

Sofia Round Table

Ancient Drama and its Reception: National Cultural Policies

8 June, 2011, University of Sofia

CLASSICAL STUDIES AND ANCIENT DRAMA PRODUCTIONS IN BULGARIA

Between Literalism and Modernization

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ISSUES

- ❖ The dynamics of the cultural interaction between ancient and modern in the Bulgarian productions of ancient tragedy
- ❖ The various means through which it is set up
- ❖ The vacuum – the ancient text remoteness and the immediacy of contemporary performance context
- ❖ The specific tension between literalism and modernization - the very motor for the vibrant intersections between antiquity and modernity

EXAMPLES

❖ 1916 *Oedipus the King* in Stara Zagora directed by
Geo Milev

- experimental and expressionistic means
- the rhythm of expression through speech and movement
- literal translation versus simple and bare set
- the specific rhythm of the Bulgarian folk dance of ratchenitsa and the rhythm of actors' movement and speech

EXAMPLES

❖ 1929 *Medea* at the National Theatre in Sofia directed by Nikolay Massalitinov

- translator's rich, clear, simple and substantial, deep Bulgarian language
- poetic translation versus classical set
- the appropriateness of translation and the impotence of Bulgarian actors to render Euripides' characters
- the immature production

EXAMPLES

❖ 1967 *Oedipus the King* in Russe directed by Jarko Pavlovich

- the context of the cold war and of the renewal of discipline of Classical Studies in Sofia University
- the literal translation and director's vision of Oedipus' character as over emotional, but less tragic and less dramatic
 - semantic translation and communicative acting
- a useful and **conscientious** attempt to rethink and revive an ancient Greek theater's work

EXAMPLES

❖ 1986 *Oedipus in Blagoevgrad* directed by Stavri Karamfilov

- based both on Sophocles' and Seneca's texts
- the context - the beginning of the perestroika and a couple of years before the disintegration of the Soviet-bloc
- the renaissance of the interest in antiquity
- the word “catharsis” - in critical reviews and in director's conception
- the focus on socio-political themes, yet not disregarding Oedipus' existential dilemma

EXAMPLES

❖ 1998 *Medea* on the stage of the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts directed by Nadejda Seykova

- the peculiar hybrid and strongly polarized perceiving of ancient drama staging in Bulgaria
- a somewhat schizophrenic fragmentation of the character of Medea
- the classical set and the original textual implications versus dramas of everyday life drawn out of news items of women who have killed their children

EXAMPLES

❖ 1998 *Antigone* on Sfumato stage (directed by Margarita Mladenova): between ancient, modern and post-modern

- the collaboration between translator, poet and playwright and director – a second instance
- the uncommon among Bulgarian translators practice of interlinear translation as an interim phase in the production
- the broader context of festivity linking ancient and modern theatre staging

EXAMPLES

❖ 2002 *Oedipus the King* on the stage of the National Theatre in Sofia directed by Andreas Pantzis

- the director's preoccupation with the close reading and following of the original text and the idea of truth
- the choice of the actors
- the quest for regional identity provided by the synthesis of Orthodox Church intonations and Bulgarian folklore rhythms

EXAMPLES

❖ 2006 *Medea* directed and played by Diana Dobрева

- post-modern plays and collage
- the inherent insufficiency of ancient dramatic texts for providing expressions of the deeper, patchy anxieties of postmodern men

DRAWING SOME CONCLUSIONS

❖ the first three decades of 20th century

- representation of the external characteristics of antiquity in set and costumes
- much more emotion and pathos than in the original texts

❖ the second half of 20th century

- focus on characters' psychological qualities

❖ from the 1990s

- the meeting of ancient drama texts with modern readings of mythology