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## Editorial

Half a century ago, while he was teaching a course at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Kurt Vonnegut wrote a sentence I find difficult to forget: "Be a good editor. The Universe needs more good editors, God knows." While humbled by invitation to become the guest editor of what is to be the first international volume of *Keria – studia Latina et Graeca*, published to celebrate the journal's twentieth anniversary, I am also ever so slightly nervous. Editing can use the authors' ingredients to make a Breakfast of Champions. However, there is always a possibility of a Slaughterhouse Five. To lessen the risk of such a calamity, I begged the assistance of my former and for ever – as it seems – partner in editorial adventure, David Movrin who being *in situ* has an innate understanding of what is right and wrong for *Keria*.

So this volume explores the topic of Classics and Communism in Theatre, offering a foretaste of a book to be published by the end of the year. It begins with a case study from regions beyond Soviet Europe, to give prominence to the research less frequently treated by scholars studying communism, namely with Edith Hall's *Communist Idealism in George Cram Cook's "The Athenian Women" (1918)*. Then the focus shifts to Russia shortly before the October Revolution, where three classicists, namely Tadeusz Zieliński, Innokentiy Annensky, and Vyacheslav Ivanov, prepared the ground for what they called the Slavonic Renaissance of Antiquity. After the October Revolution, Zieliński's son Adrian Piotrovsky and Sergey Radlov developed a concept of amateur theatre and proletarian performance where "sailors and the Red Army soldiers" staged Aristophanes' comedies at so-called *clubs*, "centres for education and propaganda for the masses." Nina V. Braginskaya explores this transition of the symbolist theory into socialist practice. From Russia, the focus moves west to neighbouring Poland, with a study of dramas by Greek and Roman playwrights performed under communism. Moving to Berlin and East Germany, Bernd Seidensticker highlights the fact that in the German Democratic Republic the ratio of theatre seats per capita was probably the highest in the world. His article on Ancient Drama and Reception of Antiquity in the German Democratic Republic provides an overview of the GDR's theatrical scene,

focusing on three pieces. These are Peter Hacks' adaptation of Aristophanes' *Peace* at the Deutsche Theater in Berlin in 1962, Heiner Müller's *Philoktet*, a play based on a Sophoclean tragedy, and the same author's *Der Horatier*, a short didactic play (*Lehrstück*) based on Roman history. The unique place of Sophocles' *Antigone* in the repertory of communist theatre and its influence on West- and South Slavonic drama in mid-twentieth century is discussed by Alenka Jensterle-Doležal, who also provides a review of theatrical innovation under communism in the region.

The scene changes from country to country and the picture is far from homogenous. The varying harshness of the communist regime affected the repertory, and both the strength of the local theatrical tradition as well as the presence of classical antiquity in education influenced the directors' choices. The public, on the other hand, could go along with or against the directors' inclinations – and could in times of tension see political allusions where none were intended, celebrating a victory of the Aesopian language.

Most of the articles of the present volume were discussed at the conference on *Classics and Communism in Theatre* in Warsaw in 2015, organised by the Universities of Warsaw and Ljubljana. The Slovenian students rocked the place with their Plautus. *Proveniant medii sic mihi saepe dies*.

When he was leaving Iowa, Vonnegut wrote a letter of friendly advice to his successor. As all his letters, it is filled with timeless wisdom. ("Every so often you will go nuts. All of a sudden the cornfields get you.") But most importantly, there is solace for all guest editors of international journals: "Forget your lack of credentials. The University is perfectly used to barbarians."

Elżbieta Olechowska  
Ljubljana - Warsaw, September 2018



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Edith Hall

## American Communist Idealism in George Cram Cook's *The Athenian Women* (1918)

The distinctive history of ancient drama in pro-Soviet, Communist, Marxist, and workers' theatres outside the Soviet Union and the "Eastern Bloc" is identifiable almost immediately after the Russian revolution of 1917. In the USA it was launched by *The Athenian Women*, written by the American George Cram Cook, with input from his long-term lover, whom he had recently married, the novelist Susan Glaspell.<sup>1</sup> *The Athenian Women* is a serious, substantial three-act drama set in Periclean Athens, but drawing on Aristophanes' "women" plays produced from 411 onwards, *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*. Although it is a new work, *The Athenian Women* also engages with Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian war, and with the figure of Socrates as portrayed in both Plato and Xenophon. According to Glaspell, when Cook was writing the play during the summer of 1917, he was filtering the daily news from Europe through the lens of Thucydides, often quoting the historian's dictum that "in all human probability these things will happen again".<sup>2</sup> The play states its socialist and feminist politics in the mouths of the two main revolutionary characters, Lysicles and Aspasia respectively. Although the play was not particularly successful, its 1918 production by the Provincetown Players had an indirect impact on the future directions taken by progressive and political theatre in the USA, especially through the subsequent dramas of Glaspell and the soon-to-be-world-famous playwright she and Cook mentored, Eugene O'Neill.<sup>3</sup>

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1 On Glaspell's fiction cf. Martha C. Carpentier, *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

2 S. Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005, originally published London: E. Benn Ltd. 1926), 267; and Thucydides 1.22.

3 The three standard histories of the company all focus mainly on the period between 1919 and 1922, rather than the early years 1915 to spring 1918, when *The Athenian Women* was produced: Edna Kenton's manuscript (published 1997), which is the only account by an original member of the group, and Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre* (New

The context in which the play was performed was the exceptional “cultural ferment” of Greenwich Village in the first two decades of the 20th century. “It was a time when everything was new and anything was possible, even contrary purposes.”<sup>4</sup> The New York bohemian scene is described in Glaspell’s 1915 novel, *Fidelity*: “There were new poets in the world; there were bold new thinkers; there was an amazing new art; science was reinterpreting the world and workers and women were setting themselves free. Everywhere the old pattern was being shot through with new ideas”<sup>5</sup>

Glaspell is always difficult to write about as a theatre writer, however, because her major contributions to the Provincetown Players have been obscured by the reputations of both Cook (usually known as “Jig”, although I refer to him throughout this article as Cook) and O’Neill. It is impossible to be sure of the extent of Glaspell’s contribution to the text of *The Athenian Women*. She certainly helped shape the dialogue and some scenes;<sup>6</sup> I have previously explored this issue in the *Oxford Handbook to Greek Drama in the Americas*.<sup>7</sup> But she systematically presented Cook as the intellectual guiding force in their conjugal relationship, even though she was equally well read and by far the better dramatist.

Born in 1876, and raised in poverty on a Midwestern farm, she was fascinated by the native Sauk people. Throughout her life she remained deeply identified with the Mid-West and the people who had inhabited it before the Europeans came, an identification most explicit in her tragedy *The Inheritors* (1921), which is partly inspired by Sophocles’ *Antigone*.<sup>8</sup> Glaspell’s down-at-heel rural Iowa family could not afford to educate her, but she became a local journalist and saved up to enter Drake University at Des Moines in 1897, where she studied Philosophy, Greek, French, History, and Biblical Studies. In 1902 she also took courses in literature at Chicago University, before hurling herself into a bohemian lifestyle and circle of friends in Paris and New York.

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York: Russell & Russell, 1931), and Robert K. Sarló, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982). On Susan Glaspell cf. especially the collection of essays edited by Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Essays on her Theater and Fiction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) and J. Ellen Gainor, *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics, 1915–48* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

- 4 L. Ben-Zvi, ‘The Provincetown Players: The Success that Failed’, *The Eugene O’Neill Review* 27 (2005): 13.
- 5 Susan Glaspell, *Fidelity* (Boston [Mass.]: Small, Maynard & Co., 1915), 269. On the importance of the mid-war years in terms of American feminism in literature, theatre and culture more widely, cf. Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick, eds., 1915, *The Cultural Moment: The New Politics, the New Woman, the New Psychology, the New Art, and the New Theatre in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991).
- 6 Barbara Ozieblo, *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 119–20.
- 7 Edith Hall, ‘The migrant muse: Greek drama as feminist window on American identity 1900–1925’, in Kathryn Boshert, Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell and Patrice D. Rankine, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Drama in the Americas* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 149–65.
- 8 *Ibidem*, 161–2.



Her immersion in Greek literature is a neglected aspect of her work; Greek tragedy informed many of her novels, especially *Fugitive's Return* (1929), a bestseller.<sup>9</sup> It tells the story of a Midwestern woman who travels to Greece in a plot that reverberates with motifs and scenery from Euripides' *Ion* (as well as partly modelling its heroine on the impresario of the Delphi Festival performances of Greek theatre, Eva Palmer-Sikelianos).<sup>10</sup>

Glaspell cannot be fully understood without recognising how impressed she was, despite her socialist views, by Cook's superior social class, Ivy League education, and accomplishments. He came from an old English colonial family and was born in 1873 at Davenport in Iowa. He had a passion for ancient Greek myths from childhood, which had led him to build sandcastles representing Troy on family beach holidays.<sup>11</sup> He had studied Classics and English literature at both Harvard and Heidelberg. He worked as a literary critic, taught literature at Iowa and Stanford Universities, and published a novel about the relationship between Nietzsche and Marx (*The Chasm*, 1911). Much of our information about him derives from Glaspell's 1926 biography, *The Road to the Temple*. It is hagiographical in tone, misrepresents the history of his troubled relationships both with her and the Provincetown Players, and under-estimates the threat to his creativity and efficiency caused by his life-long alcoholism.<sup>12</sup> Yet there is no doubt that their mutual obsession with ancient Greek culture, and especially theatre, proved a strong bond and that they must have discussed individual plays in detail. The passionate commitment to feminism in *The Athenian Women* is, I suspect, the result of Glaspell's steady input. Although colluding in stereotypes of women as irrationally swayed by physical desire, and overly concerned with justifying Aspasia's complicity in breaking up Pericles' marriage to Kallia because Love Conquers All (perhaps because Glaspell, was perceived as having broken up Cook's first marriage), it voices trenchant opinions. Aspasia says: "the Athenian woman who marries accepts the life of a cow".<sup>13</sup>

*The Athenian Women* premiered on March 1st, 1918 with the Provincetown Players, arguably the most important non-commercial off-Broadway theatre companies in the USA ever.<sup>14</sup> There were other experimental theatre groups, especially after the 1911–12 USA tour by the Abbey Players from Dublin, and

9 For Glaspell's debt to Aristophanes, cf. Marina Angel, "A classical Greek influences an American feminist: Susan Glaspell's debt to Aristophanes," *Syracuse Law Review* 52 (2002): 81–103.

10 On whom cf. especially Artemis Leontis, "Greek Tragedy and Modern Dance: *An Alternative Archaeology?*" in Kathryn Boshier, Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell and Patrice D. Rankine, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 204–20.

11 Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple* (2005 edition), 29.

12 Cf. the remarks of Linda Ben-Zvi in her edition, Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*.

13 George Cram Cook, *The Athenian Women, with a Modern Greek translation revised by C. Carthaio* (Athens: H.F. Kauffman, 1926), 40.

14 For the origins of the group cf. Robert K. Sarlós, "The Provincetown Players' Genesis or Non-Commercial Theatre on Commercial Streets," *Journal of American Culture* 7 (1984): 65–70.

the *Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* of Euripides with which the English director Harley Granville Barker had toured Ivy League campuses in 1915.<sup>15</sup> One was the Washington Square Players, founded in 1915. Some of the new groups were part of the “Little Theatre” movement,<sup>16</sup> and some had experimented with Greek drama; in 1913, the Chicago Little Theatre had already performed Euripides’ *Trojan Women* under the direction of Maurice Brown.<sup>17</sup> However, the Provincetown Players were destined to become by far the most influential of such organisations: luminaries of the American Left including Emma Goldman were in attendance at the premiere of *The Athenian Women*.<sup>18</sup>

It was Cook’s first full-length play and the first on a three-act scale to be performed by the Players. The venue was their little theatre at 139 Macdougal Street in the middle of Greenwich Village. The play was given just seven performances, culminating in a single touring production in the much larger and better equipped Bramhall Playhouse on East 27th Street, in front of the members of the Women’s Peace Party of New York.<sup>19</sup> The enterprise was challenging since the play contains more than thirty parts, played by twenty-five actors. The costumes, by Helen Zagat, made of cheap cheesecloth, simulated those to be seen in the classical artworks of the fifth century BCE. The designer, Ira Remsen, strove to recreate the sights and ambience of classical Athens with attractively painted flats and drapes, “authentic”-looking furniture, and a cut-out of the Acropolis.<sup>20</sup> The director, Nina Moise, insisted on adding three wide shallow stairs, which led down into the audience, breaking the boundary between audience and players to increase the sense of political immediacy. Reviewers commented on the skill with which she negotiated the tiny stage by artful grouping of the actors.<sup>21</sup>

*The Athenian Women* was not published until 1926 (after Cook’s death in 1924), in Greece, in a bilingual edition; the facing translation in colloquial modern Greek was a revised version of one originally made by Cook himself. He had dreamed of producing the play in Athens.<sup>22</sup> The decision to publish it

15 For the Granville Barker productions cf. Hall and Macintosh (2005) chapters 171–18; for the tours, E. Hall, *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides’ Black Sea Tragedy* (New York: OUP, 2013), ch. 11.

16 On which cf. especially the eye-witness account of the movement by Harriet Monroe, “Little Theatres and Poetic Plays,” *Poetry* 11.4 (1918): 201–207.

17 Cf. Kathryn Boshier and Jordana Cox, “Professional Tragedy: The Case of Medea in Chicago, 1867,” in Kathryn Boshier, Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell, and Patrice Rankine, *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 97–8.

18 Deutsch and Hanau, *Provincetown*, 27. On the cultural influence of the Players cf. especially Brenda Murphy, *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

19 Alfred Kreymborg, *Troubadour: An Autobiography* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925), 24.

20 Edna Kenton, *The Provincetown Players and The Playwrights’ Theatre*, with additional material by Jackson R. Bryer, Travis Bogard, Edna Kenton and Bernadette Smyth, published as special edition of *The Eugene O’Neill Review*, 21.1–2 (1997): 71; Heywood Broun, review of *The Athenian Women* in *New York Tribune* (March 4, 1918): 9.

21 Kenton, *Provincetown Players*, 71.

22 Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*.

in Greece, rather than as one of the selected Provincetown plays that appeared in the USA,<sup>23</sup> was made by Glaspell and Greek friends. It was necessary because severe disagreements over the future direction of the company between Cook and other prominent players had resulted in him leaving the USA, with Glaspell, for what amounted to self-imposed exile.

The volume containing *The Athenian Women* exists in remarkably few known copies and is difficult to access, so one aim of this essay is merely to offer an account of the nature and contents of the play itself.<sup>24</sup> Another is to demonstrate how Cook uses his ancient subject matter and sources to address, from a radical socialist perspective, the contemporary international crisis of capitalism and militarism. It will become apparent that the play struggled to reconcile a somewhat nostalgic, 19th-century idealising Romantic Hellenism, and a traditional theatrical form – the realist stage play – with what were utterly radical political ideas. Cook was ultimately too wedded to an idealising view of the “sublimity” and exceptional status in the cultural history of classical Athens, and to 19th-century dramatic forms, to do justice to the dynamic political, intellectual and social energies unleashed by the momentous revolutions that were shaking the world. A contemporary classical scholar insisted that his passionate Philhellenism refuted “the charge that the magic of Greece is merely a glamour of conventional tradition, fostered by the Schools. If ever a spirit was untrammelled by tradition and convention, that spirit was George Cram Cook’s.”<sup>25</sup> However, in hindsight, the glamorising of the “glory” of Periclean Athens, and the debt owed by the production to the craze for Greek plays in “authentic” costumes, which had swept “the Schools” constituted by North American campuses since the 1880s,<sup>26</sup> do look surprisingly conventional.

The opening Act I of the play, “Kallia and Aspasia”, is set in the Athenian house of the independent courtesan Aspasia in 445 BCE. A migrant from the Greek city of Miletus, she is not yet Pericles’ lover. Pericles is married to Kallia and pursuing an imperialist policy against other Greek states. The visionary pacifist Aspasia is partially informed by the figure of Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*, for it transpires that she has been the spiritual mentor of a young philosopher named Socrates. Pericles heard about her from this disciple “one

23 E.g. George Cram Cook and Frank Shay, *The Provincetown Plays* (Cincinnati: Stewart Kidd Co., 1921).

24 I have made a photocopy of my personal copy, which is available to the public for consultation by appointment at the Archive of Performances of Greek & Roman Drama at Oxford University.

25 Grace H. Goodale, review of Glaspell’s *Road to the Temple*, in *The Classical Weekly*, 23.15 (1930): 117.

26 Cf. K. Hartigan, *Greek Tragedy on the American Stage: Ancient Drama in the Commercial Theater, 1882–1994* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995); Fiona Macintosh, “Tragedy in Performance: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Productions,” in Patricia Elizabeth Easterling, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 284–323; Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Helene P. Foley, *Reimagining Greek Tragedy on the American Stage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Bosher et al., *Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas*.

starlit night in Euboa... He spoke of the wisdom of love in you. He said that to know you was a kind of revelation". It was Aspasia who taught Socrates to listen to his "inner voice".<sup>27</sup> Aspasia is attached to the working-class politician Lysicles, and they discuss how to stop Pericles' militarism. However, Aspasia, a woman of exceptional intelligence, charisma and rhetorical skills, also persuades Kallia both to pressure Pericles into ceasing from pursuing a war policy and into helping her make an alliance with the women of Sparta. There is a faint suggestion that Kallia has fallen under Aspasia's erotic spell just as much as her husband will later; the Provincetown Players were nothing if not sexually open-minded.

Act II, "The Women's Peace", sees Aspasia put her plans into action at an Assembly of Women taking place during the women-only festival of the Thesmophoria in the temple of Demeter. The women lead a revolt against Athenian imperial expansionism. Much to Lysicles' disgust, Aspasia becomes more interested in beautifying Athens than in achieving economic equality for the people. Pericles is persuaded by Aspasia to make Athens a city of artistic rather than imperialist enterprise. Ictinus, the architect, is becoming increasingly frustrated because Pericles is financing war rather than building projects: Aspasia insists that Pericles needs to conquer Megara and Corinth not by force of arms but through the mind, through beauty, architecture "and the voices of the tragic poets".<sup>28</sup> He is duly persuaded and subsidises the rebuilding of the Acropolis. When Ictinus and the sculptor Phidias appear, Pericles gives them two thousand talents. Phidias says to Ictinus, "we can build the temple true to your sublimest vision...the fairest since the world began!"<sup>29</sup> Pericles also transfers his affections from Kallia to Aspasia. The passion is mutual.

The third Act, "A Candle in the Darkness", is set in 431 BCE. The audience are to imagine a fourteen-year interval has passed, during which peace has blessed Athens. The Parthenon has been erected, the rebuilding of the Acropolis completed,<sup>30</sup> and endless artistic and philosophical dialogues conducted in the salon of Pericles and Aspasia, where the action is now set. However, when a vengeful Kallia joins forces with a politician to bring Pericles and Aspasia down, events spiral tragically out of control, and the Peloponnesian War breaks out. The dream of the peace-loving democratic "City Beautiful" is over and replaced by a bleak realisation that war in Greece and the ultimate destruction of the Athenian democracy are both inevitable. Alcibiades is lurking in the wings, hoping to become a king or tyrant. Kallia has emotionally defected to Sparta, opposes the democracy, and argues that the best outcome

27 Cook, *Athenian Women*, 168.

28 Cook, *Athenian Women*, 170–4.

29 Cook, *Athenian Women*, 210.

30 This is far from the historical truth: the completion of all the building and sculptures of the Acropolis temples took many more years. Cf. E. Hall, "Greek Tragedy 430–380 BC," in Robin Osborne, ed., *Debating the Athenian Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 269–70.

for Greece would be for the aristocrats of the two major cities to join forces and set up an oligarchy. Lysicles is still hoping for transnational communism, but Aspasia has become disenchanted with all politics except for pacifism. Pericles is still obsessed with Athenian glory and ordering the rounding-up of every Boeotian in Attica so that he can take reprisals. The play closes with the pathetic fallacy of a violent storm raging outside, and Aspasia mournfully ruminating: "O Pericles – our great bright circle – this life which has created beauty – we have been but a candle burning in the darkness – a point in space – a bright ripple on a black wave – a boat on a shoreless sea!"<sup>31</sup>

Although many historical characters are introduced into the action, including Hermippus, the comic poet, the intellectual heart of the play is in the triangulated viewpoints of the three main political agents, Pericles, Aspasia, and Lysicles. They are all historical figures, although Lysicles is less famous, because far less is said about him in ancient sources than the other two. Pericles is a great leader, pragmatist and a patriot who regards the defence and glorification of Athens as his primary goals, and is prepared to wage war on and dominate other Greek states in order to achieve them. In 445 BCE he is indeed persuaded by Aspasia to relinquish militarism and focus the city's revenues and his energies on the rebuilding of the Acropolis, but by fourteen years later he is unable to sustain this position given the disintegration of the fragile peace that has temporarily kept conflict between the Greek city-states in abeyance. Aspasia believes that women are crucial to the abandonment of international war; she shares attributes with both Aristophanes' Lysistrata and Praxagora in *Assemblywomen*. But she tends towards a mystical view both of love between men and women and of human destiny. She is also an egalitarian who sympathises with the far more radical socialism of her lover Lysicles, but ultimately sees peace and cultural projects such as theatre and the decoration of the Parthenon as more pressing concerns than economic levelling. Lysicles is a communist (he uses the word several times), who regards as absolute priorities the abolition of slavery, the removal of class distinctions, and the advancement of the poor. His viewpoint is supported by other characters, such as the barefoot old Thracian slave woman, who points out that the slaves never voted for the war.<sup>32</sup> At times it seems that Aspasia is in partial agreement with Lysicles. When he attempts to stop Pericles from receiving endorsement for annexing Euboea, for example, he fails because class snobbery blights the Assembly. Lysicles is a livestock-merchant, and when he tries to speak, Pericles' clique makes sheep noises. Aspasia announces that inherited wealth stops people from thinking independently and turns women into "merchants of love."<sup>33</sup>

31 Cook, *Athenian Women*, 320.

32 Cook, *Athenian Women* 08, 120.

33 Cook, *Athenian Women* 60, 36–8.

This threefold clash of political ideals and policies, rendered more emotionally intense because both men are in love with Aspasia, is articulated in the long central scene in Act II. Pericles was played by Cook himself, in a manner unkindly described by one reviewer as resembling “a very recently commissioned second lieutenant in the reserve corps.”<sup>34</sup> The role of Aspasia was taken by Ida Rauh, the woman with whom Cook was currently conducting an affair despite his recent marriage to Glaspell. This no doubt heightened the erotic electricity:<sup>35</sup> Glaspell herself did not act in this play, although this may not necessarily be significant since she had not previously performed in plays by anyone other than herself. A closer examination of some of the interchanges will both crystallise the ideological tensions underpinning the play and illustrate the tone and tenor of its dialogue.

Aspasia, being an idealist, has become an ardent supporter of Pericles’ plan to rebuild the Acropolis: as she says to him, “the realisation of your dream of the City Beautiful is at this moment nearer to my heart than anything on earth.”<sup>36</sup> She has, in fact, earlier sent Lysicles to the Assembly to broker an agreement with the Athenian citizens that they will make a thirty years’ peace with Sparta, but she aims to keep Pericles in power so that he can achieve his plans for the Parthenon. Lysicles is understandably annoyed when he divines her true strategy:

I came to you glowing with a great triumph – having accomplished all that you most desired – bringing my achievement as a gift of love. The great communist ends which you and I proposed within reach. One more stroke and I would be master in Athens! You stopped that stroke! You sent me away to save Pericles the final blow. I see now what you did! And now – again you do not wish to speak to me – you are so absorbed in saying things I may not hear to the man who must be overthrown if we are to succeed!<sup>37</sup>

Aspasia urges him to reconcile himself and his party to Pericles, and transform the city together into “the Peace of Beauty”,<sup>38</sup> for she is beginning to doubt whether economic communism is practicable at Athens at all, at least in their era.<sup>39</sup>

34 Broun, review of *The Athenian Women*.

35 For the affair between Cook and Rauh cf. L. Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 196–197. It was certainly significant enough to have featured in fictionalised form in a novel about Provincetown by Harry Kemp, *Love among the Cape Enders* (New York: Macaulay Co., 1931). Other parts in *The Athenian Women* were played by Floyd Dell, Rita Wellman, Dorothy Upjohn, Christine Ell, O. K. Liveright, Augusta Cary, and Alice MacDougal; Lysicles was played by Sidney K. Powell and Kallia by Marjorie Lacey Baker.

36 Cook, *Athenian Women* 188.

37 Cook, *Athenian Women* 190.

38 Cook, *Athenian Women* 194.

39 Cook, *Athenian Women* 196.

ASPASIA: The communism we dreamed is not the only truth. Perhaps our minds create truth by perceiving it, as our eyes create landscape out of unseen earth and sky. Pericles too sees truth. It is worthwhile to cause Athens to bring an unknown splendour into the world.

LYSICLES: With the same old needless sacrifice of all the poorer citizens? The slaves to remain slaves? All those the mind of Pericles is unable to realize as human – nothing to be done to give them human lives – In order to go on piling up great fortunes for the few?

ASPASIA: Perhaps it is the few who must bring beauty into the world; and later a time when the many shall share it.

LYSICLES: I want the many to share it now, to help create it.

Lysicles persists: “It was a greater vision you shared with me – to make beautiful the common life of men.”<sup>40</sup> But he is outnumbered; Pericles insists that communism is impossible in Athens – nobody can ever bring about “the holding of wealth in common” – and Aspasia, albeit reluctantly, agrees. They say it is more important to build the Parthenon so the people can have that in common instead.

Indeed, Aspasia seems to think that unity of the spirit must precede economic justice and that a shared work of art can somehow produce such spiritual oneness: “Wealth can be in common only as a result of a harmony of men’s minds. If Athens makes herself a work of art, she will come to have the artist mind, which out of discordant things shapes harmony.”<sup>41</sup> Aspasia is, ultimately, a Hegelian idealist: she believes in some historical dialectic, but that it is motored by the ideas in human minds; Cook suggests, using Phidias as a mouthpiece, that this strategy can never work. As war breaks out again in the final act, Phidias laments that the Acropolis “is neither Ionian nor Dorian. It is Greek. It is the marriage of the moving spirit of the sea with the stable spirit of the mountains. It is the soul of the sailor and the shepherd. But while we have achieved Greek art, you statesmen have not achieved Greece!”<sup>42</sup> Lysicles is the hard-core revolutionary Marxist who is grimly aware that the rich will never willingly surrender their wealth and privileges. He also believes that the struggle for social justice should transcend state borders – as if the international proletariat of the world should unite. It is revealing that by the end of the play Aspasia agrees: “Yes, as all the nations should combine to make one world. They could if they believed it. But they do not believe it.”<sup>43</sup>

Cook, therefore, is using Periclean Athens as a venue to stage a debate between various strands in contemporary communist thought: can art and debate in the ideological sphere help to create the conditions that will usher in socialism (a view to which, far away in Italy, Antonio Gramsci was beginning,

<sup>40</sup> Cook, *Athenian Women* 198.

<sup>41</sup> Cook, *Athenian Women* 200.

<sup>42</sup> Cook, *Athenian Women* 238.

<sup>43</sup> Cook, *Athenian Women* 280.

entirely separately, to develop)? Or are a revolution and transfer of wealth and property the necessary preconditions of the end of Capitalism? The play asks the question but does not answer it.

*The Athenian Women* was, above all, a detailed theatrical response to the immediate historical context in which it was conceived and performed amidst the international repercussions of the 1917 Russian revolution. Some reviewers objected to the transparency of the contemporary topicality, “the too obvious attempt to state present-day problems in terms of Greece, causing the spectator to hurtle ‘out of the illusion.’”<sup>44</sup> The Russian government had fallen on November 7th to the Bolsheviks, whose revolutionary committee had agreed on an armistice with the Central Powers. The USA had been at war with Germany for a year, a conflict that had included the bloody Battle of Passchendaele. On March 3rd, just after the opening of *The Athenian Women*, the Americans signed the treaty of Brest Litovsk, which made that armistice official. President Woodrow Wilson wanted to persuade the world to respect the Russians’ right to self-determination. In Act II of *The Athenian Women*, the meeting of the Spartan Agesistrata and Aspasia at the festival of the Thesmophoria, modelled on the opening episode of *Lysistrata*, is a thinly disguised USA-Bolshevik peace summit: “With your help we will make our cities friends for ever,” says Aspasia to her Spartan counterpart.<sup>45</sup>

The idea to write a new play about women arguing for peace in classical Athens resulted from Cook’s personal conviction that there were remarkable parallels between the Peloponnesian War and World War I. He believed there had been revolutionaries in Periclean Athens comparable to those who were making strides in Russia (in 1922 to become the USSR) and the socialists in America, amongst whom he and Glaspell counted themselves. In the “Preface” to the text of *The Athenian Women* he lays out his understanding of the crisis in classical Athens before and after the death of Pericles, from the plague, in 429 BCE. The text of the Preface was written at the time of the play’s production on March 20th, 1918. This is so important to our understanding of the script that I quote the relevant section in full:

A play must be true to its own orbit, not to history, unless history happens to be true to it. Critics of “The Athenian Women”, however, have too readily assumed that the play diverges from Greek fact to make a modern parallel. I feel rather that those Athenian events could not be truly perceived by me until I looked back on them from the similar tragedy of our time. Sharing a world-experience like that of the Peloponnesian War, we can feel its story more deeply than any generation between theirs and ours.

Like the war which began three years ago, the Peloponnesian War was a long time brewing; it actually began with the invasion of Plataia, a small state

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44 Broun, review of *The Athenian Women*.

45 Cook, *Athenian Women* 132.



whose neutrality, like that of Belgium, had been guaranteed by all the chief belligerents. The leading sea-power then as now fought in the name of democracy against the less democratic great power of the land.

As to the communist movement in Athens – it was there or it would not have been satirised by Aristophanes, whose play *Ekklesiazousai* makes fun of “dividing up”, even as antisocialists in America valiantly attack that idea of straw.

I believe there is nothing to show that Lysicles, the rough man refined by Aspasia, was not a communist. During those months after the death of Pericles when with the help of Aspasia Lysicles became head of the state, a capital levy or tax on capital, believed by Thucydides to be the first tax of the kind in Athens, was decreed and enforced.\* It has been surmised that Cleon was the author of this measure because he was at the time a member of the Council. It is a surmise more natural to attribute it to the man actually in power. The capital levy on the private holders of the then existing wealth can be interpreted as the first step of a communist confronted with conditions. Soon afterward, in the winter of 428, Lysicles was killed in Karia whither he had sailed to collect taxes.

There must have been, in reality, something in the political life of Athens which led Aristophanes in “*Lysistrata*” (“End-war”) to show a woman of very feminine genius saving Greece by a sex-strike against the war. Some impulse to that among Athenian women, or no such play by Aristophanes. Another woman of sufficient political power to accomplish such a deed, or suggest its accomplishment, may have lived in Athens, but we do not know her name. The prototype of *Lysistrata* was Aspasia or some person unknown.

If things happened as in “*The Athenian Women*”, it would explain the abrupt change in Athenian policy in the autumn of 445 BC, when Pericles, after reconquering revolted Euboea, suddenly renounced the reconquest of the revolted subject cities Thebes and Megara (which had massacred its Athenian garrison) and withdrawing the Athenian claim of lordship over territories in Peloponnesos and on the gulf of Corinth, signed the Thirty Year Peace.

It was in the year of that volte-face from imperialism that Pericles, divorcing his wife who was his cousin, began to live with Aspasia. The play assumes that these twin events, coincident in time, one political the other personal, are vitally interrelated.

Perhaps in this the play diverges more from our historical accounts than from the events themselves. Whether or not true in this instance, it is true in general that the brooding dream which brings a play to life is of a nature to bridge with truth gaps not filled by those poor piecemeal records from which men must write history. This is particularly true of those sources of public events which trace back into privacies of soul. (*The Provincetown Players' Club*, 138 Macdougall Street, New York, March 20th, 1918).

\*Thucydides 3.19.1: “The Athenians needing money for the siege, although they had for the first time raised a contribution (*eisphora*) of two hundred talents from their own citizens, now sent out twelve ships to levy subsidies from their allies, with Lysicles and four others in command.”<sup>46</sup>

46 Cook, *Athenian Women* “Preface,” 2–7; cf. Glaspell, *The Road*, 191.

Cook here actually claims that the *Assemblywomen* of Aristophanes proves that there was “a communist movement” in Athens, and that “there is nothing to show” that Lysicles, Aspasia’s lover, “was not a communist”. Lysicles, claims Cook, was responsible after Pericles’ death for introducing the first tax on property ever levied in Athens, and in his scholarly footnote he cites the brief sentence in Thucydides that does indeed remark on the unprecedentedness of this measure.

The debates between Lysicles, Aspasia, and the other principal characters correspond with the types of conversation that took place between the Greenwich Village radicals. Susan Kemper’s analysis emphasises the thematic opposition the play explores between beauty and war, which she thinks that Cook insists “cannot hold sway at the same time; yet these contradictory impulses constitute a given in human society, and in the mind of most individuals as well.” She argues that the play “transcends” such a simplistic dichotomy, “expressing as it does some of Cook’s deepest perceptions about the ambivalence of human nature and the precarious position peace and beauty occupy in the affairs of men in the rare times they are able to prevail at all.”<sup>47</sup> But the Provincetown Players were talking about much more than peace, war, and beauty. They were arguing about whether they embraced the principles of the Bolshevik revolution. This much more challenging and immediate debate is minutely reflected in the politics of Periclean Athens as staged by the Provincetown Players. There is actually an official “Communist Party” led by Lysicles, an Oligarchist Party led by Antiphon (a historically attested anti-democrat who was one of the masterminds of the 411 oligarchic coup),<sup>48</sup> and one that is not named led by Cleon. This demagogue’s characterisation is taken over uncritically from Thucydides; he is cynical, ruthless, and vindictive, actually stating that he will adopt any policy if it is expedient for “reasons of state.”<sup>49</sup> A ruthless militarist concerned solely with the narrow Athenian “national” interest, Cook’s Cleon echoes the sentiments of the most belligerent portion of the American population.

The populist right wing had long pressed for the USA to enter World War I, their jingoistic fervour fuelled by the destruction of the luxury Cunard liner “Lusitania”, which had sailed from New York and was torpedoed by a German U boat in May 1915, with the loss of over a thousand passengers, 128 of whom were Americans. However, Cleon may also reflect the Provincetown Players’ horror at the campaigns of William Joseph Simmons, who in 1915 established the “second wave” of the Ku Klux Klan, headquartered in Georgia, under the name of “the Invisible Empire”. It officially promulgated a policy

47 Susan Kemper, “The Novels, Plays, and Poetry of George Cram Cook, Founder of the Provincetown Players,” PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 1982, 123–4.

48 E. Hall, “Political and cosmic turbulence in Euripides’ *Orestes*,” in A. Sommerstein et al., eds., *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis* (Bari: Levante, 1993), 267–8.

49 Cook, *Athenian Women* 248, 274.

it called “Americanism”; its creed was as anti-Jewish as it was anti-African American, and closely associated with D. W. Griffith’s racist silent movie *The Birth of a Nation* (1915, originally entitled *The Clansman*), which had inspired Simmons.

Yet the figure of Lysicles, and his ideological clashes with Aspasia, reflect, instead, the painful factionalism of the socialist movement in the USA at that time. Aspasia is undoubtedly the mouthpiece for the policy of trenchant opposition to entering World War I espoused by the Socialist Party of America at its 1917 Emergency National Convention,<sup>50</sup> a cause to which Cook had devoted a great deal of journalistic energy ever since the outbreak of war in Europe became inevitable in 1914. However, behind Lysicles, there probably stands the figure of Louis Fraina, the figure who was most influential on the radical wing of the Socialist Party. He was co-editor between 1917 and 1918 of the New York City-based fortnightly magazine *The Class Struggle*; he was publisher in 1918 of the first book to make the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky on the revolution available in English (*The Proletarian Revolution in Russia*).<sup>51</sup> He was supported by the Boston-based Socialist Propaganda League, which supported Lenin, had called for all American socialists to embrace the Bolshevik revolutionary project, and given rise to two new organisations. These were the “Friends of New Russia”, which came into being almost immediately after the revolution, and the “American Bolshevik Bureau of Information”, formed around the time of the production of *The Athenian Women* in early 1918. Both provided positive information about the Russian revolution to the general American public. But the situation in Russia bitterly divided American socialists. A small majority wanted to use constitutional parliamentary means to gain influence, while the revolutionary left wing split in two. One substantial faction formed the Communist Party, officially founded in 1919, under the chairmanship of Fraina, while the other formed the Communist Labor Party. The chaos into which Athens is plunged at the conclusion of Cook’s play is a theatrical equivalent of the tumultuous arguments besetting the radical political scene in America in 1918.

At this turning-point in history, Cook’s decision to write a play informed by Greek democracy and Greek drama was almost over-determined. Ancient Greek theatre texts were known in radical American circles, as they had been in pre-revolutionary Russia,<sup>52</sup> to offer inspiration to causes harnessing culture to the furtherance of political ends. More than seven decades earlier, the feminist and abolitionist Margaret Fuller had already harnessed

50 Esther Corey, “Lewis Corey (Louis C. Fraina), 1892–1953: A Bibliography with Autobiographical Notes,” *Labor History* 4 (1963), 107.

51 Cf. Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 107.

52 E. Hall, “Mob, Cabal, or Utopian Commune? The Political Contestation of the Ancient Chorus 1789–1917,” in J. Billings, F. Budelmann and F. Macintosh, eds., *Choruses, Ancient and Modern* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 281–307.

the women of Greek myth and tragedy in her challenge to the oppression of women in contemporary America, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845): “Iphigenia! Antigone! You were worthy to live! We are fallen on evil times my sisters! Our feelings have been checked; our thoughts questioned; our forms dwarfed and defaced by a bad nurture. Yet hearts, like yours, are in our breasts, living, if unawakened; and our minds are capable of the same resolves”.<sup>53</sup> In New York City in 1908, a group of African-American literary figures and theatre professionals formed to promote collaboration, build a library, and celebrate African American achievements. No doubt intrigued by the figure of the clever and resilient slave Xanthias, they called themselves the *Frogs* after Aristophanes’ comedy, in which he and Dionysus star.<sup>54</sup> The pageant Jack Reed organised for the Paterson silk-workers’ strike in Madison Square Garden on June 7th, 1913, featured a Greek-style “chorus” singing socialist anthems as a central strategy of the Industrial Workers of the World, who were sponsoring the strikers.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Cook was himself directly inspired by the Aristophanic model of a civic theatre of argument and protest. He had seen a production of *Lysistrata* in New York City in 1914, and wrote to Glaspell lamenting the lack of political theatre in contemporary society, the lack of “freedom to deal with life in literature as frankly as Aristophanes’, and of a society like his, which had “the habit of thinking and talking frankly of life.”<sup>56</sup>

It was to fulfil the dream of a new, American version of the ancient Athenian theatre that Cook and Glaspell had initiated the amateur dramatics from which the Provincetown Players emerged. Two friends had hired a cottage in Provincetown, Massachusetts, with a veranda and a sea-view, for the summer vacation in 1915. A group of radical writers and artists gathered. The group staged two of their own plays on July 15th, in makeshift sets on the veranda. One was by co-written by Cook and Glaspell; it was a satire on the fashion for Freudian theories amongst their peers and entitled *Suppressed Desires*. The event caused a stir and created a demand for a second performance, so the plays were re-presented in an improvised theatre in a fish-shed on a wharf.

The success of the “new stagecraft” encouraged Cook to lead the others in presenting two more plays that summer and to maintain the enthusiasm for the project when the group moved back to Greenwich Village in New York City for the winter. So, in the summer of 1916, a much larger number of

53 Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1999), 113; cf. Susan Curtis, “An Archival Interrogation,” in Boshier et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas*, 13–15.

54 Anon., “Well Known Performers Organize the ‘Frogs,’” *New York Age* (July 9, 1908) 6, col. 2; cf. Curtis, “An Archival Interrogation,” 17–18.

55 E. Hall, “The migrant muse: Greek drama as feminist window on American identity 1900–1925,” in Boshier et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas*, 149–65.

56 Glaspell, *The Road*, 249–250.

avant-garde cultural figures went to Provincetown. The group now included some extremely famous figures and is immortalised in the 1981 movie *Reds*, written, directed by, and starring Warren Beatty as John Reed (author of *Ten Days that Shook the World* [1919]), with Diane Keaton as Louise Bryant and Jack Nicholson as Eugene O'Neill.<sup>57</sup>

The important Provincetown Players productions of the 1916 season included O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff* and Susan Glaspell's feminist masterpiece *Trifles*, which is itself much influenced by Greek tragedy, especially Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Medea*.<sup>58</sup> Under Reed and Cook's leadership, supported at every juncture by Glaspell, the group became an official organisation at the end of the summer. Its avowed purpose was to foster a serious new American theatre by encouraging playwrights and experimentation beyond the limits of the commercial stage of Broadway. In the autumn of 1916, the group set itself permanently in New York City, turning the main reception room in the Macdougall Street apartment into the theatre where *The Athenian Women* was produced. The stage was three metres by four metres, and there were wooden benches to seat 140.

The group struggled at first. There were not enough good new plays being written, and the acting was amateur. But Nina Moise, who had been trained as an actor, began to help with the direction when she joined the company in early 1917. The Stage Society of New York helped financially. Reed's involvement lessened under the demands of his journalism, and Cook became the sole leader. Arguments raged in the fledgling company over three issues: how far its work should be publicised and advertised, whether critics should be allowed to review the plays, and the preservation of the original amateur ethos.<sup>59</sup> Cook was an inspirational figure who wanted the company to stick to its original anti-commercial vision. By 1919 the tensions between him and the more ambitious of the younger members of the group led to his self-exile; he and Glaspell moved to Greece in 1922. Cook had attempted to imitate the ancient Athenian model of a democratic citizens' theatre that could address political issues directly; the Provincetown Players subsequently moved from "amateurism toward professionalism, from utter spontaneity toward long-range planning, and from ecstatic communal creation toward collaboration burdened with natural friction".<sup>60</sup> However, *The Athenian Women* is a product of that exciting moment when there was considerable optimism

57 For a detailed if overly negative assessment of the major figures in the group, cf. Robert Humphrey, *Children of Fantasy: The First Rebels of Greenwich Village* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978).

58 E. Hall, "The migrant muse".

59 Cf. further L. Ben-Zvi, "The Provincetown Players: The Success that Failed," *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 27 (2005): 9–21; Jeff Kennedy, "Experiment on Macdougall Street: The Provincetown Players' 1918–1919 Season," *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 32 (2010): 86–123.

60 Robert K. Sarlós, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 159.

about the future of the company under his leadership, in the spring of 1918. This coincided with the unprecedented boost to socialist morale provided by the Russian revolution and the waves of strikes and labour unrest in Western Europe that followed it.

The importance of Cook to the formation of the Provincetown Players remains in the crucial ways in which *The Athenian Women* crystallised the contradictions and tensions of the historical moment in the spring of 1918. The American Left's somewhat muddled idealisation of classical Athens must not, however, be allowed to obscure the instrumentality of Glaspell's contribution to the birth of indigenous American theatre, primarily through her dialogue with O'Neill. She learned from O'Neill, but he certainly learned from her and benefitted from her encouragement. Glaspell herself, although published as a journalist and novelist, did not attempt to write drama until her husband demanded it in 1915, needing new plays for the company. O'Neill joined them the following year. The Provincetown players produced fifteen of O'Neill's plays and eleven of Glaspell's before the original company disintegrated in 1922. Her influence upon O'Neill has never been systematically evaluated, although their contemporaries were in little doubt about it. Koutsoudaki's study of O'Neill's adaptations of Greek tragedy acknowledges a debt to the Provincetown group as a whole, especially Cook, Glaspell and Reed, arguing that he was heavily influenced by the reverence these "idealists" felt for Greek drama, combined with their interests in mysticism, Nietzsche, Freud, Jung, and the "Cambridge ritualists".<sup>61</sup> Feminist writers have pointed out how O'Neill flourished in a circle of writers with a far larger proportion of women than he would have found in any other context.<sup>62</sup> But, in terms of O'Neill's stagecraft and the tight economy of his writing, his observation of "unities", the debt he owes specifically to Glaspell, has never been recognised. And it was his "Greek plays" which ensured that a whole school of politically progressive American tragedy would continue to look to the Greeks until much later in the twentieth century. In Glaspell there is a communist feminist, in love not only with George Cram Cook but with the ancient Greeks and their dramas, standing in the half-light of the very dawn of the 20th-century classical American drama.

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61 Mary Koutsoudaki, *The Greek Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (Athens: Athens University Press, 2004).

62 Cheryl Black, *The Women of Provincetown 1915–1922* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002); Judith E. Barlow, "Influence, Echo and Coincidence: O'Neill and the Provincetown's Women Writers," *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 27 (2005): 22–28.

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## SUMMARY

### American Communist Idealism in George Cram Cook's *The Athenian Women* (1918)

*The Athenian Women*, written by the American George Cram Cook with input from Susan Glaspell, is a serious, substantial play drawing chiefly on *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*. It premiered on March 1st 1918 with the Provincetown Players. Cook was convinced of parallels between the Peloponnesian War and World War I. He believed there had been communists in Periclean Athens comparable to those who were making strides in Russia (in 1922 to become the USSR) and the socialists in America, amongst whom he and Glaspell counted themselves. The paper examines the text and production contexts of *The Athenian Women*, traces its relationships with several different ancient Greek authors including Thucydides as well as Aristophanes, and identifies the emphatically stated socialist and feminist politics articulated by the two main 'proto-communist' characters, Lysicles and Aspasia. Although the play was not particularly successful, its production had a considerable indirect impact on the future directions taken by left-wing theatre in the USA, through the subsequent dramas of Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill for the Provincetown Players.

## POVZETEK

### Idealizem ameriškega komunizma v drami *Atenke* (1918) Georgea Crama Cooka

*Atenke*, ki so prišle izpod peresa Američana Georgea Crama Cooka s prispevkom Susan Glaspell, so resna in tehtna drama, ki se opira predvsem na komediji *Lizistrata* in *Ženske v skupščini*. Premiera je bila 1. marca 1918 v gledališki skupini Provincetown Players. Cook je verjel v vzporednice med peloponeško in prvo svetovno vojno. Menil je, da so v Periklovih Atenah obstajali komunisti, primerljivi s tistimi, ki so v njegovem času napredovali v Rusiji (ki je leta 1922 postala ZSSR), in s socialisti v Ameriki, med katere sta se prištevala oba s Susan Glaspell. Članek analizira besedilo in uprizoritveni kontekst *Atenk* ter odnos drame do različnih grških avtorjev, med njimi do Tukidida in Aristofana, ter identificira eksplicitno socialistično in feministično politiko dveh osrednjih »protokomunistov«, Lisikleja in Aspasije. Čeprav predstava ni bila posebej uspešna, je imela uprizoritev posredno precejšen vpliv na usmeritev levičarskega gledališča v ZDA preko dram, ki sta jih za Provincetown Players nato ustvarila Susan Glaspell in Eugene O'Neill.





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## Symbolist Ideas in the Scripts of Gubpolitprosvet: The Theory and Practice of Proletarian Performance

Classical plays continued to be performed during the first few years following the revolution. In particular, there were revivals of pre-revolution productions in the style of the “Silver Age”. For instance, Meyerhold revived Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and Fokin’s ballets on mythological themes continued the traditions of the Silver Age, although they had nothing to do with either ancient drama or ancient theatre.

Max Reinhardt had staged Hofmannstahl’s reworking of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* in Berlin circus with a chorus of 500, and that was an attempt to reconstruct archaic performance involving crowds of people. His innovative production was presented in Saint Petersburg in 1911 also in the circus. The Russian theatrical audience, educated by symbolists and the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, took Reinhardt’s staging as a reincarnation of Dionysian mystical theatre.<sup>1</sup> When in the spring of 1918 Yu. M. Yuryev mounted a production of *Oedipus Rex* in the same Ciniselli Circus using acrobatic techniques, it was a direct reprise of Reinhardt’s production within a new post-revolutionary context.<sup>2</sup>

The opening of the children’s play *Battle of Salamis* by S. E. Radlov and A. Piotrovsky took place on 25 March 1919, with sets designed by Yu. Bondi and music by Yu. Shaporin. This was also a variation on the theme of the *Persians* more than a staging of the play, but it was already an attempt at combining the techniques of ancient theatre with buffooning and grotesque.

The idea of reconstructing ancient theatre attracted S. E. Radlov. He had produced the *Twin Brothers (Menaechmi)* of Plautus in 1918 (Courses in the

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1 Nikolai Evreinov, *Pro scena sua* (Petrograd, 1915), 36–8.

2 Vasilij Rafalovich, ed., *The History of Soviet Theater* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1933), vol. 1, 173–4.

art of theatrical production) and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in 1924 (Academy Drama Theater = Alexandrinsky Theatre). The *Menaechmi*, translated for the stage by Radlov himself, also began to be performed in places other than Petrograd Russian cities by professional and amateur actors, including a performance in Odessa (1919) on the stairs familiar to many through Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin*. Radlov had actors performing Plautus masked, and as a classical scholar, he wanted to be accurate in recreating ancient theatre. However, Radlov's study of ancient dramatic techniques was not academic. Rather, he saw them as an authoritative source for the renewal of contemporary theatre through the convention. In the Theatre of Folk Comedy, which he created (in 1920–1922), Radlov, experimented with one actor playing multiple characters and wrote loosely scripted plays, which allowed actors the freedom to improvise. It was also in the 1920s that he created a director's explication or reconstruction of the *Acharnians*, written for use in actors' training sessions.<sup>3</sup>

However, what is particularly interesting about this period is not the production of Greek and Roman plays; the most extraordinary events and incredibly artistic and social experiments were the mass quasi-ritual performances, pageants, or shows, which could include up to 8,000 "actors" and hundreds of thousands of spectators. These performances were of varying formats – they might fill the Palace Square and Winter Palace, or they might fit into a large barracks. The Spit of Vasilyevsky Island and the façade, portico, and steps of the Stock Exchange building (Birzha) would turn into a wonderful open-air theatre. Plays were performed here on the steps of the Stock Exchange, as they had been on the steps of churches in mediaeval Europe, and performances would unfold within the city, much as in modern-day India performances of *Ramlila*, the story of Rama and Sita, take place within a whole village or town. These were innovative avant-garde performances, which abandoned the box of the stage and theatre and altered perceptions of the relationship between the actor and the spectator. The initiators, the directors, and the proponents of the philosophy behind such performances were those I have already mentioned: Adrian Piotrovsky, the illegitimate son of a prominent classical scholar and Silver Age figure T. Zieliński, and S. E. Radlov, the son of a well-known historian of philosophy who was also a translator of Aristotle. Both were classicists by education and pupils of T. Zieliński, who left Russia in 1922. Another classicist, L. F. Makaryev, who taught Latin in a grammar school, was also involved in this. He later founded the Young Spectator's Theatre. Other directors also took part in the productions, but I am interested primarily in these individuals. They collaborated and polemicalised with each other. For both of them,

3 Sergej Radlov, "On the Technical Skills of Greek Player," in *Collection of Papers about Theater: 1918–1922* (Petrograd: Mysl, 1923), 65–93; Dmitri Troubotchkine, "Ancient Drama in Russia in the 1910s and 1920s," in *Greek and Roman Drama: Translation and Performance*, ed. by John Barsby (Stuttgart, 2002), 216–232.

the theatre of ancient Greece served as a theoretical model for new forms in which professional actors would collaborate with amateurs, actors would collaborate with spectators, and the theatrical space would be fundamentally different from a house with a missing wall. As Piotrovsky, an eminent translator of Aeschylus and Aristophanes, wrote, the ancient techniques of staging Greek tragedy are useful in staging the chorus scenes of mass pageants and mass performances.<sup>4</sup> Those working in the theatre at this time viewed the immediate past (the realistic theatre of the 19th century) as an interruption in the genuine theatrical tradition of which ancient classical drama, the *Commedia dell'Arte*, and Shakespeare were all a part.<sup>5</sup> That was also the general trend during the early 20th century in Western Europe.

These innovative, avant-garde tendencies were allowed to flourish on an unexpectedly grand scale in Russia immediately after the revolution and, most importantly, with an influx of unexpected performers: army men, soldiers, and sailors. We know that soldiers' theatres staged, among other things, *Oedipus Rex* and *Prometheus Bound*, but I do not know the details. However, Euripides' *Hippolytus* was staged by N. N. Arbatov on 1 May – International Worker's Day – in 1920, using the military commissariat's political education department as part of a huge theatrical event in which 200 theatre "brigades" were sent into the city. They travelled on open tram platforms, stopped to play scenes for the public, and travelled on.<sup>6</sup> However, a classical play performed as part of a mass pageant tends to be the exception. It was simply that this celebration drew in all available theatrical and non-theatrical resources.

My thesis is that classical scholars, who had been taught by T. Zieliński and Vyacheslav Ivanov, began to make the symbolist utopia a reality, ironically within the very social and cultural conditions that had forced their teachers to flee abroad.

Radical proponents of revolutionary disruption in art emerged from the milieu of classical scholars, usually a conservative group. They inspired artistic experiments that were most extreme and close to outrageous. But then even Isadora Duncan, with her revival of ancient dance, performed the *International*, the revolutionary anthem, in Petrograd through the medium of dance.

Those born in the last decade of the 19th century were too young for the wreck of tsarist Russia to become the wreck of their entire life, after which they could only live out the rest of it as best they could. With varying degrees

4 Adrian Piotrovsky, "The Festivities of 1920," in *Pro Soviet Theater* (Leningrad: Academia, 1925), 9–17.

5 E.g., Radlov wrote: "Fearfully and carefully avoids our theater the cherished door on which there is the inscription: ancient drama. And if it approached it, it was always with rusty keys in hand and a yawning mouth. And productions were in white robes, white columns, forced gestures and pompous words." Cf. *The Love for Three Oranges 2* (1914), 56.

6 Rafalovich, *History*, 268.

of enthusiasm (and Adrian Piotrovsky with a huge degree of enthusiasm) they began to build a new, proletarian, and socialist culture. During the years 1918–1919, both Radlov and Piotrovsky worked in the theatre department of the People's Commissariat for Education ('Narkompros')<sup>7</sup> and worked in the mass-cultural organisations of soldiers and sailors. In 1924 Piotrovsky became the head of the art department of the Leningrad Governorate Department for Political Education and was thus responsible for supervising amateur artistic projects in all of Leningrad. He held posts in educational establishments and theatres and worked as a dramatist, librettist, lecturer, and manager: all while translating and writing prefaces and commentaries to his translations of Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Theognis, and Catullus.

The period of the mature Soviet officialdom had not yet come. Both our heroes, therefore, worked with various avant-garde and experimental studios and institutions. In the years to come, they would both be damned as formalist and bourgeois. The greater revolutionary Piotrovsky would be executed in 1937. Radlov would at the end of World War II find himself in a prison camp, together with his wife (a poet) who died there.

Most vast mass pageants took place in Petrograd in 1920. Although almost no visual material survives, descriptions can be found in Volume 1 of the *History of Soviet Theatre*, published in 1933.

My aim, however, is not to give a historical description of these performances or build up a fuller picture of what they were like. That is something that can be done using archive materials. What I want to do is make sense of how symbolist theory metamorphosed into avant-garde and socialist theory. I want to understand how meanings changed during this process, and how those changes enriched art and culture.

The titles of some of the Petrograd mass performances were: *The Sword of Peace*, 1920 (February); *The Mystery of Liberated Labour*, 1920 (May); *Blockade of Russia* on the alleged Entente policy of surrounding Russia? 1920 (June); *Toward a World Commune*, written for the 3rd Congress of the Communist International, the spectators being its delegates, 1920 (July); *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, 1920 (November); *Victory of the Revolution*, 1922; *Festival to honour the 10-year anniversary of the October Revolution*, 1927.<sup>8</sup>

All mass pageants were propagandist in nature and were based on the events and ideas of the socialist revolution or the world revolution. Their foundation was the so-called "Red calendar" of memorable dates of the proletarian revolution. At the same time, that calendar and its colour looked back

7 In analyzing the work of the Theatre Department of the People's Commissariat one cannot lose sight of the identity of its employees. The Deputy Head of the Petrograd branch was V. Meyerhold (from autumn 1918 to spring 1919), the chairman of the repertoire section was Alexander Blok, etc. Members of the intellectual and artistic elite, the future emigrants or victims of regime, were part of its staff.

8 Adrian Piotrovsky, "The Chronical of the Festivities in Leningrad 1919 – 1922," in: *Mass Festivities* (Leningrad: Academia, 1926), 53–84.

to calendric folk rituals and the feasts associated with them.<sup>9</sup> The creation of a “Red” calendar also served to displace the traditional religious feast days.

One of the earliest of such festival performances were the semi-improvised “games” on the theme of the February revolution entitled *Overthrow of Autocracy*. They were held between March 1919 and the end of that year. Soldiers just called out of their barracks performed eight scenes: 1) 9 March 1905 (prologue), 2) Arrest of the Student Underground, 3) Mutiny in the Military Prison, 4) Capture of the Arsenal by Insurgent Workers, 5) Demolition of Police Stations, 6) Street Battle on the Barricades, 7) Revolution at the Front Line and 8) Abdication of the Tsar at headquarters.<sup>10</sup>

The main action was made up of the demonstrations and marches that had taken place in the February Revolution in 1917. The “games” were played on two wooden platforms at either end of the square, the barracks, or the hall, as the case might be. The two platforms were linked by a passageway, the “march route”. The structure of the action was episodic, but there might have been two different episodes taking place simultaneously on the two platforms: one might show the events in the Winter Palace, at a police station and General Headquarters; the other events at the factory, the front-line army committee and revolutionary headquarters, etc. As in a medieval mystery play, there was separate locus both for Heaven and Hell.

The main turning points were represented by a movement along the passageway: marches, charges and movements of groups of participants from one platform to the other. The march “to the Palace” singing “Lord, save Thy people” and the final bayonet charge on the Palace were the key highlights of the entire “games”. There were no sets, and costumes and make-up were used only for the negative characters, such as the “Tsar”, “policemen” and “generals”; whereas the “workers” and “soldiers” wore their own clothes. The dialogue was interspersed with singing. There was also inarticulate shouting, noise, and bickering in the crowd. The performance took place in barracks, in prison camps, and on the steps of buildings on the Palace Square in St Petersburg.<sup>11</sup>

By the anniversary of the revolution in October (November) 1919 a kind of satyr play, so to speak, had attached itself to the beginning: an intermezzo with farcical grotesques of “Capital”, the “Minister” and the “General”, as well as an exodus on the October coup at the end. The performance took its final and regular form by Oct. 1919 and was called then “The Red Calendar”. The

9 Anniversaries consisted of “Bloody Sunday” (Jan. 9), memorial day of K. Liebknecht and R. Luxemburg (Jan. 17), Red Army Day (Feb. 23), Day of working women (March 8), Day of the Paris Commune (March 18), Day of the Lenin’s arrival to Petrograd (Apr. 16), the 1st of May, “July Days” (3–16 July), October revolution anniversary (Nov. 7), Memorial day of the Moscow armed uprising (Dec. 22).

10 Adrian Piotrovsky, “The Chronicals (1926),” in *Theater, Cinema, Life*, ed. A.A. Akimova (Leningrad, 1969), 74.

11 Performing people were not a casual group of soldiers; it was a military guild named the ‘Red Army theatrical and dramatic workshop’, founded by N. G. Vinogradov. Its lifetime was rather short, from May 1919 to May 1920.

performance of the storming of the palace would usually draw in the spectators as well. They stood on either side of the passageway along which the workers ran to meet the rifles that were levelled at them, and the spectators would join in the assault. However, the end-piece was made up of speeches and public meetings.<sup>12</sup> Up to 100 people were involved, and the total number of performances is astonishing – there were 250!

These performances already saw a break away from the idea of a single illusory stage in favour of the dynamic festival space of folk theatre.<sup>13</sup> At the centre of the pageant is the “mass”, the crowd of workers and revolutionaries, the “chorus” that acts, sings, and speaks in concert. The “chorus”, with no make-up or costume, indistinguishable from the spectators, creates the impression that said spectators are participating in the play. The chorus and spectators exist in counterpoint to the purely theatrical “masks” – symbolic grotesques of the “Tsar”, “Gapon” and “policemen”. These masks, inspired by recent events in the same way as the Cleons or Brasides of Aristophanes, were born out of recent events in Athens, migrated from one mass performance to another. What we may observe here, therefore, is nothing other than the process of birth of a new masque theatre. Naturally, there was neither curtain nor intermission.

The central role of the chorus, the mass, was founded in ideology: as the revolution was perceived to have been carried out by the masses, so they ought to be represented on the stage.<sup>14</sup> Radlov however considered mass performances only one form of folk theatre and argued that plays with three actors, such as those performed in ancient Athens, should be able to attract 20–30 thousand spectators just as they had done there.<sup>15</sup> Radlov protested against compulsory drafting of soldiers as participants in the plays, and argued for amateur drama clubs, which would supply both the chorus and the protagonists, so that an agon, a competition, the most important driving force of any drama,<sup>16</sup> could take place between them, as between the choruses and dramatists in ancient Greece. One can, therefore, see that Piotrovsky and Radlov, practising directors but also theoreticians of theatre, systematically drew on the experience of ancient Greek theatre.

One of the grandest and most spectacular mass shows was put on after only ten days’ preparation in July 1920 in Petrograd under the guidance of K.A. Mardzhanov, with N.V. Petrov, S.E. Radlov and A. Piotrovsky as directors, and N.I. Altman as scene-painter. This was *Toward a World Commune*, in which 4,000 workers from drama clubs and the Red Army and up to 45,000

12 ‘The Bloody Sunday’ performance (in memory of the revolution of 1905) had a different ending: after shooting people down there was a funeral train and singing wake, as well as trial of the riots and departure of the condemned to penal colony with appropriate songs.

13 Piotrovsky, “Festivities,” 9–17.

14 Sergej Radlov, “On Mass Performances and more important Things,” in *Collection of Papers about Theater: 1918–1922* (Petrograd: Mysl, 1923), 37 f.

15 Radlov, “Mass Performances,” *ibid.*, 41 ff.

16 *Ibid.*, 44.



spectators took part. These were scenes that represented the history of the revolutionary movement from the days of the Paris Commune through the creation of the Communist International to the October Revolution and the World Commune. The play comprised around 170 independent scenes, which were performed not only in front of the portico of the Stock Exchange and on its steps. However, they also spread onto its parapets and rostral columns, from which signal lights would flare, as well as onto the square and the circular walkways leading down to the Neva. They continued onto both bridges over which real soldiers and cavalry passed on their way to war and returned victoriously, and even onto the River Neva itself, where torpedo-boats were anchored, and the Petropavlovsk fortress, from which guns were fired. Military searchlights lighted the performance from torpedo-boats on the Neva, the Petropavlovsk fortress, the rostral columns and both bridges. Instead of a curtain, a real military smokescreen would occasionally appear. Guns and supply wagons moved over the square, as well as lorries filled with soldiers armed with rifles. The semantics of the space constantly changed. For instance, when the performance showed the siege of Russia by the Entente, the river behind the spectators became a hostile element. A gun boomed out from it, and sirens howled from the boats. Although in summer the daylight in Petrograd lasts far into the evening, the performance lasted until 4 am, so that the siege took place in complete darkness and the victory and rejoicing came at sunrise. In the end, there were supposed to be aeroplanes flying around and airships taking off, but this did not take place for technical reasons. Radlov and the other directors directed the movements of performers (organised in groups of ten) militarily by telephone and electric bells. Managing the show, which took place in the fortress and the river with its boats, was like trying to coordinate troop movements during a battle.

“The Storming of the Winter Palace”, staged at the third anniversary of the revolution on the 7th of November 1920, was no less grandiose. Its main creator was Nikolai Evereinov (1878 Moscow – 1953 Paris), a prolific and famous dramatist, actor, theorist, and stage director, the central figure of symbolism in the theatre and the last, but not the least a pioneer of the reconstructing the Medieval performances. The Winter Palace was represented by itself, and the red and white stage-platforms on the opposite side of the square represented the insurgent people and the exploitative classes, including the Provisional Government. There were 8,000 participants and around 100,000 spectators. The newspapers advertised for those who had in fact taken part in the capture of the palace and in the overthrow of the Provisional Government to participate. The four hundred windows of the palace blazed suddenly, and shadow silhouettes demonstrated a pantomime of the clash of the old world with the new.

Piotrovsky considered soldiers and sailors to be the natural chorus of avant-garde performance. These were young men who, on the one hand, had

been men taken out of their traditional way of life, and on the other were subject to military organisation and discipline, which was necessary to make them into a thousand-headed character. For Piotrovsky, they were the ideal amateur chorus of citizens. However, one could equally say that they were not amateur actors but forced labour. Radlov accordingly objected to the forced conscription of soldiers for performances. However, without such conscription, it would not have been possible to prepare the pageant in only ten days. I should say that all kinds of property were also requisitioned for these pageants – not only the stage property of the Imperial theatres, but also any other necessary tools and paraphernalia. The performers got pickled herring and sweets as payment for their participation. But Piotrovsky wanted to see this and did see this as the birth of theatre out of folk “games”, similar to the birth of Greek drama according to classical scholarship.

The years of amateur theatre came to an end in 1927, when at the Party meeting on campaigning, propaganda, and culture the higher ranks found that mass pageants had become a “point of application of philosophical and aesthetic theories foreign to the working class”. Indeed, it has to be said that this was close to the truth.<sup>17</sup> All the avant-garde ideas of “proletarian art” broke down when faced with the fact that ordinary people’s taste was for the conservative cultural rear-guard. Piotrovsky noted that the plays produced by Radlov’s Theatre of People’s Comedy were favourites with children since for children the conventions of play are natural and habitual. However, mature socialist art modelled itself on the previous age, the age of theatrical realism.

Both the innovative experimental reconstructions of the original staging of ancient drama and the embodiment of ancient theatrical principles thus reconstructed in mass pageants were an attempt to put into practice the idea of the Slav Renaissance or Third Classical Renaissance. T. Zieliński first formulated them in 1899<sup>18</sup> and developed them further in his 1911 article “In memoriam I. F. Annensky, with whom he had discussed the idea. Vyacheslav Ivanov had then taken it up.<sup>19</sup> This idea had its roots in pan-Slavism since it posited that the Slavs were a real community just like the Germanic and Romance peoples. The idea of the Third Renaissance at once put the Slavs in the position of the future leading European nation and required that, as a sine qua non for taking up that leadership, the Slavs should absorb the classical heritage of Western Europe.

The First Renaissance was, according to this theory, the Romance renaissance that began in Italy in the 14th century and spread across Europe, lasting right until neo-classical France. The Second Renaissance was the neo-humanist Germanic renaissance of the 18th century (Goethe, Winckelmann,

<sup>17</sup> Rafalovich, *History*, 88–90.

<sup>18</sup> Tadeusz Zieliński, “Ancient World in the A. N. Maukov’s Poetry,” *Russian Bulletin* 7 (1899): 140.

<sup>19</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Native and Universal*, ed. by Vasilij Tolmachev (Moscow: Respublica, 1994), 60 f., especially 67–72.

Wolf). One could not fit all of history into this pattern of course – to place Shakespeare within the Romance Renaissance Zieliński was forced to make Elizabethan England part of the Romance world. The next thing would be the Slav Renaissance in the 20th century: “Since the Slavs are undoubtedly the third great European people, it is to be expected that they will also become one of the world powers, once they have impregnated their soul with the seed of antiquity. That soul will, as a result, be able to make fruitful the souls of other peoples. We are talking, of course, not of hegemony, not even a hegemony of ideas of culture, but only of a kind of duty: since the Slavic peoples have long been indebted to the Romance and Germanic nations, it is now time for the Slavs to repay the debt into the common pot, after adding to the original loan their own values, created by uniting classical antiquity with the national spirit ... And now I will speak as a prophet and foretell that in the future European culture will exist under the aegis of the Slav renaissance, unless something like the end of the world (which, if Spengler is to be believed, is quite possible) intervenes.”<sup>20</sup>

This sermon and this prophecy were addressed to an audience of the Russian Silver Age, permeated as it was with reminiscences and images of classical culture. In fact, by the beginning of the 20th century, the schooling of young men in Russia had been based on the study of classical languages for 30 years, and the educated strata of the Russian public could learn about classical civilisation directly, rather than having to have it mediated by the French or the Germans. However, Zieliński nevertheless refrained from expressing his ideas on the Slav Renaissance in his publications in Western European languages (until 1933).<sup>21</sup> What basis, other than wishful thinking, could he have to persuade the West of the truth of this prophecy?

Although this historiosophic prediction of a Slav Renaissance did not come true, it had considerable influence not only on the culture of the Silver Age but also on Soviet culture when instead of the Third Renaissance Russia saw the Russian revolution. Several of Zieliński’s pupils did not want to abandon the Slav Renaissance and interpreted the Russian revolution accordingly. Nikolay Bakhtin thought of it as the invasion of Achaean Greece by the Dorians, after which the next stage would be a classical flowering. Other saw it as the sack of emasculated, degenerate Rome by the barbarians, after which the rebirth of a Christian Europe would follow. Others still saw in current events a triumph of democracy similar to the Athenian democratic model, and so on. “Now or never,” Piotrovsky wrote, “we must continue the tradition of Athenian political comedy,” in the satirical amateur theatre of the masses.<sup>22</sup>

20 Tadeusz Zieliński, “Introduction to the Works by Vyacheslav Ivanov,” in *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Creation and Fate* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002) [first publ. 1933 in Italian], 255–256; “A Poet of the Slav Renaissance Vyacheslav Ivanov,” *ibid.* [first publ. in 1934 in Polish], 249–250.

21 Cf. note above.

22 Adrian Piotrovsky, “Theater of Folk Comedy (1920),” in *Theater*, 52.

I should say that the “teachers’ generation” was also very interested in Greek drama, not only as text but also as spectacle. Vyacheslav Ivanov, Zieliński and Annensky agreed, so the legend goes, to translate, respectively, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and carried out their plan. They intended the translations to be used for dramatic productions. Ivanov and Annensky also wrote plays using plots of tragedies, which have not survived.<sup>23</sup> Zieliński annotated his text with notes for actors and mise-en-scenes and welcomed the performance of *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Isadora Duncan. He was close also to the group of her Russian followers and his students as well (Heptachoros-school). Annensky read lectures on classical theatre as part of N.P. Raev’s Historical and Literary Courses for women. Zieliński wrote much about the theatre, including Attic comedy, and Ivanov created a real theatrical utopia, based on his conception of a theatrical show in ancient Greece as a communal ritual performance that not only plays a role in forming the human community but also brings it into communion with the Divine. In his “Dreams of the people as an artist”, he talks about self-organisation in art (*samodejatel’nost’ hudozhestvennaja*). He says that “the country will be covered in the *orchestrai* and *thymelai* of ancient Greece where dancers will dance the round-dance.”<sup>24</sup> “The acting and mobile community”, the “chorus” was for Ivanov the “bearer of the supra-artistic reality of communal ritual performance’. In putting on mass pageants, their creators attempted to transcend art, to create a new life in forms that were both supra-conventional and supra-real.<sup>25</sup>

Ivanov’s term was not “artistic self-organisation” (*hudozhestvennaja samodejatel’nost’*), but “self-organisation in art” (*samodejatel’nost’ hudozhestvennaja*). Because the words in this phrase have changed places, they no longer mean the same. Whereas “artistic self-organisation” is an amateur activity, which is controlled by the government and which is in the service of propaganda, “self-organisation in art” is, by contrast, an art in and of itself: theurgist, life-transforming, liturgical, etc. Ten years before 1917 Ivanov had dreamed about a “supplier of the creative needs of the community”, who would serve as the “hand and mouth of the crowd, the crowd which is conscious of its own beauty’. The followers of the symbolists embodied their teachers’ values in a radically different world. Fulfilling Ivanov’s utopia, they took upon themselves the role of the “mediators of the artist people’. In mature Soviet society, these ideas were transmuted into the slogan “Art belongs to the People’.

It was not only Piotrovsky and Radlov who were involved in the self-organised creativity of the masses, which they saw as reviving classical antiquity;

23 Catriona Kelly, “Classical Tragedy, and the ‘Slavonic Renaissance’: The Plays of Viacheslav Ivanov and Innokentii Annenskii Compared,” *Soviet and East European Journal* 33 (1989): 236–240.

24 Ivanov, *Native*, 72.

25 During the pre-revolutionary period the future Commissar of Culture in the Soviet government Lunacharsky also dreamt of theater as a free religious cult, making theaters from temples and temples from theaters; Rafalovich, *History*, 249.

for instance, certain members of M. M. Bakhtin's circle also did so when in 1919 they put on an open-air production in Nevel of *Oedipus at Colonus*, using 500 students of working schools and representing this production as the intelligentsia's contribution to the construction of a new world.<sup>26</sup>

From the previous generation, the students also inherited Theodore Lipps' idea of *Einfühlung*. They could not, therefore, be satisfied with seeing classical antiquity from an antiquarian standpoint, and drama as a book to be read. That is the foundation of the drive to reconstruct authentic classical productions of ancient drama. Radlov and Piotrovsky found themselves joining the ranks of G. Craig, M. Reinhardt, Vs. Meyerhold and N.N. Evreinov, since they saw ancient theatre as highly conventional. That was typical of those who worked in the theatre, whereas classical scholars who had no contact with the theatre avant-garde could not rid themselves of the conception of realistic theatre when reconstructing the ancient production in their minds. "We have to understand," Radlov wrote, "that ancient theatre could show an actor flying away from the earth on the back of a beetle just because no-one cared that it was physically impossible to represent this realistically."<sup>27</sup> Radlov turned out to be a pioneer of the method of theatrical reconstruction that is so popular today and to which the scholars of the English-speaking world came in the 1970s based on Shakespearian studies and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The theatre of Aristophanes was a state institution regarding its organisation, a socially revolutionary institution in spirit, a choral institution in form and a highly professional institution regarding the skill of its actors. This was the ideal of theatre in the new Russia; this was what "revolutionary classicists' dreamt of when they produced revolutionary street pageants in Petrograd."<sup>28</sup> They started to revive, with varying degrees of success, ancient self-organised theatre as a people's proletarian theatre, a theatre of political satire.<sup>29</sup> In his preface to the *Acharnians* Piotrovsky wrote: "After the ethical insights of the Renaissance and the aesthetic fantasies of Winckelmann, it was given to our generation to be able to see beneath the sentimental-humanities rubbish of 19th-century classical studies the simple, grand socio-religious basis of Athenian art, founded on blood and kin: our own classical antiquity."<sup>30</sup> One can notice the familiar signposts: Renaissance, Winckelmann, Russia, and of course "our own classical antiquity'. This is how the Slav Renaissance took place and how proletarian Slavs absorbed classical antiquity under the guidance of an "artist-mediator'.

26 L. Maximovskaya, ed., "Newspaper 'Hammer' (1918–1920)," in *Nevel Collection: Papers and Memoirs* 1 (Saint Petersburg, 1996), 150.

27 Radlov, "On the Skills," 72.

28 Sergej Radlov, "The Theater of Folk Comedy," *Life of Arts* 410/412 (1920, 27/29 March): 2.

29 Piotrovsky, "Ancient Plays to the Soviet Stage (1936)," *Theater*, 135–138; "Theater of Folk Comedy," *Theater* (1920): 50–53.

30 Aristophanes, "'The Acharnians' with Director's Stage Explanations by S. Radlov (Petropolis, 1923), 10.

In the 1930s criticism was heaped on the pupils of symbolist magicians. In response, they disowned the mystic element of the communal ritual performance, “empathic feeling” (*Einfühlung*), the revival of classical antiquity, mass pageants,<sup>31</sup> and “antiquarian” reconstruction (as it is now called):<sup>32</sup> “after all, no-one would think of antiquarian or conservation principles when producing *Romeo and Juliet* or *Othello*.”<sup>33</sup> One would do so, in fact, and very soon after those words were spoken, but no longer in Russia.

The ideas of Adrian Piotrovsky and Sergej Radlov demonstrate that the soil of ancient Greece lay beneath both the Silver Age utopia and the early Soviet utopia. The revolution brought Russia countless disasters and calamities. However, like a nuclear explosion, the destruction of the social and cultural paradigm freed an amazing amount of energy – not only destructive but also constructive energy, which was artistic, scientific, and creative. During the times of chaos, hunger, and civil war, ideas were born, works were created, and events of huge spiritual significance took place. Nearly all those beginnings were soon stifled, and the innovators brought to ruin. However, the ideas and works created or conceived in the first quarter of the 20th century, though sometimes realised only long afterwards, remain the most important achievements of Russian culture and, despite their utopian nature, continue to feed it to this day.

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31 Rafalovich, *History*, 245.

32 Piotrovsky, “Ancient Plays to the Soviet Stage (1936),” *Theater*, 135.

33 *Ibidem*, 136.

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## SUMMARY

### Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow: *Symbolist Ideas in the Scripts of Gubpolitprosvet: The Theory and Practice of Proletarian Performance*

During the period of the so-called Silver age of Russian culture, three outstanding translators of the Greek tragedy, Tadeusz Zieliński, Innokentiy Annensky and Vyacheslav Ivanov, put forward the idea of the third, Slavonic Renaissance – the new rebirth of Antiquity, with the leading role of the Slavic peoples, particularly the Russians. They claimed that while the first Renaissance was Romanesque and the second German (in the era of Winckelmann, Goethe and German classical philology), the third one was supposed to be Slavonic. In the early Soviet period, the idea of Slavonic Renaissance brought about some unexpected results, first of all precisely in the sphere of theater. The paper focuses on how symbolist ideas got to be expressed in the performances of classical tragedies. Ivanov authored the expression “creative self-performance” that later, in the Soviet era, acquired the meaning of “non-professional performance,” such as comedies staged by “sailors and the Red Army soldiers,” Adrian Piotrovsky’s “amateur theatre,” and the pioneer reconstruction of the scenic performance of Aristophanes’ comedies done by Sergey Radlov, Adrian Piotrovsky, and others.

## POVZETEK

### Ruska državna humanistična univerza v Moskvi: *Simbolistične ideje v scenarijih Gubpolitprosveta: Teorija in praksa proletarske predstave*

V takoimenovanem srebrnem obdobju ruske kulture so trije nadarjeni prevajalci grške tragedije, Tadeusz Zieliński, Inokentij Anenski in Vjačeslav Ivanov, zastopali zamisel o tretji slovanski renesansi, o novem preporodu antike, kjer naj bi imela vodilno vlogo slovanska ljudstva, zlasti Rusi. Menili so, da je bila prva renesansa romanska, druga germanska (v času Winckelmanna, Goetheja in nemške klasične filologije), tretja pa slovanska. V zgodnjem sovjetskem obdobju je ideja slovanske renesanse prinesla nekaj nepričakovanih rezultatov, predvsem na področju gledališča. Prispevek se osredotoča na to, kako so prišle v uprizoritvah klasičnih tragedij do izraza simbolistične ideje. Ivanov je uporabil izraz »ustvarjalna samopredstava«, ki je v sovjetskem obdobju dobil pomen »amaterske predstave«. Sem so sodile komedije, ki so jih postavili »mornarji in vojaki Rdeče armade«, »amatersko gledališče« Adriana Piotrovskega ter pionirska rekonstrukcija uprizoritvenega uspeha pri Aristofanovih komedijah Sergeja Radlova, Adriana Piotrovskega in drugih.





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Elżbieta Olechowska

## Ancient Plays on Stage in Communist Poland

We reached this shameful impasse, when the entire world drama, from Aeschylus to Shakespeare, to Brecht and Ionesco, became a body of allusions to People's Poland. (...) I dream of a form of socialist life that will abolish the unbearable and destructive state of affairs, where the authorities see cultural creations and their reception as a constant threat requiring the use of force.

Leszek Kołakowski<sup>1</sup>

Using ancient drama as a vehicle for propaganda or as a weapon in the ideological struggle is neither simple nor predictably successful. The Greek and Roman plays have been established in European culture for millennia, their ideas, conflicts, characters remain part of human psyche “for all seasons”; whether interpreted from the point of view of the past, present, or future, they have been used “for and even against” conflicting ideologies, as per Lech Wałęsa’s famous *bon mot*.<sup>2</sup> Intuitively, we would be inclined to lay such attempts at politicising antiquity at the door of the anti-communist intellectual opposition, who knew their classics almost as well as they knew their Polish Romantic bards, rather than blame “working class” politicians for such

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1 Leszek Kołakowski (1927–2009) was Polish philosopher and historian of ideas. This is his statement at the meeting of the Union of Polish Writers held on 29 February 1968, devoted to the banning of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* [The Forefathers] directed by Kazimierz Dejmek at the National Theatre [Teatr Narodowy] in Warsaw; quoted according to Marta Fik, *Kultura polska po Jalcie: Kronika lat 1944–1981*, Vol. 2 (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1991), 523. All translations in this article are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

2 Wałęsa’s words “Jestem za, a nawet przeciw” were broadcast in an interview on Polskie Radio 3, on 25 May 2003, and he expressed his position on the Polish accession to the EU before the June 2003 national referendum on the subject.

unlikely sophistication. We will test this intuitive hypothesis and its scope against the data on the staging of classical plays in communist Poland.

It may be useful to start with a few thoughts on the complicated process of reception of classical antiquity.

## THE PROCESS OF RECEPTION

While the first mode of reception is based on contact with the original text, its language naturally limits dramatically the number of potential recipients – how many people today fluently read and understand Ancient Greek or Latin? The fact of being able to reach only small, classically educated elites disqualifies original ancient texts as desirable propaganda or persuasion carriers.

The second mode of reception relies on the translation of the original, its quality as artistic or literary text and its reliability in adequately rendering the sense; this leads us directly to the role of the translator as an intermediary, or interpreter. The translated text may advance to the next level of reception and serve as a script for the production on stage (live theatre, radio, television, or film) in the region where the language of the translation is spoken. Ancient texts, especially Greek dramas, have repeatedly been translated, as each successive period finds its reading of some of these masterpieces that is particularly relevant for the times. The latest existing version may sound obsolete because of archaic vocabulary favoured by certain philologists; other fluctuating tendencies relative to the rendering of the metre create the need for a new, more modern approach before producers tackle the play. While the text of a play is already designed to be used for a performance, theatre directors usually proceed first with some form of revision or adaptation, if only to compress the text to the length their performance requires, using a variety of devices, namely eliminating parts of dialogue, cutting out scenes, or removing secondary characters. At the level of ideas and plot they may decide to activate one of the many other modes of reception, such as a faithful rendition of the original, remake, remix, re-visitation, paraphrase, transformation, re-interpretation, re-deployment, inspiration, etc. The director instructs the actors and shares with them his understanding of the text; they follow his guidance but imbue the words with their talent and know-how. The director, the actors, and the whole production team work in concert to present to the audience a specific vision and performance co-created by the author, the translator, the director, literary managers and dramaturgs,<sup>3</sup> set and costumes designer, musicians, and actors. The same ways of appropriating ancient material may be used

3 The directors may rework the text themselves, order a new translation (like Juliusz Osterwa, who asked Ludwik Hieronim Morstin to translate Sophocles' *Antigone*), or request the services of a dramaturg. The 58–59 issue of *Notatnik Teatralny* from 2010 was entitled “Zawód Dramaturg” [Profession Dramaturg]; cf. in particular Rafał Węgrzyniak's article “Ale dramaturg, kto to jest?” [And Dramaturg, Who Is That?] for a discussion on the role of the dramaturg and its tradition in the Polish theatre.

by modern playwrights who seek to create their texts, painting their visions of an ancient dilemma, a universal problem, or an archetypal figure, and relating them to their own time and reality, using the ancient text as a source of inspiration.

This is hugely complex and fertile area of research.<sup>4</sup> One can divide it into what is done directly to the text, its content, and values at the various creative levels (by translators, playwrights, directors, dramaturgs, actors), and what the recipients (readers, listeners, viewers) make of it according to their mode of engagement with the text. Here, performances of ancient plays in translation stand out as a separate category. They define the scope of this article, i.e., we sidestep the later playwrights<sup>5</sup> inspired by classical antiquity and explore the impact of the ancient texts as they were transmitted through the ages and translated into modern languages. Such restriction allows us to explore the full spectrum of the extant texts in a shorter study, such as the present article, and examine all instances of their occurrence on the Polish stage. It also provides for more homogenous material on which to test our hypothesis reformulated as follows: ancient drama was used by theatre directors for artistic, aesthetic,<sup>6</sup> and educational rather than political purposes during communism and by the opponents rather than supporters of the regime. What the theatrical public made of these performances occasionally came as a surprise to the directors, although they should have been able to anticipate the reactions given the situation of totalitarian censorship, when words pronounced on the stage were expected to have a double meaning and refer to what nobody was allowed to criticise openly.

## POLISH THEATRE UNDER COMMUNISM

The Soviet revolutionaries knew, instinctively, that theatre should play an essential role in shaping the new, post-October 1917 communist society. This

4 Cf. *'Antigone' on the Contemporary World Stage*, Erin B. Mee, Helene P. Foley, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8–13; Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), passim; Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 17–41.

5 By “later” I mean not only Shakespeare – a frequent guest on the Polish stage – but other playwrights like Racine, Molière, Polish Romantics, Shaw, Giraudoux, Cocteau, and Anouilh, as well as Polish interwar and World War II writers who became fascinated by ancient mythological themes resonating with current events. Most of these (Tadeusz Miciński, Karol H. Rostworowski, Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, Aleksander Maliszewski, Stefan Flukowski, Tadeusz Gajcy, Anna Świrszczyńska) are discussed in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland: Ancient Theatre as an Ideological Medium; A Critical Review*, Elżbieta Olechowska, ed. OBTA Studies in Classical Reception (Warsaw: OBTA, 2015), 123–281 passim.

6 Marta Fik, Polish theatrologist, in her chapter on “Topos (?) antyczny w polskim teatrze” [Ancient Topos (?) in the Polish Theatre] for *Topika antyczna w literaturze polskiej XX wieku* [Ancient Topics in Twentieth-Century Polish Literature], ed. by Alina Brodzka and Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temeriusz (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1992), 152–153, emphasised that during the entire twentieth century ancient dramas were staged fairly regularly in Poland only through the efforts of scholars and connoisseurs, much less theatre directors and actors. “The theatre of the inter-war decades remained deaf not only to [Greek mythology] but also to plays like O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* or travesties of antiquity, or to Jean Cocteau, André Gide, and Jean Giraudoux, so fashionable at the time in France.”

universal conviction was at the basis of the early Soviet theatrical revolution, its short-lived avant-garde experiments, and its fleeting infatuation with ancient drama.<sup>7</sup>

Polish theatre directors resumed their regular activities in 1945, marked by the six-year-long horrific ordeal of Nazi rule and under a cloud of forthcoming Soviet domination. While they could have had an almost thirty-year historical perspective on what Soviet communism did to the theatre, this knowledge was second-hand, and they had no choice but to test for themselves the limits of their freedom under the new regime and try to adapt. Their collective experience also included two decades of activities in inter-war independent Poland, followed by the underground theatre during the German occupation and preceded by over a century of dealing with foreign partitioners bent to varying degrees on forced assimilation and denationalisation rather than the development of Polish culture. Polish Romantic playwrights delved deep into the Graeco-Roman tradition, reworking myths and ancient history according to patriotic aspirations and dreams of independence. The classical examples of civic virtues and heroism expressed all that one could say openly without a swift reaction from the foreign authorities. Audiences were accustomed to such subterfuges, looked for them in theatre, and found them, often despite directors' intentions. There is a considerable wealth of scholarship on the attitude of the Polish Romantic poets to classical Antiquity to which we need not refer here.

Polish theatres as cultural institutions were not all created equal. Since the nineteenth century they have been developing in all three partitions of the country, and particularly after the restoration of the independent Polish state in 1918, in all regions, beginning naturally in urban centres: Warsaw, Krakow, Lviv, Vilnius, Poznań. During World War II, the occupying forces operated theatres for the Germans and allowed very low-quality entertainment for the Polish population at a few small stages in Warsaw and Krakow. The underground organisations of theatre artists declared a relatively well-respected boycott of these theatres in 1940.<sup>8</sup> The Clandestine Theatre Council [Tajna Rada Teatralna – TRT] whose driving force was provided by three outstanding artists and teachers: Leon Schiller (1887–1954), Edmund Wierciński (1899–1955), and Bohdan Korzeniewski (1905–1992), organized educational activities, sponsored underground spectacles, and also worked on plans for the restoration of the Polish theatre and its future development.<sup>9</sup>

The underlying conditions after the war were appalling: considerable losses in talent, professional teams decimated, or worse, completely non-existent

7 See Nina Braginskaya, *Symbolist Ideas in the Scripts of Gubpolitprosvet: The Theory and Practice of Proletarian Performance* in the present volume.

8 Cf. Stanisław Marczak-Oborski, *Teatr czasu wojny: polskie życie teatralne w latach II wojny światowej (1939–1945)* (Warsaw: Polski Instytut Wydawniczy, 1967), 44–48, 123; Marta Fik, *Trzydzieści pięć sezonów teatry dramatyczne w Polsce 1944–1979* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1981), 11–12.

9 Cf. Marczak-Oborski, *Teatr czasu wojny*, 118–138; Fik, *Trzydzieści pięć sezonów*, 11–13.

infrastructure, especially in Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Wrocław; buildings, if not wholly ruined, were devastated and required costly reconstruction. Still, sixteen theatres started working even before May 1945. Others followed quickly. By the end of 1946 there were forty repertory theatres, five operas, eight musical theatres, and twenty-eight theatres for children and young people.<sup>10</sup> The Ministry for Culture and Art, or, *sensu stricto*, its Theatre Department, subsidised, first only selected theatres, later – once private theatres disappeared – practically all of them. Various short-lived bodies, such as Repertory Commission and Advisory Committee were created in 1946, along with the Theatre Council, a most promising agency composed of the best minds and talents of Polish cultural life, designed to implement plans prepared during the war by the Clandestine Theatre Council. The new council met only once and was promptly deactivated. The process of nationalising theatres and making them part of state structures was completed in 1954, but already in 1950 the Council of Ministers decreed that theatres had to transform into state enterprises operating under a full planning and financial reporting regime.<sup>11</sup>

The Polish Radio, until 1989 the only radio broadcaster in the country, inaugurated its theatre in 1925; Homer's *Odyssey*<sup>12</sup> was the first classical text in the repertory of the Polish Radio Theatre after World War II. The monopolistic Polish state television founded its theatre in 1953; a year later it staged the first ancient play, Aristophanes' *Peace*.<sup>13</sup> Both theatres were hugely popular and appreciated, had mass audiences, and reached the entire Polish population. Various national and international theatrical festivals, usually but not always<sup>14</sup> held in the capital, allowed the public to enjoy performances from abroad but also to see the best productions from the provincial theatres. With some historical and regional variations, theatres were under the

10 Cf. Fik, *Trzydzieści pięć sezonów*, 115–116.

11 Cf. Fik, *Trzydzieści pięć sezonów*, 117–118.

12 Cf. the *List of Theatres* at the end of this article.

13 *Ibidem*.

14 At first, festivals were one-time events, such as the Shakespeare Festival in 1947, Festival of Russian & Soviet Plays in 1949, and Festival of Polish Contemporary Plays in 1951. Later a number of annual festivals appeared, such as Theatres of Northern Poland in Toruń (1959), Theatrical Meetings in Kalisz (founded in 1961 but fully active since 1969–1972 and still continuing), National Theatrical Confrontations – Polish Classics in Opole, and Counterpoint in Szczecin. Cf. Fik, *Trzydzieści pięć sezonów*, 18–19; Magdalena Raszewska, *30 x WST: Warszawskie Spotkania Teatralne* (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny, 2011), 15–16; as well as Zenon Butkiewicz, *Festiwal w czasach PRL-u: O Festiwalu Teatrów Polski Północnej w Toruniu (1959–1989)* (Toruń: Zapolex Media, 2004); and *Konkurs Szekspirowski wczoraj i dziś*, ed. by Jan Ciechowicz (Gdańsk: Fundacja Teatrum Gedanense, 1997). The most influential were the Warsaw Theatrical Meetings, held annually from 1965 to 2010, with interruptions for 1980, 1982–1986, and much less regularly after the collapse of communism in 1989. They assumed the function of decentralisation or integration of theatrical life and offered a chance for national fame to provincial or “outside of Warsaw” theatres, the term ‘provincial’ being considered derogatory. From 1967 to 1993 the International Festival of Open Theatre in Wrocław presented alternative performances from abroad. In the last season before the change of regime (1988/1989), thirty theatre festivals were organized in Poland. See Zenon Butkiewicz's entry “festival teatralny” for [www.encyklopediateatru.pl](http://www.encyklopediateatru.pl).

control of the party and the government and were dependent on them for budgets. The choice of plays needed approval for each season or planning period. Provincial theatres were occasionally less strictly controlled than their counterparts in big cities, but that was due to people in positions of power rather than to general regulations. Theatre under communism was not a static bloc but a living and diversified organism, evolving and reacting to social and political events and manipulations of the authorities that funded its activities and controlled them.

Every ancient play performed during that time should be discussed in the context of the political situation at the moment of staging, as well as of the prestige and position of its director, and the theatre itself. The importance of these variables forms one of the central premises of our research. A recently published register<sup>15</sup> of ancient (and inspired by antiquity) plays staged in Poland during communism allows us to explore systematically and with a high degree of accuracy which plays were staged (and in whose translation), when, where (the theatre), and by whom (the director). It also provides an excellent checklist to which one can quickly add the rare new finds.

The presence of classical plays on the Polish scene from 1945 to 1989 as analysed by all the criteria discussed above would undoubtedly require a full-length book. For this volume, and the present article, we will rather follow the basics necessary to present a comprehensive but general picture of the use of classics in theatre under communism.

## WHAT DO THE FIGURES SAY?

The data, by the author, may not appear predictable, but it is indeed not entirely surprising. During the forty-four years of communism all extant plays by Aeschylus were staged. The *Oresteia* trilogy was produced nine times. (Additionally, in 1973, the Greek National Theatre performed it in Warsaw; and in 1980 during the International Theatre Meetings, also in Warsaw, Poles watched the famous nine-hour production of the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer from Berlin, directed by Peter Stein.) *Seven against Thebes* was produced eight times, *Prometheus Bound* five times, *The Persians* and *The Suppliants* were staged only once. *Agamemnon*, the first part of the *Oresteia*, was produced on the same bill with Euripides' *Electra* and Aristophanes' *Frogs* at the National Theatre in Warsaw by Kazimierz Dejmek in 1963, one of the most impressive examples of ancient theatre on Polish stage, in its intent, design,

15 Cf. *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland*, 17–121. The number of times each production was performed is indicated, if the records are available. Other sources include Stefan Srebrny, *Teatr grecki i polski* (Warsaw: PWN, 1984), 714–736; Fik, *Trzydzieści pięć sezonów*, passim; Raszewska, *30 x WST*, 235–254 and passim, as well as monographs on individual theatres and websites, such as [www.e-teatr.pl](http://www.e-teatr.pl) and [www.encyklopediateatru.pl](http://www.encyklopediateatru.pl).

and performance. All Aeschylus' plays combined were produced forty-three times (counting three for an *Oresteia* production).

The same period saw the staging of four out of Sophocles' seven surviving plays: *Antigone* fifty-one times, *Oedipus Rex* twenty-one, *Electra* four, and *Oedipus at Colonus* once. Altogether, Sophocles' plays had seventy-seven different productions.

Euripides with his almost twenty surviving dramas fared slightly worse. Twelve of his plays were produced thirty-two times. The most popular were the *Trojan Women*, nine times (seven in Jean-Paul Sartre's adaptation, once in Jerzy Łanowski's translation from ancient Greek, and once in modern Greek by the visiting Theatre of Northern Greece from Thessaloniki). Then *Medea*, eight times, *Electra* three (including the 1963 Dejmek's production), *Iphigenia in Aulis* twice, *Helen* twice, *Bacchae* twice, *Andromache*, *Hercules Furens*, *Ion*, *Cyclops*, and *Suppliants* once each. Ancient Greek Drama Theatre Verghi came from Athens in 1977 to perform *Iphigenia in Tauris* in Wrocław, Krakow, and Warsaw.

Roman tragedy during the same period was represented by two of Seneca's plays: *Phaedra* staged twice and *Medea* once. Concluding the numbers game, we come up with one-hundred-fifty-two productions during forty-four years, or on the average, three per year, just for the tragedy.

Two names from Greek comedy stood out: Aristophanes with eight plays (*Lysistrata* – staged eight times, *Birds*, *Frogs*, and *The Assemblywomen* three times each, *Plutos*, *Peace*, *Thesmophoriadzousai*, and *The Knights*, once) and three adaptations of texts excerpted from *Wasps*, *Acharnians*, *Lysistrata*, *Peace*, *Clouds*, and *The Assemblywomen* (all Aristophanes' titles combined were produced twenty-four times),<sup>16</sup> as well as Menander, with unavoidably only one comedy, *Dyskolos* (staged once). From the Roman comedy, Polish viewers saw Plautus with three plays (staged eleven times). The most popular among Plautus' comedies was *Mercator* staged seven times, followed by *Miles Gloriosus* (three times), and *Amphitryon* (once). Altogether, thirty-six productions which put up the average number of classical plays staged at the Polish theatres under communism to above four per year.

While it will not significantly change the averages, the picture would be incomplete if we excluded other genres of ancient literature adapted for the stage. These were epos – Homer's *Odyssey* (produced five times), philosophical dialogue – Plato's *Defence of Socrates* (nine times), and poetry – staged Greek lyric poetry readings (two editions, one devoted to Sappho, Pindar, Simonides, Anacreon, and Solon, the other focusing exclusively on Sappho).

16 These statistics may have been different, if the masterly contemporary translation of all Aristophanes' plays by Janina Ławińska-Tyszkowska had still been published under communism; cf. *Arystofanes: Komedie I; Acharnejczycy, Rycerze, Chmury, Osy, Pokój* (Warsaw: Prószyński i Ska, 2001) and *Komedie II; Ptaki, Lizystrata, Thesmofofie, Żaby, Sejm Kobiet, Plutos* (Warsaw: Prószyński i Ska, 2003).

The numbers game should not be confined to productions. Another critical variable must be introduced, the stage itself, i.e., the theatres. Altogether sixty-three Polish repertory theatres, the State Television and Radio Theatres (both with mass national audiences), and two theatre schools staged ancient plays during communism. Out of the sixty-three, nine were in Warsaw, six in Krakow, five in Wrocław, five in Łódź, three in Poznań, and three in Szczecin; the remaining theatres operated in twenty-eight provincial centres all across Poland.

## THE DIRECTORS

Who were the theatre directors fascinated enough by classical tradition to reach for ancient plays during communism? Our records show one-hundred and thirty names across live theatre, television, radio and dramatic school performances. Eighty-eight directors staged only one such play. Twenty-six produced ancient plays twice. Ten went up to three instances, two to four, another two to five, one directed six plays, and one seven. Greek and Roman theatre had its fans, but such productions were marginal compared to the total number of plays performed on sixty-seven Polish communist stages.

Focusing on four among those who displayed the most apparent interest for classical antiquity and produced the highest number of classical plays,<sup>17</sup> we will rapidly sketch their profiles, hoping they will lead us to a better understanding of what were their objectives in staging classical plays.

We start our reflection with the legendary theatrical couple of high integrity, Tadeusz Byrski (1906–1987) and Irena Byrska (1901–1997),<sup>18</sup> who managed between them to stage eight ancient plays during communism. They were both dynamic actors, directors, and teachers, with considerable pre-war experience. Both were connected to Juliusz Osterwa's theatre Reduta, as well

17 One can only mention briefly specific examples, like Maryna Broniewska (1911–1989), a choreographer from 1934–1939 at the Teatr Miejski and Opera [Municipal Theatre and Opera] in Lwów, and from 1944–1945 director at the Polski Teatr Dramatyczny Lwów. Her real name was Tarnawa, and later Szlemińska, once she got married; cf. *Almanach Sceny Polskiej* (1989/90) 216–217. She directed Aristophanes' *Peace* at the Television Theatre in 1954, *Lysistrata* in 1959, Homer's *Odyssey* in 1968 (Television Theatre), and Sophocles' *Antigone* in Wałbrzych in Lower Silesia in 1973. Mieczysław Daszewski (1926–1990), who produced and repeatedly directed only one ancient play, Plautus' *Mercator*, in 1960, 1961, 1977, and 1978, merits a separate brief mention. Daszewski spent forty-five years of his career at the New Theatre in Zabrze, a provincial theatre in Upper Silesia. Another unusual case is that of Włodzimierz Herman (1937), active in avant-garde theatre in Wrocław in Lower Silesia, where he staged Aristophanes' *Clouds* in 1964 and *Assemblywomen* with fragments from *Frogs* in 1968. In Koszalin/Ślupsk in 1968, he produced Aristophanes' *Plutos*. In 1962–1968, he worked as director and artistic manager at the Student Pun Theatre (*Teatr Kalambur*), and as director at the Polish Theatre and Television Theatre (1966–1970). In 1970 he emigrated to Denmark and worked in Switzerland, and later in New York, Germany, Sweden, and Russia. In Denmark he worked at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen and at the theatre of the Danish Radio.

18 See their bios in Tadeusz Byrski, *W pogoni za teatrem* (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2015), 425–427.



as to Vilnius and its intellectual and artistic elite. Both believed in the educational, social, and cultural value of theatre and in bringing the theatre to all. Friendship with the eminent Stephen Báthory University classicist and ancient theatre specialist Stefan Srebrny provided the couple with additional incentive and expert support in approaching ancient repertory. The couple often worked together, sometimes separately, at a series of places, most often but not only in the provinces. Tadeusz taught at the State Theatre School in Łódź (1946–1949) and became director of the State Theatre in Opole (1948–1949), where his wife also played an essential managerial role. He began directing the Polish Radio Theatre in 1949 (a position he held for two years before the war) and stayed there until 1951. He moved as artistic director to Theatres of Pomerania in Toruń (1951–1952) with his wife directing plays; the couple spent the next six years managing the Stefan Żeromski Theatre in Kielce and Radom. In Kielce they also opened a theatre school where Irena staged Aristophanes' *Peace* in 1956. From Kielce they went on to assume the same functions at the Dramatic Theatres in Poznań until 1959. From 1962 to 1966 they worked at Juliusz Osterwa Theatre in Gorzów Wielkopolski, where, among many other important plays, they directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in 1964. Tadeusz spent the five years following their stay in Gorzów Wielkopolski directing at the New Theatre in Łódź. Irena retired in 1967 but over the following twenty years or so occasionally directed plays at various theatres, like Menander's *Dyskolos*, staged in Jerzy Łanowski's translation at the Dramatic Theatre in Wałbrzych in 1969.<sup>19</sup>

In all these provincial centres the couple played a crucial role in instilling the love of theatre among the local population and offering an ambitious repertory with the participation of many well-known theatre personalities as collaborators. They considered this their sacred mission, putting it ahead of any aspirations to great national fame, despite the difficulties and discomforts such an itinerant way of life presented to a family with three children. Personal and professional integrity founded on Catholic values did not endear the couple to communist authorities; they had to battle with many obstacles and lack of official support building up small-town theatres after the desolation of World War II. Some of their projects did not succeed, like the Artistic Institute, which they founded in Kazimierz Dolny after the war. The Polish theatrical community recognised the value of the couple's contributions as evidenced in publications and other tributes by Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw.<sup>20</sup> The reason why the couple staged a fair number of classical plays had no political background: they were convinced that Greek drama was a valuable cultural

19 Cf. *Monografia Teatru Dramatycznego w Wałbrzychu 1964–2015*, ed. by Dorota Kowalkowska (Wałbrzych: Teatr Dramatyczny im. J. Szaniawskiego, 2016), 301, available online.

20 Cf. *Teatr Byrskich: refleksje, dokumenty wspomnienia*, ed. by Małgorzata Iskra and Magdalena Rzepka (Kielce 1992); Tadeusz Byrski, *W pogoni za teatrem*, ed. by Iwona Arkuszewska, Dorota Buchwald, and Monika Krawul (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny, 2015); "Irena i Tadeusz Byrscy," *Mówiona encyklopedia teatru polskiego*, available online.

legacy and theatre had the duty to offer such plays to the public, for pleasure, appreciation, and education.

After these two exceptional personalities, ideologically on the side of the anti-communist opposition, we pass to an entirely different artist who nonetheless in his own way was as committed to the mission of theatre as the Byrskis. An outstanding, hugely popular, and appreciated yet unequivocally pro-communist figure, at least initially, Kazimierz Dejmek (1924–2002),<sup>21</sup> directed ancient Greek dramas seven times in a total of approximately one-hundred-seventy productions. This represented barely four percent of Dejmek's output from 1945 to 1989, and not a single ancient author was staged after the change of regime and until his death in 2002. Even these seven productions were in fact based on only four plays: Dejmek produced Plato's *Defence of Socrates* three times, in 1960 at the New Theatre in Łódź, in 1964 at the Warsaw Athenaeum Theatre, and in 1975, again at the New Theatre in Łódź. He staged Aristophanes' *Frogs* twice: in 1961 at the New Theatre in Łódź and 1963, at the National Theatre in Warsaw. The latter performance was staged as the final part of a trilogy also composed of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Electra*. It is undoubtedly a logical and appealing idea for someone who already produced and admired the *Frogs*, to want the public to be provided with a proper background for a more informed appreciation: he decided to let the audience sample the two playwrights' wares first, and then expose them to Aristophanes' comparative criticism and judgment. The public and the critics were almost unanimous in praise,<sup>22</sup> especially because Dejmek was able to cast truly outstanding actors in all the roles. Curiously enough, there was even a review from the first rehearsal of the three plays published in a popular Warsaw daily that – in an innovative marketing move – served to prepare the public for the delights to come.<sup>23</sup>

Here, we must digress to discuss productions of more than one play in one performance. The only other combination of three ancient plays staged together in the Polish theatre, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (trans. by Stanisław Dygat), Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (trans. by Stefan Srebrny), and Sophocles' *Antigone* (trans. by Kazimierz Morawski), was directed by Stanisław Wieszczycki (1921–2015) under the title *Against Thebes*, in December 1961, at the provincial Theatre of the Opole Region. There are no reviews available about Wieszczycki's production, as is often the case with provincial theatres

21 Cf. his biography, e.g. in the *Almanach Sceny Polskiej* 44 (2002/2003) (Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2008), or in Tadeusz Byrski, *W pogoni za teatrem*, 446.

22 Cf. Stanisław Ostrowski, "Tryptyk antyczny," *Świat* (23.06.1963), available online; Jaszcz, "U źródeł tragedii i komedii," *Trybuna Ludu* 7/663 (05.06.1963), available online; Leonia Jabłonkówna, "Antyk u Dejmka," *Teatr* 15 (01.08.1963), available online; Andrzej Wirth, "Tu stoję gdzie zadałam cios," *Teatr* 15 (01.08.1963), available online; Karolina Beylin, "Antyk i nowoczesność," *Express Wieczorny* 7/663 (05.06.1963), available online; Maria Czannerle, "Szansa Eichlerówny," *Życie Literackie* (05.06.1963), available online.

23 Cf. Ludwika Woyciechowska, "Express przy narodzinach przedstawienia teatralnego," *Express* 73 (27.03.1963), available online.

in that period. Two classical plays staged together were produced a year later, when Irena Babel directed *Antigone* and *Seven against Thebes* at the Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw in 1962. Babel's design of merging the texts of two entirely different authors linked only by the continuation of the same myth, instead of presenting one play after the other, failed to convince the critics, who emphasized the difficulty the actors had in speaking the texts produced by two different translators (Stefan Srebrny for Aeschylus and Ludwik Hieronim Morstin for Sophocles). The anti-war message of Aeschylus mixed badly with the anti-Creon message of Sophocles, leaving no room for the more subtle tragedy of Antigone herself.<sup>24</sup> Not every modernisation of ancient tragedy leads to the discovery of a new, contemporary key to the ancient text.<sup>25</sup> The spectacle was a misunderstanding: too many symbols, too many visions, and too much invention dominated and blurred the meaning of the ancient texts.<sup>26</sup> Despite biting criticism, the same selection (*Antigone* and *Seven against Thebes*) was staged at a provincial theatre in Sosnowiec in the Upper Silesia in 1965 by Antoni Słociński (1925), an actor, theatre director, and artistic manager; the spectacle was not a particular success.

Another instance worth mentioning is a combination of an ancient play with a contemporary one staged together for contrast and comparison. It was due to Dejmek's former student, Michał Pawlicki (1932–2000), an actor and occasional director, who also assisted Erwin Axer<sup>27</sup> in 1966 and Bogdan Korzeniewski<sup>28</sup> in 1967. He paired Euripides' *Medea* with Jan Parandowski's<sup>29</sup> play of the same title, to the collective displeasure of the critics and a relatively weak approval rating of the audience: it closed after twenty-four performances. The ancient masterpiece was flattened and reduced, as one critic said, to a comic book, unsuited to compete with Parandowski's poetic modern vision of Medea as a smart, beautiful, and powerful woman facing a weak, ungrateful, and unfaithful Jason. In fact, both plays suffered from having been compiled from two sources, despite an excellent program booklet boasting of contributions from experts such as Kazimierz Kumaniecki, Lidia Winniczuk,

24 Cf. awk, "Ajschylos i Sofokles w jednym widowisku," *Teatr* 21 (Nov. 1, 1962), available online.

25 Cf. Grzegorz Sinko, "Nasienie, które nie wschodzi," *Nasza Kultura* 38 (September 6, 1962), available online.

26 Cf. Jan Kłossowicz, "Siedmiu przeciw Antygonie," (September 13, 1962), available online.

27 Erwin Axer (1917–2012) was one of the eminent directors of the period but while he did produce a number of plays inspired by classical antiquity, he never staged an ancient drama as such in his internationally successful career.

28 Bohdan Korzeniewski (1905–1992), director, theatre historian, critic, teacher, and translator. He was also more interested in plays inspired by antiquity than in the actual ancient drama, but he did supervise young colleagues directing such plays, such as Jerzy Markuszewski, who staged under his guidance Euripides' *Medea* at the Dramatic Theatre in Warsaw in 1962, and Wojciech Jesionka, who produced Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in 1969 at the Juliusz Osterwa Theatre in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

29 Jan Parandowski (1895–1978), classicist, essayist, and writer, author of the popular *Mythology*, prose translator of the *Odyssey*; published his version of Medea's myth as a play, in *Dialog*, in 1961. It was staged in 1964, twice in 1966 (once by the Polish Television Theatre), and finally in 1969.

Wojciech Natanson, and Jan Parandowski, who placed there an epilogue to his play claiming ironically that Euripides himself came to the performance, and gave praise and advice.

Coming back to Dejmek and his position in the communist theatre, there is no doubt that his career, which started only after the war, is divided into quite distinctive periods reflecting his rapport with the ideology and the communist authorities. He began his adventure with theatre as an actor, then continued as director and artistic manager. In the later nineteen-forties, Dejmek, member of the Polish United Workers' Party, participated with great enthusiasm and full ideological conviction in the attempt to create a genuinely socialist theatre in Łódź, suited for the new Polish reality. Disillusioned with the performance of the communist regime,<sup>30</sup> especially after his visit to Moscow in 1954,<sup>31</sup> he still thought that the idea was sound, but the execution needed fixing.

Fascination with old Polish literature and early religious theatre alternated in Dejmek's output with devotion to great Romantics resulting in his canon of Polish national theatre and his longstanding concern: "we still lack the courage to cling to what is truly ours, to develop it, disseminate, and elevate."<sup>32</sup> These convictions became the basis of Dejmek's dream of a Polish national theatre under his creative guidance.<sup>33</sup>

In 1967, to celebrate the half-century of the October Revolution, Dejmek, still a party member, decided to stage the national Romantic masterpiece, Mickiewicz's *The Forefathers*. Contrary to his intentions, the public took it as an act of defiance against the regime and among many others who suffered as a consequence was Dejmek himself, expelled from the party and fired from the National Theatre. It was the end of the second period of his career. He was not allowed to work abroad until 1969. His first foreign contract was at the National Theatre in Oslo (Marlowe's *Edward II*), followed by a series of other guest productions in Vienna (Ionesco), Essen (Chekhov, Gombrowicz), Belgrade (Fernando de Rojas), Düsseldorf (Hochhuth, Berrigan), Milan (*La Passione*), Novi Sad (Gogol, Dürenmatt, Molière), Zürich (Dürenmatt), and Hamburg (Gogol). Dejmek returned to Poland in 1972; in 1974 he took over the direction of the New Theatre in Łódź. The Polish Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa – SB) became interested in Dejmek right after the *Forefathers*' debacle in 1968. He was under secret police surveillance in Łódź – codenamed "Theatre Director [Reżyser]" – and later until 1988,<sup>34</sup> as described in his police files.

30 Cf. Wanda Zwinogrodzka, "Dejmka cena wierności," *Gazeta Wyborcza* 15 (January 19, 1994), 10.

31 Cf. Joanna Krakowska, "Święto Wilkenrida, czyli torsje," *Teatr 4* (2013), available online.

32 Cf. Anna Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, "Kazimierz Dejmek – 'nieprzedawnione?'" *Teatr 4* (2013), available online.

33 Cf. an analysis by Magdalena Raszewska, "Opętany teatrem" [Possessed by Theatre], *Dialog 12* (2014) – 1 (2015), available online.

34 Joanna Godlewska, "Kryptonim 'Reżyser', czyli Kazimierz Dejmek w oczach SB," *Teatr 4* (2013), available online.

In October 1980 he criticised Polish cultural policies in response to questions included in the poll conducted by *Kultura*: “What qualities should define an authentic, autonomous cultural life? How should it function? What is required for its development?” He stated: “History should not be explained using conspiracy theory, but what was happening [...] in the last years necessarily indicates that the reached impasse could not have been only the result of stupidity, voluntarism, the style of government, and other ‘errors and deviations’ of the helmsmen of our state. It was the result of conscious, systematic activities undertaken to achieve a total annihilation of our talents and cultural, scholarly, and agricultural potential.”<sup>35</sup>

In September 1981, at the time he assumed the direction of Teatr Polski in Warsaw, he talked about his belief in the mission of theatre:

Theatre should be a good, interesting newspaper. Like it was when Aeschylus was staging *Persae*, Shakespeare *Julius Ceasar*, Molière *Tartuffe*, Gogol *The Government Inspector*, Wyspiański *The Wedding*. I would like to be the editor of such a theatrical newspaper.<sup>36</sup>

Briefly a member of Solidarity, Dejmek was perceived later as siding to a degree with the communist authorities and was accordingly shunned by the opposition. Still, his stage was populated by eminent dissident actors, some of whom he was able to bring from internment. His idea of an “exterritorial theatre” that would allow the artist to take a neutral stand was far removed from the audience and its attitude to whatever was happening on the stage. Dejmek was against the boycott of television by actors during the martial law and even suggested recording live theatre performances to present them to television viewers, which also evoked an adverse reaction among his colleagues.<sup>37</sup>

Post-communist governments according to Dejmek had no interest in developing theatre and significantly disappointed him, leading to launching his political career (*out of despair*)<sup>38</sup> as an MP and Minister for Culture and Art in 1993–1996, in the government of Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak (Polish People’s Party – PSL). His time in office was not particularly memorable.

As a director of classical plays, Dejmek cannot be considered as someone who tried to use ancient drama for political purposes. They remain a very insignificant margin of his artistic output, and while he had an obvious admiration for classical Greek playwrights, he considered Polish classics to be his favourite and most beloved repertory, as well as the core of what he saw as his artistic mission.

<sup>35</sup> Fik, *Kultura polska po Jalcie*, 849.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted from Dejmek’s interview in *Teatr* 21–22 by Marta Fik, *Kultura polska po Jalcie*, 935.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Wanda Zwinogrodzka, *Dejmka cena wierności*, passim.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

The last director discussed here is Helmut Kajzar (1941–1982),<sup>39</sup> a playwright, theatre director, essayist, and translator. He selected *Oedipus Rex* as his first production in 1962 at the student Theatre 38. In his 1965 director's exam assignment at the Theatre School in Warsaw (preserved in manuscript), he explained his understanding of Sophocles' play: *Neither fate, nor gods bring us to justice, but we do it ourselves. The Chorus chooses among themselves a victim whose fear and death should confirm them in their faith. The 'Other' is expelled from the social organism, not only to cleanse it but also to strengthen it.*<sup>40</sup> In 1970, Kajzar produced *Oedipus Rex* again, at the Stefan Jaracz Theatre in Łódź; he considered the play as crucial for the development of his playwriting.

In 1971 Kajzar wrote his adaptation of *Antigone* based on a faithful transcription of some translations into Polish and into other modern languages, intended for his friend, the actor Wojciech Zasadziński, “for the March generation, generation of contestation. Moreover, later I produced it in Warsaw as a memorial for my late friend.”<sup>41</sup> He staged the play altogether three times, at the Teatr Polski in Wrocław, in 1971, in 1973 at the Teatr Propozycja in Warsaw – “*Antigone* is for us a play about the need for love. The third staging, in 1982, the year of his premature passing, took place at the Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw; Kajzar, commemorating his friend, saw the play as an *Elegy to Death*.”<sup>42</sup> Kajzar's intention had an apparent ideological background but not one of active, instrumental propaganda but rather a homage to past courageous deeds.

## SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE – A SPECIAL CASE

The extraordinary and continuing appeal of Sophocles' *Antigone* to the Polish theatre directors requires particular attention. Several scholars, with one exception all of them Polish, wrote about this phenomenon exploring it not only in theatre but also in poetry and literature.<sup>43</sup> The numbers for *Antigone* under

39 He directed in Poland and abroad and was known for his productions of Tadeusz Różewicz's plays. He translated Peter Handke, Franz Xaver Kroetz, and Sophocles; for his evolution as a playwright and director cf. Marcin Kościelniak, *Prawie ludzkie, prawie moje: Teatr Helmuta Kajzara* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!Art, 2012).

40 Ibidem, 38–39, 354.

41 Ibidem, 62–63.

42 Ibidem, 63.

43 Cf. Tadeusz Zieliński, “Antygona – Tragedja władzy” [*Antigone – a Tragedy of Power*] in his *Sofokles i jego twórczość tragiczna* [Sophocles and His Tragedies]. Trans. from Russian by Koło Klasyków U. W. (Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1928) 229–274, available online; Stanisław Zabierowski, “Polskie Antyfony,” *Rocznik Komisji Historycznoliterackiej* 15 (1978), 163–181; and more recently Marta Fik, *Kultura polska po Jalcie*, 154–159; Alicja Szastyńska-Siemion, “Polskie Antyfony, stan wiedzy i postulaty badawcze,” *Eos* 84 (1996): 345–353, who lists other scholars writing about *Antigone* in various publications and in introductions to the translations of the text; Jerzy Axer and Małgorzata Borowska, “The Tradition of the Ancient Greek Theatre in Poland” in *Productions of Ancient Greek Drama in Europe during Modern Times*, ed. by Platon Mavroumoustakos (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1999), 71–72; Barbara Bibik, “Antigone: A Study of the Character; The Analysis of Selected Polish Translations and Theatre Stagings,”

communism are overwhelming; curiously, the change of regime in 1989 did not put an end to new productions but, on the contrary, during the following decades *Antigone* appeared in the repertory even more often than before.

In fact, *Antigone* began her career as a Polish cultural icon in the early twentieth century when the eminent classicist Kazimierz Morawski (1852–1925) preceded his translation of the play (1898) with his poem, an invocation to *Antigone* likened to a Christian martyr, asking her to bring hope to Poles still suffering under foreign rule. Morawski's prologue made a significant impression on Stanisław Wyspiański (1867–1907), who in his play *Wyzwolenie* [Liberation], strongly inspired by classical antiquity, published and staged in 1903, talks about a Polish incarnation of the Sophoclean heroine, born out of national destiny and historical events that nothing could render better than a full-blown Greek tragedy. Another translator of *Antigone* (1938), Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, was asked to translate the play by the famous actor/director Juliusz Osterwa.<sup>44</sup> This text was used even more often than Morawski's in staging the play after the war. He also wrote his prologue to the play staged for the first time during World War II by the Morstins Home Theatre at the family estate Pławowice near Krakow, where several artists, actors, and directors found refuge during the German occupation.<sup>45</sup> According to available, potentially incomplete records, *Antigone* was the only Greek drama performed during World War II in Poland.<sup>46</sup> In Pławowice, the play was directed by Henryk Szletyński, who staged it again in 1946 in Katowice, following Teofil Trzcziński's *Antigone*, also in Morstin's translation, staged in 1945 in Krakow. Morstin saw *Antigone* as an archetypal model for Polish women participating in armed conflicts, ready to die for all the unburied victims and give them back their dignity.<sup>47</sup>

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*Eos* 97 (2010): 313–318 (which is a short English version of Bibik's PhD dissertation, cf. below); Marc Robinson, "Declaring and Rethinking Solidarity: *Antigone* in Cracow," in *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, ed. by Erin B. Mee and Helene P. Foley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 201–218; Michał Mizera, "Sophocles, *Antigone*," in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland: Ancient Theatre as an Ideological Medium; A Critical Review*, Elżbieta Olechowska, ed. OBTA Studies in Classical Reception (Warsaw: OBTA, 2015), 311–330.

44 Cf. Bibik, "Polska Antygona," *Litteraria Copernicana* 2, 16 (2015) 135, available online, who quotes Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, *Moje przygody teatralne* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1961), 134.

45 Cf. Marczak-Oborski, *Teatr czasu wojny*, 154, 223, 303.

46 Apparently, at the Offizierslager (Oflag) VII-A in Murnau am Staffelsee in Bavaria, the Camp Theatre performed Aristophanes' *Birds*, directed by Zbigniew Bessert; cf. Marczak-Oborski, *Teatr czasu wojny*, 275; Danuta Kisielewicz, in her *Niewola w cieniu Alp. Oflag VII A Murnau* (Opole: Centralne Muzeum Jeńców Wojennych w Łambinowicach-Opolu, 2105), 113, mentions only the name of Aristophanes without specifying the title of the play. After the war Bessert worked in theatres in Warsaw until 1953, and was later active in Lublin, Kalisz, Wałbrzych, and for a decade until his retirement in 1977 in Białystok. I was unable to identify the play from the 300 photographs of life in the camp recovered a few years ago in France by the photographer Alain Rempfer, who kindly made the collection available to me; cf. also his website for more details.

47 Cf. the analysis by Szastyńska-Siemion, 346–351, and other scholars, such as Stanisław Zabierowski, "Polskie Antygony," *Rocznik Komisji Historycznoliterackiej* 15 (1978): 163–180, and more recently Bibik, "Antigone," 314–315, and "Polska Antygona," 132–146.

Writing new prologues is an exciting mode of adaptation, as it manifests an intense desire to bring the translator's contribution to the classical play and to influence the understanding of the critical issues by the contemporary audience or readers. It also demonstrates the highest respect for the text and the need both to render it accurately and, at the same time, to speak one's mind.

The Polish *Antigone* shares naturally the tragic choice facing the universal *Antigone* analysed by generations of scholars. Tadeusz Zieliński labelled the play a "tragedy of power;" Stefan Srebrny identified three ways of looking at the conflict between *Antigone* and Creon: antithesis between state law and divine law, or written and unwritten law; between polis/state and its citizen – the individual; and between the truth as seen by reason and the truth illuminated by emotions.<sup>48</sup>

While Giraudoux's *Electra*, directed by Edmund Wierciński in Łódź in February 1946, a spectacle virulently contested by the communists,<sup>49</sup> was openly a homage to the heroic soldiers of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, *Antigone* remained a personification of womanly sacrifice in times of war and struggle. Her appeal to Polish society, which since the Romantic period had identified with classical values and with a mystical national mission powerfully felt in spite (or because) of being deprived of statehood, relied on her significance as a symbol of civil disobedience challenging the imposed, unbending, and unnatural laws.<sup>50</sup> Refusal of the right to burial or depriving of burial is a theme often occurring in situations of war. There is no lack of World War II examples of such hideous crimes against the divine laws. A quintessential example is, of course, the Holocaust with its countless unburied dead and, on a different scale but no less hideous, the Katyń massacre with its anonymous mass graves of over twenty-thousand executed victims.

Polish history provides valid but not *all* the reasons why *Antigone* has been so well ingrained in the Polish psyche and appealed so strongly to theatre directors and audiences. Classically educated elites in the nineteenth century read *Antigone* in the original at the high school, theatre audiences of the time belonged unquestionably to the same elites; they should have been logically the ones particularly interested in attending such performances. Nonetheless, *Antigone* had to wait until 1903 for its first-ever Polish theatre production. An obvious explanation for this delay was the lack of a truly successful (for theatrical purposes) translation. There were four translations of the play in the nineteenth century, but only the last one (Kazimierz Morawski's of 1898) attracted theatre directors. Forty years later, a modern and popular translation

48 Cf. Zieliński, "Antygona," 229–274; Stefan Srebrny, *Teatr grecki i polski*, ed. by Szczepan Gąssowski (Warsaw: PWN, 1984), 340–347.

49 Cf. my introduction to the early postwar period in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage*, 24–25, and comments by Erwin Axer made fifty years after the performance, quoted there from Elżbieta Wyśniska, "Łódź, Teatr Kameralny," *Teatr* 6 (1994).

50 Cf. Axer and Borowska, "Tradition of the Ancient Greek Theatre," 71–72.



(Ludwik Hieronim Morstin's of 1938) was gratefully accepted by the theatre community and often used on stage.

Brożek,<sup>51</sup> Hebanowski (1912–1983), and Kajzar<sup>52</sup> were the best-known translators during communism. Stanisław Hebanowski's version produced in 1968, at the request of his colleague Marek Okopiński for a spectacle at the Szczecin Contemporary Theatre, became immediately an almost standard text.<sup>53</sup> Helmut Kajzar (1971) and Józef Jasielski (1971) translated and paraphrased Sophocles' text for their productions; Kajzar's adaptation was used as well by three other directors.

Independently of being read in classical high schools in the original Greek, *Antigone* in translation was on the list of compulsory reading at the secondary level during the interwar decades and later, after World War II. The knowledge of the myth and familiarity with the play were widely established. *Antigone* remained in the curriculum until 2008, when it was removed; the only required Sophocles' play is now *Oedipus Rex*, added to the high school list in 2007.<sup>54</sup> The first cohort of students who were not required to read *Antigone* are now twenty-four years old; counting a minimum of five years for obtaining a director's diploma at the School of Theatre, this cohort could have in theory began directing a year ago. A future scholar should check how many times *Antigone* will have been staged in twenty-five years, by A. D. 2041, when this Antigone-less cohort reaches the respectable age of fifty. Curiously, after the fall of communism, four more translations were published, a fact indicating a lasting fascination with Sophocles' tragedy throughout the two decades of transition to democracy, as well as a certain discontent with the existing translations and a need to update them.

In the reception of *Antigone*, the entangled mythical background becomes somewhat blurred and distant. The Labdakides of Thebes is a family doomed by fate. Eteocles and Polynices, and Antigone and Ismene are children of incest between Oedipus, the unwilling killer of his own father, and his mother Iocasta, who commits suicide when she learns the truth. Their very existence is an abomination against the divine law. Eteocles and Polynices mistreat their blind father, who curses them, predicting their death in a fratricidal fight. Whether we consider that Antigone is right, or that Creon is, a tragic outcome is inevitable. Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice, Creon's wife, die like dominoes – Haemon takes his own life because Antigone is dead, Eurydice kills herself because Haemon died.

51 Mieczysław Brożek (1911–2000), the only classicist among the three, published his translation in 1947 at M. Kot in Kraków; it had multiple later editions by the Wrocław Ossolineum but was used on stage only three times in the mid-1960s. His version of the chorus was combined with Hebanowski's translation by Ewa Bułhak in 1984. Hebanowski and Kajzar were not using the Greek original; they relied on translations into modern languages.

52 Cf. the section in the present article entitled 'The Directors.' Kajzar produced *Antigone* in 1971 in Wrocław at the beginning of his career and at the end, in Warsaw, in 1982.

53 It was used twenty-one times between 1968 and 1989; cf. the list of theatres and productions. Cf. also Sofokles, *Antyгона* (Gdańsk: Słowo / Obraz / Terytoria, 2003), 64–65, available online.

54 Cf. the list online.

Antigone inspired Polish playwrights beginning just before World War II and continuing until after the collapse of communism.<sup>55</sup> Some such inspired plays were staged. Their authors are not the focus of this article, but I mention them here to complete the picture and document the general familiarity of the Polish society with the archetypal heroine and the moral dilemma she personified. Five such authors wrote plays influenced by Antigone<sup>56</sup> between 1939 and 1960 but did not meet with much theatrical success:

1. Krystyna Berwińska (1919), *Ocalenie Antygony* [Saving Antigone] (1948, publ. 1954); staged only once by Irena Byrska at the Stefan Żeromski Theatre in Kielce, in south-central Poland, in 1957;<sup>57</sup>
2. Aleksander Maliszewski (1901–1978), his *Antigone* written in 1939, was staged only once under communism by Waldemar Zakrzewski at a school theatre “Teatr Młodych” [Theatre of the Young] in 1963, in the provincial, south-eastern Polish town of Zamość;<sup>58</sup>
3. Artur Marya Swinarski (1900–1965), *Godzina Antygony* [Antigone’s Hour] (1948–1959, publ. in 1960 in Paris, by Instytut Literacki in Biblioteka Kultury 60); the action takes place in Aragon in 1937 during the civil war. The local parish priest refuses burial to a Polish soldier who fought on the Republican side. The play was never staged;<sup>59</sup>
4. Nora Szczepańska (1914–2004), *Kucharki* [Cooks] (1959–1960, publ. in 1961); it was staged once by Jan Kulczyński, at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw (Scena Kameralna) in 1965; the play is divided into three acts, each referring to a different celebrated drama (Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Beckett’s *En attendant Godot*;<sup>60</sup>
5. Roman Brandstaetter (1906–1987), *Cisza (Winogrona Antygony)* [Silence (Antigone’s Grapes)] (1958–1959, publ. in 1961); staged only once, by Maria Dzięgielewska, who adapted the text and directed the play for the Polish Radio Theatre; it was broadcast 2 November 1986.<sup>61</sup>

55 The last one, Janusz Głowacki’s *Antygona w Nowym Jorku* [Antigone in New York], was written after the fall of communism and published in 1992.

56 Cf. Cezary Rowiński, “Moda na mity greckie,” *Dialog* 9 (1962): 116–127, and Alenka Jensterle-Doležal’s article on Antigone in West and South Slavonic cultures in the present volume.

57 For a biography of the author and a summary of the play cf. Paulina Klóś, “Krystyna Berwińska-Bargielowska,” in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland*, 246–248.

58 For a biography of the author, a summary of the play, and the story of its staging cancelled by the censors at the Theatre Athenaeum in Warsaw just before World War II, cf. Julia Hava, “Aleksander Maliszewski,” in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland*, 202–205.

59 For a biography of the author cf. Paulina Klóś, “Artur Marya Swinarski,” in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland*, 196–199. Swinarski wrote a series of plays that constitute a humorous rereading of myths. The most popular and most often staged, *Achilles and the Maidens*, was produced fifteen times between 1955 and 1985. Since 1985, it was staged only once, in 2011.

60 For a biography of the author and a summary of the play, cf. Małgorzata Glinicka, “Nora Szczepańska,” in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland*, 240–244.

61 For a biography of the author and a summary of the play, cf. Joanna Koziół, “Roman Brandstaetter,” in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland*, 226–232.

On the other hand, Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (next to Cocteau's, Giraudoux's, and Sartre's adaptations/remakes of other ancient plays)<sup>62</sup> was incomparably more popular under communism<sup>63</sup> than the Polish plays inspired by the Greek *Antigone*. However, its success paled in comparison with the reaction to the Sophoclean original. The French version of the tragedy was staged sixteen times: five times in 1957 – clearly in the wake of the October 1956 thaw; twice in 1958 – by the same director (Jerzy Rakowiecki, who directed Sophocles' *Antigone* for the Polish Radio Theatre in 1956), first at the Warsaw Teatr Dramatyczny and then at the State Television Theatre just one year after Tadeusz Aleksandrowicz's production. Another spectacle at the Television Theatre followed thirty years later, in 1987. Andrzej Łapicki directed it, and it remains the last Anouilh's *Antigone* on Polish television.

Looking at all thirteen live theatre spectacles, it is important to note that only two were staged in Warsaw and two in Krakow, the remaining nine at provincial theatres. After the collapse of communism the popularity of Anouilh's *Antigone* dwindled considerably: from 1989 to 2015, only five theatres offered it to the public; out of these five, three spectacles were directed by the same person, but none was staged in Warsaw.

Despite the post-Romantic appropriation of *Antigone* as a "Polish" heroine under the partitions, until 1945 *Antigone* had been staged in Poland only three times. All three cases are memorable because of the outstanding actresses playing the title role. In 1903 at the Municipal Theatre in Krakow (dir. Józef Kotarbiński), *Antigone* was played by Helena Modrzejewska. In 1908 at the State Theatres in Warsaw, directed by Kazimierz Zalewski, Seweryna Broniszówna played *Antigone*. And in 1911 in Krakow, at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre, directed by Leonard Bończa and performed by the Academic Artistic Circle of Classical Drama at the Jagiellonian University, *Antigone* was Wanda Siemaszkowa. This last production was also staged in Warsaw the following year, at the Grand Theatre. Once independence came in 1918, there is no evidence of any interest in staging the play, which is hardly surprising, as there was no foreign domination and no need to look for powerful allusions.

The forty-four years of communism yielded fifty-one productions of *Antigone*: six staged in various Warsaw theatres, three at the Television Theatre, three at the Polish Radio Theatre; the remaining productions were staged at smaller centres; three of these provincial spectacles were shown at the Warsaw Theatre Meetings.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, after the collapse of communism, during the twenty-five years from 1990 to 2015, in stark contrast to the total lack of interest in the play during the 1918–1939 independence mentioned above, *Antigone* was staged

62 Cf. Axer and Borowska, "Tradition of the Ancient Greek Theatre," 71–73.

63 Cf. Michał Mizera, "Sophocles, *Antigone*," in *Classical Antiquity on the Communist Stage in Poland*, 327.

64 In 1965, 1968, 1973, cf. Raszewska, 30 x WST, 235, 237, 239.

forty-four times: only four times in Warsaw, once by the Television Theatre, and once by the Polish Radio Theatre (both public broadcasters). The vast majority of the remaining productions were staged in smaller provincial centres.

## THE RELEVANCE OF ANCIENT PLAYS TO POLES UNDER COMMUNISM

In his essay *The Issue of Relevance in Theatre*,<sup>65</sup> written in 1946, at the beginning of the period of interest for the present study, Stefan Srebrny, one of the best Polish experts on ancient, as well as modern theatre, an eminent classical philologist, translator of ancient theatre and pre-war theatre director, discusses the idea of political theatre. He is interested in the way it was developed before the war by the German director Erwin Piscator, who thought that staging plays on contemporary hot topics would bring the public to the theatre and would renew vibrant and dynamic relations with the audience. Greek drama and especially Greek comedies reflect the times in which they were written. Part of this reflection is impossible to identify today, as our knowledge of their reality remains only fragmentary. This relevance to the classical audience is not the reason why ancient plays reached the peaks of artistic values.

The theatre is an art; it is ruled, like all arts, according to principles and laws of aesthetics. Moreover, what about relevance? It is neither a plus nor a minus for the artistic value of the play: it is merely a phenomenon of a different nature.<sup>66</sup>

The case of *Antigone* most prominently speaks to the issue of relevance. A theatre director who wanted to stage *Antigone* had the advantage of being able to justify this choice by the guaranteed audience of high-school students and educated intelligentsia; if he could secure known actors, their fans would also be tempted to come. In large centres like Warsaw, or Krakow, something new and original was the ingredient required for success, whether in the attitude towards the dramatic conflicts – who was to be favoured: Antigone, Creon, Haemon; or in the staging itself – scenography, costumes, music, special effects, allusions to current events, etc. Several different translations could be selected, or if none suited the selected vision, the director could adapt, paraphrase, or arrange the text accordingly. There were also political considerations – a strong Creon and an immature and entitled Antigone could please the party and its mouthpiece reviewers, but all sorts of subtle configurations were possible. Morawski and Morstin had shown how to make the play relevant to Poland by adding prologues that from the outset gave a specific tone to the performance.

65 Cf. Stefan Srebrny, *Teatr grecki i polski*, ed. by Szczepan Gąssowski (Warsaw: PWN, 1984), 693–697.

66 Srebrny, *Teatr grecki i polski*, 696–697.

There were also off-stage means like extended booklet programs that, besides the necessary info on the spectacle, could provide the audience as well as the critics, censors, and other stakeholders with an explanation, justification, an advance defense against possible accusations, or facts and information useful for better understanding the play and the director's intentions. The "tragedy of power" naturally contained many elements that one could refer to the current state of affairs; it was up to the director to highlight, or minimise these clues, but in practice, it was even more up to the audience, traditionally sensitive as it was to anything that one could construe as an allusion. The public from experience knew in advance that theatre directors had to toe the line, compromise, exercise diplomacy, and they were certain that the director was able to only allude to his intention, never to speak about it openly. If the message were pro-regime, such caution on the part of the director would be unnecessary; the public accordingly always assumed that the words coming from the stage had a double meaning and reacted accordingly. Not only the audiences but also the censors, and occasionally an accidental witness could contribute to the "shameful impasse, when the entire world drama, from Aeschylus to Shakespeare, to Brecht and Ionesco, became a body of allusions to People's Poland", to repeat after Leszek Kołakowski, quoted in the opening of this article. The need for universal values is a galvanising force that will erupt despite restrictive measures devised against social discontent.

## LIST OF THEATRES BY LOCATION, IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER, INCLUDING ANCIENT PLAYS' TITLES AND THE NAMES OF DIRECTORS

### BIAŁYSTOK

*Teatr Dramatyczny im. Aleksandra Węgierki w Białymstoku – Aleksander Węgierko*  
*Dramatic Theatre in Białystok*

Jerzy Zegalski directed Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, opening night 22 May 1965

Stanisław Wieszczycki directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 23 November 1972

Stanisław Wieszczycki directed Seneca's *Phaedra*, opening night 4 January 1974

Wojciech Pisarek directed Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen*, opening night 23 June 1979

### BIELSKO-BIAŁA

*Teatr Polski w Bielsku-Białej – Polish Theatre in Bielsko-Biała*

Józef Para directed Aeschylus' *Persae*, opening night 30 September 1972

### BYDGOSZCZ

*Teatr Polski w Bydgoszczy – Polish Theatre in Bydgoszcz*

Stanisław Bugajski directed Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, opening night 2 December 1961

Leszek Czarnota directed Aristophanes' *A Paradise of Lazybones, or the Athenian Democracy* (fragments of *Assemblywomen*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Lysistrata*, opening night 25 May 1980)

Hieronim Konieczka directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night December 10, 1982

Marek Mokrowiecki directed Aristophanes' *Knights*, opening night 15 March 1985

#### KRAKOW

*Stary Teatr im. Heleny Modrzejewskiej w Krakowie – Helena Modrzejewska Old Theatre in Krakow* (Inaugurated 1 April 1945)

Lidia Zamkow-Słomczyńska directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 4 February 1960

Bogdan Hussakowski directed Euripides' *Troades* (in Jean-Paul Sartre's adaptation), opening night 11 February 1967

Zygmunt Hübner directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, opening night 19 June 1982;

Andrzej Wajda directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 20 January 1984

*Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego w Krakowie – Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Krakow* (Inaugurated 19 February 1945)

Teofil Trzciniński directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 21 September 1945

Mieczysław Górkiewicz directed Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, opening night 20 October 1959

Lidia Zamkow directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 6 April 1968

Jerzy Goliński directed Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, opening night 6 October 1973

Marcel Kochańczyk directed Euripides' *Ion*, opening night 13 June 1976

Aleksandra Domańska directed Euripides' *Troades*, opening night 9 April 1983

*Teatr Ludowy w Nowej Hucie – People's Theatre in Nowa Huta* (Inaugurated 3 December 1955)

Krystyna Skuszanka and Jerzy Krasowski directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, opening night 6 May 1960

Olga Lipińska directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Piotr Paradowski directed Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, opening night 18 July 1964

Vojo Stankovski directed Homer's *Odyssey*, opening night 15 June 1986

*Teatr Rapsodyczny w Krakowie – Rhapsody Theatre in Krakow* (Inaugurated 1 November 1941, after the war 22 April 1945; closed for political reasons in 1953, the opening night of Aristophanes' *Attic Salt* (a mix of four plays), directed by Mieczysław Kotlarczyk, did not take place; theatre re-opened in 1957 and closed definitively on 5 May 1967)

Mieczysław Kotlarczyk directed Homer's *Odyssey*, opening night 28 June 1958

Mieczysław Kotlarczyk directed Aristophanes' *Attic Salt* (Fragments of several plays), opening night 21 September 1963

Mieczysław Kotlarczyk directed Homer's *Odyssey*, opening night 15 April 1967

*Teatr Rozmaitości w Krakowie – Variety Theatre in Krakow* (opened 1 January 1958, closed 19 June 1973)

Ryszard Smożewski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 27 July 1969

*Teatr 38, Kraków – Theatre 38, Krakow*

Helmut Kajzar directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 2 March 1963

## CZĘSTOCHOWA

*Teatr Miejskie, Częstochowa – Municipal Theatres, Częstochowa* (Inaugurated 3 February 1945; 1 December 1949, the name change to Teatry Dramatyczne – Dramatic Theatres; 2 March 1957, another name change: Teatr Dramatyczny im. Adama Mickiewicza w Częstochowie – Adam Mickiewicz Dramatic Theatre in Częstochowa)

Kazimierz Czyński directed Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, opening night 22 September 1949  
Eugeniusz Aniszczenko directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* [Gromiwoja], opening night 5 November 1955

Wojciech Kopciński directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 19 October 1979

Bogdan Ciosek directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 26 October 1986

Michał Pawlicki directed Plato's *Defence of Socrates*, opening night 17 December 1988

## GDAŃSK

*Teatr Oświatowy Gdańskiego Zespołu Artystycznego – Educational Theatre of the Gdansk Artistic Ensemble*

Malwina Szczepkowska (1909–1977) directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 10 December 1946

*Teatr Wybrzeże Gdańsk – Coast Theatre Gdańsk* (Inaugurated 20 November 1946)

Maria Chodecka directed Plautus' *Menaechmi*, opening night 5 May 1961

Piotr Paradowski directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, opening night 19 April 1969

Stanisław Hebanowski directed Euripides' *Helen*, opening night 3 March 1973

Marek Okopiński directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 23 October 1983

Ryszard Ronczewski directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* [Bojomira], opening night 23 August 1986

## GDYNIA

*Teatr Dramatyczny, Gdynia – Dramatic Theatre, Gdynia*

Kazimierz Łastawiecki directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 1 April 1976

Kazimierz Łastawiecki directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* [Gromiwoja], opening night 2 February 1979

*Teatr Muzyczny, Gdynia – Music Theatre, Gdynia*

Pierre Cunliffe directed Seneca's *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 30 November 1986

*Teatr Wybrzeże Gdynia – Coast Theatre Gdynia*

Kazimierz Łastawiecki directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, opening night 2 February 1979

## GNIEZNO

*Teatr im. Aleksandra Fredry, Gniezno – Aleksander Fredro Theatre, Gniezno*

Halina Sokołowska-Łuszczewska directed Plautus' *Amphitryon*, opening night 8 October 1949

Eugeniusz Aniszczenko directed Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, opening night 23 June 1963

Eugeniusz Aniszczenko directed Euripides' *Bacchae*, opening night 8 April 1979

## GORZÓW WIELKOPOLSKI

*Teatr im. Juliusza Osterwy w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim – Juliusz Osterwa Theatre in Gorzów Wielkopolski*

Irena Byrska and Tadeusz Byrski directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 14 March 1964

Wojciech Jesionka directed Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, opening night 25 January 1969

Krystyna Tyszarska directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 30 September 1972

## GRUDZIĄDZ

*Teatr Ziemi Pomorskiej – Theatre of Pomerania, Grudziądz*

Krzysztof Rościszewski directed Sophocles' *Antigone* (in Helmut Kajzar's paraphrase), opening night 13 January 1973

## JELENIA GÓRA

*Teatr Miejski im. Cypriana Kamila Norwida w Jeleniej Górze – Cyprian Kamil Norwid Municipal Theatre in Jelenia Góra*

Janusz Kozłowski directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, opening night 18 May 1973

Wojciech Kopciński directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 4 December 1980

Irena Dudzińska directed Sophocles' *Antigone* (in Helmut Kajzar's paraphrase), opening night 22 March 1987

## KATOWICE

*Teatr im. Stanisława Wyspiańskiego w Katowicach – Stanisław Wyspiański Theatre in Katowice* (initially called *Teatr Miejski w Katowicach – Katowice Municipal Theatre*)

Henryk Szletyński directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 12 October 1946;

Mieczysław Daszewski directed Plautus' *Mercator*, opening night 29 April 1960;

Józef Para directed Euripides' *Troades* (in Jean-Paul Sartre's adaptation), opening night 16 July 1966

Zofia Petri and Michał Pawlicki directed Plato's *Defence of Socrates*, opening night 6 August 1981;

Jan Sycz directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 7 October 1982

## KIELCE

*Teatr im. Stefana Żeromskiego w Kielcach – Stefan Żeromski Theatre in Kielce* (initially called *Teatr Województwa Kieleckiego – Theatre of Kielce Voivodeship*)

Irena Byrska directed Aristophanes' *Peace*, opening night 17 September 1956, staged together with a selection of Greek lyric poetry (Sappho, Pindar, Simonides, Anacreon, and Solon) directed by Tadeusz Byrski and Leon Witkowski

Tadeusz Byrski directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 1965

Jarosław Kusza directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 19 July 1978

## KOSZALIN-SŁUPSK

*Bałtycki Teatr Dramatyczny w Koszalinie – Słupsku Baltic Dramatic Theatre in Koszalin-Słupsk*

Lech Komarnicki directed Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, opening night 12 June 1965

Włodzimierz Herman directed Aristophanes' *Plutos*, opening night 20 July 1968

Andrzej Przybylski directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, opening night 17 April 1971



## LEGNICA

*Teatr Dramatyczny, Legnica – Dramatic Theatre, Legnica*

Józef Jasielski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 17 December 1989

## LUBLIN

*Teatr Miejski, since 1949 im. Juliusza Osterwy w Lublinie – Juliusz Osterwa Municipal Theatre in Lublin (until 1949 Municipal Theatre)*

Józef Jasielski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 21 February 1971

Andrzej Kruczyński directed Plautus' *Mercator*, opening night 27 June 1974

*Lubelska Szkoła Dramatyczna, Lublin – Dramatic School in Lublin (A private dramatic school connected to the Municipal Theatre, active from 1945 to 1949)*

Irena Parandowska directed Homer's *Odyssey*, opening night 11 October 1947

## ŁÓDŹ

*Teatr im. Stefana Jaracza w Łodzi – Stefan Jaracz Theatre in Łódź (Inaugurated in 1888 under the name of Teatr Polski; during World War II the building was taken over by Theater zum Litzmannstadt – a German theatre; 1945–1949: Polish Army Theatre [Teatr Wojska Polskiego] inaugurated 26 January 1945, ended activities in Łódź on 31 August 1949, and moved to Warsaw; 1 September 1949, Stefan Jaracz Theatre in Łódź began operations)*

Helmut Kajzar directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 24 October 1970

Jerzy Grzegorzewski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 8 September 1972

*Teatr im. Juliana Tuwima, Łódź – Julian Tuwim Theatre, Łódź (later Teatr Studyjny '83 im. Juliana Tuwima – Julian Tuwim Studio Theatre '83)*

Józef Jasielski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 27 February 1981

Marek Mokrowiecki directed Aristophanes' *Knights*, opening night 30 May 1989

*Teatr Nowy w Łodzi – New Theatre in Łódź (Inaugurated 12 November 1949)*

Kazimierz Dejmek directed Plato's *Defence of Socrates*, opening night 11 September 1960; another staging of the same play took place at the same theatre, opening night 23 November 1975

Kazimierz Dejmek directed Aristophanes' *Frogs*, opening night 15 February 1961

Aleksander Strokowski directed Euripides' *Troades* (in Jean-Paul Sartre's adaptation), opening night 16 April 1966

Janusz Łosiński directed Plautus' *Casina*, opening night 19 June 1966

Jerzy Hoffman directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 3 March 1974

*Teatr Powszechny Towarzystwa Uniwersytetu Robotniczego (TUR) w Łodzi – Theatre for All, the Society for Workers' University in Łódź (Inaugurated 8 March 1945, but already in the fall the same year became the second stage for Polish Army Theatre; Became a separate entity in 1948/49, when the Polish Army Theatre moved to Warsaw)*

Roman Sykała directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, opening night 20 June 1970

*Teatr Ziemi Łódzkiej – Theatre of the Łódź Region, Łódź* (Inaugurated 2 May 1953, as a touring theatre; in 1980 ended its activities; in 1983 the building was taken over by Julian Tuwim '83 Studio Theatre; in 1998 became the property of the State Higher School of Theatre and Film)

Aleksander Strokowski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 19 February 1966

#### OLSZTYN/ELBLĄG

*Teatr im. Stefana Jaracza w Olsztynie – Stefan Jaracz Theatre in Olsztyn*

Tadeusz Kozłowski directed Plato's *Defence of Socrates*, opening night 19 December 1965

Bohdan Głuszczyk directed Aeschylus' *Danaids*, *Seven against Thebes*, and *Oresteia*, opening night 27 March 1968

Andrzej Przybylski directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 5 December 1970

Andrzej Kruczyński directed Seneca's *Medea* in his paraphrase, opening night 2 July 1976

Krzysztof Rościszewski directed Sophocles' *Antigone* (in Helmut Kajzar's paraphrase), opening night 24 January 1980

#### OPOLE

*Teatr Ziemi Opolskiej w Opolu – Opole Region Theatre*

Stanisław Wieszczycki directed Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* under the title *Against Thebes*, opening night 20 December 1961

*Teatr im. Jana Kochanowskiego, Opole – Jan Kochanowski Theatre, Opole*

Stanisław Wieszczycki directed a mix of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, *Peace*, and *Lysistrata* under the title *War Shattered*, opening night 12 July 1970

Bohdan Cybulski directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 15 September 1979

Jan Nowara directed Euripides' *Electra*, opening night 11 March 1989

#### PŁOCK

*Teatr Dramatyczny im. Jerzego Szaniawskiego w Płocku – Jerzy Szaniawski Dramatic Theatre in Płock*

Andrzej Koper directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 19 December 1987

#### POZNAŃ

*Teatr Nowy w Poznaniu – New Theatre in Poznań* (2nd stage of Teatr Polski)

Izabella Cywińska-Adamska directed Sophocles' *Electra*, opening night 23 April 1970

Wojciech Szulczyński directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 19 May 1979

*Teatr Polski w Poznaniu – Polish Theatre in Poznań*

Jan Perz directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 25 May 1960

Jowita Pięńkiewicz directed Euripides' *Troades* (in Jean-Paul Sartre's adaptation), opening night 16 November 1966

Leszek Czarnota directed Aristophanes' *A Paradise of Lazybones, or the Athenian Democracy* (fragments of *Assemblywomen*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Lysistrata*), opening night 12 November 1982

Jacek Pazdro directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 18 January 1985

*Teatr Satyry w Poznaniu – Satirical Theatre in Poznań*

Mieczysław Daszewski directed Plautus' *Mercator*, opening night 10 March 1961

## RZESZÓW

*Teatr Wandy Siemaszkowej w Rzeszowie – Wanda Siemaszkowa Theatre in Rzeszów*

Jerzy Pleśniarowicz directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 7 September 1962

Jacek Andrucki directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 31 October 1982

## SŁUPSK

*Słupski Teatr Dramatyczny – Dramatic Theatre in Słupsk*

Jowita Pieńkiewicz directed Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen*, opening night 30 October 1981

Ryszard Jaśniewicz directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 17 March 1984

Ryszard Jaśniewicz directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 23 November 1985

## SOSNOWIEC

*Teatr Zagłębia w Sosnowcu – Coal Fields Theatre in Sosnowiec*

Antoni Słociński directed Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, opening night 31 January 1965

Antoni Słociński directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, opening night 20 December 1975

## SZCZECIN

*Teatr Krypta w Szczecinie – Crypt Theatre in Szczecin*

Plato's *Defence of Socrates* staged, opening night 12 October 1970

Ireneusz Szmidt directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 16 June 1975

*Teatr Polski w Szczecinie – Polish Theatre in Szczecin*

Aleksander Strokowski directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 20 October 1973

Janusz Bukowski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 3 November 1977

Andrzej May directed Plato's *Defence of Socrates*, opening night 10 October 1987

*Teatr Współczesny w Szczecinie – Contemporary Theatre in Szczecin*

Marek Okopiński directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 20 September 1968

## TARNÓW

*Teatr Ziemi Krakowskiej im. Ludwika Solskiego, Tarnów – Ludwik Solski Theatre of the Kraków Region* (Inaugurated 1 January 1945, as the Municipal Theatre; nationalised on 1 January 1957)

Kazimierz Barnaś directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 7 February 1964

Jacek Andrucki directed Euripides' *Troades* (in Jean-Paul Sartre's adaptation), opening night 11 October 1980

## TORUŃ

*Teatr im. Wilama Horzycy w Toruniu – Wilam Horzyca Theatre in Toruń*

Lech Komarnicki directed Euripides' *Troades*, opening night 8 June 1973

Michał Rosiński directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 18 April 1975

## WAŁBRZYCH

*Teatry Dolnośląskie, Wałbrzych – Lower Silesian Theatres, Wałbrzych* (1964–1979 changed its name to Teatr Dramatyczny – Dramatic Theatre; in 1979 became Teatr Dramatyczny im. Jerzego Szaniawskiego – Jerzy Szaniawski Dramatic Theatre)

Michał Bogusławski directed Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, opening night 5 May 1962;

Irena Byrska directed Menander's *Dyskolos*, opening night 21 December 1969

Maryna Broniewska directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 26 July 1973

## WARSAW

*Teatr Adekwatny, Warszawa – Adequate Theatre, Warsaw*

Henryk Boukołowski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 4 September 1970

Magda Teresa Wójcik directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 14 January 1979

*Teatr Ateneum im. Stefana Jaracza w Warszawie – Stefan Jaracz Theatre Atheneum in Warsaw* (Inaugurated 25 July 1951)

Kazimierz Dejmek directed Plato's *Defence of Socrates*, opening night 16 May 1964

*Teatr Dramatyczny w Warszawie – Dramatic Theatre in Warsaw* (Inaugurated 22 July 1955)

Konrad Swinarski directed Aristophanes' *Birds* in Andrzej Jarecki's and Agnieszka Osiecka's adaptation, opening night 19 March 1960

Ludwik René directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 27 May 1961

Jerzy Markuszewski directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 17 January 1962

Stanisław Brejdygant directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 13 May 1978

Gustaw Holoubek directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 21 April 1982

Paweł Pochwała directed Aristophanes' *Birds*, opening night 17 February 1988

*Teatr Narodowy w Warszawie – National Theatre in Warsaw* (Inaugurated 13 December 1949)

Kazimierz Dejmek directed Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Euripides' *Electra*, and Aristophanes' *Frogs*, opening night 5 June 1963

Adam Hanuszkiewicz directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 11 January 1973

*Teatr Polski w Warszawie – Polish Theatre in Warsaw* (Inaugurated 17 January 1946)

Arnold Szyfman directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, opening night 20 March 1947

Stefan Burczyk and Teresa Żukowska directed Sophocles' *Antigone* in December 1957, as a State Higher School of Theatre diploma performance, stage of Teatr Kameralny

Czesław Wołłejko directed Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, opening night 27 February 1963

Jan Kulczyński directed Euripides' *Troades* (in Jean-Paul Sartre's adaptation), opening night 23 March 1966

Michał Pawlicki directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 4 January 1969

*Teatr Powszechny w Warszawie – Theatre for All in Warsaw* (Inaugurated 2 February 1945)

Maryna Broniewska directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* [Gromiwoja], opening night 10 October 1959

Mieczysław Daszewski directed Plautus' *Mercator*, opening night 28 May 1961

Irena Babel directed Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, opening night 6 September 1962

Ryszard Major directed Aristophanes' *Birds*, opening night 27 February 1975  
 Helmut Kajzar directed his paraphrase of Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 18 June 1982  
 Zygmunt Hübner directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 25 March 1988

*Teatr Rozmaitości, Warszawa – Variety Theatre, Warsaw*

Giovanni Pampiglione directed Aristophanes' *Frogs*, opening night 16 February 1963

*Teatr Studio, Warszawa – Studio Theatre, Warsaw*

Maciej Z. Bordowicz directed Euripides' *Hercules Furens*, opening night 22 December 1973  
 Hanna Skarżanka directed Euripides' *Medea*, opening night 5 February 1977  
 Maciej Z. Bordowicz directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 31 March 1977

*Teatr Ziemi Mazowieckiej w Warszawie – Theatre of Mazovia in Warsaw (Inaugurated 1 January 1956; in 1978 TZM was renamed Teatr Popularny – Popular Theatre)*

Krystyna Berwińska-Bargiełowska and Stanisław Bugajski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 26 April 1969  
 Andrzej Ziębiński directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 10 October 1986

WROCLAW

*Drugie Studio Wroclawskie – Wrocław Second Studio (The stage existed from 1985–1989)*

Zbigniew Cynkutis directed Seneca's *Phaedra* (I version), opening night 24 January 1986  
 Mirosław Kocur directed Seneca's *Phaedra* (II version), opening night 2 May 1986  
 Mirosław Kocur directed Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, opening night 25 October 1986

*Teatry Dramatyczne, Wrocław – Dramatic Theatres, Wrocław*

Włodzimierz Herman directed Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen*, opening night 16 January 1968

*Teatr Kalambur, Wrocław – Pun Theatre, Wrocław*

Włodzimierz Herman directed Aristophanes' *Clouds*, opening night 23 March 1964

*Teatr Polski we Wrocławiu – Polish Theatre in Wrocław (Inaugurated 20 December 1950)*

Włodzimierz Herman directed Aristophanes' *The Assemblywomen* with fragments of *Frogs*, opening night 13 January 1968  
 Helmut Kajzar directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 15 May 1971  
 Piotr Paradowski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 3 March 1980  
 Ewa Bułhak directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 26 February 1984

*Teatr Rozmaitości we Wrocławiu – Variety Theatre in Wrocław (Inaugurated as the Puppet and Actor Theatre on 18 October 1946; nationalized 1 January 1950 under the name: Teatr Młodego Widza – Young Viewer's Theatre; on 1 January 1957, it became the Państwowy Teatr Rozmaitości – State Variety Theatre; in 1967 another name change: Wrocławski Teatr Współczesny im. Edmunda Wiercińskiego we Wrocławiu – Edmund Wierciński Contemporary Theatre in Wrocław)*

Halina Dzieduszycka directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 6 June 1964  
 Raul Zermeño directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, opening night 17 March 1973

Józef Para directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, opening night 31 October 1973

Travis Preston directed Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, opening night 20 May 1979

#### ZABRZE

*Teatr Nowy im. Gustawa Morcinka w Zabrzu – Gustaw Morcinek New Theatre in Zabrze* (inaugurated as Teatr Nowy 7 October 1959)

Mieczysław Daszewski directed Plautus' *Mercator*, opening night 30 April 1977

#### ZAKOPANE

*Teatr im. Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza, Zakopane – Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz Theatre, Zakopane*

Andrzej Dziuk directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* under the title *e. g. Oedipus*, opening night 18 December 1987

#### ZIELONA GÓRA

*Teatr Ziemi Lubuskiej – Lubusz Region Theatre, Zielona Góra* (since 1964 called Lubuski Teatr im. Leona Kruczkowskiego – Leon Kruczkowski Theatre of the Lubusz Region in Zielona Góra)

Jerzy Zegalski directed Sophocles' *Electra*, opening night 4 June 1960

Zbigniew Stok directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, opening night 14 May 1967

Jerzy Hoffman directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opening night 22 May 1971

Andrzej Kruczyński directed Plautus' *Pseudolus*, opening night 22 March 1975

Jerzy Głapa directed Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, opening night 19 February 1977

Mieczysław Daszewski directed Plautus' *Mercator*, opening night 18 February 1978

Wojciech Maryański directed Sophocles' *Electra*, opening night 30 April 1982

Krzysztof Rotnicki directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 28 February 1987

#### SCHOOLS OF DRAMATIC ARTS

*Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna im. Ludwika Solskiego w Krakowie (PWST) – Ludwik Solski State Higher School of Theatre in Krakow*

Mieczysław Górkiewicz directed Sophocles' *Electra*, opening night 26 April 1962

*Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna i Filmowa, later Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna im. Leona Schillera w Łodzi – Leon Schiller State Higher School of Film, Theatre and Television in Łódź*

Kazimierz Brodzikowski directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 27 October 1962

Jadwiga Chojnacka directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, opening night 27 October 1970

#### RADIO AND TELEVISION

*Teatr Telewizji – Television Theatre*<sup>67</sup> – in 1953, TT produced its first play: "Okno w lesie [A Window in the Woods] by Soviet authors Leonid Rachmanov and Yevgeniy Ryss

67 *Teatr Telewizji* – originally part of state television, later public broadcaster – has produced more than four-thousand plays during well over half a century. Ancient drama constituted a small margin of this output. In 1999 a specially created Akademia Teatru Telewizji, composed of artists, scholars, and entrepreneurs, identified one hundred key spectacles among all the productions of Teatr Telewizji, the so-called "golden hundred." None of the ancient plays staged by the theatre figure on this golden list.

Maryna Broniewska directed Aristophanes' *Peace*, broadcast 1954<sup>68</sup>  
 Wanda Laskowska directed a selection of Sappho's poetry, broadcast 18 June 1960  
 Mieczysław Daszewski directed Plautus' *Mercator*, broadcast on 23 September 1960  
 Ewa Bonacka directed Homer's *Odyssey*, broadcast 15 April 1962  
 Barbara Borman directed Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, opening night 16 December 1963  
 Olga Lipińska directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, broadcast 19 December 1966  
 Jerzy Gruza directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, broadcast 18 September 1967  
 Adam Hanuszkiewicz directed Euripides' *Electra*, broadcast 27 March 1968  
 Maryna Broniewska directed *Odyssey* under the title *Return to Ithaca*, broadcast 21 October 1968  
 Jan Maciejewski directed Euripides' *Andromache*, broadcast 16 February 1970  
 Henryk Boukołowski and Magda Teresa Wójcik directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, broadcast 18 June 1972  
 Stanisław Brejdygant directed Euripides' *Medea*, broadcast 15 March 1974  
 Lidia Zamkow directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, broadcast 24 March 1975  
 Jerzy Wójcik directed Euripides' *Medea*, broadcast 6 February 1978  
 Antoni Halor directed Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, broadcast 16 March 1979  
 Jerzy Gruza directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, broadcast 23 March 1981

*Teatr Polskiego Radia – Polish Radio Theatre*

Rena Tomaszewska directed Homer's *Odyssey*, adapted by Irena Parandowska under the title *Odysseus on Ithaca*, broadcast in 1953, available online  
 Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* – the name of the director unknown – broadcast in 1956, available online  
 Jerzy Rakowiecki directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, broadcast in 1956, available online  
 Tadeusz Byrski directed Aristophanes' *Peace*, broadcast in 1966  
 Tadeusz Bradecki directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, text adapted by Tadeusz Byrski, broadcast 1 January 1969  
 Tadeusz Byrski directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, broadcast 1969 (recording available online)  
 Helmut Kajzar directed Euripides' *Helen*, broadcast 1975  
 Jerzy Rakowiecki directed Euripides' *Cyclops*, broadcast 1978  
 Tadeusz Łomnicki directed Plato's *Defence of Socrates* under the title *Socrates' Victory*, broadcast 4 May 1980  
 Zdzisław Dąbrowski directed Euripides' *Suppliants*, broadcast 1981  
 Wojciech Maciejewski directed Euripides' *Electra*, broadcast 1981  
 Henryk Rozen directed Sophocles' *Antigone*, broadcast 1984

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68 This production is mentioned only on two pages of the public television's (TVP) website.

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## SUMMARY

### *Ancient Plays on Stage in Communist Poland*

A recently published analytical register of all ancient plays and plays inspired by antiquity staged in Poland during communism, provided factual material for this study of ancient drama in Polish theatre controlled by the state and of its evolution from the end of WW2 to the collapse of the Soviet regime. The quasi-total devastation of theatrical infrastructure and loss of talent caused by the war, combined with an immediate seizing of control over culture by Communist authorities, played a crucial role in the shaping of the reborn stage and its repertoire. All Aeschylus' plays were performed at various points during the period, four out of seven Sophocles' tragedies – with *Antigone*, a special case, by far the most popular – about half of the extant Euripides' drama, some Aristophanes, very little of Roman tragedy (Seneca) and a bit more of Roman comedy (Plautus). The ancient plays were produced in big urban centres, as well as in the provinces, and nationally, by the state radio and later television. The various theatres and the most important directors involved in these productions are discussed and compared, with a chronological and geographical list of venues and plays provided.

## POVZETEK

### *Antična dramatika na odrih komunistične Poljske*

Gradivo za pričujočo študijo je priskrbel nedavno objavljeni analitični register vseh antičnih dram in z antiko navdihnutih predstav na Poljskem v obdobju komunizma. Posvečena je antični dramatici v gledališčih na Poljskem, ki jih je obvladovala država, in razvoju tega področja od konca druge svetovne vojne do sesutja sovjetskega režima. Skoraj popolno uničenje gledališke infrastrukture in izguba talenta, ki ju je prinesla vojna, sta imela skupaj s takojšnjim prevzemom nadzora nad kulturo s strani komunističnih oblasti ključno vlogo pri oblikovanju ponovno rojenega gledališča in njegovega repertoarja. V tem obdobju so uprizorili vse Ajshilove igre, štiri od sedmih Sofoklovih tragedij (pri čemer je bila daleč najbolj priljubljena *Antigona*, ki je poseben primer), približno polovico ohranjenih Evripidovih dram, nekaj Aristofana, peščico rimskih tragedij (Seneka) in nekaj več rimskih komedij (Plavt). Antične drame so uprizarjali v velikih mestnih središčih, pa tudi na podeželju in v nacionalnih medijih, na državnem radiu in pozneje na televiziji. Članek obravnava in primerja različna gledališča in najpomembnejše režiserje, ki so sodelovali pri teh predstavah, ter predstavi kronološko-geografski seznam prizorišč in predstav.



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## Ancient Drama and Reception of Antiquity in the Theatre and Drama of the German Democratic Republic (GDR)

Theatre played an important role in the cultural policy of the German Democratic Republic. Probably nowhere in the world were there more state-subsidised theatres in relation to the size of the country and its population. The numerous theatres were heavily subsidised so that everybody could afford the low entrance fees, and, at the same time, they were closely supervised. To be sure, there were brief more liberal periods between 1953 (death of Stalin) and 1956 (the Hungarian uprising) and after 1971 (the replacement of the general secretary of the communist party Walter Ulbricht by Erich Honecker) and there were regional differences in the strictness of the controls. However, in general the close-knit network of supervision by two complementary institutions – state and party – which sometimes worked together and sometimes against each other – functioned perfectly. On the one side was the Ministry of Culture with its special advisory committee for the dramatic arts, which decided about all world premieres and GDR premieres of plays, but mostly acted through state officials at the district or local level. On the other side was the omnipresent party, perfectly organized in its tight hierarchical structure from the groups of party members within the theatres<sup>1</sup> up to Politburo and Central Committee.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, behind the scenes, there was a third player: the Ministry of State Security (MFS) or “Stasi”.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 In the larger theatres there were several different party subgroups organized on an occupational basis: administrators, technicians, actors etc.
- 2 Christa Hasche, Traute Schölling und Joachim Fiebach, *Theater in der DDR: Chronik und Positionen*; Mit einem Essay von Ralph Hammerthaler (Berlin: Henschel, 1994), 187–93; in cases of doubt the party, of course, had the final say.
- 3 Cf. Hammerthaler, n.2, 187–93; 203–207; Barrie Baker, *Theatre Censorship in Honecker's Germany: From Volker Braun to Samuel Beckett*, German Linguistic and Cultural Studies 23 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), and Laura Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict: GDR Theatre Censorship, 1961–1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

All theatres had to submit their annual programs and three-to-five-year plans, in which they had to specify the plays they intended to stage and outline the aesthetic and political conceptions of their productions. Time and again they had to justify themselves for particular productions during the rehearsals. Often productions were forbidden and directors and authors were not only criticised but penalised. Artistically the performances were to conform to the doctrine of socialist realism as developed in the Soviet Union by the odd pair of fathers of social realism, Maxim Gorky and Josef Stalin; and productions that failed to meet this standard were criticised as examples for western decadence and formalism.<sup>4</sup>

Politically, authors and theatres were required to produce plays that contributed to the building of a socialist state and presented socialist ideas and heroes as positive role models for their audiences.<sup>5</sup> It is no wonder that for a fairly long time the staging of Greek and Roman tragedies and comedies played a marginal role.<sup>6</sup> Even Bertolt Brecht – after his return from exile in the US – did not begin his work in East Berlin with a production of his adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but with his *Mother Courage*,<sup>7</sup> and the few ancient plays that were produced were exclusively anti-war plays: Aeschylus' *Persae*, Euripides' *Trojan Women*, and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.<sup>8</sup> It fits the picture that there were almost no productions of the 'Greek' plays by Eugene O'Neill, Jean Giraudoux, Jean Anouilh, or Jean-Paul Sartre, which were so highly successful in the West.<sup>9</sup>

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- 4 The first example was the severe criticism of Carl Orff's *Antigona* (Dresden 1950) as 'pure formalism' and 'cultural barbarism'; other key words of the criticism were 'scepticism' and 'pessimism'. Cf. Walter Ulbricht, "Fragen der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Kultur und Kunst" (Rede vor Schriftstellern, Brigaden der sozialistischen Arbeit und Kulturschaffenden in Bitterfeld am 24. April 1958), in *Zur sozialistischen Kulturrevolution: Dokumente 1957–59*, ed. by Marianne Lange (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1960), 455–77, 456f. Ulbricht demanded an affirmative, idealising art, which showed that problems and contradictions were resolved; cf. Hasche, Schölling und Fiebach, *Theater in der DDR*, 55–57; Günter Agde, *Kahlschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965; Studien und Dokumente* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), 128–47 (for Ulbricht's Philippica at the 11th plenary session of the central committee in 1965), and the documents of the formalism-debate in Helmut Kreuzer and Karl-Wilhelm Schmidt, *Dramaturgie in der DDR 1945–1990* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1998), vol. 2, 1970–1990, 41–112.
- 5 The discussion about the role and form of theatre in a future socialist state (after the victory over Nazi-Germany) had already begun in Moscow, where many communists and socialists had fled after 1933, and continued after their return to East Berlin. The goal was the constitution of a "Socialist National Theatre", which had to present German classical drama and contemporary socialist plays; cf. Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen: Studien zum DDR Theater* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2000), 12–18; for the official function(s) of theatre in the GDR cf. Hammerthaler, n.2, 250–255.
- 6 Cf. Christoph Trilse, *Antike und Theater heute* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1979), 65–71.
- 7 11 January 1949; the 'Churer' *Antigone* was seldom performed in the GDR: first production in Greiz (1951); later Eisenach (1951/52) und Gera (1957/58), never in Ostberlin!
- 8 This is also true for new plays with a classical theme. Here we find almost exclusively plays about the home-comer Odysseus; cf. Trilse, *Antike und Theater heute*, 67f. The production of Euripides' *Ion* in Meiningen (1960) is a rare exemption; about this Trilse, *Antike und Theater heute*, 143–47, who also, 130–43, discusses the frequently staged free adaptations of classical tragedies by Matthias Braun – *Troerinnen* (first 1957); *Medea* (first 1958); *Perser* (first 1960); *Elektras Tod* (1970), 130–43.
- 9 The productions of Jean Giraudoux' *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* 1946/47 in Cottbus, or Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* 1947/48 in Leipzig and Erfurt remained exceptions.

This general picture did not change until the sixties.<sup>10</sup> In 1962 the leading theatre of the GDR, *Das deutsche Theater* in Berlin, presented Peter Hacks' adaptation of Aristophanes' *Peace*, directed by Benno Besson, and celebrated one of the greatest successes in its successful history. In no less than twelve theatre seasons *Peace* was shown in more than 250 performances, and road tours spread the fame of the production throughout Germany, Europe, and beyond.<sup>11</sup> The play was put on stage by a large number of theatres in the GDR and inspired other dramatists to adapt Greek and Roman comedy and tragedy for the contemporary stage.

In the following years the number of theatres that took part in the boom grew, the number of performances continued to increase, and, in the eighties, there were even extensive theatre festivals with ancient plays in Stendal<sup>12</sup> and Schwerin.<sup>13</sup> There were some favourites (marked with an asterisk), more or less the usual suspects, one is tempted to say:

Aischylos: *Persians*,\* *Prometheus Bound*;\* *Seven against Thebes* (1969); *Agamemnon* (1982);  
 Sophokles: *Antigone*;\* *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1965); *Electra* 1979, 1980); *Trachiniae* (1989);  
 Euripides: *Trojan Woman*;\* *Medea*;\* *Cyclops* (1981); *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (1982)  
*Helen* (1983); *Bacchae* (1987);  
 Aristophanes: *Lysistrata*;\* *Peace*;\* *Ecclesiazusae* (1975, 1979); *Birds* (1981);  
*Acharnians* (1982); *Knights* (1985); *Ploutos* (1987).

Productions of Roman comedies, such as the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus,<sup>14</sup>

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- 10 Cf. Mara Zöllner, Berlin, "Volksbühne: Die 'Troerinnen' von Matthias Braun," in *Theater der Zeit* 16 June (1961): 63; "Die DDR-Bühnen haben es versäumt, sich die klassische Antike zu erobern."
- 11 Cf. Bernd Seidensticker, "Aristophanes is back! Peter Hacks's Adaptation of *Peace*," in *Aristophanes in Performance*, ed. by Edith Hall and Amanda Wrigley (London: Legenda, 2007), 194–208; Ulrich K. Goldsmith, "Aristophanes in East Germany: Peter Hacks' Adaptation of *Peace*," in: *Hypatia: essays in classics, comparative literature, and philosophy presented to Hazel E. Barnes on her 70. Birthday*, ed. by William M. Calder et al. (Colorado: Colorado Associated Press, 1985), 105–123; Christa Neuweg-Herwig, "Benno Bessons komödiantischer und kritischer Realismus," in *Durch den eisernen Vorhang: Theater im geteilten Deutschland 1945 bis 1990*, ed. by Henning Rischbieter (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag 1999), 105–116; Frank Stucke, *Die Aristophanes-Bearbeitungen von Peter Hacks* (Berlin: Tenea, 2002).
- 12 For the first three of the theatre festivals in Stendal cf. Volker Riedel, "Theaterfest Antike I–III," *Weimarer Beiträge* 31 (1985), 268–71.
- 13 In 1982 Christoph Schroth presented four plays (under the title "Antike-Entdeckungen"): Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (Friedrich Schiller), Euripides, *Trojan Women* (Jean-Paul Sartre), Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (Gerhard Kelling), and Aristophanes, *Acharnians* (Kurt Bartsch). The four anti-war plays (Schroth: 'a cycle of violence') served as a plea for peace at a time when NATO was deploying Pershing missiles in West Germany; cf. Renate Ullrich, *Schweriner Entdeckungen: Ein Theater im Gespräch* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1986), 118–28.
- 14 In a free adaptation by Joachim Knauth; cf. Trilse, *Antike und Theater heute*, 246–49; already a decade earlier Erika Wilde had used Plautus' comedy for a successful musical libretto (first production Leipzig 1957); the only other plays by Plautus that inspired adaptations were the *Amphitruo* – cf. Peter Hacks, *Amphitruo* (1967/68), Armin Stolper, *Amphitruo* (1967/68) – and the *Mercator*, cf. Egon Günther, *Das gekaufte Mädchen* (Berlin: Henschelverl., Abt. Bühnenvertrieb, 1965).

were the exception; Seneca's tragedies were not played at all. In addition to the plays of the great ancient playwrights, there were a fairly large number of modern plays based on ancient myths and history, which, however, often could not be staged.<sup>15</sup>

For Peter Hacks the adaptation of Aristophanes' *Peace* was 'the beginning of a wonderful friendship' with antiquity, attested by the long series of Greek and Roman plays that he wrote in the following three decades.<sup>16</sup> The other famous dramatist of the GDR, Hack's contemporary Heiner Müller, experimented similarly with ancient plays and subjects,<sup>17</sup> and a number of younger dramatists followed suit: Stefan Schütz,<sup>18</sup> Hartmut Lange,<sup>19</sup> Jochen Berg,<sup>20</sup> and Karl Mickel.<sup>21</sup>

From a later perspective, the 1962 production of Hacks' adaptation of Aristophanes' *Peace* appears to have been the starting-signal for the rich reception of antiquity both in the dramatic literature and on the stages of the GDR.

The astounding breadth and variety of the reception of antiquity, which besides theatre and drama included lyric poetry and prose, as well as music and the visual arts,<sup>22</sup> cannot be explained, however, by a single theatre-event.<sup>23</sup> There were other and stronger stimuli: one of the main reasons was that the

15 Cf. notes 16–21.

16 *Die schöne Helena*, nach Jacques Offenbach (1964), *Amphitryon* (1967), *Prexaspes* (1968), *Omphale* (1971), *Numa* (1971), *Vögel*, frei nach Aristophanes (1973), *Rosie träumt* (1974) – a homage to Hrotsvit von Gandersheim, *Senecas Tod* (1978), *Der Geldgott* (a free adaptation of Aristophanes' *Ploutos*, 1991); cf. Andrea Jäger, *Der Dramatiker Peter Hacks: Vom Produktionsstück zur Klassizität* (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1986); Volker Riedel, "Utopien und Wirklichkeit: Soziale Entwürfe in den Antikestücken von Peter Hacks," *Gymnasium* 109 (2002): 49–68, reprinted in: V.R., "Der Beste der Griechen – Achill das Vieh". Aufsätze und Vorträge zur literarischen Antikerezeption II (Jena: Verlag Dr. Bussert & Stadel, 2002), 195–209, 299–302; Peter Schütze, *Peter Hacks: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik des Dramas* (Kronberg: Scriptor Verlag, 1976); Ronald Weber, *Peter Hacks, Heiner Müller und das antagonistische Drama des Sozialismus*, Deutsche Literatur – Studien und Quellen 20 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

17 *Philoktet* (1958/1964) *Herakles 5* (1966), *König Ödipus* (trans. 1967, using Hölderlin), *Der Horatier* (1968), *Prometheus* (trans. 1969, using an interlineary translation by P. Witzmann), *Zement* – with 'Intermedien': *Prometheus, Herakles, Ödipus und Medea* (1972), *Verkommenes Ufer – Medeamaterial – Landschaft mit Argonauten* (1982), *Perser* (trans. 1992, using an interlineary translation by P. Witzmann). In addition there are three "Tragödien-Szenarien": *Elektratext* (1969), *Medea Spiel* (1974), *Bildbeschreibung* (for a production of Euripides' *Alkestis* by Robert Wilson, 1989) and a number of poems.

18 *Seneca* (1971, unpublished), *Odysseus' Heimkehr* (1979), *Antiope und Theseus* (1979), *Laokoon* (1980), *Iokaste Felsen Meer* (1984), *Orestobsession* (1988); cf. Verena Thimme, *Zwischen Rebellion und Resignation: Das dramatische Frühwerk des DDR-Autors Stefan Schütz* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2008).

19 *Hundsprozeß* (1964), *Herakles* (1967), *Die Ermordung des Aias oder Ein Exkurs über das Holzhacken* (1971), *Staschek oder Das Leben des Ovid* (1973).

20 A tetralogy, consisting of *Niobe*, *Klytaimestra*, *Iphigeneia*, and *Niobe am Sipylos* (between 1975 and 1979), as well as a free translation of Euripides' *Phoenissae* (1980).

21 *Nausikaa* (1963/64), *Halsgericht*, 2. Teil: *Der Angeklagte; Komödie nach der Apologie des Apuleius* (1987).

22 Jürgen Dummer and Bernd Seidensticker, "DDR" in *Der Neue Pauly*, ed. by Hubert Cancik, Helmuth Schneider and Manfred Landfester.

23 Of some importance for the development were the guest performances by the Piraikon theatre under the director Dimitris Rondiris in 1962. His productions of Sophocles' *Elektra* and Euripides' *Medea* (with Aspasia Papathanassiou in the leading roles) made a strong impression.

reception of antiquity allowed authors and artists to evade the aesthetic constraints of “Socialist Realism”, the official artistic concept of the regime from its beginning in 1949 until the end of the GDR.

The evasion or retreat into Greek myth or Roman history could be defended by a reference to the great father figure of GDR literature Bertolt Brecht, who throughout his life worked with ancient history and literature. Or to classical socialist thinkers and writers, such as Marx and Engels, Lenin and Liebknecht, who repeatedly stressed the importance of the Greeks for the development of humanism. Of special importance was Lenin’s fourth thesis on proletarian culture. It proclaimed that “Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture.”

The program that is implied in this thesis was taken up by the leading cultural ideologists of the GDR and developed into the official concept called *Kulturelles Erbe*, “cultural heritage”. At a meeting of the central committee of the communist party Walter Ulbricht proclaimed “that given the decadence of late capitalism it is necessary that we diligently preserve the great tradition of our humanistic heritage for the benefit of our people.”<sup>24</sup>

Ulbricht and his followers in the ministry of culture were, of course, talking about the affirmative socialistic interpretation and utilisation of the literary and artistic achievements of the great periods of our European past. However, it is obvious that – under the wide umbrella of the official cultural (or rather ideological) policy – authors (and theatres) could put the classical tradition to quite different uses.

For the retreat into antiquity did not only offer artistic alternatives but also opened up interesting political possibilities. It could be used as a vehicle of more or less open criticism aimed against political or cultural developments. Socialistic utopias could be sketched as a contrast to the much shabbier reality of the contemporary GDR; the history or the present state of the communist party could be discussed, and one’s own position and situation as an intellectual within the regime could be defined.

In 1902, in his essay “What is to be done”, Lenin stated: “In a country ruled by an autocracy, in which the press is completely shackled, and in a period of intense political reaction in which even the tiniest outgrowth of political discontent and protest is suppressed, the theory of revolutionary Marxism suddenly forces its way into the censored literature, written in *Aesopian language* but understood by the ‘interested.’” It is the paradoxical irony of history that fifty years later many authors in the GDR resorted to Lenin’s tactical concept

24 Cf. Gerhard Zinslerling, *Das klassische Altertum in der sozialistischen Kultur*, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich Schiller Universität Jena 18 April (1969): 6.

of *Aesopian language* (also called *slavish tongue*), and turned it not against the capitalist enemy, but against shortcomings and failures of communism and undesired developments within the GDR.<sup>25</sup>

Theatres had to be cautious, though, since their repertoires and productions, as I outlined at the beginning, were closely monitored by the cultural bureaucracy and by the party. There were many cases in which production was forbidden before the first performance or directly after it, or where the directors were forced to change their conceptions considerably. At the end of this article I will briefly discuss an especially interesting example of this, a production of the *Seven against Thebes* at the *Berlin Ensemble* (the *BE*) in Berlin.

Hacks and Besson in their production of *Peace* made sparing use of allusions to politics, politicians, or censorship, and there are only traces of *Aesopian language*.<sup>26</sup> Hacks at the beginning of the sixties had considerable problems with the mandarins of the department of culture. Twice he had to rewrite his play *Die Sorgen und die Macht* (*The Worries and the Power*).<sup>27</sup> Other plays of his could not be staged or were quickly taken off the program. So the poet had reason to restrain his criticism if he wanted to be staged.<sup>28</sup> At the end of

25 Plays by the German classical authors Goethe and Schiller and others were used in the same way; cf. Wolfgang Engel, "Eine Art von indirektem Siegel," in Michael Raab, *Wolfgang Engel: Regie im Theater* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), 37: "Die DDR Bürger hatten gelernt, zweisprachig miteinander zu leben oder aber eine Sprache zu sprechen und eine andere zu meinen, man könnte das in einem negativen Sinne als die Sklavensprache bezeichnen, die es offensichtlich auch war. Auf diese Weise konnte unter Gleichgesinnten eine Verständigung hervorgerufen werden, mit der man aber nicht aneckte. Anhand eines alten Stückes Machtstrukturen der DDR aufzudecken bzw. die Beschädigung des Individuums durch Machtstrukturen zu erzählen, war bis zur Beendigung der DDR eine vornehme Aufgabe des Theaters, es bildete so eine Art von indirektem Spiegel." Cf. Ernst Schumacher, "DDR-Dramatik und das 11. Plenum," in Günter Agde, *Kahlschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der DDR*, 102f.: "Peter Hacks und Heiner Müller haben es seitdem vorgezogen, ihre Ansichten über die Gesellschaft in Parabeln, in Legenden, in geschichtliche Stoffe einzukleiden. Sie haben sich nicht mehr unmittelbar geäußert. Auf diese Weise entstand auch eine neue 'Sklavensprache' in der Dramatik, und diese Sklavensprache ist von allen Eingeweihten verstanden worden. Gerade die Stücke, die in dieser Richtung etwas geboten haben, waren ja dann die gefragtesten." – There are a number of critics who astonishingly do not believe that the use of ancient plays and topics by Müller, Hacks, and others had anything to do with the problems the poets encountered and with *Aesopian language*; cf. e.g. Jürgen Schröder, in *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Wilfried Barner, ed. (München 2006), 570: "Mit Flucht aus der Gegenwart oder der Suche nach einer <Sklavensprache> hatte dieser Weg nichts zu tun. Wie bei Hacks, Lange und anderen handelte sich zunächst um einen Erbevorgang: analog zur bürgerlichen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts eignete sich nun die Literatur des vierten Standes das antike und klassische Erbe an."

26 Cf. Seidensticker, "Aristophanes is back," 200–203.

27 The problems began with the premiere in 1960 (in Senftenberg) and did not end with the production of an amended version at *Das Deutsche Theater* in 1962, which was severely criticised. Hacks lost his position as author and dramaturge at the *DT*; cf. Hasche, Schölling und Fiebach, *Theater in der DDR*, 45–47, and the material published by the *DT* after the fall of the wall in 1991: "Der Fall die Sorgen und die Macht 1962/63: Dokumente," *Blätter des Deutschen Theaters* 19, 1991, and in Kreuzer und Schmidt, *Dramaturgie*, 259–97; cf. also Rischbieter, *Durch den eisernen Vorhang*, 92.

28 The few satirical remarks about critics and censorship certainly were understood by the audience as his answer to the criticism of his work, and the same holds true for the parabasis: Where the Aristophanic chorus praises the poet's fight against the monster Cleon, Hacks, to evoke his own controversies with the cultural bureaucrats, only had to cut Cleon and generalize the lines into "the eternal battle of art against the mighty, which the artist always loses, but which art always wins."



the first part of the *parabasis* of *Peace* there is an inconspicuous, but significant change. Whereas the Aristophanic chorus asks the jury to honour the poet's poetic and political achievements, i.e. to award him the first prize in the competition, Hacks adds an idea that can be found in many ancient texts from Ibycus to Horace, but not in Aristophanes:

Honour him, you authoritative bald heads,  
and honour yourselves in honouring him.  
...  
Make your changes, by supporting him, eternal.

The bald heads, which Hacks' chorus here addresses, clearly, as the attribute *authoritative* shows, refer to the leading politicians of the regime, whose "changes", i.e. the socialist revolution, Hacks promises to make immortal if his art is not restricted but supported and promoted. Already the ironical mocking of politicians, critics, and censorship are rather general and lacking real bite; and here it appears that Hacks does not use the ancient text to criticise the mighty and their politics. To be sure, the chorus praises the poet who dares to attack the powerful and speaks of the perpetual battle between art and power, but then all it does is asking for acknowledgement and support. Hacks' final goal is not "the perpetual fight against the mighty", but the patronage of the regime. Moreover, Hacks' wish became true; not immediately perhaps, but in the long run. The sensational success of his adaptation of *Peace* certainly contributed to the fact that after all his problems with the cultural bureaucracy Hacks was finally accepted and honoured. Since the seventies he was the most-played contemporary dramatist in the GDR.

Heiner Müller, the most important dramatist of the GDR, was less adaptable – and less successful on the stage. Born in 1923, he began his career in the fifties with realistic plays about social and economic problems in the early GDR. After difficulties with political censorship that increasingly hampered the production of his plays,<sup>29</sup> Müller turned to antiquity. He produced two translations – first of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*<sup>30</sup> for Benno Besson's production in 1967, which was almost as successful as Hacks' adaptation of

29 Cf. below, note 33.

30 *Ödipus, Tyrann*; Müller's text is an adaptation of Hölderlin's translation, but with his own political interpretation of the story; cf. Georg Wiegand, *Zwischen Auftrag und Verrat: Werk und Ästhetik Heiner Müllers* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1984), 131: "Hat der Kommunismus – so fragt Müllers 'Ödipus Tyrann' – der für sich in Anspruch nimmt, das Rätsel der Geschichte gelöst zu haben, in seiner eigenen bisherigen 'realsozialistischen' Geschichte nicht gezeigt, wie stark er immer noch dem rätselhaften, menschenfressenden Prinzip der Sphinx verhaftet ist? Steht die exzessive, triebhafte Gewalt nicht auch am Anfang der mit der Oktoberrevolution angeblich begonnenen neuen Menschheitsepoche? Und ist nicht auch das heutige Theben nur dann zu retten, wenn es sich schonungslos konfrontiert mit diesem seinem Ursprung?" With the self-blinding at the end Oedipus – so Wiegand – represents the intellectual who shirks his political responsibility. For Besson's production of the play cf. Hellmut Flashar, *Inszenierung der Antike: Das griechische Drama auf der Bühne der Neuzeit* (München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2009), 266f.

Aristophanes' *Peace*, and then of Aeschylus' *Prometheus* (in 1969) for a production of the play in Zurich. And he wrote *Philoktet*, his best 'Greek' play, based on Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, followed by a satyr play-like farce about Hercules' cleaning of the stables of Augias, (title: *Herakles 5*)<sup>31</sup> and by a short didactic play in the Brechtian tradition called *Der Horatier* (*The Horation*). The Akmé of Müller's Antikerezeption was in the sixties, but he continued to work with Greek myths until the end of his life in 1995.<sup>32</sup>

I will first look at *Philoktet* and then concentrate on *Der Horatier*, both plays being highly instructive examples for Müller's use of *Aesopian language*. However, before focusing on these two plays, which Müller wrote in the sixties, I want to should look at an early poem by Müller that can be read as a programmatic statement about the necessity of using Aesopian language.

The hexametric text is called *Tales from Homer*<sup>33</sup> and uses a famous episode in the second book of the *Iliad*. There, Thersites attacks Atreus in the general assembly for always taking most of the booty for himself and suggests to the Achaeans that they no longer fight for such a bad leader, but return home. He is then not only sharply criticised by Odysseus, but badly beaten up.<sup>34</sup>

In the first part of the poem Homer is asked by his pupils why he puts the bitter truth about the Trojan war into the mouth of Thersites and then discredits this truth by having Thersites criticised, walloped, and derided:

How is that with this Thersites

You let him say the right words but then with your own words  
You prove him wrong. This seems to be difficult to understand.  
Why did you do it?

31 Müller tried, "verzweifelt und vergeblich," to persuade Benno Besson, to use the play, which was written 1964/65, as a satyr play for his production of *Ödipus, Tyrann* (cf. note 30).

32 Cf. note 17.

33 *Geschichten von Homer – 1 – Häufig redeten und ausgiebig mit dem Homer die / Schüler deutend sein Werk, ihn fragend um richtige Deutung. / Denn es liebte der Alte immer sich neu zu entdecken / Und gepriesen geizte nicht mit Wein und Gebratnem. / Kam die Rede, beim Gastmahl, Fleisch und Wein, auf Thersites / Den Geschmähten, den Schwätzer, der aufstand in der Versammlung / Nutzte klug der Großen Streit um das größere Beutstück / Sprach: Sehet an den Völkerhirten, der seine Schafe / Schert und hinmacht wie immer ein Hirt, und zeigte die blutigen / Leeren Hände der Söldner als leer und blutig den Söldnern. / Da nun fragten die Schüler: Wie ist das mit diesem Thersites / Meister? Du gibst ihm die richtigen Worte, dann gibst du mit eignen / Worten ihm unrecht. Schwierig scheint das uns zu begreifen. / Warum tatst du? Sagte Homer: Zu Gefallen der Fürsten. / Fragen die Schüler: Wozu das? Der Alte: Aus Hunger. Nach Lorbeer? / Auch. Doch schätzt er den gleich hoch wie auf dem Scheitel im Fleischtopf. – 2 – Unter den Schülern, heißt es, sei aber einer gewesen / Klug, ein großer Frager. Jede Antwort befragt er / Noch, zu finden die nicht mehr fragliche. Dieser nun fragte / Sitzend am Fluß mit dem Alten, noch einmal die Frage der andern. / Prüfend ansah der Alte den Jungen und sagte, ihn ansehnd / Heiter: Ein Pfeil ist die Wahrheit, giftig dem eiligen Schützen! / Schon den Bogen spannen ist viel. Der Pfeil bleibt ein Pfeil ja / Birgt wer im Schilf ihn. Die Wahrheit, gekleidet in Lüge, bleibt Wahrheit / Und der Bogen stirbt nicht mit dem Schützen. Sprachs und erhob sich.*

34 Homer, *Ilias* 2.211–277.

And Homer answers: “To be liked by the princes.” And when they ask, why he would have wanted to be liked by the princes, he explains: “From hunger.” And when they still do not quite understand him, he adds that it was not the hunger for laurel, i.e. for glory and fame, but for food that made him do it. The poet cannot write as he pleases, at least if he wants to publish and to eat. Political circumstances and power structure can prevent the open advocacy of the political truth.

Already here the political topicality is obvious, but Müller in the second part of the poem goes one step further; the most intelligent of Homer’s disciples is not satisfied by the answers of his master and repeats the question when the two are alone. And now Müller’s Homer gives a second and more profound justification for not saying openly and directly what he thinks. It is not only that the truth leaves pot and pan empty and that it does not provide any laurel: the truth is dangerous, and already to bend the bow to shoot the arrow of truth is an accomplishment. For “*the arrow is still an arrow if one hides it in the reed*”. Namely, even if the author hides the truth among his lies – as the truth of Thersites is hidden among the lies of the context – it remains a potentially deadly weapon that can be understood and used by others. Müller thus – practising the lesson of his fable in his poem – gives an eminently political comment on the situation of poets, or intellectuals in general, who live and work under a totalitarian regime.

Müller had personally experienced what he was talking about: In 1962, after a heated ideological discussion about his second play, he was expelled from the writers union of the GDR, which meant that he had serious problems in earning his living through writing.<sup>35</sup>

Let us now look at two of Müller’s dramatic texts, which are instructive examples for his use of Aesopian language: first *Philoktet* and then *Der Horatier*.

*Philoktet* is a free adaptation of Sophocles *Philoctetes* (staged in 409).<sup>36</sup> Müller cut the chorus, eliminated fate and the gods (including the *deus ex machina* Heracles), and significantly modified the characters (especially Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, who both are much less appealing than in Sophocles); but for more than three quarters of his play he follows the dramatic action of the Sophoclean tragedy fairly closely. He finally breaks away from

35 In 1961 *Die Umsiedlerin*, a play about the land reform in the GDR, was severely criticized as reactionary, the director B. K. Tragelehn and others who were part of the production were expelled from the party, and Müller was excluded from the Schriftstellerverband; cf. Marianne Streisand, “Chronik einer Ausgrenzung: Der Fall Heiner Müller, Dokumente zur ‘Umsiedlerin’,” *Sinn und Form* 43 (1991) vol. 3; Hasche, Schölling und Fiebach, *Theater*, 43f.; Matthias Braun, *Drama um eine Komödie* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 1996); Reinhard Tschapke, *Heiner Müller*, 1996, 24–27.

36 For detailed comparisons of the two plays cf. Manfred Kraus, “Heiner Müller und die griechische Tragödie: Dargestellt am Beispiel des Philoktet,” *Poetica* 17 (1985): 299–339; Bettina Gruber, *Mythen in den Dramen Heiner Müllers* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1989), 21–33; Eva C. Huller, *Griechisches Theater in Deutschland: Mythos und Tragödie bei Heiner Müller und Botho Strauß* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 46–102.

Sophocles at the moment when Philoctetes gets the bow back from Neoptolemus and is about to kill Odysseus. In the Sophoclean play Neoptolemus stops Philoctetes so that Odysseus can escape. In Müller's version of the story neither Neoptolemus nor Odysseus, who does not run away, but stays and faces Philoctetes, can overcome Philoctetes' burning hatred towards Odysseus and all Greeks, and Neoptolemus, finally, to prevent Philoctetes from killing Odysseus, is forced to kill him. (Stage direction: he picks up the sword and runs it through Philoctetes' back.)

In both plays it looks – for a moment – as if the goal of the action cannot be reached: Sophocles uses a *deus ex machina* to resolve the impasse, as Hercules appears and persuades Philoctetes to go to Troy. Müller dispenses with a divine solution and has Odysseus come up with yet another trick, with the help of which the dead Philoctetes will achieve what the living Philoctetes was supposed to bring about. By lying that the Trojans killed Philoctetes (and from behind), they will be able to trick his men into returning to the battlefield that they abandoned because of their chief's exposure.

The play was published in the prestigious monthly journal *Sinn und Form* (17, 1965, 733–65), and Müller's dramatic rival Hacks was full of praise. However, the official reaction was critical, and the play could not be staged for a long time.<sup>37</sup> In fact, for more than ten years – between 1957 and 1968 – only Müller's translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and of Aeschylus' *Prometheus* were played in the GDR, whereas in the West he was quickly recognized as the most important dramatist of the GDR and was staged regularly. But Müller did not leave the GDR – as his younger colleagues and friends Stefan Schütz and Hartmut Lange – because, as he put it himself, “to live in the GDR meant to live within a material.”<sup>38</sup>

If one reads the analyses by critics and academics in the GDR, it is not evident why Müller had to wait twelve years to see his *Philoktet* performed by a major theatre in the GDR. For the play was taken as an anti-imperialistic anti-war play,<sup>39</sup> and Müller at first played along with this official reading by stating that *Philoktet* was “a parable about events and processes that are only possible in a class society with antagonistic interests” (i.e. not in socialist

37 It was first produced in the West (1968, Residenztheater München); first productions in the GDR: 1974 by a student theatre group, Karl-Marx-Stadt, and 1977 by *Das Deutsche Theater*, Berlin; for the history of production cf. Jan Christoph Hauschild, *Heiner Müller oder Das Prinzip Zweifel: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2001), 253–55.

38 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 3. 9. 1994: “Der Aufenthalt in der DDR war in erster Linie Aufenthalt in einem Material.” In his poem *Ausreisen 2/3/4/5* Müller speaks of his “wütende Liebe zu meinem Land”; there was a joke in the GDR about Müller remaining in the GDR, because the tax return forms were easier to fill out than in the BRD; cf. Tschapke, *Heiner Müller* (Berlin: Morgenbuch, 1996), 39–43.

39 Cf. e.g. Werner Mittenzwei, “Eine alte Fabel neu erzählt: Heiner Müllers ‘Philoktet’,” *Sinn und Form* 17 (1965): 948–56; Trilse, *Antike und Theater heute*, 85–110, 89; Rüdiger Bernhardt, “Antikerezeption im Werk Heiner Müllers,” *Weimarer Beiträge* 22 (1976): 83–122; Wilhelm Girnus, in “Gespräch mit Heiner Müller,” *Sinn und Form* 18 (1966): 42; Girnus refers, however to (anonymous) critics, who believe that *Philoktet* was a decidedly anti-party play.

societies).<sup>40</sup> The real reason, however, for the rejection of the play by the cultural bureaucracy most probably was, that *Philoktet* is much more than an anti-imperialistic anti-war play and that Müller was not – or at least not only – writing about problems in pre-socialist societies, but about past and present problems and aberrations in the world of communism. Critics in the West had immediately read the play as a parable about the power-struggles within the communist party (Rischbieter). The Trojan war was understood as a symbol for the still undecided class struggle (Schulz) or a metaphor for the world revolution (Schivelbusch),<sup>41</sup> in the course of which everybody and everything is instrumentalised and measured by its usefulness for the common goal.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, after the first production of the play Müller openly agreed with this reading: “In my version of the play the battle for Troy is nothing but an image or picture for the socialist revolution in stagnation.” ... In the early sixties one could not write a play about Stalinism; one had to use a kind of model if one wanted to ask the real questions. The people here understand that quite quickly.<sup>43</sup> And in his autobiography Müller revealed a biographical aspect of the play by comparing *Philoktetes*’ situation with his isolation<sup>44</sup> after the political storm about *Die Umsiedlerin*.<sup>45</sup>

*Philoktet* is a complex play, and there is not enough space here to give a detailed introduction to Müller’s explosive political parable. The second text of Müller’s is a similar parable, but shorter and somewhat simpler: *Der Horatier*.

Müller wrote *Der Horatier* (*The Horatian*) in 1968. The play is based on the famous story from Rome’s mythical past, which Livy reports in 1.22–26,

40 Cf. *Sinn und Form* 18, 1966, 43: “Die beiden Interpretationen, die sie anführten, klammern eine Grundvoraussetzung der Geschichte aus, nämlich die Tatsache, daß die Vorgänge, die das Stück beschreibt, nur in Klassengesellschaften mit antagonistischen Widersprüchen möglich sind, zu deren Bedürfnissen Raubkriege gehören. Das ist entscheidend für das Verständnis der Vorgänge. Für uns ist das Vorgeschichte.”

41 Henning Rischbieter, “Ein finsternes Stück. Heiner Müllers ‘Philoktet’”, *Theater heute* 9 (1968): 28–31 (anti-Stalinist critique of the power-struggles in the central committee); Genia Schulz, 71 (analysis of the internal problems of the communist politics); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Sozialistisches Drama nach Brecht* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1974), 125f. (a parable about the totality of contradictions regarding both the communist history and the socialist present).

42 Cf. Schröder in: Barner, *Geschichte*, 570f., who speaks of a “blutige Kostenrechnung der Revolution; das nackte Modell einer Machtpolitik, die alle ihre Mittel mit rücksichtsloser Konsequenz und Rationalität dem Erreichen des Ziels (Eroberung Trojas/Weltrevolution) unterordnet.” Wolfgang Emmerich, “Antike Mythen auf dem Theater der DDR: Geschichte und Poesie, Vernunft und Terror,” in *Dramatik der DDR*, ed. by Ulrich Profitlich (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), 237f. interprets the end as a “victory of instrumental reason.” Cf. also Georg Wieghaus, *Heiner Müller* (München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1981), 62f.; Tschapke, *Heiner Müller*, 28–30.

43 Rotwelsch, 75, 77 (interview with Sylvie Lotringer); in a radio interview in 1978 (shortly after the premiere of the play in the GDR) Müller declared: “Als das Stück geschrieben wurde, so in den Jahren 58–64 ungefähr, war das auch eine Auseinandersetzung mit Problemen und Fehlentwicklungen, die z.B. mit der Person Stalins zusammenhängen”; cf. Horst Laube and Brigitte Landes, “Hat Heiner Müller gelogen?” *Theaterbuch I* (München): 259.

44 Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht, Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Köln 1992), 187: “Danach, von 1961 bis 1963 war ich zwei Jahre tabu, selbst eine Art Insel, und in der Zeit habe ich dann *Philoktet* geschrieben. Das war nur so möglich, ...” Wieghaus, *Heiner Müller* had anticipated this biographical aspect in his interpretation of *Philoktet*; cf. 117 and 127f.

45 Cf. note 34.

and which before Müller had already been used by Aretino, Corneille and by Brecht for his *Lehrstück Die Horatier und die Kuriatier*. Müller turned the story into a short epic text in the tradition of Brecht's didactic plays, the so-called "Lehrstücke."<sup>46</sup>

Whereas Brecht put the fight between the three Horatians and the three Curiatians into the centre of his didactic play about revolutionary cunning, Müller concentrates on the aftermath. He compressed the first four chapters of Livy's report – from the beginning of the war to the victory of the Horatian – into a short exposition, which, while preserving the gist of Livy's narrative, comprises only about a tenth of his text. The killing of the Curiatian is immediately followed by the killing of the sister, which in turn, as in Livy, is followed by the trial of the "*doer of the two different deeds*". Which is to say by a debate over whether "*the Horatian should be honoured as a victor or punished as a murderer*", but the form, result, and function of the trial have little in common with the ancient source.

In the first part of the proceedings the indissoluble antithesis of *merit* and *guilt* leads to a deadlock.<sup>47</sup> However, then the people decide – "*with one voice*" – to distinguish the identity of conqueror and murderer and to give to both what they deserve:

Let each receive his due:  
To the conqueror the laurels,  
To the murderer the sword.<sup>48</sup>

Thus the Horatian is first honoured for the victory over Alba and then put to death for the murder of his sister.

In the second part of the trial the assembly faces the question of how to treat the corpse of the victorious murderer or murderous victor, and again the Romans vote "*with one voice*" to preserve the "*double truth*". The corpse is first honoured by all Romans, but then, despite the pleas of the old father, thrown to the dogs. In answer to the father's appeal not to punish his son beyond death, the dramatic narrator stresses the paradigmatic character of the event and insists that only the radical analysis and documentation of the truth can set an example:

46 The narrative form (the story is told in the third person and in the past tense) creates epic distance; the rhythmical language, the detailed description of gestures and movements of the characters, the composition by scenes and the ample use of direct speech lend the text a distinct dramatic quality.

47 *And the one who bore the laurels said: / His service quits his crime. / And the one who bore the axe said: / His crime undoes his service. / And the one who bore the laurels asked: / Should the victor be punished? / And the one who bore the axe asked: / Should the murderer be honoured? / And the one who bore the laurels said: / If the murderer is punished, / The victor is punished. / And the one who bore the axe said: / If the victor is honoured, / The murderer is honoured. / And the people looked upon him / That had committed the two deeds, one man, undivisible / And were silent.*

48 "*Jedem das Seine. / Dem Sieger den Lorbeer. Dem Mörder das Beil.*"

Longer than Rome shall rule over Alba,  
 Shall his Rome be remembered and the example  
 It gas given or not given,  
 Weighing one against the other in the scales  
 Or cleanly marking service from the crime  
 In what one man, indivisible, had done,  
 Fearing the impure truth or not fearing it.  
 For half an example is no example.  
 What is not taken to its proper end  
 Crawls to nothing.<sup>49</sup>

The short last part of the text develops the question of the preservation of the event for posterity. One of the Romans asks:

What shall we call the Horatian for those after us?<sup>50</sup>

And the people answer, for the third time “*with one voice*”:

He shall be called the victor over Alba.  
 He shall be called the killer of his sister.  
 In one breath both his service and his crime.<sup>51</sup>

The reasoning added in support of the decision shows that Müller is aiming at the preservation of historical truth in words, whether this be through literature, historiography, journalism – or theatre:

For our words must remain pure. Because  
 A sword can be broken, and a man  
 Can also be broken, but words  
 Fall irrevocably into the wheels of the world,  
 Making things known to us or unknown.  
 Deadly to humans is what they cannot understand.<sup>52</sup>

49 “Länger als Rom über Alba herrschen wird / Wird nicht zu vergessen sein Rom und das Beispiel / Das es gegeben hat oder nicht gegeben / Abwägend mit der Waage des Händlers gegen einander / Oder reinlich scheidend Schuld und Verdienst / Des unteilbaren Täters verschiedener Taten / Fürchtend die unreine Wahrheit oder nicht fürchtend / Und das halbe Beispiel ist kein Beispiel / Was nicht getan wird ganz bis zum wirklichen Ende / Kehrt ins Nichts am Zügel der Zeit im Krebsgang.”

50 “Wie soll der Horatier genannt werden der Nachwelt.”

51 “Er soll genannt werden der Sieger über Alba / Er soll genannt werden der Mörder seiner Schwester / Mit einem Atem sein Verdienst und seine Schuld.”

52 “Nämlich die Worte müssen rein bleiben. Denn / Ein Schwert kann zerbrochen werden und ein Mann / Kann auch zerbrochen werden, aber die Worte / Fallen in das Getriebe der Welt uneinholbar / Kennlich machend die Dinge oder unkenntlich. / Tödlich dem Menschen ist das Unkenntliche.”

The epilogue is given to the actors who have narrated the events and now add a closing commentary:

Thus, expecting the enemy, they set – not afraid  
 Of the impure truth – a provisional example  
 Of clean distinction, and didn't hide the rest,  
 That was not resolved in the irresistible change of things.<sup>53</sup>

This conclusion once again underlines the thesis of Müller's paradoxical paradigm. The solution propagated by Müller's Romans is paradigmatic because by the clear distinction of merit and guilt they do not cover up, but uncover the *impure truth*, i.e. the ambivalent truth of political reality in which positive and negative, necessary and unnecessary violence are indivisibly intertwined, both in individuals and in historical processes.

Many critics have felt that the moral of *Der Horatier* to bear and preserve the impure truth of the inseparable mingling of merit and guilt, of necessary and unnecessary violence, is yet another of Müller's contributions to the Stalin-debate of the sixties.<sup>54</sup>

I agree. However, as a later statement by Müller shows, there was a more specific political impulse behind the conception of this text. In his autobiography published in 1992, Müller wrote: "The text was my reaction to Prague. *Der Horatier* could not be staged. There was an attempt by the *Berliner Ensemble* to put it on stage, but it was prohibited by the political secretary in charge. The argument was that the text reflected the Prague-position, the claim to give the power to the intellectuals."<sup>55</sup>

In this sense, the adjective *vorläufig* (*provisional*), used by Müller to limit the validity of the example the Romans tried to set, unveils its true meaning. The text is a presentation of the Czechoslovak 'provisional' attempt to set an example. At the same time, it was Müller's appeal not to suppress the truth about the events in Prague in the necessary debate about the merits and guilt of communist socialism.

No wonder that the production of the text, planned by the *Berliner Ensemble* (*BE*) in Berlin, was forbidden. The play was first produced five years later in Hamburg and had to wait no less than twenty years before it was finally staged in the GDR.

53 "So stellten sie auf, nicht fürchtend die unreine Wahrheit / In Erwartung des Feinds ein vorläufiges Beispiel / Reinlicher Scheidung, nicht verbergend den Rest / Der nicht aufging im unaufhaltbaren Wandel."

54 An open anti-Stalinist play is Hartmut Lange's satirical farce *Der Hundsprozeß* (1964; one year before Lange fled the GDR via Yugoslavia to West Berlin). Lange later (in 1967) added a second play about Stalin, *Herakles*, in which he (as he states in an interlude) introduced Heracles as metaphor for Dshugaschwili: "ein großer Arbeiter," der "hin und wieder an blutigem Wahnsinn erkrankte." Cf. Hartmut Lange, *Der Hundsprozeß, Herakles*, Edition Suhrkamp 262 (Frankfurt 1968).

55 Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, 58f.



My last short example for the use of Aesopian language in the theatre of the GDR is a production of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* at the *Berliner Ensemble*, which also was intended to be understood as a reaction to the events in Czechoslovakia.<sup>56</sup>

The play was chosen for production already in 1967,<sup>57</sup> i.e. sometime before Dubček's attempt to create a "socialism with a human face" and the brutal repression of all hopes. The first version of the play, which the two young directors, Matthias Langhoff and Manfred Karge, had produced on the basis of all available German translations,<sup>58</sup> met with general approval, and the only reason, why the play was not produced in the season of 1967/68, was that the theatre first decided to produce Peter Weiß's *Viet Nam Diskurs*. When Langhoff and Karge started with rehearsals in 1968, however, the so-called Prague spring lent the production much greater topicality. The fraternal conflict of the Aeschylean tragedy had turned into a metaphor for the growing tensions between the two communist 'brother states' and its climax, the invasion of 'big brother' USSR, joined by troops of the Warsaw Pact, which included troops of the GDR. The parallel suggested itself, but the two young directors, Matthias Langhoff and Manfred Karge, added a new ending, which left no doubt about their intention to present the Aeschylean play as a parable for the events in Prague and the conclusions to be drawn by the development. When the messenger, who had brought the news that Eteocles and Polyneices had killed each other, invites the chorus to sing the funeral dirge, a vivid controversial discussion begins about who was responsible for the war and the tragic death of the brothers. It is agreed that both sons of Oedipus are to blame, because Eteocles did not have the right to keep the power and to drive his brother into exile and Polyneices did not have the right to attack his country, and the chorus declares: "So let us bury them and be silent." However, two of the women of the chorus object and criticise their earlier silence:

I remained silent for a long time, and now I am to do the same  
And remain silent, if it happens again,  
the same, the disaster, the one without a name?<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, when the chorus argues that he could not speak up, while the enemy threatened to attack Thebes,<sup>60</sup> another woman asks:

56 I would like to thank Petra Hübner from the archive of the Berliner Ensemble for letting me look at the rich material about the production and for her generous help.

57 In the light of Brecht's lifelong interest in antiquity it is astonishing that *Sieben gegen Theben* was the first Greek tragedy that the *Berliner Ensemble* produced.

58 The text is a quite free adaptation with many cuts, additions, and transpositions of lines; cf the three versions of the text (I 1967; II 1968/ III 1969) in the archive of the *Berliner Ensemble*.

59 *Lange schon schwieg ich und soll dabei bleiben / Um wieder zu schweigen, wenn wieder geschehe / Das Gleiche, das Unheil, das ohne Namen?*

60 *So hätt' ich reden sollen, als der Feind / Mit Pferd und Wagen, Eisen und Geschrei / Verwüstung schwor der Stadt und Tod? / War's richtig nicht, zu schweigen?* – The same motif can be found in Müller's *Der Horatier*, where the Romans discuss whether it is the right time to discuss the punishment of the Horatian in the face of the impending attack of the Etruscans (cf. also note 55).

And before the enemy came?  
 Why have I been silent then?  
 Did he not come, because I was silent? And now I am to do it again?<sup>61</sup>

And the chorus concedes its failure:

Now I realise – shamefully – my own guilt.  
 The lie turned into truth; I accepted it silently.  
 And by my silence, I nurtured the unlawful rule  
 Until my silence turned against myself.<sup>62</sup>

The chorus promises to speak and search for the hidden truth and demand an answer, whatever it may be.

Now, I wish to talk, even if it causes distress,  
 To banish the shadow that hangs over us,  
 To search for the truth that lies buried,  
 To demand the answer, whatever it may be.<sup>63</sup>

The new scene, which Langhoff and Karge substituted for the spurious Aeschylean ending, does not put most of the blame on the attacker Polyneices, as the first version does, where only the dead Eteocles is brought on stage and lamented, whereas Polyneices is cursed.<sup>64</sup> Now both brothers are brought on stage and the chorus, while some of its members want to blame only Polyneices, insist that both are guilty.<sup>65</sup> Of course, already the fact that Polyneices was blamed at all could be understood as criticism of the official position of the GDR, that had participated in the invasion. But the fact that Langhoff and Karge in the second version put much greater emphasis on the equal guilt of Eteocles suggests that their main political concern was not to condemn the Russian aggressor. Their main point is the announcement of the chorus to no longer remain silent, but

61 *Und eh der Feind kam, warum schwieg ich da? / Kam er nicht, weil ich schwieg? Jetzt soll ich's wieder tun.*

62 *Schamvoll entdeck ich die eigene Schuld / Lüge wurde Wahrheit, ich folgte ihr schweigend / Nährte durch Schweigen die rechtlose Herrschaft / Bis daß mein Schweigen sich gegen mich kehrte.*

63 *Reden will ich nun, entsteht auch Bedrängnis, / Den Schatten beschwören, der über uns lastet. / Suchen nach der verschütteten Wahrheit, / Die Antwort verlangen, wie immer sie ausfällt. – It is hardly by chance that this proclamation is similar to the ending of *Der Horatier*. Langhoff and Karge were close friends of Heiner Müller. – The second version then concludes with a request to the chorus that they bury the brothers, before the new power (i.e. the people) takes the helm in the polis: *Das Volk erwartet dich, komm, Tochter Thebens / Der Brauch verlangt, daß du zu Grabe trägst / den toten König, eh die neue Macht / An Bord der Stadt das Steuer nimmt.**

64 Only in the last six lines of the play does the chorus, while praising Eteocles as the saviour of the polis, concede that he was responsible for the attack on his brother: *Ihr, die ihr mit angesehen diesen Mann Eteokles / Wisst, dass wir ihn ehrend betten, ihn, der Thebens Retter war / Wenn er auch den Feind getötet, den er selber uns gebar.*

65 *Beide war'n Könige. Gleich ist die Schuld. / Grausame Rache suchte doch der, / Den grausames Unrecht davontrieb ... Der Streit war verbannt nicht, als er ihn verbannte. / Unrecht schuf Unrecht, wie Schlechtes das Schlechte.*

to raise their voice and ask questions. This request would have been taken by the audience as a call for participation in open political discourse, something unheard of not only in the context of the events in Prague but in general.<sup>66</sup>

No wonder that censors, as soon as they were briefed by informers from within the theatre, intervened, stopped the rehearsals, and forced the directors to cut the new ending<sup>67</sup> and make other smaller changes in the text and the staging. If it had not been for Helene Weigel, Brecht's wife and artistic director of the *Berliner Theater*, the play would not have reached the stage.<sup>68</sup> There were just ten performances, spread over a period of six months, and the 'tamed' third version without the explosive ending Langhoff and Karge had added at the height of the Czechoslovak revolution did not encounter any political objections from party or state authorities. Theatre reviews both in East and in West Germany even criticised the production's lack of political relevance.<sup>69</sup>

However, I must come to an end. The history of the theatre in the GDR shows that, when the theatre is under tight control – artistically and politically – authors and directors will try to undermine censorship with ever new forms of Aesopian language and, if I may say so, Aesopian performances; the audiences will become particularly sensitive to allusions and double meanings. We know of many cases in which the GDR audiences responded with applause to seemingly innocuous sentences or lines because they took them as a hidden comment on a politician or a current political or social problem. Moreover, I remember authors and theatre people who welcomed the new personal freedom after the unification of Germany, but complained that they had lost their wonderfully receptive audience for their manifold forms of Aesopian language.

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66 In the production concept the two directors stated their conviction that theatre in the GDR, like ancient Greek theatre, should discuss political and social issues.

67 Langhoff and Karge returned to the ending of the first version, but this time stayed closer to the Aeschylean original, except for the very last lines. When the chorus has lamented both brothers and decided to bury them both, a spokesman of the city council insists (as in the pseudo-Aeschylean ending) that only Eteocles, the defender of the polis, would be buried, while Polyneices, the enemy would be left unwept and unburied.

68 For the censorship process and the role of Helene Weigel cf. Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 100–107; ead., "Prager Luft at the Berliner Ensemble: The Censorship of *Sieben gegen Theben*, 1968/69," *German Life and Letters* 58 (2005): 41–54.

69 Cf. Bradley, *Prager Luft*, 52f. – In the leaflet for the production Langhoff and Karge tried to explain the political topicality of the *Seven against Thebes* on the basis of an interpretation of the tragedy, which is based on George Thomson's book *Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama*. Thomson understood the battle between Polyneices/Argos and Eteocles/Thebes as a battle between clanship and democracy. The play ends with the victory of polis order over blood bonds and family relations. Langhoff and Karge argue that the play, despite the fact that the socialist revolution is quite different from this change, can stimulate the audience to think about the contemporary 'Epochenumbruch': "Diese Sicht ist für uns, die wir eine ganz andere Revolution durchleben, bedeutsam, da sie uns dazu anregt, unser sozialistisches Bewußtsein zu formieren durch die Erfahrungen, die es aus einer Epochenkonfrontation zwischen damals und heute gewinnt."

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## SUMMARY

### *Ancient Drama and Reception of Antiquity in the Theatre and Drama of the German Democratic Republic (GDR)*

Theatre in the German Democratic Republic was an essential part of the state propaganda machine and was strictly controlled by the cultural bureaucracy and by the party. Until the early sixties, ancient plays were rarely staged. In the sixties, classical Greek drama became officially recognised as part of cultural heritage. Directors free to stage the great classical playwrights selected ancient plays, on one hand, to escape the grim socialist reality, on the other to criticise it using various forms of Aesopian language. Two important dramatists and three examples of plays are presented and discussed: an adaptation of an Aristophanic comedy (Peter Hack's adaptation of Aristophanes' *Peace* at the Deutsche Theater in Berlin in 1962), a play based on a Sophoclean tragedy (Heiner Müller's *Philoktet*, published in 1965, staged only in 1977), and a short didactic play (*Lehrstück*) based on Roman history (Heiner Müller's *Der Horatier*, written in 1968, staged in 1973 in Hamburg in West Germany, and in the GDR only in 1988). At the end there is a brief look at a production of Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* at the BE in 1969.

## POVZETEK

### Antična dramatika in recepcija antike v gledališču in dramatiki Nemške demokratične republike (NDR)

Gledališče je bilo v Nemški demokratični republiki pomemben del državnega propagandnega stroja ter pod strogim nadzorom kulturne birokracije in partije. Do začetka šestdesetih let so bile uprizoritve antičnih dram redke. V šestdesetih letih je klasična grška drama postala uradno priznan del kulturne dediščine. Režiserji so lahko svobodno uprizarjali gledališke klasike in antične drame so po eni strani izbirali zato, da bi se izognili mračni socialistični realnosti, po drugi pa zato, da so to realnost lahko kritizirali z uporabo različnih oblik ezopskega jezika. Članek predstavi in analizira dva pomembna dramatika in tri primere dram: najprej adaptacijo Aristofanove komedije (Petra Hacka in njegovo adaptacijo Aristofanovega *Miru* na odru gledališča Deutsche Theater v Berlinu leta 1962), nato dramo, zasnovano na Sofoklovi tragediji (*Filoktet* Heinerja Müllerja, objavljen leta 1965, uprizorjen šele leta 1977) in slednjič kratko didaktično igro (*Lehrstück*), ki temelji na rimski zgodovini (dramo *Der Horatier* Heinerja Müllerja, napisano leta 1968, uprizorjeno leta 1973 v Hamburgu v Zahodni Nemčiji in šele leta 1988 v NDR). V zadnjem delu obravnava uprizoritev Ajshilove *Sedmerice proti Tebam* v BE leta 1969.



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# In the Realm of Politics, Nonsense, and the Absurd: The Myth of Antigone in West and South Slavic Drama in the Mid-Twentieth Century

Throughout history humans have always felt the need to create myths and legends to explain and interpret human existence. One of the classical mythical figures is ancient Antigone in her torment over whether to obey human or divine law. This myth is one of the most influential myths in European literary history. In the creation of literature based on this myth there have always been different methods and styles of interpretation. Literary scholars always emphasised its philosophical and anthropological dimensions.<sup>1</sup> The first variants of the myth of Antigone are of ancient origin: the play *Antigone* by Sophocles (written around 441 BC) was a model for others throughout cultural and literary history.<sup>2</sup> There are various approaches to the play, but the well-established central theme deals with one question: the heroine Antigone is deeply convinced that she has the right to reject society's infringement on her freedom and to act, to recognise her familial duty, and not to leave her brother's body unburied on the battlefield. She has a personal obligation: she must bury her brother Polyneikes against the law of Creon, who represents the state. In Sophocles' play it is Antigone's stubbornness transmitted into action

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1 Cf. also: Simone Fraisse, *Le mythe d'Antigone* (Paris: A. Colin, 1974); Cesare Molinari, *Storia di Antigone da Sofocle al Living theatre: un mito nel teatro occidentale* (Bari: De Donato, 1977); George Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Elisabeth Frenzel, *Stoffe der Weltliteratur: Ein Lexikon Dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte*, 5. Aufl. (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1976); Herbert Hunger, *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie: Mit Hinweisen auf das Fortwirken antiker Stoffe und Motive ... bis zur Gegenwart* (Vienna: Hollinek, 1953).

2 Antigone was the last of the three Theban plays – chronologically it was the first one. The play departs significantly from the Theban legend (as presented in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*).

that shows her love for her family. Antigone's suicide also destroys Creon's family, so the play ends with tragedy for both parts.<sup>3</sup>

The problem of Antigone always returned in the tragic period of human existence: when the values of humanity were rejected and when the rights of the human being were not respected. We have some plays from the twentieth century that were influenced by Antigone's motif. During the World War I, the German author Walter Hasenclever wrote his *Antigone* (1918).<sup>4</sup> During the World War II, the French existentialist author Jean Anouilh wrote *Antigone*,<sup>5</sup> a play that provoked conflicted reactions of the politicians.<sup>6</sup> *Antigone* was adapted into a modern form. This play also had a particular fate in the socialist "Eastern" cultures: it was very quickly translated and rapidly staged. The play and its performances influenced the cultural atmosphere in the Czech Republic and Slovenia significantly. (Slovene playwright Dominik Smole wrote his *Antigone* under the influence of Anouilh).

After World War II, German playwright Bertolt Brecht published his *Antigone* under the title *Antigone Modell*;<sup>7</sup> it was based on the translation by Friedrich Hölderlin. His focus was on the crisis of war.<sup>8</sup> All three plays made a deep impression on audiences.

We will analyse here a selection of contemporary West and South Slavic dramas (nine) that were inspired by Antigone's myth, with an emphasis on the 1950s and 1960s; we will also explore the complicated question of the growth of mythological drama in East Europe after World War II,<sup>9</sup> using a comparative methodological approach focused on vibrant models of the intertextual dialogue.

At the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, in all three main cultures of Yugoslavia, the wave of mythological dramas was launched by the

3 The translation of the play was also very important for Slavic national literatures and cultures: in the 20th century Sophocles' play was staged five times in the National Theatre (Národní divadlo) in Prague.

4 Walter Hasenclever, *Antigone, Tragödie in 5 Akten*, 2. Aufl. (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1918).

5 Jean Anouilh, *Nouvelles pièces noires: Jézabel, Antigone, Roméo et Jeannette, Médée*, ed. pr. 1946 (Paris: La Table ronde, 1957).

6 For the first time it was performed in the Atelier theatre in Paris in 1944 under the German occupation.

7 The story of two sisters confronted with the body of their dead brother is situated in Berlin in 1945.

8 It was published under the title *Antigone*, based on Sophocles' translation by Hölderlin and adapted for theatre by Brecht. It was performed for the first time in Chur Stadttheater in Switzerland in 1948.

9 Cf. also Alenka Jensterle-Doležal, "Antigona v povojni slovanski dramatik, mit ali politična alegorija?" *Opera Slavica* 6,3 (1996) 20–28; "Mit o Antigoni: metafora ali alegorija; Južnoslovanska dramatika po drugi svetovni vojni" in Halina Mieczkowska and Julian Kornhauser, *Studia slawistyczne* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998), 153–161; "Mit Antygony w dramacie słowiańskim" in *Wielkie tematy kultury w literaturach słowiańskich*, ed. by Anna Paszkiewicz and Łucja Kusiak-Skotnicka, *Slavica Wratislaviensia* 122 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2003), 249–256; *Mit o Antigoni v zahodno- in južnoslovanskih dramatikah sredi 20. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2004), 263.



most famous playwright fascinated by ancient motifs:<sup>10</sup> a Serb, Jovan Hristić, a Croat, Marijan Matković, and the Slovene Dominik Smole.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, another Croat author, Drago Ivanišević, wrote a psychological drama *Ljubav u koroti* (*Love in Mourning*, published in 1955, staged in 1957) based on the motif of Antigone. The plot is based on a love triangle among two sisters, Marta and Marija, and Ognjen, who is Marta's ex-suitor and Marija's current fiancé. The conflict is rooted in the past: Marta is a staunch communist and has a very pragmatic personality; because of her political beliefs she betrayed her brother during the war and Ognjen, her lover, executed him. She feels guilty about that and is mourning her brother. Marija, on the contrary, is presented as a decadent sensualist. A resolution to the psychological conflict and also the moral problem proves impossible.

The Serbian playwright Oto Bihajli-Merin was writing a play, *Nevidljiva kapija* (*The Invisible Gate*), for three years (from 1953 to 1956) and published it in 1957.<sup>12</sup> He depicts the period of World War II in Croatian society and the complex development of the socialist society divided between different political ideas after the war. Antigone's father died in the conflict and Antigone was mourning him during the war and also after it – even though the communist party and her lover Ljubo forbade her from expressing her emotions because her father was on the wrong political side. The realistic presentation of characters and the action turn rapidly into an absurd picture. Here also we observe the dualistic world of romantics and idealists on one side and realists and sensual hedonists (represented by Ismene) on the other. In Serbian culture, Jovan Hristić continued with the series of mythological dramas, using allegory and apocrypha in an artistically perfect form.<sup>13</sup>

Slovene author Dominik Smole wrote *Antigona* in 1959, and in 1960 produced it on an alternative stage called *Oder 57*. In the play he used Sophocles' plot: he follows the main action (the heroine must bury the dead brother), but his ancient world gets modern characteristics. Antigone is not presented on stage, but all the others speak about her actions – she becomes the moral imperative for all the others. The most tragic hero in the play is Kreon: as a ruler, he loses his identity and his humanity, and becomes just a merciless king. The conflict is presented as a struggle between the claims of the conformist little bourgeois world and the power of Antigone's belief in the spiritual world of

10 Marijan Majetić, "Antička drama na zagrebačkih pozornicah" in *Rad Jugoslovenske Akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 5 (1962): 519–533; "Antičke teme u novijoj hrvatskoj drami (1860–1961)," *Književnik* 3.1.23 (1961): 557–569.

11 Some of the Yugoslav critics wrote about a mode of using ancient myths in drama. (Cf. Jože Koruza, "Vprašanje mita kot mode in 'zaščitnega paravana,'" *Primerjalna književnost* 1 (1981): 24–28).

12 Oto Bihajli-Merin, Serbian critic and literary scholar, tried to explain the origins of his play in the essay: "Putovi do moje Antigone," *Književnost* 22.3 (1956): 203–217.

13 In his essay he proclaimed his desire to discover the historical validity of the myth – metaphor. Jovan Hristić, "Antički mit i savremena drama," *Izraz* 5.10.11/12, (1961): 116–128.

ideas and ideals. The characters are “stuck” in existentialist situations.<sup>14</sup> The poetical drama is written in the metaphorical style. The performance was considered an event in the whole of Yugoslav theatre of the time.

Ancient myths and particularly the character of Antigone have long occupied a special place in Polish literature.<sup>15</sup> The Polish author Artur Marya Swinarski wrote the play *Godzina Antygony* (Antigone’s Hour) between years 1948–1949 but published it in 1960 in Paris. He depicts the war in Aragonia in the fall of 1937, where soldiers from various nations fought in the Spanish revolution. It is a pacifist drama using Antigone’s theme of a burial refused to a fallen soldier.

Another Polish playwright, Krystyna Berwińska, wrote *Ocalenie Antygony* [The Saving of Antigone] in 1948 and published it in 1954. In the first act, Antigone wants to bury her dead brother, and in the second, her life is threatened by the revolutionary crowd. The playwright exposes the dark side of the revolution. Still another Polish playwright, Nora Szczepeńska, dedicated the first act of her play *Kucharki* (The Cooks, 1960) to the story of Antigone.<sup>16</sup> The ancient plot cannot be reproduced from the myth any more: *Mała* buried the dead body before Antigone came; tragedy has no place in the banal, modern world. Between the years 1958–1959, Roman Brandstaetter, another Polish dramatist, wrote the play *Cisza* (Silence, published in 1961) as the last part of his mythological tryptic. Because of its predominantly literary character the play was never staged. The dramatic plot is a variation of the old Greek myth. Antigone is an absurd heroine: at first, she is convinced that her action is nonsensical. The chorus persuades her to change her mind. In the second act, she prepares for her death. Death is depicted as a positive category in that world.

In 1962, in Slovakia, Peter Karvaš wrote another variation of Antigone: *Antigona a tí druhý* (Antigone and the Others). The action is presented in a World War II concentration camp. The emphasis in the play is on Antigone’s action: in the world of prisoners the dead comrade Polly must be buried, and the act of the burial is a moral and political obligation for all. The whole presentation has a black and white perspective to it: on one side of P. Karvaš’ world there are the evil Germans, on the other political (communist) and other prisoners who are trapped in the hopeless environment of the concentration camps.

Czech authors also used the myth of Antigone some years after the war.<sup>17</sup>

14 Cf. Marjeta Vasič, *Eksistencializem in literatura* (Ljubljana: Državna založba, 1984), 11–120.

15 Cf. “Z dziejów Antygony w Polsce” in Jerzy Starnawski, Maria Wichowa, Andrzej Obrębski, *Antyk w Polsce* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1992), 24–40. Cf. also Elżbieta Olechowska’s article *Ancient Plays on Stage in the Communist Poland* in the present volume.

16 The other two plays were about Hamlet and Godot.

17 Cf. the collective publication *Antika a česká kultura* (Prague: Academia, 1978); Eva Stehlíková, *Classical Themes in Czech Drama*, *Československá akademie věd, Listy filologické* 1 (1968): 91; Adam Závodský, “Tschechische Dramen auf Antike Motive” in *Antiquitas Graeco-Romana ac tempora nostra*, ed. by Jan Burian and Ladislav Vidman (Prague: Academia, 1968), 553–558.

In 1967 Czech playwright Milan Uhde, influenced by the literary and philosophical movement of the absurd, wrote the play *Děvka z města Théby* (The Whore from the City of Thebes). The play is a pessimistic vision of the modern world before the end of the civilisation. In the conflict, the degenerated, morally corrupt society of an imaginary town of Thebes dominates. It is not possible that an individual changes society; the existence of Antigone the heroine is absurd. She also cannot be saved; the city destroys her morality and idealism.<sup>18</sup>

It was not for the first time in literature that there existed a fashion or trend about how ancient Greek mythology was brought into life and how the playwrights incorporated it in various texts. We know from literary history the importance of the myth of Prometheus for the literature of the romantics. The myth of Orpheus also had its peculiar fate in the texts of fin de siècle literature. Orestes was essential for existentialism – also because of the famous play by J.-P. Sartre. To highlight the absurd position of modern man, the existentialist Albert Camus focused on the myth of Sisyphus (published in 1942, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*).

Playwrights in the West- and South Slavic literatures after World War II, living under the pressure of socialist ideology, liked to incorporate the myth of Antigone in their plays: it occupied a particular place in respective national cultures. The variations and transpositions of the myth reflected different aspects of societies and their problems and mirrored complicated relations between the dramas, their performances, theatres, and culture. The audience could sense the complicated relations between the theatre and society: the playwrights suggested in the plays what was happening in post-war “Eastern” societies. The myth of Antigone was, in the second generation of Slavic dramatists, one of the most frequently used and performed in this area. It is not a coincidence: this myth suggested to the readers and viewers the possibility of political interpretation of the dramatic conflict, which existed already in Sophocles’ version. G. W. Friedrich Hegel understood the conflict between Creon – representing the claim of the state (the law of Zeus) – and Antigone, who represented the claim of the family (reflecting the love between family members and also the law of the underworld gods).<sup>19</sup> He named two typical ancient Greek tragedies: Oedipus and Antigone. He emphasised the moral

18 In the same time as Slavic playwrights exploited the myth in literature, some plays with the myth of Antigone appeared elsewhere in the world. The Haitian writer and playwright Félix Morisseau-Leroy translated and adapted Antigone into Haitian Creole under the title *Antigòn* (1953), rethinking through the performance their religious experience of Vodou. In 1967 Spanish playwright María Zambrano wrote *La tumba de Antígona*, Antigone’s tomb. In 1968 Puerto Rican playwright Luis Rafael Sánchez published *La Pasión según Antígona Pérez*, setting the conflict in the contemporary world. In 1977 Antigone was translated into Papiamentu in Aruba by the director of the play Ms. Burny Every together with Pedro Velázquez and Ramon Todd Dandaré.

19 Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetik I*, 219–309, *Aesthetik II*, 479–581 (Leipzig, 1820–1829); *Religionsphilosophie II*, 96–156 (Leipzig 1928).

dilemma; for him, the suffering of the tragic hero is a means to reconcile opposing moral claims, which are both justified. The heroes – including Antigone – believe in one ethical system and because of that come in conflict with the ethical claims of another. The two claims represent what Hegel regards as essential the ethical claims: Antigone's problem is a question of conscience.

We could find political subtexts and codes almost in every adaptation of the discussed play. On the other hand, the story has its metaphysical dimensions, which could lead to symbolic interpretations of the myth – appropriate to these tremendous historic and social changes.

The second generation of the Slavic playwrights returned to antiquity and myths. Contrary to the first generation, they began to discover their individual style of writing. In their texts we can find all the tendencies of modern drama of the twentieth century, occurring in the Slavic drama of the sixties:<sup>20</sup> the disappearance of the protagonist, a fragmented view of time and place (which meant the fragmentation of the motifs and themes), and, above all, the disappearance of a unique central conflict and dramatic plot. In these plays there is usually no rigorous dramatic plot any more: the playwrights in some way disregard the fundamental need for plot and unity, and also for the consistency of characters. The theatrical language becomes significant in connection with the possible performance and poetics of theatre space. The playwrights also think about the rhetoric of dialogues and the possibility to utilise all the theatrical means of expression.

The plays of “Slavic” Antigone were created in the shadows of the horrifying events of World War II and after it. In the play *Ocalenie Antygony* by K. Berwińska, the descriptions of the imaginary Thebes in a state of war represent extreme images of society under the law of historic change: the plot is grotesque, with allusions to the Polish war situation. The play by A. M. Swinarski takes place in the divided society in revolutionary pre-war Spain. The conflicts in the plays of D. Ivanišević and O. Bihajli Merin are rooted in World War II Yugoslavia. The Slovak P. Karvaš, in the play *Antigona a tí jiní*, was one of the first playwrights to depict the desperate and hopeless atmosphere of concentration camps. The dilemma of *Antigone* of the Slovene author D. Smole (the play was of importance not only to Slovene culture but also to all of Yugoslavia) is the tragedy of brothers deprived of burial: the 10,000 sacrificed victims – the Slovene home guards, the territorial army, killed by the partisans after the war. These were the unacknowledged victims about whom nobody was allowed to speak under the new regime. The playwright focused on the “silenced” history, on the problem of the reinterpretation of history by the victors.

Some Slavic dramatists used the ancient myth as a vehicle to present difficult social problems, to underline political traumas, and also to promote

20 Irena Slawinska, *Współczesna refleksja o teatrze* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979).

actual philosophical ideas; in interpreting the myth they used “Aesopian language.” In 1961 Martin Esslin defined this idiom (already used before by György Lukács)<sup>21</sup> as the language to express the function of the absurd in the socialist states. When he spoke about the spread of the theatre of the Absurd in Eastern Europe, he highlighted the hidden meaning of a political conspiracy for the socialist audience as one of the reasons for its success in the Eastern European cultures:

“It is one of the ironies of the cultural history of our time that, after the thaw had set in Eastern Europe, it was precisely the theatre of Ionesco that provided the model for an extremely vigorous and barbed kind of political theatre in some of the countries concerned.”<sup>22</sup>

The analysis of the myth of Antigone in these plays could only be confirmed and understood by examining the social and historical context of that time. The different versions of the myth of the brave female hero and her action, express the social and political significance of the unburied victims of World War II and immediately after that. The motif of the burial of the body of a brother could become timely in the atmosphere of general awareness of suppressed traumas and neglect of ethics and values in the socialist societies. This is a theme for a society with the history of frustration with such abandoned dead: history in new socialist states was changed and ideologically adapted to the needs of the new system and its rulers. It was possible to speak only about the “ideologically acceptable dead”: the ones who died fighting on the *right* side but not about the others. For more than forty years it was forbidden to speak about those ‘others’. The oppressive grip of the socialist government extended beyond death. It changed only in the 1990s, when people became able to give a symbolic burial to their killed relatives. The interpretation of Antigone allowed for the recognition of truth and catharsis, if only in “the field of imagination”.

In these plays Antigone and Creon merge into one character; in their tragic action both oscillate between family values and the state claims and pressures: between their obligations and their feelings, between love and responsibility to the state and society, between the personal and the public sphere. It was a typical trauma for the intellectuals in Eastern Europe after World War II.

In Central-European plays of that period there was a profound change in the presentation of the two central characters: Antigone and Creon. The brave Antigone with her unconditional action, her life bound to her fatal destiny of death, sealed by cruel fate, is the point of orientation in this myth. The original, strong individuality of Antigone in her modern variations loses her power and her *raison d'être*; her voice disappears among the voices of others. In these dramas she approaches Creon's characteristics; their personalities become similar.

21 And by others, cf. the Introduction to the present volume.

22 Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Penguin, 1970).

Her actions lose their sense and moral power; Antigone does not want to bury Polyneikes anymore. Already in the play of K. Berwińska, Antigone abandons the right to bury her brother. In the play of N. Szczepańska Antigone arrives too late to act, as *Mała* has already buried the body. In the beginning of Brandstaetter's play Antigone does not want to accept her mythical role, because she is convinced of the absurdity of all women's actions: the chorus of girls persuades her to do just the opposite. In the drama of D. Ivanišević, the action of burying has been already accomplished in the past, and, because of that, Antigone remains psychologically unstable and torn to pieces all her life. Antigone in the play of P. Karvaš is not successful in burying the remains because the soil is frozen and too hard to dig. In the play of D. Smole the reality of action is questioned: Antigone is looking for the body throughout the play, but she does so somewhere in the distance, not on stage; we receive mere reports of her attempts. At the end of the play we do not know if she was successful: we could assume that perhaps the page boy took away the reality of her action.

In these Slavic dramas the importance of the character of Creon significantly grows. In the sixties the critics and the philosophers preferred him to Antigone: in 1967 the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka proclaimed Creon the hero of our time.<sup>23</sup> In 1959 the French philosopher Jacques Lacan, in his study *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, suggested that the perspectives of communism do not in any sense differ from the mental horizons of Creon, the leader and head of a communist state; if we were to predict the future, we would say that his functional pragmatism would conquer the whole world.<sup>24</sup>

In the analysed plays Creon sometimes functioned as a symbol for the communist leader, the absolute dictator of the socialist government of the typically bureaucratic state. However, Antigone, too, begins to look like Creon: their figures mingle into one another. Creon in the analysed dramas also has the problem with his role as the antagonist and the opposition to Antigone's idealism. Already in the play of Sophocles the drama of Antigone is also the drama of Creon, and we could also say the same for the later plays inspired by that myth. In the analysed dramas, his role becomes more powerful, and in the political interpretations, Creon becomes a real dictator, which allows no compromise. In the plays of D. Smole and M. Uhde, Creon's humanity is accentuated and his personality underlined, his moral convictions are close to those of Antigone. Creon is morally split between the man and the politician/bureaucrat, between his feelings and his obligations as a ruler.

The scholars also highlighted the philosophical roots of this myth. The German critic Margaret Dietrich discussed in 1961 the myth of Antigone within the circle of the Labdacids, with the myth of Orestes as part of the

23 Jan Patočka, "Ještě jedna Antigona a Antigone ještě jednou", *Divadlo* 18 (1967), 1–6.

24 Jacques Lacan, *Lecture*, I. Hribar, trans. *Nova revija* 51/ 52, Ljubljana 1986, 1999. In English: J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, translated by Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 240–286.

existentialist cycle of myths.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, the Polish critic Jan Kott proclaimed that this myth represents a typical example of a *reductio ad absurdum*.<sup>26</sup> The interpretations of the myth also reflected different ideologies and philosophical movements. In Slovenia the reception of Sophocles' and Smole's *Antigone* reflected the different philosophical movements of the sixties: from existentialists and the absurd movement to interpretations following the philosophy of Heidegger;<sup>27</sup> later reception also exhibits the ideas of Lacan's psychoanalysis, which was very well received by Slovene intellectuals.

In the Central European cultures of that time the existentialist movement enjoyed a powerful influence, still present in the fifties and sixties. Existentialism according to Sartre considers that existence precedes essence; each individual – not a society and a religion – is solely responsible for giving meaning to life, for their actions: people are defined based on how they act. The individuals must fight against the meaningless world that surrounds them – and that is also the meaning of Antigone's behaviour, seen from a modern point of view. Particularly in the dramatic worlds of D. Smole and R. Brandstaetter all characters must decide whether to bury or not to bury Polyneikes' corpse. In the drama of D. Smole, we find in the peaks of action the fatal moments of existentialist decision, which tear the characters to pieces.

In the 1950s the theatre of the absurd spread throughout Europe: there were several productions of plays by Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, in the sixties the plays by Edward Albee. The *absurd* authors describe lonely men in a desolate world. In the play of M. Uhde, the behaviour of Antigone loses its *raison d'être*. In the end, the sensual and degenerated city of Thebes overcame her character, her idealism and her deep motivation.

All analysed plays reflected the classical conflict between moral obligations of the individual and the pressure of the collective. The reward for Antigone's brave act is her death. She became a martyr for society's future well-being and the moral balance: in this sense, she traded her life for bringing moral values back to the world. An individual such as Antigone in these plays has a hard task and difficult goals: she must find sense in her life and her actions and discover her identity between her personal space and the public sphere. The modern Antigone tries to solve the dilemma of her individuality, but the power of her action is dwindling.

On the other hand, in all these plays the role of the collective is strengthened. The picture of the collective force – of society – acquires grotesque characteristics. The city functions as a mirror and an allegory of the whole of society. The historical dimension also brings invigoration. A picture of

25 Margaret Dietrich, *Das moderne Drama: Stromungen, Gestalten, Motive*. 3 ed. (Stuttgart: A. Kröner, 1974), 394.

26 Jan Kott, *Zjádanie bogów, szkice o tragedii greckiej* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986).

27 The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka in his interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone* also derived his ideas from Heidegger (Patočka, op. cit.).

the collective is depicted in bloody, rebellious society in the drama of K. Berwińska, or in the pragmatic, one dimensional and also depressive Thebes of D. Smole. The darkest presentation of the collective model of a society full of suffering is the city of Thebes of M. Uhde, which is sinking in the mire of evil deeds and moral decadence. Antigone loses her force to finish her act of burying the dead body. Even though Creon is on the other side as her enemy, he is also threatened by the citizens of Thebes: in his reactions and deeds he is becoming similar to her. Also, the other characters have minimal possibilities to react and change things, to rebel against the political and social system of Thebes. Antigone in the drama of K. Berwińska is afraid of the demoralised crowd. The people of Thebes conquer, Antigone's solution is not possible anymore, and the crowd persuades her to commit suicide. From that point of view we can see the changing perspective of the dramatist: the first part of the play represents the new variations of the myth and also the drama of the individual, while the second one depicts the drama of the revolution and the conflicted society. Also in the play *Kucharki* of N. Szczepańska the collective of the cooks conquers the situation; they represent the continuation in the world. In the play of A. M. Swinarski, only the collective exists, and, inside the collective, we can recognise just the particular types of people: the soldiers, the actress, etc. The act of burying is a collective action. First the soldiers experience that act, later two religious sisters – fanatics. The problem of belonging to society is the central conflict in the play of D. Ivanišević. Marta is simultaneously Antigone and Creon because she must also decide between two possibilities: either to become a member of the revolutionary party or to show feelings for the dead brother. The conflict between the rational and emotional side of the individual presented ideologically is not solved till the end of the play.

The act of burial becomes a collective act, and it transmits from one person to the other. Not only Antigone but also the other people try to finish the heroic act. In the drama of P. Karvaš the specific people are not so significant; even the little dancer Anti loses her importance. This is because in the ideological view the heroic act of burying is transmitted from one person to another in the group of prisoners in the concentration camp. The dissonance between the individual and the society in the *Antigona* of D. Smole is hugely disproportionate. Creon is the state leader, who installs the order at any price. The imaginary collective raises for all the imperative of burying the enemy brother. Even though all are impressed by Antigone's moral decision, only Anti and the page boy make a stand against them. The act of burial is presented more as a symbolic act than concrete action. Also tragically depicted is the conflict between the individual and the collective in the play of M. Uhde. Antigone – as Creon in the past – is the carrier of ideals; she wants to change the world. In the end, the city of Thebes and its pragmatic philosophy conquers her.

When we analyse the function of the myth in these plays, we find a change in appearance: it is possible to recognise the line between the political



plays with allegorical plots from the fifties and the metaphorical plays from the sixties when ancient motifs become metaphors of modern subjectivity. The Serbian dramatist Jovan Hristić, the author of the Serbian mythological plays of that period, maintained in 1962 that neither Oedipus, Orestes, nor Penelope were real persons, but were just metaphors representing historical values.<sup>28</sup> Polish literary critics wrote about similar tendencies in the Polish mythological drama.<sup>29</sup>

The mythological texts link political allegory with the concretised metaphor of the postwar normality of the East European countries: they oscillate from historical presentation to poetic expression, in which symbolic themes are the metaphors for philosophical thoughts. According to the tendencies of modern drama there are no coherent plots anymore and more or less only the fragments of the ancient story exist. If the mythological narrative is an allegory for the political situation, it represents the problem of losing identity in the modern, collective world, where the old “Cartesian subject” lives under the pressure of the political structure. Antigone in this society also becomes a cultural phenomenon, an archetype for an ethical ideal and a cultural model for a social outsider.

At the beginning of the wave of mythological dramas there was a tendency to write political plays in which the dramatist allegorically presented the political frustration of the society. In the later dramas inspired by Antigone the allusions to political reality were not so clear and not so common. Later in the sixties the authors of mythological drama liked to cultivate metaphor with more general meaning and symbolic, individualistic poetics. The openness of the style and the poetical theatre’s proximity to the philosophical meanings are typical for *Cisza* by R. Brandstaetter, *Antigona* by D. Smole, and *Antygona* by M. Uhde.

The myth of Antigone is still prevalent at the end of the twentieth century. In this time of violence and wars, in this period of manipulation and historical traumas, in this time of postmodernism and new political and historical changes, the myth of Antigone is still a measure for the development of society and a measure for the state of awareness of its civilisation. Still, the question remains as to where the borders of the Creon’s rational pragmatism and his loyalty to the state and society end, and when Antigone’s true love and affection for her nearest relatives begins. Her respect for the dead and her search for the sacred ideas and humanism in what is eternal.

The myth of Antigone in these societies had great importance also for the development of theatre and the evolution of the theatrical world. The myth unveiled the significant connection between the meaning of the myth and its historical interpretations. It represented the changes in culture after World

28 Jovan Hristić, “Antički mit i savremena drama,” *Izraz* 5.10.11.12 (1962): 116–128.

29 Elżbieta Wysocka, “Drogi przez antyk ciąg dalszy,” *Dialog* 11 (1962): 121–121; Cezary Rowiński, “Moda na mity greckie,” *Dialog* 9 (1962): 116–128.

War II, and it depicted new experiences in drama and new literary ideas. It also reflected the development of philosophical thinking and critical approaches.

As we have seen, the transpositions of Antigone have their unique life also in the cultural, not just in the literary life of nations. The myth of Antigone is unexpectedly relevant in the contemporary world and that we can see from the new plays inspired by this myth, which appeared in Slavic drama in the seventies, eighties, and nineties. Playwrights in the historically exposed situations wrote new plays about Antigone, which affirmed a renewal of the old images again.<sup>30</sup>

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30 In 1972, Czech dramatist Vojtěch Trapl wrote a new Antigone – a version of Sophocles (*Ananke*). In 1976 Polish author Helmut Kajzar also wrote his paraphrase of Sophocles' play (*Antygona*) – staged in 1971, published in *Nowy Wyrz* in 1972; for more information about Kajzar, cf. Olechowska's article in this volume. In 1984, Miro Gavran, a Croat author, published another Antigone: *Kreontova Antigona* (The Creon's Antigone). In 1989, the Czech playwright Přemysl Roth wrote *Polygone*. In 1996, Slovene dramatist Dušan Jovanovič wrote a new Antigone (staged in 1996, published 1997) about the Balkan war. In 1992 Polish author Janusz Głowacki published *Antygona w Nowym Yorku*, dealing with the problems of the homeless and immigrants in the American society.

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## SUMMARY

### In the Realm of Politics, Nonsense, and the Absurd: The Myth of Antigone in West and South Slavic Drama in the Mid-Twentieth Century

The myth of Antigone remained relevant in the twentieth century, and new plays inspired by this myth appeared not only in the West but also in Slavonic drama during and after WW2. Oppressed societies, abuses of power, persecution and execution of political and ideological opponents create a fertile ground for a creative return to the Sophoclean tragedy. Some of the new plays have roots in the trauma of WW2, others in post-war Soviet domination. Significantly, these plays attach growing importance to the character of Creon. Among the discussed playwrights are two Serbs, Jovan Hristić and Oto Bihajli-Merin, two Croats, Marijan Matković and Drago Ivanišević, and the Slovene, Dominik Smole; four Poles, Artur Marya Swinarski, Krystyna Berwińska, Nora Szczepeńska, and Roman Brandstaetter; one Slovak, Peter Karvaš, and one Czech, Milan Uhde.

## POVZETEK

### Področje politike, nonsensa in absurd: mit o Antigoni v zahodno- in južnoslovanski dramatiki sredi dvajsetega stoletja

Mit o Antigoni je v dvajsetem stoletju ohranil svoj pomen in nove drame, ki jih je navdihnil, se niso pojavljale samo na Zahodu, temveč tudi v slovanski dramatiki med drugo svetovno vojno in po njej. Družbena represija, oblastna zloraba, preganjanje in pobijanje političnih in ideoloških nasprotnikov – vse to je ustvarilo plodna tla za ustvarjalno vrnitev Sofoklove tragedije. Korenine nekaterih od teh novih dram so segle v travmo druge svetovne vojne, korenine drugih v povojno sovjetsko dominacijo. Pomenljivo je, da v teh dramah vse večji pomen dobiva lik Kreonta. Med obravnavanimi dramatikami sta dva Srba, Jovan Hristić in Oto Bihajli-Merin, dva Hrvata, Marijan Matković in Drago Ivanišević, ter Slovenec Dominik Smole; štirje Poljaki, Artur Marya Swinarski, Krystyna Berwińska, Nora Szczepeńska in Roman Brandstaetter; ter po en Slovak, Peter Karvaš, in en Čeh, Milan Uhde.

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