

Theatre Reviews

***Hamlet, that Punk.* Dir. Mary Maragoudaki. Vafeio theatre, Athens, Greece.**

Reviewed by *Xenia Georgopoulou**

In May 2015, at the Vafeio theatre, in the centre of Athens, Mary Maragoudaki presented her own version of *Hamlet*, entitled *Hamlet, that Punk*.¹ In her production the director located Shakespeare's "maladjusted"² hero within a punk-rock context, not only in terms of aesthetics, but also regarding Hamlet's similarities with the punk movement. "Punks, like Hamlet, are angry, disgusted, mocking, subversive and to many people dangerous", she argued in the press release of the production.

The set and costumes (both designed by Tassos Sklavounos) seemed in line with the director's view. The play was staged on a bare black stage with several levels (such as a kind of elevated balcony, which was also used in the scenes on the battlements), with minimum props. The only basic prop was apparently a throne, located almost at all times at the front of the main space of the stage, right in the middle. The position of the throne defined the role of the characters in many instances. After his first meeting with the new royal couple Hamlet overturned the throne in rage, whereas Polonius, once he saw it thus overthrown, restored it immediately to its original upright position. When Claudius felt relaxed, Gertrude sat on the throne and he lay at her feet, but when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were announced, the king returned to his throne to receive them, with Gertrude standing by his side.

The costumes were casual urban for the youngsters and more formal for the elders. The informality of the young characters' clothing underlined their free spirit as opposed to the hypocrisy of the court. "A society in decay", Maragoudaki explained, "is the society that wears the mask of prosperity when

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¹ The production was a success, and more performances were booked at the Athinais theatre (October-December 2015).

² This characterization of Hamlet figures in the press release.

injustice and crime triumph. Hamlet is the prince who refuses to sink in his princely privileges, who claims justice, seeks the truth in depth, does not ask for easy solutions and takes responsibility for his actions. In his face some see a reactionary character, others a self-destructive figure, others a fool and others an idol. Albert Camus says: ‘The only way to face a world without freedom is to become so absolutely free, that our very existence constitutes an act of rebellion’, and this is exactly what Hamlet represents”.³

The translation, also by Maragoudaki, was not poetic, and perhaps rather clumsy, but this seemed to be in line with the atmosphere of the production. Furthermore, some changes were made to the original configuration of the characters on the stage: Hamlet’s first soliloquy was uttered in the presence of Horatio; when Polonius gave his pieces of advice, both his children were on stage at the same time; the oath in the Ghost scene was required only from Horatio.

The director opted for a couple of interesting solutions for particular scenes of the play. The way the Ghost scene was presented on stage was rather intriguing: Voices were heard from all around Hamlet, whispering clues about murder, giving a summary of the Ghost’s speech, and underlining his omnipresence. The *Mousetrap* was a movie projected on the floor between the audience and the king. In this way, Hamlet’s evidence of Claudius’s guilt was displayed right before the feet of the spectators, as if they were Danish courtiers watching the play-within-the-play.

The actors communicated successfully the director’s vision. Nikolas Piperas was convincing in the role of Maragoudaki’s “angry, disgusted, mocking, subversive and to many people dangerous” youth, performing all the changes of the prince’s behaviour with ease. At the antipodes of Piperas’s restless Hamlet, Kornilia Kiriaki portrayed Ophelia’s fragility with a calm, though strong in its impact, sensitivity. Nikos Mavroudis as Claudius gave a self-confident as well as slimy usurper, and Manolis Kavidas (who also played the Gravedigger) grasped Polonius’s swiftness and servility. Andreas Andreadis (who also played Rosencrantz) as Horatio was a solid presence next to the prince, and Manolis Vazeos was a robust Laertes.

As for Maragoudaki, who also played Gertrude, she described her view of the queen, an approach that was also evident in her acting: “My own interpretation, which relates to this production only, regards Gertrude as a woman-trophy for the usurping king, a queen that strives to preserve the fake image of welfare and harmony, this attempt of hers leads her to a fatal conflict of

³ “Interview [Q & A] with Mary Maragoudaki” [“Συνέντευξη [Q & A] με τη Μαίρη Μαραγκουδάκη”], *VIP, Sin Radio*, 15-10-2015, accessed 30-10-2016, <http://vip.sinwebradio.com/2015/10/συνεντευξη-qa-με-τη-μαιρη-μαραγκουδακη.html>.

her internal world with the world that surrounds her, and this leads her to a catastrophic deconstruction.”⁴

Despite the vivid spirit of youth (also underscored by the presence of three students of the acting workshop of Studio Melenikou 31, the director’s own art studio), the production remained dark, like Shakespeare’s play itself, and Tassos Sklavounos’s lights design, but also Manos Antoniadis’s original music (also in line with the director’s punk-rock vision) worked well to that effect.

But what about the relevance of *Hamlet* to the Greek financial crisis? In 2011 Stella Mari created a performance called *Hamlet Committed Suicide*,⁵ where excerpts from *Hamlet* were aptly used to illustrate the financial disaster of Greece. Maragoudaki focuses on a different element of a society in crisis: “Hamlet’s Denmark, Shakespeare’s England, the punks’ England, as well as Greece during the crisis are possessed by a tendency towards hypocrisy, an attitude of illusion that all is well and nothing needs to change.”⁶ However, for Maragoudaki *Hamlet* is linked to a more general view of our world: “We live in a world where trivial and petty things overwhelm our interest more and more. As a result, values, important events and human relations are marginalized to such extent that they stop concerning us. Kindness, aesthetics, goodness, the tolerance of difference, passion, love itself become little by little old-fashioned issues within our value system. We adopt rudeness, cynicism, ephemeral relations, and are fatally led to isolation and depression. All these issues are dealt with in the Shakespearean text, and this became my personal motive.”⁷

Once more, *Hamlet* was used “to prove that a play is really timeless, when it speaks with a language of ‘then’ about ‘here and now’”.⁸

⁴ See Sin Radio interview.

⁵ For more on that production see my review “Hamlet in the streets of Athens – and onstage...”, *Multicultural Shakespeare* 8 (23) (2011), pp. 147-149.

⁶ See Sin Radio interview.

⁷ “Mary Maragoudaki speaks to all4fun” [“Η Μαίρη Μαραγκουδάκη μιλάει στο all4fun”], *all4fun*, 22-10-2015, accessed 30-10-2016, <http://www.all4fun.gr/interviews/theater/11665--all4fun.html>.

⁸ From the press release.



Nikolas Piperas as Hamlet and Mary Maragoudaki as Gertrude. Photograph by Thomas Daskalakis



Manolis Kavidas as Polonius and Kornilia Kiriaki as Ophelia. Photograph by Thomas Daskalakis

***Julius Caesar*. Dir. Giorgos Adamantiadis. Synchrono Theatro, Athens, Greece.**

Reviewed by *Nektarios-Georgios Konstantinidis**

Julius Caesar is one of the plays with primary historical tissue, from the decadent Roman period. It is the tragedy of treason as a method of seeking freedom; a play that proves fatal for its characters, who, aiming at the end of tyranny, end up as tyrants, mainly of themselves. And this happens through treason: They betray, but treason torments them and devours them; at first politically, sentimentally and eventually physically, when the group of the conspirators is broken, divided and gone. This process of the characters' self-fashioning as traitors constitutes a painful method for themselves as the inspirers of the conspiracy, but also for its recipients, namely the Roman people and Julius Caesar himself.

Shakespeare handles masterly this method of self-fashioning or identification of the characters. For example, the dialogue between Brutus and Cassius is a masterpiece of ambiguous thought, since freedom as a state desideratum has its own measure, which is soon identified with the lack of freedom of its inspirers. The tyrant here is not Caesar, but Brutus, the complex Cassius, the naively bright Casca and the ambiguous Cinna. Their bet is tyrannical. If treason thrives, as the murder has been executed, the traitors themselves fail, since, by acting against themselves, they annul their deed, in the most definite way, by eliminating each other. It seems that one cannot betray without being betrayed. The more unjust the treason the bloodier the outcome for its inspirers. Thus, while during the building up of treason the reader/spectator risks to be persuaded about the bet of the traitors with the mutual exchange of the arguments, in the end he/she is persuaded definitively about the unfairness against the victim. The press release of the production underlines this ambiguous character of the story: "What is 'honesty' and what 'dishonesty'? What is 'patriotism' and what 'treason'? What is a 'crime' and what a 'political action'?"

The production we saw at the Synchrono Theatro (December 2014 - April 2015) had as its basic virtue the vigour of the young actors, the vehemence and passion, which are effective on stage. In his first work as a director, Giorgos Adamantiadis, who also translated and adapted the text, invested exactly on that, transforming the conspirators into brave hyenas that devour their victim. On the

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almost bare stage, the realism of certain situations was transformed into a commenting means of projecting the inner emotional chain that connects the characters with life, at the level of the theatrical microcosm as well as that of the current reality of the audience, the “here and now”. Giorgos Adamantiadis, with the help of dramatic illusion and in an homeopathic way, succeeded in recreating situations that concern the spectator, whom they stimulate and puzzle. The director’s view is manifested in the press release of the production: “Shakespeare’s classical masterpiece is not simply a political or historical play that depicts the myth of the rise and fall of an empire. Cliques, bribes from the city’s building development, riots, ideological conflict, unholy alliances and intense backroom reciprocation bring to the spectator’s mind the contemporary reality of opacity and corruption that torments every society.”

Romanos Kalokyris as Cassius was tense and violent, like Fotis Lazarou as Brutus, and so was Promitheas Nerattini-Dokimakis as Casca. Coldly self-confident, almost detached, was Giorgos Kapiniaris as Julius Caesar. Interesting acting by Giorgos Adamantiadis (Antony), Lefteris Papacostas (Cinna), Nikos Krikas (Octavius), Dimitris Korakis (Lucius), Urania Fournalou (Calpurnia), Ioanna Mantzari (Portia) and Daphne Kafetzi (a female Soothsayer).

The interactive presence of the clownish acting in the beginning of the production surprised the spectator, whereas the “carnival party” portrayed a naïve, festive people that deserved to breed traitors.

What the production lacked, that the director seemed to promise to cultivate in the future, was a working method, an awareness of the art of acting and of this stage that cannot contain anything unfiltered, especially in the case of poetic theatre. Because a method does not only involve technical requirements for its identification, but also a philosophic thought, a knowledge of history, aesthetic theories, and much more that constitute challenges for the young artists and their confrontation with the classics.

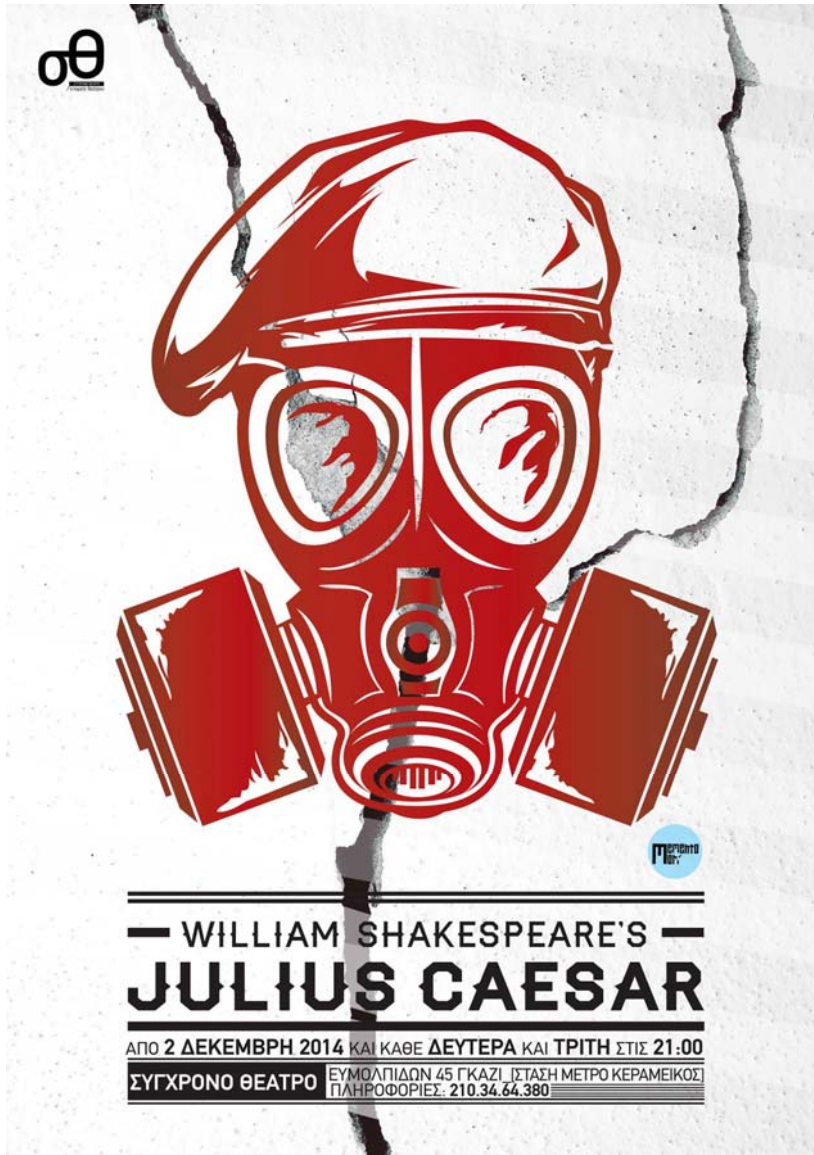
In any case, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* was an apt choice for the Greek stage during this period of severe crisis.



The director Giorgos Adamantiadis as Antony. Photograph by Dimitris Logothetis



The cast. From left to right: Fotis Lazarou, Romanos Kalokiris, Promitheas Nerattini-Dokimakis, Dimitris Korakis, Lefteris Papakostas, Giorgos Adamantiadis, Nikos Krikas, Giorgos Kapiniaris. Photograph by Dimitris Logothetis



The poster of the production