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## Ancient drama: a text written for the stage

### *Up close and personal*

This text is personal. It was written for *you* because there is no time to speak to *you* as much as I want to, or as much as I could. By that I do not mean that this is not an attempt towards a 'serious' book. I rather mean that it was not written for people who do not see ancient drama as a personal matter – despite what they profess. But then for whom is this book written? Should it really be in writing? Perhaps not, as the written word is already fixed, frozen right from the beginning. Or perhaps it should be in writing, if we accept that what we see on its pages are not mere signs, letters printed on the paper, but a look a shiver a breath in the late afternoon when the sun has just set but the light is still there and we, you and I, start talking about something that we dare say we love, i.e. the theatre. *This* kind of text has never been written in order to be imprisoned inside a book; on the contrary, its every line is destined to become an encounter or complicity with something able to make us, solitary as we are, capable of pronouncing, at least for as long a performance lasts, the word *us*.

Such an art is uniting and at the same time surpassing us, leading us to a world that can be ours, on the condition that it is no-one's. I will narrate the few things I know about this theatre I have loved, and I know how much *you* love, because these things are not mine or should not remain mine. Memories, ideas and knowledge, all imperfect, like some ancient manuscripts, that one day, mostly due to a fortunate coincidence, come to light, in a desert so waterless and barren that it has managed to preserve them, at least to some extent, but also so defenseless that they emerge dirty, full of holes; the golden rugs of a memory that constitutes our only wealth. I am writing to you a few words about this wealth. About those rugs of light which I will not manage to read in time, nor decipher all their words, nor study their silence and their speech. You can hold those rugs in your hands for me. Lift them in the air. Let the light speak through their holes. Read the play your way.

### *When the body speaks*

When theatre makers attempt at modernizing the ancient dramatic texts in the name of the body, they end up underestimating them; it is the body that speaks through such texts. In the Parodos – the first choral passage – of *Agamemnon* in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the chorus informs us the two sons of Atreus had seen two eagles tearing apart a pregnant female hare. Calchas the seer had interpreted the omen saying that the two birds symbolize the two brothers who would plunder Troy and kill its inhabitants. The pregnancy of the hunted hare, interrupted by

death, is the first body metaphor in a trilogy that is dominated by the body. Agamemnon's and Cassandra's bodies cut to pieces by Clytemnestras' axe and Aegisthus' sword. Thyestes' sons' bodies, slain, cooked and served to their father by Atreus, as Aegisthus, the only survivor, tells us at the end of the play. Clytemnestra's body, who sees a newborn serpent bite her breast in a prophetic dream, as the chorus in *The Choephoroi* informs us. The Gorgon's body, whose head was decapitated by Perseus. The chorus urges Orestes to kill his mother "as if she were the Gorgon". The monstrous bodies of the Eumenides, the Furies, featured in some vases with Gorgon heads and human torso and members.

Clytemnestra's breasts, in the matricide scene of the same play; she will exhibit them to her son right after she has realized she has given birth to a serpent-child who is ready to kill her. From pregnancy and birth to *eros* and death, the body's *pathe* – both in the sense of troubles and of passions – remain dominant in *The Eumenides* while earth serves as a uterus giving birth to pain, madness and death. Athena, the just goddess, will declare in *The Eumenides* that she is *odinon aneletheia*; she was not born amidst the pains of pregnancy. Oedipus' daughter dies in Sophocles' *Antigone*. However, such death is also a birth taking place in the netherworld. As we will see in the fifth choral ode of the play, Iacchus, the Dionysus of the dead, will ascend from the netherworld in order to purify Thebes, saving it from political epidemic. Semele, Dionysus' mother and Zeus's lover, was killed by a thunder, one of Zeus's forms, we are told in *The Bacchae*. Dionysus returns to his birth-place where now stands his mother's grave.

The conditions surrounding Semeles' death/childbirth will be repeated; a thunder will destroy Pentheus' palace. The dismemberment Bacchus suffered at the time of his birth will be repeated; Pentheus' body is torn apart by Agave, his mother. Dionysus convinced him to climb mount Cithaeron in order to spy what he believed to be the sexual orgies of the Bacchae. The body is the dominant metaphor in tragedy; in other words, the tragic *logos* generates metaphors concerning the body of man, the polis and cosmos. Comedy, too, is the domain of the body, i.e. "the body seen from below": male and female genitals, belly and intestines, whatever stinks and shocks, yet maintaining a number of links with ritual and initiation. We live in a time when some may talk rather carelessly about body in relation to art and theatre, fortifying the deep divide between text and performance. Their reasons can be, as we will examine, personal, social, political or economic. Despite all that, ancient dramatic text, this matrix of corporeal or incarnate speech, persists.

Ancient Greek drama still plays a very important part in theatre repertories around the world. We could easily compare its influence to the influence of Shakespearean drama. Moreover, it constitutes one of the main components of Greece's cultural identity. The reasons why we are interested are, however, not

limited to the above. Its importance is not limited to its high aesthetic quality. Ancient drama offers us a lesson of theatrical praxis, yet through its aesthetic message, it also leads to something else. The tragic vision, as well as the way all ancient playwrights – tragic or comic – view the world, refer to crucial aspects of culture and politics. The way ancient dramatists view life enables us to decipher truths concealed under the surface of things, behind the misleading show of life as staged both by those in power and by our own weakness. What these creators communicate to us enables us resist any despotic power's will and the sophists' – of all kinds – arguments. *Eleos* (mercy) and *phobos* (fear) constituted the paths leading to tragic catharsis, yet mercy and fear were teaching courage and humanity. Lament or *commos* as it is technically termed in tragedy, is one of the most important moments in ancient drama, yet lament is not an end in itself. Tears in tragedy as well as laughter in comedy and satirical drama aim at the liberation of the soul. Here lies the basic reason for proposing one more book among so many dealing with this subject. Such vision, that is taking into account the concept of liberation, is absent from numerous representations of ancient drama in Greece and abroad.

This is also occurring in the fields of politics and communication, where such vision is also often absent. A strong tendency of neglecting, avoiding or abandoning what is essential is present in our contemporary world. This is why any effort to delve into ancient drama necessitates a quest for hidden truth behind veils of near-reality.

Ancient drama in this book is viewed using a holistic approach. This kind of approach is based on the confirmation, both by historical documents and dramatic texts, that this is how the ancient *polis* viewed it. Ancient dramatic authors, especially the comic ones, despite the existing differences among genres, envisaged it in this way too. Theatre of various forms existed in many places in Greece as well as in the Greek city-states of Sicily. Tragedy and comedy, however, flourished only in Athens. They were staged as part of the same or similar events. They were written in the same dramatic language – with variations producing either dialogues or choral odes. They were addressed to the same audiences; male citizens, women, metics, slaves and probably Greek speaking *barbaroi*. What's more, comic plays abound in direct or indirect references to the tragedians, while Aristophanes' *Frogs* openly suggest that the fate of tragedy and that of the city-state are one and the same.

The often one-dimensional way ancient comedy is staged in contemporary theatre does not take into account that comic plays touch upon, in their own fashion, the most central social and political issues. Plato was the first to realize, when he incorporated comic elements as central parts of his project of political/social reforms exposed in his *Republic*. The vision of Greek comedy

bequeathed to our world does not consist in humour in a one-dimensional sense, but in laughter employed to denounce lie and evil, while putting forward for consideration what is demanding but necessary. Scholarship has attributed the term *political* to Greek comedy due to the fact that it constantly refers to the *polis* and its basic values: *freedom, democracy*, as well as, if we keep in mind Aristophanes' plays, *peace*.

It is worth adding that, if we move beyond commonplace observations – something that some essays, translations and performances in Greece and abroad have managed to achieve<sup>1</sup>– we are going to realize that comedy does not propose a comical perception of life but rather a whole *cosmos* (universe) combining, as comedies by Shakespeare, Lope de Vega or Moliere do, fear, cruelty and vision under the same comic mask. Referring more specifically to contemporary Greece, which, as we will go into further later on, does not claim any kind of monopoly regarding the interpretation of ancient drama and owes much to international scholarship and theatrical creation, we will highlight an important factor which might inspire Greek initiatives in the fields of research, creation, cultural management and diplomacy:

The whole world has kept referring to ancient drama for centuries. It still does so – in relation to art, philosophy, psychoanalysis and politics. Opera has been created as a post Renaissance equivalent of tragedy. European tragic playwrights Racine and Goethe, were also very good Hellenists. The structure of Hegel's dialectics has been influenced by his dialogue with *Antigone* <sup>2</sup>, Freud has based his psychoanalytic theory on the dialogue with *Oedipus the King* and visual artists, from Renaissance to Picasso and Paul Klee, have been inspired by myth, tragedy and comedy. Such universal and diachronic presence of ancient drama enables us, Greeks, realize that investigating and creatively deploying tragedy, comedy and satirical drama offers a channel of communication with the rest of the world and with creators of other times and places.

Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Moliere, Bhasa and Zeami Motokiyo constitute the foundations of world culture and theatre and anyone has the right to suggest new interpretations of their work. At the same time they are key figures enabling us to access and delve into the cultures in which they lived and created. Accessing the major creators of one's own culture constitutes the first step in a spiritual journey around the world towards universal knowledge. This

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<sup>1</sup> See for example note 37 on the reception of *Lysistrata's* translation by Minos Volanakis and the related essay by Tasos Lignadis. Stagings of Aristophanes: stagings by Karolos Koun and Spyros Evangelatos have produced very remarkable results underlining their dominant comic side. More recent productions have also underlined the nightmarish aspects of comedies such as *The Birds* and *The Assembly of Women*.

<sup>2</sup> See Steiner, George, *Antigones*, London, Yale University Press, 1996.

knowledge enables us better understand our own country and ourselves. Such statement is equally valid for us Greeks. The second part of this text represents

an effort to maintain that despite ancient drama performances stopping around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, a series of aspects of Greek culture, ranging from religion and scholarship to poetry and ritual, have conserved important and fertile elements of Greek drama. What we term here as “The Greek school of ancient drama”, that has emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has based its arguments upon such double heritage – both indigenous and universal. What the creators involved have achieved as well as the difficulties they faced constitute a pool of knowledge enabling contemporary creators to better communicate with themselves and the world.

Among the central characteristics of this school one can trace the answers given to the question of theatrical space, including the decision to return to the ancient theatres where Greek drama had once been staged; or the question of how to speak the dramatic logos; or that of design and semiotics proposed or imposed by theatrical spaces. The main answers, however, were produced by the practical wisdom that several leading actors acquired and textually *incorporated* through their dialogue with ancient dramatic texts. Some of them are still active today. Like the genre of Kabuki in Japan, these actors performing ancient drama would fall into the same category of Intangible Heritage. We live in a world where memories – cultural or others – are stolen from us or falsified. Freedom, democracy and creation are often persecuted instead of being defended and developed. The reader who, being aware of these facts, reads ancient drama, the spectator who watches a performance and the actor who interprets a part on stage gain strength and maturity which, today, are more necessary than ever.

The text that follows presents challenges. Whole libraries have been devoted and leading thinkers and theatre makers have dedicated their lives to the questions it attempts to address in a brief and concrete manner. It does not examine all ancient Greek dramatic texts but concentrates on those presenting the greater challenges and opportunities – and they are numerous. It also tries to identify, in a simple and operational way, the aesthetic and political context, the ideas and the events related to ancient drama. It aims to help the reader, especially the young one, approach the ancient texts while becoming familiar with the basic questions examined by scholars while at the same time contributing to the theatre maker’s efforts – whether he is a director, an actor or contributes to a production in any other way. It is the result of the writer’s work for many years but also of other, far more talented people’s work, who conducted research and/or experimented with ideas on stage, combining theory and practical/creative activity. My dominant argument is based on the affirmation

that the synthesis of those two approaches, theory and praxis, in this field, are not only attainable but also necessary.

### *The triptych of ancient drama*

Tragedy, comedy (Ancient and New) and satirical drama were the three dramatic genres in Greece. Francis Macdonald Cornford has argued that in a more remote period all three genres shared only one and the same ancestor<sup>3</sup>. Thespis had already been recognized as the creator of tragedy, which, according to Aristotle, had developed out of dithyramb, the ritual performed in honor of Dionysus. Thespis – to whom are attributed four tragedies' titles – was the one who performed the decisive action, stepping back from the body of those who were singing the dithyramb and into addressing those who assisted, thus inaugurating the dual structure *actor/audience* of European theatre. The argument that theatre originates from ritual has not only been claimed as regards to Greek theatre but also other classical genres of Chinese and Indian theatre<sup>4</sup>; such kinship comes forth when we consider the ancient dramatic text structure as well as the scenic forms. Furthermore, Greek and Indian Drama share a specific peculiarity: in India not only classical theatre, especially in the case of Bhasa, but also marionette and shadow theatre, draw inspiration for their plots from the two great epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. In Greece, too, *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were such a central source of inspiration that Aeschylus declared that his plays were nothing more than “Homer’ rugs”, while Plato in his *Republic* and Aristotle in his *Poetics* recognized Homer as the father of both tragedy and comedy.

In their developed form, tragedies were usually staged as parts of a trilogy, consisting of three tragedies that narrated parts of one and the same story. As the genre progressed, however, this rule did not apply to every case. The trilogy was followed by a satirical drama by the same playwright, thus forming a tetralogy. Comedy seems to have derived from a rather grotesque genre. Still, it developed into a scenic form combining an incomparably cheeky humor with theatrical craftsmanship, high quality and a deep interest in politics. Easy generalizations concerning all three genres are generally misleading. Tragedy is

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<sup>3</sup> See Macdonald Cornford, Francis, *The Origins of Attic Comedy*, New York, Anchor Books, 1961.

<sup>4</sup> Csapo, Eric and Miller, Margaret *The Origins of Theatre in Ancient Greece and beyond. From Ritual to Drama*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007.

not always “tragic”, in the sense that it doesn’t always have a catastrophic finale, as has been erroneously believed by the German playwrights who produced the plays called *Schicksal Tragödie* (Tragedies of Fate) and is still believed by several other theatre makers and scholars. *The Eumenides* and *The Suppliants* by Aeschylus, *Philoctetes* and, up to a certain point, *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles, *Alcestis*, *Ion* and *Helen* by Euripides share a positive if not happy ending. Furthermore, almost every tragedy, including the ones ending with death and disaster, creates a feeling of liberation and catharsis. Satirical drama, too, was far more important than a piece offering some comic relief after the so-called gloomy tragedies. Judging from Euripides’ *Cyclops*, they contained social and political references of vital importance. Comic elements were not absent from Greek as well as Elizabethan tragedy. In similar fashion, Greek comedy, satirical drama, as well as comedies by Shakespeare, Lope de Vega and Moliere, contained what could nowadays be termed, following Artaud, as *cruelty*.

### *Aristotle’s Poetics and the code of ancient Greek theatre*

Treatises codifying thought and emotion regarding theatre have been produced in various eras and areas of the world. Among them one can find the *Natya Sastra*, a treatise by Bharata which is codifying Indian theatre and dance (around 200 BC-299 AD), *The Transmission of the Flower through (a Mastery of) the Forms* by Zeami (1363-11443) which is codifying Japanese Noh Theatre, the *New Art of Writing Plays in this Time* by Lope de Vega (1609), *The Paradox of the Actor* by Diderot (written between 1773 and 1777) the *Short Organum for the Theatre* by Brecht (1949) and more. The treatise that includes theoretical and practical questions concerning ancient Greek drama, especially tragedy, is Aristotle’s *Poetics*, while several additional elements are contained in his *Rhetoric*<sup>5</sup>. It is probably useful to note that all these texts constitute valuable instruments helping us approach theatre but they are far from offering tools towards the plays’ evaluation. If we just think of prince Hamlet’s instructions to his actors just before the performance of the *Mousetrap*, it is also worth remembering that

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<sup>5</sup> On Aristotle’s *Poetics*, see Ramfos, Stelios, *Mimesis enantion morfis*, Athens, Armos, Part A’1992 and Part B’1993; Sifakis, Gregory, *Aristotle on the Function of Tragic Poetry*, Crete, Crete Univ. Press, 2002. On the theatre studies’ point of view, see Lignadis, Tasos, *To zoon kai to teras*, introduction by Yangos Andreadis (On the self direction of ancient drama), Athens, Herodotos, 1988. On the *Natya Sastra* see Muni, Bharat, *Natya Sastra (with English translations)* translated by Manomohan Ghosh, Calcutta, 1951. On Indian drama, see Byrski, Maria Krzysztof, *Concept of ancient Indian Theatre*, Delhi, Munshiran Manoharlal, 1974 and Ghosal, S.N., *The Inception of Sanskrit Drama*, Calcutta, Book House, 1977. For a comparative study of ancient Greek and Classical Indian Drama with references to Aristotle and Bharata Muni see Gupta, Bharat, *Dramatic Concepts Greek and Indian*, New Delhi, D. K. Printworld (P), 1994. On Chinese Drama see Choung-wen, Shih, *The Golden Age of Chinese Drama*, New Jersey, Princeton Univ. Press, 1976. On Japanese theatre see Takeda, Sharon Sacado, *Miracles & Mischief: Noh and Kyogen Theatre in Japan*, Los Angeles, Agency of Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, 2002. The text of Lope de Vega *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, dating back to 1609, presents a comparison between the norms imposed by Spanish Academia and the ideas emerging from theatrical practice of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*. The essay by Diderot sustaining the control of emotions by the actor has gained a new popularity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century because of the great influence of Bercht’s ideas on *Verfremdungseffekt* translated as the distancing effect/a-effect/alienation effect (see *Short Organum for the Theatre*).

creators such as Euripides, Aristophanes and Shakespeare, express in their plays their own ideas about theatre.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is a treatise dealing at the same time with philosophy and theatre. Although a rapid survey of this work, to which a huge amount of research has been dedicated, is impossible here, we are going to underline a few elements, judged necessary for our discussion. The first one among them regards both philosophy and theatre; it has to do with *mimesis*, on which Aristotle based his definition of tragedy. Continuing the discussion initiated by Plato in his *Republic* and in some of his other dialogues, Aristotle, who was himself the author of some missing tragedies, underlines that *mimesis* is not synonymous to imitation but to creation. It is worth noting that, according to his opinion, text lies at the heart of theatrical creation, while the other elements, such as acting or the visual dimension (*opsis*), have to interpret and in some ways obey the text. It might be constructive to bear in mind the period during which such defense of the texts by the author of the *Poetics* took place. This was the time when the actor was becoming more and more independent from the playwright, outwitting him in popularity, something which, according to the philosopher's opinion, was a sign of the decadence of theatre. Let us remember Lycurgus, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Athenian politician who had managed to convince the people's assembly to vote for the *theorica*, an indemnity for spectators of theatrical festivals. Lycurgus was also the one who established a law, according to which it was prohibited to change dramatic texts, so that the exigencies of the actors could be satisfied. In Aristotle's times, however, the *hypocritae* (actors) had overshadowed the *poietai* (playwrights), and during the following centuries the situation deteriorated: choragic monuments were dedicated not to the playwrights' but to the actors' victories. Such situation reached unprecedented extremities during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and finally led to the dismemberment of classic theatrical texts<sup>6</sup>.

Aristotle's famous statement that tragedy *brings to an end (accomplishes) the purgation (catharsis) of such emotions through pity (or mercy) and fear* has caused a very long series of debates that several times end up being rather misleading. My own interpretation is that such words do not signify that tragedy is deploying the element of fear or that of terror as an end in itself nor, as I have already explained, that its finale should necessarily be "tragic", in the sense of disastrous. Entering a dialogue with fear, rooted in every soul, is rather a tool enabling us to face our own traumas and those of the others so that we can go beyond them reaching catharsis. Aeschylus in his *Eumenides* argues that the right

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<sup>6</sup> Andreadis, Yangos, *The Tragic Mirror, Narration and Theatre in the Time of Crisis, [O Tragikos Kathreftis, Afigisi kai Theatro ton Kairo tis Krisis]*, Athens, Sideris, 2015.



attitude towards fear contributes to democracy's good function. The opinion that, in Greek culture, the right evaluation of fear did not mean yielding to it is corroborated if we consider that the Spartans, the bravest among Greeks, had, according to Pausanias, erected a statue of *Phobos* (Fear). Following Aristotle's view, I believe that, while staging a tragic play, the feeling of fear should not be produced by the visual dimension (*opsis*) but rather by narratives such as the messenger's speech, that mobilize what we can call the spectator's "inner cinema".

Fear, as well as the feeling of *suspense* in cinema, is intensified by the feeling of emotional closeness, implied by the ancient term *philia*. The reason why the philosopher tells us that the *kallistoi* (nicest) *mythoi* (plots) are those dealing with *ta en tais philiais pathe* (family clashes or disputes) is that the most terrible traumas – the ones men have to realize in order to avoid their repetition – are produced, generation after generation, among the members of one and the same family. Let us note that Aristotle's view seems equally valid when it comes to Shakespeare's or Calderon's plays and seems to foretell the core of what psychoanalysis will argue after more than two millenniums. This doesn't seem to be a mere coincidence if we take into account that, in a different context, certainly, *Oedipus the King* has served as a source of inspiration for Freud.

The tragic term *mythos*, central in *Poetics*, usually translated as *plot* in English and *intrigue* in French, needs some clarification. *Mythos* is something more than the extrinsic sequence of events we call plot, which can be repeated almost unaltered in a tragedy and in a comedy, as is the case with Euripides' *Ion* and Menander's *Epitrepontes*. The fact that *mythos* is not only an extrinsic sequence of events is implied by the following statement in *Poetics*: "*Mythos* [is] therefore the origin and the soul of tragedy" (VI.15). *Mythos*, according to Aristotle, is, I believe, close to what we nowadays call *narrative* in the field of cinema. It possesses an affinity with what the philosopher calls *systasis pragmaton*, namely the synthesis of all creative elements of a play.

It therefore does not seem fortuitous that both *mythos* and *systasis* are considered by the author of *Poetics* as the *soul of tragedy*. Let us discuss *mythos* further with the help of a statement concerning the importance attributed to Homer in *Poetics*. According to both Aristotle and Plato, Homer is the father of tragedy. The fact that such opinion is far from being a stereotype is proved by Aristotle's constant appeal to Homer while seeking answers regarding the problem of the unity of myth. Aristotle deploys the example of Homer in order to argue that a well narrated *mythos* should be *aplous* (simple and not heterogeneous and mixed), not concentrating on everything that has happened to a person, for example Ulysses, but on a single subject. This subject should dominate a literary work. An example is *nostos*, Ulysses' return to Ithaca. The

best contemporary playwrights, script writers and novelists comply with this advice.

I will conclude this brief reference to Aristotle's *Poetics* by mentioning three elements of great importance, both for Aristotle's text and for how we perceive theatre today. The first one regards the term *dran* (to *act*, in the sense of *doing* something). From what the blind beggar says to the chorus in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, we can understand that *dran* (to act, to do) and *paschein* (suffering) coexist as almost one and the same thing in human life and action, the second, namely suffering, often being predominant. As Oedipus says to the chorus (266-267):

*epei ta g' erga mou*

*peponthot' esti mallon e dedracota*

*(Because my deeds*

*were rather suffered, not done)*

It is in this sense that we can argue that the acts and the *pathe* (meaning at a time *deeds* but also *passions*) are really one and the same. Following on from what the philosopher says, we must add that there can be no tragedy and very probably no theatre at all – no matter whether feelings and thoughts are represented well or not – that does not originate from *dran*: this inextricable combination of action, feeling and suffering, theatrical action, without which tragedy would be inconceivable.

The second element regards the term *peripeteia* (reversal or inversion of a situation). *Peripeteia* in tragedy occurs when, during theatrical action, the fate of one or more persons changes radically for better or for worse, or, if we use Aristotle's words, when "the change of a situation to its contrary" takes place (XI.1). Such is the case in *Oedipus the King*, as the author informs us, when the messenger arrives from Corinth (924-1185) and, believing he will please Oedipus, tells him that he is not the son of Polybus and Merope, thus leading him unintentionally to the discovery of his true identity. A similar moment can be found in *Antigone*. Teiresias, in his effort to admonish Creon, who has already ordered his people to bury Antigone alive in a cave, tells him "you must know that your fate is balanced on a razor's edge". Indeed, Creon could still bury Polyneices and liberate Antigone. Instead of listening to the seer, the king almost immediately (1140 seq.) offends Zeus and his fate – the fall from happiness to misery is sealed. Such moments, however, are not independent from the rest of the tragic text. On the contrary, they are born with the opening line of a tragic play and they mature through a somehow subterranean process: the change in meaning of a series of important, ambiguous or polyvalent keywords (such as the

words *paides* in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *mania* in *Antigone*) which, through their repetition from one line to the next, are preparing the ground for radical reversals. In other words, *peripeteia* in a play is gradually generated through planned modifications of meaning of several keywords.

The last term we are going to refer to is *anagnorisis* (recognition). Such term denotes either the revelation of a specific person's secret identity to another person, let's say Oreste's identity to Electra or to Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia*, or of an identity unknown to both persons who, through a mutual recognition, finally realize who they really are, as is the case with Creusa and her son in Euripides' *Ion*. It is rather important and theatrically useful to note that the changes produced by such *anagnorisis* were not limited to a sequence of actions and events. They concerned the soul of those who experienced them too and, eventually, their whole understanding of the world. As a result, they constituted part of the political training of citizens, enabling them to peek through the misleading surface of things, to go beyond the world of phenomena, to refuse appearances, like the Danish prince in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* when he declares "nothing in me is seems". In this sense *anagnorisis* leads to a better knowledge of the self, the *psyche* (soul), the city/state or the world.