she was gang-raped and left for dead “in a pile of bodies ... seething with ants” (Buffini, 2010, p.5). Having fought for warring factions, joining at times whoever “still had food”, the soldiers are now left, after the end of the war, not knowing who – or what – to fight for. Junior Lieutenant Scud, who is “only old enough to kill / not vote” (p.70) poignantly asks “Who do we fight for now?” (p.7). There does not seem to be an answer, “the ghosts are grey” (p.7) and therefore not definable or identifiable. He walks off the stage together with the sergeant he worships and leaves Megaera to welcome the audience to Thebes, a place where, by her words, incomprehensible folly has reigned, people have fought on the side of whoever has had food to give them, young boys have killed without knowing why, and young girls have been raped into hatred. According to her the citizens of Thebes “have not survived this war / [they] are breathing but [they] are not alive” (p. 8).

The audience’s reaction to the soldiers’ violent storming of the auditorium is worth pointing out, as it is a direct reflection of the same awkward behaviour that the civilised, technologically advanced Athenians have when they arrive with all their twenty first century, first world superiority and sleek paraphernalia on a stage set outside bombed and desolate buildings and a storm cloud filled sky, a design by Tim Hatley which clashes the ancient and the modern to reflect the wretched past and ominously uncertain future of Thebes. As Megaera barks her threats to anybody who is still talking to “shut up” and turn off their mobiles otherwise they will be shot at, she shouts: “Anyone who wants the toilet I don’t care.

You missed your chance” (p.3). The moment is powerfully ‘haunted’ by evident connections to events as they occurred during the siege of the Dubrovka Theatre by Chechen rebels in Moscow in 2002. Yet, the audience laugh out loud.³⁰ We all feel safe and certain in our certainty that things like this surely do not happen in a London auditorium. Our world is too ‘civilised’ for such occurrences to take place, and events which we are aware of as occurring a world far from our own are shocking, but not ‘real’ enough.

Theseus as a western world contemporary politician reflects this same detached attitude when he is smugly shocked and ‘disturbed’ to hear from Eurydice about the details of the war that has just ended in Thebes. Following her revelations he has an exchange with her that shows his Western, superior attitude towards wars that are fought too far away from home to matter to us:

Theseus: What happens when a whole state
When a place descends into – fuck
It’s like you bred some different kind of war out here
Eurydice: All war is savage Theseus, whether it’s fought
close quarters with machetes or from afar with missiles
and computer-guided bombs. Are you more civilised
because you can’t hear people scream?” (p.57)

This Eurydice, with her brave, new democratic ideas and her almost all-female cabinet of ministers, dressed in splendid African clothes, is presented as the total antithesis to the chaos of what seems to be a still smouldering battlefield and the cold, extravagant display of Athenian superiority. She promises the citizens of Thebes peace, freedom and democracy – but in order for her poor, ravaged nation to rise from its own ashes and stand on its own two feet she has to seek and accept the political and financial aid of the democratic, powerful and civilised Athens. Like Liberia’s president and other leaders of the Third World she has to bite her lip and accept the patronising advice of the super-power of her day and turn to the Athenian ‘First Citizen’ Theseus in supplication, begging for the funding to rebuild her

shattered nation. It is within this inter-association between an impoverished country and an imperial, western super-power, the collision between the First and Third World that Buffini explores Western imperialism and the role of women struggling to exert themselves in a male dominated political world. It is also within this context that her women are delivered from their traditional options of suicide or silence into a world of choice but also terrible responsibility.

This is a world where all the women – fully aware of their faults and weaknesses – take on the men in a struggle for peace, and win. And even though Antigone says about Eurydice that she “isn’t peace / She’s power / Power is never peace / It is barbarity” (p.44), Eurydice manages to show that female power is not always barbaric, it can be self reflexive, thoughtful and even healing.

Eurydice’s strength is explored through her relationship to Theseus, an unmistakable Obama figure, who is at once revered (and feared) as a powerful politician but also ridiculed as a man through comical allusions to the Hippolytos myth and his family life back in Athens. Theseus might be, as Aglaea the foreign minister says, wearing “a splendid suit / Sewn with a democratic thread; / [but] he is still a warlord with a warlord’s heart” (p.16). His condescending, authoritarian behaviour towards Eurydice but also towards Talthybia, his senior diplomat, shows that the prejudices against women are strong and by no means particular to Thebes, making Eurydice stand out even more prominently as a wise, democratic, admirable ruler. Buffini takes the major characteristic of all authoritarian rulers, whether mythical like Creon or real like the Liberian warlords that she alludes to, i.e. their inability to recognise and admit their mistakes, and turns it into a powerful tool in Eurydice’s hands. So while Eurydice does forbid the burial of Polynices, like Sophocles’ Creon, her reasons are entirely different as is the way in which she announces her prohibition:

Eurydice: Polynices' body has been found.
 It will not be given burial
 This warlord's corpse shall be our monument
 To all the horrors we have witnessed /and survived ...
 The ground where he lies ... will be a garden of reflection
 Where we can meditate upon the cost of war (pp. 37-8)

It is established by all the characters from the onset of the play that Polynices was no saint. He is hated and thought of with dread by family members and strangers alike for having been the bloodiest warlord in the freshly ended civil war. That Antigone chooses to bury him is not explored as the ultimate act of female courage or political activism, but as an act of sisterly love; the catalytic action in *this* play is not Polynices' burial by Antigone. It is Eurydice's acknowledgment and public admission of her error of political judgment which is brought about by the death and burial of another, more innocent human being, the child soldier Junior Lieutenant Scud.

In an altercation which ensues when Miletus, Megaera and Scud bring Antigone to hand her over because they caught her burying the body they had been guarding, Scud is shot by one of Theseus' security men. The scene of chaos immediately prior to the shooting reflects the nervousness and tension which still reigns in this new democracy that balances on a razor's edge:

Miletus: Scud, if you shoot her, we will be at war again
Scud: / We are at war...
Miletus: At peace, Scud. / This is peace (p.71)
Scud: We came to speak to someone
Eurydice: I am someone. Speak to me
Scud: Somebody who matters
Talthybia: She is the –
Scud: Shut your mouth bitch or I will shoot
Eurydice: I am Eurydice, your president.
 There is no need for violence here
 Let's all put down the guns (p.74) ...
 What is your name?

The Junior Lieutenant tries to remember it

Miletus: We call him Junior Lieutenant Scud (p.75)

Scud's confused state of mind shocks the audience into the gruesome reality of child soldiers and their long lost innocence. "They made a killer of him overnight," says Miletus in defence of Scud after he has just been shot, "Do they expect that he'll just as easily become a boy again?" (p.78)



Fig. 5.10 *the madness of guns and violence on full display in the play's central scene*
(image by Nobby Clark)

In this central scene of the play, the burial of Polynices becomes subservient to the killing of an innocent boy. Scud's death becomes the catalyst for all the actions that follow and this is made visual by his spilt blood which remains in a large, dark red, conspicuous blot on the centre of the stage for the rest of the performance. Upon seeing an innocent boy die in front of her eyes, Eurydice realises that "the opposite of great heroic destiny is a quiet ordinary life: to love" (p.87), and admits that forbidding someone's burial is an act of hatred and not political memory as she had proclaimed originally:

It is an act of hatred that I've done
A desecration
And I'm guilty
And it's my fault
I caused that child soldier's death
And lost the help of Athens.
This is not the match that lights my own destruction

Not to do what I've exhorted all my countrymen to do:
Be reconciled.
I cannot reconcile
I hate him, still I hate
He took my boy and mutilated him
And I'm full of vicious unforgiving hate
The moderate and principles
New President of Thebes
What future is there for us? (p.86)

Being brave enough to carry the burden of her political decisions and her guilt at their outcome, Eurydice stands in front of two graves – those of Junior Lieutenant Scud and General Polynices – and speaks her 'strongest words' boldly facing all her citizens including Antigone, Haemon, Ismene, Miletus and Megaera:

By insulting Polynices
I've insulted all the dead.
I have been wrong
I'm trying to turn back time one hour
And it keeps buckling against me, flying on
The death of Junior Lieutenant Scud
Is my responsibility
I won't insult him with my sorrow and my shame
But I must give his death some value
Since his life was held so cheap
Today we've buried two Theban boys;
One, in life a mighty powerful man
One still a child without a proper name.
General Polynices, son of Oedipus
And Junior Lieutenant Scud.
The way we treat these boys in death
Must illuminate how we intend to live
The Junior Lieutenant will be honoured,
Foremost son of Thebes.
Polynices will lie at his feet,
Marked only with his name.
In death, the general will wait upon the child (p.90)

This image of reconciliation which comes from knowledge acquired through errors is central to Buffini's re-writing of *Antigone* into a play which radically redefines the world of tragedy into a world where "There's no such thing as destiny / There's only change" (p.88). Antigone does not *have* to commit suicide because within this new democracy where a woman rules,

the head of state acknowledges her mistake and tries to right her wrongs so she can embrace the future and “see what life is like to live” (p.96). Ismene is not *forced* into the role of the misjudged, silent sister because she lives in a society where she can speak her own mind and have her own opinion, right or wrong. Eurydice does not have to step back and watch the action happen while knitting in helpless silence because she acts rather than suffer the consequences of the actions of others. It is the concept of choice that strikes the difference between Buffini’s Eurydice and Sophocles’ Creon as rulers of Thebes. Creon, the tragic hero, who learns from his mistakes and “through suffering, become[s] wise” (Sophocles, 1998, p.188), is unable to take his fate into his own hands and he therefore has no choice but to suffer. Whereas Eurydice, the democratically elected female politician, suffers, accepts the consequences of her actions and makes choices based on the knowledge she has acquired.

Buffini brings her play to a close by leaving the options for Thebes, this twenty-first century West African country, open but also its grave problems unresolved. She clearly places the future wholly in the hands of the women, though their choices are not all constructive, positive, or peaceful. However in their diversity she celebrates and glorifies the individual voice of Theban and Athenian women who are struggling to survive and perform as equals in a world dominated by men.³¹ Megaera is unable to leave behind her the cycle of hatred and violence that her past has thrown her into. Before leaving for Athens with Miletus to seek a “new” life, she stabs Tydeus when she recognises him to be her violator: “I have seen that mouth before”, she says, “Against the sun, above me, twisting, hurting / In a village by the river where I used to be a girl” (p.108). The play’s closing words are given to her. They are not words of peace or reconciliation, but they are words of a woman who will not let go, and will fight on. And though the action she advocates is unquestionably violent action, it is action nonetheless:

Miletus: Megaera woman, what do you suggest?
Megaera: Miletus, man,
 They give us any shit
 They stand there in their marble palaces and try to keep us out
 We'll soak our rags in petrol
 And we'll burn their city down (p.115)

Ismene chooses to shed her Theban identity and her African clothes and turn to the civilised world of the Athenian superpower because she can see no future in Thebes. She believes that Eurydice's vision is "a fantasy" and her "optimism ludicrous"(p.109). Echoing Tiresias' earlier words to Antigone that she had "not survived this war; [that she] was breathing but not alive" (p.8), she declares to Eurydice, "I have not survived this war" (p.109), and seeks to leave her homeland disillusioned and unable to believe that anything can be challenged or changed. On the contrary Talthybia would like to stay on in Thebes because "The Theban attitude would seem to be / That in the face of our destruction / the only thing humanity can do / Is to create" (p.107). Likewise Antigone, in defiance of Tiresias' fatalistic predictions that her destiny lies "in darkness", leaves the stage stating, "Then the future's mine to make" (p.112). In these words Antigone epitomises the outlook of the numerous powerful women in this play and also very clearly alludes to the political situation in Liberia and to how the women of that country decided to take their own future and the future of their country into their own hands and "make" it. By exploring this political situation so diversely, *Welcome to Thebes* celebrates the voices of African women both in politics and in more private aspects of their social life.

There is however one aspect of this performance which remains open and debatable, that while it is a re-making of a canonical text which investigates the politics of a country ravaged by civil war and atrocities like few others, it is not produced from within that culture whose politics it exposes and condemns; nor is it staged within that social situation. It is written by a British playwright and staged in a theatre in the heart of a civilisation far

removed from the reality of a Liberian, or a West African world. It is performed in a city so much like the Athens of the play, for an audience who are not culturally or historically conditioned to attach more than some form of detached significance to its political connotations. Just as is the case for the Athenians of the play, the events that London audiences witness happen in a world very remote from their own.

The questions which arise are inevitable but can only be productive: How would a Liberian audience receive a performance of *Welcome to Thebes*? Would an audience in West Africa laugh when three actors dressed as soldiers carrying machine guns entered a theatre shouting threats and pointing their rifles straight at them? How subversive would a play like this be for an audience who are actually living in this country of “famine ... rubble, plague and debt” and experiencing the “politics of dire need”? (p.104) A British Nigerian student who watched the production at the National Theatre writes on her blog that she felt the “raw energy of Africa” before the play began and that for her, the “powerful heart wrenching desperation” of the set echoed Lagos. “I see images of the corrupt Nigerian Generals rise before me” she explains, and “hear my father’s tales recounted” (<http://jfkwalks.wordpress.com/2010/08/10/welcome-to-thebes/>). For what she considers an honest account of African politics, she thanks Buffini. However, this heartfelt reaction of a member of the audience with African roots comes from within the safety of a London theatre and her reaction is almost one of detached romanticism. So while *Welcome to Thebes* succinctly *reports* African politics and celebrates the strength of African women, it presents an optimistic view of a future with leadership being in capable female hands to an audience that might be too far removed from the African situation to comprehend or even possibly to care about the full force of its political connotations and implications. It would be very interesting to see how a production of the play would function as a cultural appropriation, a

politically charged intercultural performance within the country whose politics it explores and uncovers, and whose women's strength it celebrates.

The above scepticism, however, can be confronted by acknowledging that *Welcome to Thebes* seeks to subvert the politics it decries, from within the establishment itself. Richard Eyre utilises the National Theatre in the way that Edward Bond used it himself in 1978 when he described the Olivier as a stage which “is massive, open and public – as public as a street corner ... not a bourgeois theatre, but a theatre of society, just as the Greek theatre was. In that sense it is a political stage. It demands politics” (Itzin, 1978, p. 13). Seen in this light the performance subverts the foundations of the western civilisation which it criticises precisely by being performed in the National. Furthermore, Moira Buffini brings the voice of Liberian women to the centre of the world whose politics are denounced in the play, and that in itself is a form of empowerment and contains an inherent subversion which gives the play its genuine political imperative.

NOTES

1. We have no definitive date for the performance of *Antigone* but scholars have been able to place its first performance approximately between 441-440 BCE based on few fragments of historical context. For details on dating of the play see Hall 2010, Kitto 1939, Knox 1965, Sophocles 1998, Sophocles 2008.
2. cf. what happens in *The Trojan Women* when the Greeks murdered Astyanax but then delayed their departure from Troy to wait for the women to properly mourn and bury the boy.
3. This concept stems from the idea of «παν μέτρον ἄριστον» (pan metron ariston) i.e. ‘measure is excellence’ attributed to the sixth century poet Cleoboulos from the island of Rhodes.
4. See Ismene lines 61-67 and Creon lines 676-80 (Sophocles, 1954)
5. See Mee, E. B. and Foley, H. P. (2011) *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press especially pages 1-47 where Mee and Foley discuss how *Antigone* has been mobilized in performance around the world and has been transformed to address a multiplicity of cultural, historical, political and social issues in “Argentina, Canada, The Congo, Egypt, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Poland, Taiwan, Syria, Turkey and the United States” (p.2).
6. See Mee and Foley (2011) Chapter 3, Moira Fradinger “An Argentine Tradition” (pp.67-89).
7. See Mee and Foley (2011) Chapter 4, Fiona Macintosh “Irish *Antigone* and Burying the Dead” (pp. 90-103). Also see McDonald, M. and Walton, J. M. (eds.) (2002) *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*, London: Methuen.
8. Two of the best known ‘African’ *Antigones* are Fugard’s *The Island* (Fugard, 1993), and Femi Osofisan’s *Tegonni* (Osofisan, 1999), studies of which can be found among others in *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky* (Wetmore, 2002) pages 169-212, Goff (2005) *Classics and Colonialism* chapter 6, (Goff and Simpson, 2007) *Crossroads in the Black Aegean* chapters 5-7 and Kevin Wetmore’s *Black Dionysus; Greek tragedy and African American Theatre* (Wetmore, 2003)
9. Lane writes about the one-woman performance of *Anigona Huanca* in which the Peruvian actress Teresa Ralli, member of the Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, directed by Miguel Rubio, performs Watanabe’s play on her own, taking on the role of all the characters (*Antigone*, *Creon*, *Haemon*, *Teiresias*, *Ismene*) in turn. The text has not been translated or performed in English but I have retrieved this information from Lane’s article about it and from a video recording of Ralli’s performance, available on the internet (Zapata, 2000) The story of *Antigone* is retold in the aftermath of the long period of civil violence in Peru from 1980 to 2000, shaped by the armed conflict waged between the Marxist–Maoist group Sendero Luminoso (the Shining Path), led by Abimael Guzmán, and the military, ultimately led by the president-turned-dictator, Alberto Fujimori. Watanabe’s *Antigone* is aligned with contemporary citizens searching for missing family members “disappeared” by the state or assassinated by the Shining Path; *Ismene* is aligned with those who did not act during the war but are invited to seek justice today.
10. I have not been able to access reviews of the play’s first performance in Yugoslavia, but have acquired information about it from a personal e-mail communication with the playwright and his personal assistant. The play has since been translated into eight languages and performed all over the world, but more extensively in France where it was most recently staged at L’Atelier du 8, in Grenoble in 2011 and again by the same company at the AuPetit Theatre, Grenoble from 30 March to 1 April 2012.
11. Dominik Smole (1929-1992) was a Slovenian playwright who wrote a play in hypertheatrical relationship with *Antigone* in 1959, entitled *Antigona*. In his play everything revolves around an *Antigone* who never appears on the stage. Smole’s *Antigona* thus uses Sophocles’ work as an allusion to the Slovene political and social situation under the Soviets and Tito and its main concealed secret, the killings of 12,000 Slovenian Home Guard members in May and June 1945, perpetrated by the authorities (Cardullo, 2011, pp.85-171).
12. Between 1945 until the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, the country had no institutionalized censorship and since power shifted back and forth between the communist party’s conservative and liberal factions, with frequent changes in the political climate, what was tolerated at one moment became prohibited the next. Furthermore, the federal structure of the country and increasing rivalry between the Party elites and their bureaucratic bodies in the six federal republics, led to varying standards: a publication banned in one republic could be published in another one, a banned production could be transferred to one of the other republics and could even win a prize at a festival there. But more than this, an informal political censorship had a greater power in restricting the intellectual and

- artistic freedom of Yugoslav theatre artists. For more details on censorship in Yugoslavian theatres see Jovicevic (2008).
13. “Human fear has a certain odour, and I am one of the few who has a nose for human fear. All people spread fear’s odour, but not with equal intensity. You have less of an odour of fear than Ismene does ... You are the most dangerous one, so I will kill you and save Ismene” (Gavran, 1983, p.4).
 14. Fradinger (2011) argues that there is an engagement with the Antigone myth which goes back to the early nineteenth century (Juan Cruz Varela’s 1824 *Agria* which was written in response to Argentina’s independence from Spain). She lists another four major re-workings of Sophocles’ play which she attests function as a “lineage of Argentine Antigones’ in dialogue with one another” (p.68).
 15. Gambaro’s play is the best known to the Anglo-American academia possibly because again as Fradinger claims, it is the only one (to date) which has been translated and staged in English.
 16. Griselda Gambaro was forced into exile to Spain during the dictatorship in 1977 after a presidential decree banned one of her novels. While in exile she wrote a novel, but was unable to write for the theatre, because as she has said herself a play is “an assemblage of signs, received, modified and given back by the audience ... In no foreign country [do] I have the dialogue I have with my compatriots. Our common history means that much can remain tacit; there is no need for exposition or explanation, no need to de-code images and signs” (Feitlowitz, 1992, p. 2) *Antígona Furiosa* was written and staged under the democratic government, after Gambaro returned to Argentina.
 17. The term was first coined by the dictators themselves when president Vileda said that as long as somebody is missing they do not have an entity, they are not there, neither dead nor alive, they are *desaparecido*, ‘disappeared’. By denying the existence of these people the Argentinean government washed their hands of any responsibility for the hundreds of them that allegedly disappeared “into thin air”, but who in fact had been abducted by agents of the government itself, tortured and killed. (see Brysk, 1994; Schirmer, 1989)
 18. The last march of the *Madres* took place on Jan 27th 2006, 25 years and 1500 Thursdays after the first march, on the 30th anniversary of the last military coup in Argentina.
 19. For details on the performative aspect of the weekly marches see Diana Taylor (1997).
 20. After the end of the trials in 1986, under the presidency of Raul Alfonsin, the government passed the Full Stop Law (*Ley de Punto Final*) whereby lawyers were given only 60 days to finish the remaining prosecutions of the officers involved in the Dirty War and within months congress passed the Law of Due Obedience (*Ley de obediencia debida*) which put an end to all trials of police and military officials, whowere all excused on the basis of ‘due obedience’. For details see Brysk (1994).
 21. According to the military and to some of the Argentine population who would always cross to the other side of the Plaza de Mayo, in order never to be associated with them, the *Madres* were considered troublemakers engaged in a futile, irrational protest: “In Argentina, the military originally labelled *Las Madres* as “*las locas*” (the madwomen): poor, naive women undone by grief, not citizens demanding accountability from their government” (Brysk, 1994, p.7).
 22. “The disappeared” like Polynices, were killed twice, once while being alive and once again when they were dead. Not handing over the bodies to the families, not allowing a proper burial means that the dead are wronged once more; their killings are restaged over and over again like a never ending cycle.
 23. For details on the tactics of the Argentinean military dictators and their handling of the accusations that they had actually abducted and killed thousands of adversaries of the regime see (Schirmer, 1989, 1994, Simpson and Bennett, 1985, Taylor, 1997)
 24. In a performance of Jean Anouilh’s *Antigone* at the Oxford Playhouse, directed by Janet Bolam in March 2010 Eurydice is a silent character who walks on to the stage at the very beginning of the performance, sits on a chair downstage right, just outside the proscenium arch for the entire show, knitting and apparently listening but not being visibly involved in the action. Before the end of the play she gets up and leaves, disappearing without a mention.
 25. Gbowee together with Johnson-Sirleaf were awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize on 7th October 2011 “for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work.” See http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2011/press.html
 26. In her speech at the acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony on December 10th 2011 in Oslo, Johnson Sirleaf addressed herself to Gbowee by saying “Leymah, you are a peacemaker. You had the courage to mobilize the women of Liberia to take back their country. You redefined the “front line” of a brutal civil conflict – women dressed in white, demonstrating in the streets – a barrier no warlord was brave enough to cross”. (Johnson Sirleaf, 2011)
 27. For details on the Women of Liberia’s Peace Movement and the country’s recent history see UN article (Popovic and Ancil, 2009) also watch documentary “Pray the Devil Back to Hell” (Reticker, 2008)

28. Johnson-Sirleaf was re-elected in the general elections held in Liberia in November 2011 and is currently the President of Liberia again for another six-year term.
29. Information on the process the playwright went through to write the piece, and on her background research, is from a Playwrights' Workshop that she led at the Drama Department of the University of Birmingham on 28th February 2011 and the discussion which followed.
30. News reports at the time, and later reports by survivors all indicate that the audiences of the Dubrovna Theatre in Moscow on the night of 23 October 2002 laughed at first because they thought that the real event was part of the performance – they soon fell silent as they realised that the event was a terrorist attack. "Playing at the theater that Wednesday night was a hit Russian musical about the Red Army in World War II, so when masked gunmen burst on stage, the audience at first thought that it was all part of the show ... The moment was captured by the theater's video camera ... But when those gunmen announced that if the Russian Army didn't get out of Chechnya they would blow up the theater, the audience realized that they had just become players in a terrifying real-life drama. Video footage, shot during the siege by one of the terrorists, shows what the Russians were up against." available from http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-579840.html Accessed on 02/02/2013
31. Listening to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's speech which she gave while receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on 10th December 2011, eighteen months after *Welcome to Thebes* premiered in London, I was struck by the echo of Eurydice's voice in the Liberian President's words:

So I urge my sisters, and my brothers, not to be afraid. Be not afraid to denounce injustice, though you may be outnumbered. Be not afraid to seek peace, even if your voice may be small. Be not afraid to demand peace.

If I might thus speak to girls and women everywhere, I would issue them this simple invitation: My sisters, my daughters, my friends, find your voices!

Each of us has her own voice, and the differences among us are to be celebrated. But our goals are in harmony. They are the pursuit of peace, the pursuit of justice. They are the defence of rights to which all people are entitled. (Johnson Sirleaf, 2011)

AFTERWORD

In 1984 Irish poet and playwright Aidan Carl Matthews collaborated with director Michael Scott to write and stage an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Following the play's production in July of the same year at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, Matthews reflected in retrospect about his experience of making an entirely new *Antigone* for twentieth century audiences. The driving force for his work, he writes, was a conviction that "*Antigone*, like all the major tragedies of the Greek canon, exists in cowed form. It has been sedated by its own stature. The harm of its art has been drained from it. As a result it has suffered ... a fate worse than death; it has become a classic." Following that realisation he was eager "to oust the inertia of our customary appreciation of the text and to introduce instead the energy of a startled re-cognition" (Mathews, 1984, p.18).

What I have affirmed in this thesis is that radical hypertheatrical interaction not just with *Antigone*, but also with *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* achieves just that aim which Mathews set out to accomplish in his own remaking. It breathes a new life into plays that have become "stylised, stately and ceremonious" (p. 18), and transforms them so that the audiences perceive something entirely new in something very old. Consequently, this novel perception becomes for the audiences what Peter Boenisch calls an "act of encounter [rather than a] traditional aesthetic attitude of 'reception'" (2010, p. 171) since these radical remakings become assimilated by and reflective of the culture, the political moment or the socio-historical coincidence in which they are conceived, created and performed.

The adaptations which I have used in this thesis to argue for a radical, political, cultural and topical appropriation of *Medea*, *The Trojan Women* and *Antigone* all confront the ancient hypoplays fearlessly to explore issues related to race, empire, gender and war. They are all, to use Charles Mee's and Christine Evans' idea, involved in a head-on collision with

the hypoplay from which they emerge as works with a forceful vision at their centre. They all re-define and empower their female protagonists, give them a voice of their own and present them in a different light to that which more traditional scholarship has shed on them through interpretations of the hypoplays. They re-establish them as powerful, independent women, focus on their political presence, and centralise them within the contemporary moment. Hence, these adaptations are re-made into narratives of female empowerment.

Some of them, like Gambaro's, Gavran's, Taxidou's or Buffini's plays are more overtly political with clear or easily discernible topical or historical references and they place their female protagonist figures in situations of power and political advantage. Others such as Müller's, Mee's, O'Reilly's, Evans' and Ramos' and Maravala's works use formalistic experimentation more than specific socio-historical references to make their gendered political statement against the established order and to give their central female figures a political prerogative. But without exception they all perform an act of violence on the hypoplay and its assumed universality which they treat as a western conceit that places western culture above and beyond all others. This 'violence' is a deliberate alternative to a concept of 'restoration' which has been and still is connected to the writing and performance of older works with a contemporary veneer. Such is the concept that playwright Peter Barnes referred to when he likened adaptation of Greek plays to the restoration of art: "Adapting an old play is much like restoring an old painting. Time renders certain areas opaque and words, like protective varnish, go dead. These obsolete words have to be replaced by others of equal precision and force but whose meaning is clear"(cited in Walton, 2006, p.192). Barnes' perception of adaptation is the complete opposite of the concept as it has emerged from the work in this thesis, both in intention and in result. Because while his approach aims to clarify and make more easily accessible assumed great ideas that have always been there but have

somehow become less visible or less relevant with the years, the works which I call hyperplays of the ancient texts seek to question and overturn those very ideas surrounding the classic by using the seeds of subversion which can be located within the ancient plays themselves.

This marked difference between the hypoplay and its hyperplay can be traced, as I have argued in detail, back to the first half of the twentieth century and theories of translation and owes a lot to Bertolt Brecht's revolutionary take on authenticity and representation. The following anecdote clearly depicts Brecht's idea that a translation is a different version and not a reflection of the original and provides the basis from which the concept of radically adapting an older text springs. When Brecht was being questioned by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, a committee member solemnly read out an English translation of one of Brecht's poems, as evidence of his Communist connections. "Did you write that poem Mr Brecht?", he accused the playwright, "No", replied Brecht, "I wrote a German poem, but that is *very* different from this thing". (Jones, 2012)

The overarching question of course is why an artist, like Brecht himself and countless others since Brecht and even before him would want to create a work that might be considered dependant on, or a version of a pre-existing work of artistic expression and not choose to make their statement through an entirely new construct. The answer lies once again in Brecht's revolutionary concept of *Verfremdung* which can work only if it has something familiar to de-familiarise. That is why Brecht had to present realism on stage in order for defamiliarization to take place, because if something is not familiar in the first place how can it be made to seem unfamiliar? (see Barnett, 2010)

The presence of the familiar even as a spectre acts as a referent against which the fixity of the traditional narrative is questioned, for as Derrida asks, "Can one, in order to

question it, address oneself to a ghost? ... Could one *address oneself in general* if already some ghost did not come back?" He answers his own question by suggesting that we "learn from the ghost ... to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet." (2006, p. 221)

Taking this as a premise one can reach a logical conclusion which relates to the more recent, experimental and subversive adaptations which have formed the core of this thesis. The aim of these adaptations is to take apart given significations and to question more traditional approaches to the classic – the "play as noun" – which focus on what dramatic literature means and to centre instead on the new construct – the "theatre as verb" – which involves looking at what happens on stage and what a play's production "does" (Mee, Erin B. and Foley, 2011, p.13). These adaptations are deconstructive by definition since they clearly work against an ideology, against a fixed narrative, and against the stability of realism. But how can a work of art be deconstructive if it doesn't have a referent to go against? So while they do away with the stability of realism and the fixity of the classic form, they use the plot as a known value and a premise that they can then work against. When the myth, the narrative, the 'what happens next' part of the theatrical event is known, then it is easier for the form to become new and surprising, difficult and challenging, experimental and deconstructive. Therefore by taking something old and turning it into something new playwrights and directors of the relevant theatrical events provide a productive tension between that which is known and established and that which is deconstructed and blown apart.

Furthermore, they take their audiences on a challenging, demanding journey which re-shapes their preconceived notions as it transforms the hypoplay into a new construct. When audiences attend an adaptation of a well known fixed narrative, they usually bring with them certain expectations which have been shaped and conditioned by the very nature of the narrative and its fixed place in the canon. They are ‘haunted’ by its place in the history of theatre and consequently by its place in their own cultural memory. These radical, subversive adaptations smash their audiences’ preconceived ideas and engulf them in a world where their perception of the classic is re-negotiated and re-defined. This assault on all fronts on the classic as hypotext brings onto the stages of the world, theatrical events that have irreversibly changed how we perceive and approach plays which were written in fifth century Athens.

In closing I would like to refer to the words of the renowned French theatre director Ariane Mnouchkine, which have become my own haunting since I came across them at the very beginning of this project. When Mnouchkine wrote the message for World Theatre Day in 2005, she composed an inspired invocation which personifies Theatre, and calls on it to help her in dire times:

Help !
Theatre, come to my rescue !
I am asleep. Wake me
I am lost in the dark, guide me, at least towards a candle
I am lazy, shame me
I am tired, raise me up
I am indifferent, strike me
I remain indifferent, beat me up
I am afraid, encourage me
I am ignorant, teach me
I am monstrous, make me human
I am pretentious, make me die of laughter
I am cynical, take me down a peg
I am foolish, transform me
I am wicked, punish me.
I am dominating and cruel, fight against me
I am pedantic, make fun of me
I am vulgar, elevate me

I am mute, untie my tongue
I no longer dream, call me a coward or a fool
I have forgotten, throw Memory in my face
I feel old and stale, make the Child in me leap up
I am heavy, give me Music
I am sad, bring me Joy
I am deaf, make Pain shriek like a storm
I am agitated, let Wisdom rise within me
I am weak, kindle Friendship
I am blind, summon all the Lights
I am dominated by Ugliness, bring in conquering Beauty
I have been recruited by Hatred, unleash all the forces of Love. (Mnouchkine, 2005)

I suggest in this thesis that *Medea*, *The Trojan Women* and *Antigone* have been appropriated as theatrical events, myths and dramatic works to create theatre that would satisfy Mnouchkine's plea for help and create contemporary, radical, hyperplays which subvert the established order and deconstruct the classics' aura of universality.

LIST OF PRODUCTIONS

- Creon's Antigone* by Miro Gavran; directed by Damir Madariæ, at the Gavella Drama Theatre in Zagreb. December 22, 1983
- Antígona Furiosa* by Griselda Gambaro; directed by Laura Yusem, at the Goethe Institute in Buenos Aires. September 24, 1986
- The Trojan Women: A Love Story* by Charles L. Mee; directed by Tina Landau at the University of Washington in Seattle. Spring 1996
- Medea: a World Apart* by Olga Taxidou; directed by Nana Kvaskhadze, at the Georgian International Festival of Theatre in Georgia. Tumanishvili Film Actors' Studio. October 1997
- Trojan Barbie* by Christine Evans; directed by Carmel O'Reilly, at the Zero Hour Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts. American Repertory Theatre. March 2009
- Medeamaterial* by Heiner Müller; (staged as *Heiner Müller's the Trilogy of Medea*) directed by Nikos Sakalidis at the Teatro Simeio in Athens. Aktis Aeliou Art Theatre. May 22, 2009
- Welcome to Thebes* by Moira Buffini; directed by Richard Eyre, at the National Theatre, Te Olivier Stage in London. June 19, 2010
- Peeling* by Kaite O'Reilly; directed by Kirstie Davis on tour in Hampshire, UK. Forest Forge Theatre Company. Appleshaw Village Hall, Andover. March 26, 2011
- Hotel Medea* by Zecora Ura Theatre Network and Para Active / Urban Dolls Project; directed by Jorge Lopes Pamos and Persis Jade Maravala in warehouses at Trinity Buoy Wharf in London, 17 July 2010 and at Southbank Centre's Hayward Gallery in London, 20 July 2012

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