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THE POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT OF MYTH IN ITS STAGE ADAPTATIONS¹

L'ENGAGEMENT POLITIQUE DU MYTH DANS SES ADAPTATIONS THÉÂTRALES

Les mythes antiques de la culture méditerranéenne deviennent une langue utilisée pour exprimer les angoisses politiques actuelles. Dans le théâtre contemporain mythes sont souvent déconstruits selon au dialogue post-moderne avec la tradition. Cet article est pour analyser deux productions théâtrales du théâtre polonais (*Iphigénie* par Antonina Grzegorzewska, 2008; *Orestie* par Michał Zadara, 2010) qui adaptent le plus politique mythe antique des Atréides, dans le contexte de ses versions littéraires anciennes (*Orestie* d'Eschyle, *Iphigénie en Aulis* d'Euripide). Les questions politiques discutés comprennent menace du terrorisme mondiale, le communisme, les guerres en Irak et en Afghanistan.

Mots-clés: mythe antique, tragédie grecque, postmodernisme, théâtre

1. Introduction

According to Tadashi Suzuki, culture and art are coming to be a powerful tool in the hands of politicians and this observation is distinctively important in theatre:

For any nation, the people and incidents of its past never remain unchanged matters of historical fact. Things that are reinterpreted or modified to suit each political purpose or to justify the actions of a particular group are forever referred to as past historical fact. (...) theatre makes possible a variety of interpretations of past reality, making it a powerful weapon for enabling the individual to participate freely in the creation of history (Suzuki²).

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² 'The Promise of Theatre': <http://www.scot-suzukicompany.com/en/philosophy.php> (accessed 04.10.2016).

The issue of political involvement of a myth is its constant feature, which was generated and developed by the culture of ancient Greece. In that time the term 'political' described all the matters regarding *polis* including religious, moral and constitutional questions (Czerwińska 2011), and this *sensus largus* should be kept in mind while talking about myths. Therefore, a myth that is deeply rooted in the time of its origin or adaptation reflected current historical, socio-political and religious phenomena. Changes occurring within these backgrounds simultaneously affected the method of myth's presentation in literary and theatrical works. Artistic creation of a myth was always conditioned by vivid oscillation within political and social organism of state³. Thus, modifications growing in myth through the years allow one to recognize and understand the evolving historical realities and dynamic nature of literature as well. The analysis of different versions of a myth enables one to identify its various contexts. Doing so, it also becomes possible to realize why myth is going to be not only an object of religious belief, but it correspondingly turns out to be an attractive motif of current discussions and criticism. This process clearly indicates how myth is transformed from the religious to the aesthetic field and becomes a literary motive (di Benedetto 1971)⁴. The condition of myth, in general, is connected with the procedure of trans-codification when a story, even having similar structure, is transmitted in different codes that changes its meaning (Guardini 1987: 25).

Diversity of myths is strictly connected with *krisis* considered in its source Greek meaning indicating: *separating, power of distinguishing, decision, judgment, choice, dispute, issue, event* (Liddell-Scott 1883: 847). Referring all these denotations to the multifaceted heterogeneity of myths in the ancient Greek tragedy, it should be underlined that *krisis* will be considered in this paper as an implementation of a mythical topic firstly by the ancient Greek playwrights and subsequently by the modern theatre directors. Ancient myths from the Mediterranean Culture often become a language used to express current social and political anxieties. In the contemporary theatre, they are frequently deconstructed and subverted according to the postmodern dialogue with tradition while aesthetic changes are accompanied by the ideological modifications. Therefore, within this artistic approach, it is no longer justifiable to talk about 'staging of Greek tragedy', but mainly and more reasonably to analyze 'staging of Greek myth'. Theatre

³ Cf. Guardini (1987: 8) points out: 'Questa analisi permette di arrivare a constatare un'altra caratteristica della letteratura greca: il fatto che essa è strattamneta legata da un lato alla religione e al mito, dall'altro alla vita politica e che, se muta uno di questi elementi, variano anche gli altri'. However, prof. Richard Buxton from University of Bristol rightly observed during the conference discussion that ancient myths more or less oscillate between the space of *oikos* (household, private) and *polis* (political, social, public) and some of them are more associated with *oikos* (like Medea's or Phaedra's myth), some with *polis* (like Atreides' myth).

⁴ Cf. Guardini (1987: 8): 'E' possibile dunque, leggendo le versioni di questo mito, comprendere i mutandi storici, il diversificarsi della funzione dell'intellettuale e della produzione letteraria nei diversi contesti e constatare che il mito, da oggetto di fede, diventa motivo di discussione e desacrazione, di critica o di ironia, spunto puramente estetico per una «poesia bella»'.

productions nowadays are mainly immersed in the poetics of intertextuality and they are often based on more than one cultural text in order to investigate the phenomena included in ancient dramatic version of myths more extensively.

This article aims at recognizing the relationship between modifications made by ancient playwrights and contemporary directors that expose political and aesthetic tendencies considered in *sensu largo* as explained above. The *krisis* then will be recognized in the ideological as well as in the aesthetic sense. The aesthetic *krisis* understood as a selection of appropriate dramaturgical methods and tools is obviously used to express an ideological *krisis*. This crisis position of myth is associated with the method of re-contextualization when a mythical plot or just a mythical character is taken out of its source context and next is re-contextualized being involved in the current political background.

As an exemplification of the above defined idea, two of the most political myths of ancient Greece, namely, the myths of Atreides and Labdacides will be taken under consideration. According to this assumption, three ancient dramas will be analyzed: *Oresteia* by Aeschylus (the trilogy divided into three tragedies: *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, *Eumenides*), *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides and *Antigone* by Sophocles. Consequently, three theatre productions which adapted these myths will be deliberated: *Oresteia* by Michał Zadara, *Iphigenia* by Antonina Grzegorzewska and *Antigone* by Marcin Liber. Making the critical *analogon* between ancient plays and its modern staging, this study tends to emphasize a deep involvement of myths in political concerns beyond all the time or space limits.

2. Myth of Atreides

2.1.1 Ancient tragedy – *Oresteia*

On the basis of the old tradition (Garvie 1986; Neschke 1986) Aeschylus developed the myth of Atreides in his trilogy. He exposed these elements that were useful for his ideological purposes and ignored what was unsuitable. Furthermore, the poet added some new plots to create his own mythological story which perfectly expresses his tragic idea.

In the first two parts of the trilogy the curse imposed on Atreides' family is the dominant motif. As Robert Chodkowski notes, 'Each generation [of this family] has committed a crime as if giving it hereditarily' (1994: 144) and this observation remains in accordance with Aeschylus' statement that:

Tis the deed that is unholy shall have issue, child on child,
Sin on sin, like his begetters; and they shall be as they were.

(Aesch. *Ag.* 759-760)⁵

⁵ All quotations from the Aeschylus' *Oresteia* we provide on the basis of the edition by Murray (1920).

Every crime needs to be revenged and is followed by another avenger and crime. Therefore, Aeschylus, in the first two parts of *Oresteia*, shows how instinctive and bloody desire of vengeance leads to the circle of crime within the family, when wife, Clytemnestra, together with her lover kills her husband, Agamemnon, and consequently they are murdered by her son, Orestes. The son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon is motivated by two reasons: one is the Apollo's order but the most important is his own motivation – he is mainly the avenger of his father's blood and liberator from tyranny of pretenders⁶. History of Orestes' family is then strictly attached to the history of Argos' state and additionally to the history of Athenian state, because the Athenian court of Aeropagus makes a judgment of the Orestes' deed.

The judgment of Orestes, described in the last part of the Aeschylan trilogy, has a great significance to explore political involvement of this myth. The playwright introduces the characters of Erynies⁷, goddesses of vengeance, which represent the old tradition of the revenge's law juxtaposed with the newly constituted law represented by Athena. By that means, Aeschylus creates the etiological myth, which describes the very beginning of a new order, it means, the origin of the law of justice and forgiveness. The excellent dramaturgical effect is achieved by the *agon*, arguments' struggle, performed between Erynies and Athena. The goddesses of revenge point out that:

There are times when Fear is well. [...]

As the heart's inquisitor

Ever must it bide enthroned.

Suffering oft

Teacheth wisdom best to men.

Yet who never in the light

Freely recreates his soul

Be it city or be it man,

Can he reverence Justice still?

⁶ Aesch. *Cho.* 298-305:

Though I trust them not, the dead must yet be done.

For many motives to one end concur:

The God's commands; my great grief for my father:

Besides there is my poverty that galls me:

Then shame that my world-famous countrymen,

Whose glorious valour compassed Troy's destruction,

Should that be subject to a pair of women.

For a woman he is at heart, soon shall he learn.

⁷ Aesch. *Ag.* 1186-1190

This house is ever hunter by a quire

Of hideous concord, for the song is foul.

Lo, drunken with human blood till they wax bold

And insolent, they abide within, a rout,

Hard to expel, of reveling kindred fiends.

Neither uncontrolled, nor yet
 Despot-ridden, such the life
 Thou shouldst praise.
 (Aesch. *Eum.* 516- 527)

Although Athena agrees with Erynies regarding the fear of punishment, she cannot accept their method of bloody revenge. As Kitto has observed:

In this conflict humanity is most deeply concerned: on its outcome depends political and social stability, or its alternatives of anarchy or despotism. The focus point refers to mankind: its solution decides if there will be the political and social balance or, contrarily, the anarchy and despotism. (Kitto 2013: 94) [...] Anarchy and despotism are the extremes that meet – in moral and political violence; for despotism is the violence of the one or the few, anarchy the violence of the many. (Kitto 2013: 93)

Athena finds the solution for the conflict by constitution of the Athenian court of Aeropagus which should be ‘pure from corruption, reverend, quick to wrath’ (Aesch. *Eum.* 704). This court frees Orestes from his guilt and consequently a worship of Erynies, which are changed to the graceful goddess of forgiveness, Eumenides, is constituted (Aesch. *Eum.* 1021–1026).

The version of Atreides’ myth retold by Aeschylus indicates its strong association with the *polis*, underlining political aspect of this myth *sensu stricto*, however it is similarly connected with the private space of *oikos*. The playwright uses the old, well-known myth that was focused on the role of Erynies to describe the process of change from the social structure based on the family (the space of *oikos*) to the society with the dominant role of *polis*. The chain of crimes founded by the family vendetta, typical for the previous period of Greek civilization, is replaced by the social structure based on ethical authority of the Athenian tribunal. Aeschylus thus created the myth in the strong correlation with the current political situation when the significance of Aeropagus is going to be weaker. This myth, then, becomes a paradigm for the society of Athenian *polis* that was marked by crisis.

2.1.2 Staging of the myth – *Oresteia*

Oresteia by Michał Zadara from the National Opera in Warsaw⁸ is a paraphrase of the ancient myth described by Aeschylus. The director has deleted the ancient context and placed the story of Agamemnon’s family in the communist time of the post-war Poland. Tripartite construction of the ancient play is used here to express the evolution of communist regime up to its fall. The first two parts focus

⁸ *Oresteia* by Michał Zadara in the National Opera in Warsaw (premiere 14.03.2010) was formally a production of Iannis Xenakis’ opera *Oresteia*.

on the political struggles that are signed by death and vengeance, and which engage family of the leader. While in the family space (*oikos*) we deal with the homicide of husband and next with matricide, in the political space (*polis*) we can observe the following stages of communist system in Poland. The director clearly indicates the essential rule of the communist system – total dependence between private and public space of life. In this political scheme, ancient *oikos* and *polis* are intrinsically linked to each other; this production, therefore, even in postmodern dress, fully reflects the main idea of the ancient myth.

Agamemnon must die because he is a representative of the National Army which stood against the new regime imposed by Russia after the Second World War. He is killed more as a soldier because of political reasons than as a husband who discovers his wife with a lover. Revenge for his death is taken by his son, Orestes, but it is quite beyond the reason of the vengeance. For the young man it seems to be more important to eliminate a rival, his stepfather (Aegisthus), who is a representative of the cruelest time of communism in Poland and who, after Stalin's death (1953), must give a place for a younger leader who manages a new stage of the regime. This circle of murders has political basis and the director seems to demonstrate his involvement to express interdependencies between family's story and history of the state. The system of communism is particularly predestined to exemplify such interrelations as it was mentioned above. The pure idea of community life assumes mutual exchange of goods and living in deep dependence on state (community) reason. In its degenerated form developed in post-war Poland, communism becomes a totalitarian system. Inscribing ancient myth in such a historical background, the director aspires to show how deeply the politics of that time was connected with the fate of individuals.

Iphigenia's, Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's deaths in the ancient myth are caused by the political and social determinations, and Zadara uses this political potency of the ancient matrix, putting it on the national history. Furthermore, the biography of this opera's composer, Iannis Xenakis, is not without importance. He also had a political experience with communism in Greece and his stochastic music clearly expresses the atmosphere of that time. After the Second World War almost every European country had to re-establish its state order. The time of new reconstruction of state is always signed by chaotic and radical struggles between different political visions. The music by Xenakis with its clipped tones, disturbing changes to the rhythm and voices extended between baritone and falsetto is an excellent audial translation of the source meaning of the ancient myth⁹.

Zadara directs his production in the style developed by Erwin Piscator and it seems obvious for the *mise-en-scène* so deeply involved in the socio-political

⁹ However, the opera by Xenakis is often described as an oratorio because the incidental (stochastic) music can hardly be harmonized with the mythical plot (cf. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/15/arts/music/15xena.html>. accessed 03.12.2014). Nonetheless, we argue that this kind of music and Zadara's staging create suitable *analogon* to the ancient myth.

context. The director creates his scenic vision of ancient myth in accordance with the formal manifesto of Piscator:

In lieu of private themes we had generalisation, in lieu of what was special the typical, in lieu of accident causality. Decorativeness gave way to constructedness, Reason was put on a par with Emotion, while sensuality was replaced by didacticism and fantasy by documentary reality¹⁰.

This, let's say, communist manifesto of the great German theatre director is directed by Zadara on stage. The scenography consists of scaffoldings which indicate a process of reconstruction. The chorus is divided into two groups of workers, men and women, whose gaze is imposed on leaders all the time and who become a real authority. Communism, which privileges a working class, gives these people the illusion of power, but on the other hand, leaders must be very careful because the protest of a working class is always a dangerous social movement. Ancient Agamemnon in Aeschylus' play had the same problem with his soldiers. Actually, he was only a puppet in the hands of the army of thousands¹¹ and he needed to decide to sacrifice his daughter to calm the public mood. Consequently, his death and the death of his wife reflect the ancient instinct of vengeance which, before the established law, was the only possible tool to gain satisfaction.

Contemporary society seems to be still involved in this kind of behaviour managed by the anger and tendency to dominate and to subdue other human being. Forgiveness is still not trendy. This issue relating forgiveness and dialogue above divisions is the most urgent concern of contemporary society and therefore the production by Zadara refers not only to the past, but also to the current social anxieties.

2.2.1 Ancient tragedy – *Iphigenia in Aulis*

It is worth underlining that this problem in ancient Greek literature was expanded by Euripides in *Iphigenia in Aulis*. We can now come back to antiquity to observe another episode of the myth of Atreides, which created an additional aspect of political nature of this myth. Euripides was the most innovative tragic poet of classical period in ancient Greece – the ideological *krisis* in his works was strongly connected with the aesthetic one (Czerwińska 2013). His main novelty refers to the creation of the new female characters, who fight for their reasons with determination compared or even stronger than men. Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, is chronologically placed at the beginning of the myth described

¹⁰ From a speech given on 25th March, 1929, and reproduced in *Schriften 2* p. 50, quoted by Willett (1978: 107).

¹¹ Cf. Eur. *IA* 450 where Agamemnon is described as 'the slave of the mob' (τῶ τ' ὄχλῳ δουλεύομεν).

previously by Aeschylus in *Oresteia*. She is a first victim within Agamemnon's family and she becomes an impulse of the circle of crimes. As a young girl, she paradoxically becomes a paradigm of courage. Giving her life on the altar of the reason of state she obtains 'undying fame' (Eur. *IA* 1605)¹² and becomes a real warrior more than her father, Agamemnon, and her fiancé, Achilles.

The noble self-sacrifice of Iphigenia makes her, as she said, 'the destroyer of Ilium's town and the Phrygians' (Eur. *IA* 1475). Her sacrifice initiates the Trojan War, which becomes the situation of deleted forgiveness and pity. Furthermore, Iphigenia after her death as a human being turns out to be a priestess of Artemis in Tauris, who sacrifices Greek men. Participating in the cruelty of the goddess, she gets a position of an executioner and takes tools of death in her hands accepting the rules of the male violent world. Simultaneously, the great heroes, as Agamemnon and Achilles, are deprived of their heroic features. Euripides clearly shows how a desire of fame and of being a leader wins with the family's and friendship's duties. The identity of Agamemnon in this play is divided into two parts: paternal and royal, and king of Greeks, who cannot decide to be a human being and as a father to protect his child. Despite his own suffering, he wants to get a position compared with god, position of a leader, and therefore he undergoes the pressure of the military mob and sacrifices her daughter to satisfy the army. In his play Euripides highlights that 'Truly the mob is a dire mischief' (Eur. *IA* 1357), and king of Greeks is overcome by 'clamorous cries' (Eur. *IA* 1359) of his army demanding death of his daughter.

2.2.2 Staging of the myth – *Iphigenia in Aulis*

Iphigenia by Antonina Grzegorzewska from the National Theatre in Warsaw¹³ moves the core of Atreides' myth into the context of contemporary terrorism and gender tensions. Agamemnon and Menelaus represent a male world involved in war for power and they are shown as American soldiers in a camp somewhere in the Near East. They are bored and tired and they find the sense of life in the drunken misogynist discussions about the usability of women. Their counterpoint is created by the figures of Achilles and Patroclus, great ancient warriors which are subverted into the homosexual beings proclaiming their pacifism. Renouncing violence, they live on the other side of masculinity than Agamemnon and Menelaus, but they still are on the position of misogynist – in this case considering the uselessness of women. Such a background of differently juxtaposed male figures generates a socio-political context for women.

¹² All quotations from the play by Euripides we provide on the basis of the edition by Coleridge (1891).

¹³ *Iphigenia* by Antonina Grzegorzewska in the National Theatre in Warsaw had its premiere 07.11.2008.

In this production we can recognize three main female characters taken from different myths: Iphigenia, Clytemnestra and Medea. The relationship between mother and daughter is exposed in the manner of a teenage rebellion. Iphigenia is a young girl searching her identity as an adult woman. This liminal position causes exaggeration and quarrels within family and seems to be a social picture of contemporary family. The change is achieved when individual and intimate life of a teenager meets public and political space of authority. It is also a clash between female and male ways of thinking about a world and its principles. Priorities of political space managed by the men are going to be imposed on the individualized space of the women. Decision of Agamemnon, who needs to sacrifice his daughter to enable military expedition to Troy, breaks the world of Iphigenia and Clytemnestra. Father's identity of the Greek king must be covered under the identity of a political leader for whom the right of the state is a priority. The political part of Agamemnon's personality predominates and onstage it is represented by the mythical figure of Artemis. The goddess emerges from the bath of blood and this image is a presage of the king's future death from his wife's hand.

Iphigenia herself feels a pressure of social gaze and a political need to be a tool in political affairs. This figure's ancient source of meaning is changed in the performance together with modification of the previously established world simply divided in two gender spaces. The initiative onstage is taken by the women which represent alternative scenarios for female life involved in the male war for power. Daughter of Agamemnon is surrounded by different female figures, who dialogue with her and try to convince her to their vision of life. One of them is Clytemnestra, her mother, who wants to protect her child and induces daughter to escape her political fate. The other is Medea, a figure included in this production from different myth, who is fully laden with meanings of female power, creative and destructive as well. This procedure of re-contextualization of ancient figures seems to be an ironic gesture of the director, who wants to underscore the idea of blurring limits between male and female ways of thinking and behaving. Ancient Medea acts as a man, and she is regarded as a reflection of a male genius of Jason. Her hybrid nature is emphasized by her male actions of killing blended with her female actions of witchcraft. Her entourage of a witch is an excellent exemplification of a hermaphrodite state of mind, which is free from any kind of gender limitations. Medea convinces Iphigenia to 'take tools of death in her hands' and not to be a tool of death in the world managed by the male *logos*. The attitude of Medea is multiplied by the chorus consisted of Muslim women wearing burqas and explosive belts. This clearly legible scenic sign refers to the military world of Agamemnon and Menelaus and it represents women, who do not take tools of death in their hands as they sing, but who are obviously used as tools of death by contemporary terrorists.

Terror caused by the war for power and domination in ancient world and in the present days is the experience of many societies. In the political struggles

individuals are subjected to the reason of state, and men and women are equally involved in these fights, but the ultimate truth is that women and children are still used as tools of death in suicidal attacks. On the other hand, threat of global terrorism in the Western civilization is used by media as a pretense to create an atmosphere of constant risk and these circumstances cause restrictions of human rights. In such a circle of terror politicians manage and administrate a fear of death, which seems to be the best basis to create stable power.

3. Myth of Labdacides

3.1 Ancient tragedy – *Antigone*

The frightening consequences of war including management of memory that involves decision-making process referring to dead heroes and enemies are considered in the myth of Labdacides' family, as described in Sophocles' *Antigone*. Creon, ambitious king of Thebes, who identifies the state with himself (Chodkowski 2004: 41), in spite of public opinion, administrates the death bodies of warriors. In this process he decides to use the dead body of one brother, Eteocles, as an example of a hero while the dead body of another brother, Polyneices, must be useful to perform a ritual aiming at post-mortem humiliation of the enemy. Creon cannot overcome his own private hatred and replace hostility to pity. He arbitrarily indicates what is good and what is bad and thus he regulates the limits of freedom¹⁴.

His arrogant attitude evokes a resistance of Antigone, of his son Haemon, of his wife Eurydice, and finally of the citizens of Thebes. The violence of this individual using his political power causes a *danse macabre*. In the mythical background we can observe a political distribution of dead bodies of two brothers, in the drama's plot we need to deal with the subsequent deaths of Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice. In his actions Creon subverts the old established rule that dead body should be buried and alive body should not and he creates the chaotic situation of immorality.

¹⁴ Soph. *Ant.* 666-672:

No, whomever the city may appoint,
 that man must be obeyed in matters small and great
 and in matters just and unjust. And I would feel confident that such a man would be a fine ruler
 no less than a good and willing subject,
 and that beneath a hail of spears he would stand his ground where posted,
 a loyal and brave comrade in the battle line.
 But there is no evil worse than disobedience.

All quotations from the tragedy by Sophocles we provide on the basis of the edition by Jebb (1891).

In this play we can also consider the issue of patriotism. In spite of the fact that Creon accuses Antigone of acting against the state, she fairly acts in accordance with the best interests of the state. She behaves according to the religious and moral rules – *thesmoi ton theon* (laws of gods) while the king tries to break the old law and habit to gain his own private fame and power over the people. Apart from the noble attitude of Sophoclean heroine, we should also note her behavior as a young girl who is terrifying in the face of death. The poet subtly emphasizes the intimate tragedy of a woman which is deprived of her life, of marriage and children¹⁵. Her choice has absolutely political nature, and her death is a political gesture performed by a woman acting as a man. Her public resistance places her in the political background of *polis* and is heard by people. Political resistance of an individual against the ruler is always a tragic choice followed by consequences of loss of private life.

3.2. Staging of the myth – *Antigone*

This clash between individual desire of a quiet and intimate moment of death and the political theatre of death is presented in the performance of Sophoclean *Antigone* by Marcin Liber¹⁶. The director takes under discussion several global and local issues concerning the management of memory in society. One of them is the Polish mentality involved in the patriotism of victims and in the cult of dead heroes. The figure of Antigone is put in the context of ‘poetics of graves’ and she represents constantly renewed ritual of public dying, which absolves contemporaneity by focusing on the past.

The next question considered in this production is the American trauma after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq presented in the photo report by Todd Heisler¹⁷. Antigone is here a representation of a woman, who sitting on the mattress by the coffin with her brother’s (Eteocles) dead body is simultaneously a guardian of memory of his second brother’s (Polyneices) dignity. The director using this

¹⁵ Soph. *Ant.* 806-816:

Citizens of my fatherland,
see me setting out
on my last journey,
looking at my last sunlight,
and never again.

No, Hades who lays all to rest

leads me living to Acheron’s shore, though I have not had my due portion of the chant that brings the bride, nor has any hymn been mine for the crowning of marriage.

Instead the lord of Acheron will be my groom.

¹⁶ *Antigone* by Marcin Liber in the New Theatre in Lodz had its premiere 07.04.2013.

¹⁷ Cf. <http://todd-heisler.squarespace.com/final-salute/> (accessed 23.09.2016).

image on stage seems to express this kind of post-memory, which works through emotions and imaginary and which belongs only to individuals, not to the society (Hirsch 2008). Just like Antigone perceives Polyneices as a brother while Creon sees him as a warrior, the woman on the Tod Heisler's picture says goodbye to her husband while the American nation perceives him as a soldier. This clash between public and private memory is the clue in the *mise-en-scène* by Marcin Liber.

Antigone's production by Liber shows a contemporary public theatre immersed in 'the poetics of graves' strongly associated with the necrophiliac historical politics that try to gain a political capital by manipulation with history and memory. Antigone begs for silence over a coffin, for an intimacy of mourning, for an individual memory and for a possibility to forget.

In the context of an escape from the patriotism defined on graves the director shows a young girl, who is frightened at the vision of the cruel death that deprives her of experiences of life, especially of love initiated by the relationship with Haimon. Sophoclean phrase: 'It is my nature to join in love, not hate' (Soph. *Ant.* 418) becomes an answer opposing to the necrophiliac patriotism. The director develops a plot of love between two young people that should constitute the most natural basis of the new patriotic thinking. Love of Antigone and Haimon and their common suicidal death becomes a tragic sign of an opposition to the norm proclaiming the patriotism of victims. They do not want to be the victims of politics, which are used to ideological propaganda, and therefore they decide to commit a suicide, to be killed by their own hand and by their own decision.

The theatre of death over the coffins is manifested by the scenes of lamentation wailed on command. The ancient chorus is here consisted of men in black suits led by a soldier to cry in a standardized way. The power of Creon's authority is based on the fitting an individual into the standards which facilitate the societal and political mechanisms of control. Antigone with her mattress contaminates the theatre of death directed by Creon and his wailed chorus.

As an additional element attached to this scenic images, the director introduces a motif of prisoner's number which was tattooed on the chest and the forearm of Auschwitz's prisoners. This topic taken from the movie directed by Artur Żmijewski *80064* (2005) seems to correlate with the main idea of the production as another symbol of human cruelty and death caused by a man to another man. It significantly directs the performed idea to the background of totalitarianism established by the ancient ruler Creon and by the modern Nazi system. According to the Nazi ideology, the other, not German, nations were treated as a pollution of a new eugenic system. The totalitarian sign of a tattooed number is written by Antigone on the forearm of Ismene, who substantially becomes a mental prisoner of Creon's standards. As Miro Gavran says in his play (Gavran 1983), Ismene more smells of fear than Antigone and therefore she can be alive prisoner, whose opposition will always be limited to words, while Antigone's is performed in actions.

4. Conclusion

An aesthetic technique of meta-theatrical commentaries of stage characters is often used by the contemporary theatre directors. Although it is an aesthetic issue, it becomes close to the ethical and political gesture of *parabasis*, which in ancient Greek tragedy was covered in the song of the chorus and in the speeches of the characters¹⁸, but on the contemporary stage it is going to be a political manifesto. As Tadashi Suzuki observed, art, especially performing art, is the dangerous weapon in the hands of politicians because it has the power to change social thinking. By emotional and mental *katharsis*, theatre deeply engages the audience. The old well-known myths performed onstage enable one to communicate important messages and therefore myths will never be freed from its political, in *sensu largo*, involvement.

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¹⁸ Direct *parabasis* was part of ancient Greek comedy.