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Shakespearean Histories and Greek History: *Henry V* and *Richard II* at the Greek National Theatre (1941, 1947)

As in most European countries so, too, in Greece the English history plays of Shakespeare have not been popular.¹ Apart from *Richard III*, the only representatives of this genre to appear before a Greek audience and the only instances of an intentional, purposeful appropriation of Shakespeare on the Greek stage are *Henry V* and *Richard II*. Both plays were performed at the National Theatre in Athens during the 1940s, an especially turbulent period in Greek history that includes both a Nazi occupation and a civil war, yet neither play seems to have made a notable impact on the audience. The indifferent response of the Greek audience can only be understood if we locate the performances within their historical context and the political function of the national institution at which they were staged: the National Theatre.

Shakespeare at the National Theatre before the War

From its establishment in 1932, the National Theatre had adopted a classics-oriented repertory with a clear preference for Shakespeare. At least one Shakespeare play, more often a tragedy, was produced yearly, usually at the start of every

¹ *Richard III* has formed the exception both in translation and stage production. The first rendering of this play into Greek was done by Kleanthos Triantafyllou and published in 1874 in Constantinople, which, though under Turkish rule at the time, was a predominantly Greek city vibrating with cultural activity. The first recorded performance took place in 1897 in the Municipal Theatre of Athens, with the English-bred N. Lekatsas in the title role (Sideris; Karagiorgos).

new theatrical season. In fact, the most memorable moments of the National Theatre were performances of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, with Alexis Minotis and Emilios Veakis in the title roles respectively. Performances of such plays, which rivalled in expense and glamour those of Western Europe,² remained long in repertoire and were removed only to make space for the next play on the production schedule (Spathis 55). A poverty-stricken country at the time, Greece could not afford such productions, but the dictator Ioannis Metaxas, who held power from 1936 to 1941, incorporated the national stage into his plan of cultural expansionism. Instrumental in the operation of the National Theatre was its General Director Costis Bastias, the dictator's appointee, who kept politics out of the Theatre but brought in ample state money and hired the best actors and directors available.

The productions of Shakespeare and other classics owed a great deal to the influence of western Europe, especially German theatre, which had served as a training ground for many Greek actors, directors and intellectuals before the war. The German influence was evident in the highly aestheticized full-text productions that used period costumes, elaborate stage designs and special effects. With such productions, the National Theatre increasingly acquired the reputation of an elitist institution that catered to the educated and the aspiring urban middle class. Though it enjoyed the support of most critics and intellectuals, it was clearly not the sort of theatre that an ordinary Greek would feel comfortable watching. The long and elaborate performances of Shakespeare plays were based on the assumption that Shakespeare is primarily for the cultivated and well-read.

The 1939 production of *Richard III* exemplifies the focus, style and general outlook of the public stage in this period: attention to the histories was minimal, and staging political issues was not in the interest of the dictatorship. *Richard III*, however, which had been extremely popular on the European stage in the 1930s, forms an exception because it was viewed primarily as a tragedy. The spectacular palaces in the stage design, the fine period costumes and the sophisticated props gave the performance a general atmosphere of grandeur. This was not linked in any way to the politics of the play; the focus remained on Richard as an individual, played by star actor Alexis Minotis. Although they may disagree on the constituents of Minotis's portrayal of Richard (the proportion of outward expression, boldness, heroism, evil, revenge, etc.), all critics speak of a character in a "tragedy" which seeks to locate the motives of his actions and reveal the psychology of his personality. None notices any allusion to contemporary politics or to Richard as a symbolic type of ruler. Solely the fascination with the character sustained the audience's interest in the four-hour performance that ran into the early morning hours with only one fifteen-minute break. The historical relevance of the play was marginal and,

² Emboldened by its successes at home, the National Theatre took the 1938 production of *Hamlet* to Cairo, Alexandria, London and Frankfurt.

for at least one critic, dull: “The endless backstage dealings and intricate plottings of the old English court left it [the audience] for the most part indifferent and cold” (Mamakias 2). Interest in the performance, which was unanimously acclaimed by the critics, lay exclusively in the study of the tragic character and the challenge it could pose to the talent of a star actor.

1941: *Henry V* and the Demand for Patriotic Plays

Henry V was staged by the National Theatre between 19 March and 6 April 1941, in the short interval between the defeat of the Italians at the Greek-Albanian border and the arrival of the heavily-armed Germans on the mainland. The play had been introduced to an English-speaking audience in March 1939 when the company of the Old Vic had come to Athens for a week with an assortment of plays.³ But this was the first time that *Henry V* was being staged by a Greek company. The decision to stage the play was taken by the Artistic Board at the recommendation of Costis Bastias, the influential man who had ruled the National Theatre as General Director since 1936. The choice of *Henry V* was a response to the recently developed demand for patriotic war plays as well as a tribute to England, a friend and ally that was lining up its forces on Greek soil while the performance was being shown. The English presence in Athens was exceedingly strong at the time as was the pro-English sentiment, which at times appeared like a craze (Theotokas 265). Apart from expressing their positive feelings towards their brothers-in-arms, the Greeks also showed a desire to learn more about English culture. From January to April 1941, the weekly literary periodical *Neoellinika Grammata* (Neohellenic Letters) published a large number of articles on British literature and cultural history, written mostly by English critics who were in Greece at the time. The National Theatre production of *Henry V*, however, did not jibe with this high spirit, nor did it elicit the kind of response one would expect considering the favourable, pro-English climate.

Most reviewers kept a careful balance between criticism and praise, acknowledging the adverse conditions, especially the difficulty of mounting a play of this kind on the small stage of the Pallas Theatre, which replaced the National Theatre as the venue on account of its underground bomb shelter. Alexis Minotis, who had considerable experience in Shakespearean roles, played Henry with heroic expression (Rodas 2). This was undercut, however, by his physically unimposing posture seen by one critic as a leftover from Richard III (H.E.A. 1). Comparing the visual impact of this performance to that of the

³ The other plays were *Hamlet*, *The Rivals*, *Man and Superman* and *I Have Been Here Before*. Their visit to Athens was part of a European tour that included several cities in southern Europe. On the performances of *Henry V* in Italy, see Tempera 115.

Old Vic in 1939, the critic Alkis Thrilos says: “The stage sets were not as colourful and as fanciful as those that the English company presented last year [sic] when it too played *Henry V*” (1977a: 21). The austerity of the sets and the slow pace of the action, noted by another critic, suggest that the production was less than uplifting – hence unable to match the highly optimistic mood that prevailed outside the theatre. Despite its shortcomings, this was still a competent performance, the kind that, in the late 1930s, would have been attended by a sizeable audience if only because it was produced by the National Theatre. In 1941, however, it failed to attract public attention, touching bottom at the box office. Alkis Thrilos, who approved the choice of play as well as the National Theatre practices in general, writes: “people do not frequent the theatres very much this year, especially when the staged plays are somewhat heavy, requiring of the spectator hard effort, which he does not have the psychological and intellectual serenity to make, and thus it was rather certain that the performance would not do well at the ticket office” (1977a: 21). As a result, *Henry V* failed to make an impact on the audience and achieve its intended purpose – to celebrate the Greek-English solidarity, to inspire patriotism and to communicate optimism about the outcome of the war.

The failure to attract public attention can be traced to two sets of issues: the National Theatre style of staging Shakespeare and the changing historical context of the audience. Before the war, the National Theatre had been associated with an elitist atmosphere and a certain aestheticism that did not appeal to the ordinary Greek citizen. Shakespeare performances had come to be identified with the style of Dimitris Rondiris, Artistic Director of the National Theatre for many years (1934–1942, 1946–1950). Initially trained in Germany, where he was much influenced by Max Reinhardt, Rondiris maintained a pragmatic approach to staging, mixing Reinhardtian techniques with his previous Greek experience. The meticulous re-working of stage detail and the persistent training of the actors in matters of speech and voice were the distinguishing features of his method. The stamp of his work was evident in the dominance of spectacle and the harmonious co-ordination of the diverse elements of the performance reminiscent of Reinhardt. In matters of interpretation, however, Rondiris was silent or noncommittal.⁴ Adamantly opposed to making explicit social or political statements through the performance, he refrained from establishing a dialogue

⁴ Rondiris did not engage in much critical/theoretical writing. He wrote, all in all, three short pieces on the staging of ancient drama, arguing in favour of a method that “could communicate to the modern spectator the tragic thrill [and] the sacred awe” (Rondiris 202), but nothing which could give us an idea of how he viewed the specific plays he directed. One of the few Shakespeare notebooks included in his archive, the marked stage script for the 1938 production of *Hamlet*, shows that his interventions concerned mainly the enhancement of character and the clarification of setting (Glytzouris 398–99).



King Henry V, National Theatre of Greece, 1941
Dir. Dimitris Rondiris. (Courtesy of the Theatre Museum, Athens)

or engaging actively with the poetic text. He did not like mixing art with politics, which is one of the reasons why he remained outside the underground Resistance Movement that swept up large numbers of Greek people, including artists, during the German Occupation. Those who have studied Rondiris closely, like his editor Dio Kagelari, claim that he never did anything straightforwardly (Kagelari n.p.).

When Rondiris directed *Henry V* in March 1941, the social and theatrical conditions had dramatically changed compared to those in the late 1930s. Although the war with Fascist Italy, carried out since October 1940 on the Greek-Albanian border, had ruined Greece economically and had taken many lives, people remained united against the enemy and patriotism ran high. Despite all kinds of shortages and the increased level of poverty, theatres did not shut down or stay in the background but assumed a leading role. Nearly all theatrical companies, even the most reputable ones, abandoned their old repertoires and turned to the satirical revue or the war play as they realised that there was a high demand for “light” entertainment that related to current events. Plays such as *War Images*, *Up on the War Front*, *In the Rear Lines*, *After the Victory* or revues like *Bravo Colonello* and *Finita la Musica* attracted large audiences. The revues especially would be heavily attended even during air-raids (resuming after temporary interruptions). One eye-witness actress is quoted to have said: “These were not merely performances but national gatherings” (Georgopoulou 284). This type of theatre offered people what they most needed at the time: laughter, information on the development of the war and opportunity to express their patriotic sentiment. As Glykeria Kalaitzi observes, theatre took on a social role at that critical moment: the whole experience of laughing at the enemy together or watching scenes with courageous Greek men fighting on the war front created a feeling of solidarity and thus became a significant factor in the formation of a national consciousness (18, 23–26). Although the staged material was neither politically nor ideologically informed, it had a strong patriotic character, which appealed to the audience and blurred the dividing line between it and the stage. One historian reports that, in emotional scenes, actors playing the wounded soldiers would occasionally break down and embrace the real war veterans sitting handicapped in the front row (Georgopoulou 284). The staged plays may have been without poetic value, but the experience of watching such plays allowed the spectators to express their communal feelings, and that’s what they needed most at that moment. For the first time, theatre became democratic in the sense that it was attended by the wider masses; for the first time the *locus* and the *plateia* merged in modern Greek theatre.

But this was not true of the National Theatre. In the crucial six months between the start of the War on 28 October 1940 and the German Occupation in April 1941, the National Theatre had remained relatively inactive, offering mainly ballet, operas and musical comedies. It did, however, make two attempts

to respond to the war situation. The first was in November 1940 when it re-staged an older performance of Aeschylus's *The Persians*, a play that celebrates the victory of the Greeks over Xerxes in the naval battle of Salamina (480 B.C.). The second was in March 1941 when it staged Shakespeare's *Henry V*. It was the only original production that related to current historical developments. In the specific context, the *choice* of this play suggests an attempt to appropriate it for political purposes, but the *manner* of staging indicates that this was only a half-hearted attempt at appropriation. That the play was not adapted to the needs of the Greek audience under the circumstances shows that either the National Theatre administration, and Rondiris himself as the play's director, had failed to realize the profound change that was being effected in the theatre or that they saw the change but refused to accommodate it in their staging practices, treating it as a phenomenon that was a concern only of those companies that were out to exploit the situation for financial purposes – not of “serious” (classic) theatre. There was a sharp division between the National Theatre, as the custodian of “reputable” theatre, and the rest of the theatre companies, which showed greater flexibility in their reaction to changing conditions, both in their repertoires and in their staging methods. The result was that people did not go to “the theatre” very much, “especially when the staged plays [were] somewhat heavy”, requiring of the spectator hard effort to make sense of them (Thrilos, 1977a: 21). By refusing to go the way of adaptation, Rondiris presented a hard to understand *Henry V*, and, in a moment of national crisis, the Greek people abandoned such a play in favour of more easily accessible forms of entertainment for moral support. Their strong pro-English feelings did not automatically create a desire to attend a Shakespearean play that dramatized unfamiliar historical events.

1947: *Richard II* and the Monarchy Referendum

Richard II was staged in November 1947 also at the National Theatre and directed by Dimitris Rondiris. After a long absence, he had returned to his public post in the spring of the previous year when the conservative party had come to power. As he had done before the War, Rondiris included one play by Shakespeare in each season's repertory, but, this time, he was restricted to comedy and romance – *Much Ado About Nothing* (1946), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1948) and *The Tempest* (1950) – probably because he no longer had the actors who could play the tragic roles.⁵ Unlike *Henry V*, whose staging had been decided by the Artistic Board and dictated by national interests, *Richard II* was solely the choice of Rondiris, who was now Artistic and General

⁵ Shortly after his re-appointment in 1946, Rondiris reconstituted the National Theatre Company, hiring new, mainly young actors and dismissing those who had been involved in leftist politics, including top Shakespearean performers like Veakis, Karousos and Glynos.

Director of the National Theatre. No reason was given for the choice of this play which, like *Henry V*, had only few admirers among those who were familiar with Shakespeare.⁶

The immediate context of the staging of *Richard II* was provided by Europe's prime social event that year: the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on 20 November 1947 in Westminster Hall. It was a most glamorous event, with political overtones on the royal guest list. King Paul of Greece was bed-ridden and thus unable to attend, but his wife, the German-born Queen Frederica, insisted on attending without him. The British influence on Greek politics and future of the monarchy was strong, so the Greek newspapers gave the wedding extensive coverage, with detailed reports and large photographs. The performance of *Richard II*, which was to open the 1947–48 theatrical season, was delayed partly because the National Theatre actors were on tour. When it finally opened on 22 November, its reviews figured side-by-side with photographs of the newly-wed Elizabeth and her husband. This topical interest in the British royal family might have played a role in the staging of English history, but the choice of *Richard II* in particular, I would argue, includes a more subtle compliment to the Greek monarchy and constitutes, therefore, an appropriation for a particular political purpose.

In September 1946, a referendum on the restoration of King George, who had fled the country along with the national government on the eve of the German Occupation in May 1941, gave the monarchy a 68% favourable vote according to official reports (Mavrogordatos 310). The result was highly contested by many Greeks, especially the communists, who suspected fraud. Although the King returned to Greece soon after the results were announced, those who had cast a negative vote could not easily swallow the fact that the monarchy had been imposed on them once more. When King George died six months later in April 1947 and was succeeded by his brother Paul, the resentment had not subsided, for the new King found it necessary to tour the country repeatedly in an attempt to alleviate negative feelings. In this context, the performance of *Richard II* can be seen as a gesture of support for the new King. Dimitris Rondiris, who picked and directed the play, had every reason to show his respect to the king, the titular patron of the National (then Royal) Theatre, and to express his gratitude to the pro-royalist government that had given him total control of the public stage. Although no hard and fast evidence proves that the play was consciously appropriated for political purposes, several contextual facts make it plausible. Shakespeare's play deals with the situation of civil war and the issues of authority and rebellion. Although Shakespeare takes no sides in the political conflict he dramatizes, he does, in the end, cast Richard in the position of a powerless, highly sensitive man who holds moving speeches that capture the

⁶ The theatre critic Michalis Rodas sees *Richard II* as a play relevant mainly to England and its past (3), while another critic, Petros Rigas, judges that it is not one of the bard's masterpieces (168).

audience's attention in the closing scenes of the play. This view of Richard as a sensitive poet-king appealed especially to the Romantics and conservative critics in Greece clung to it in the 1940s (see Theatrikos 2). As in the past, Rondiris did not slant the play in any way, but, as a politically conservative man, he was likely to take the Romantic view of Richard as a given. Certainly, the emotionally charged scene of King Richard's return to his native Wales held great potential on the Greek stage, as it represented a patriotic parallel to the return of the late King George of Greece after his five-year involuntary exile. If, indeed, the support for the monarchy was behind Rondiris' choice of *Richard II*, his effort was wasted, for the royal family was unable to attend the premiere and there is no suggestion in the reviews that anyone in the audience perceived the link.

Aesthetically, the production offered little that was new. Through the frequent change of scenes and the use of ample light, it seems to have attempted an allusion to Olivier's recent film version of *Henry V*, but, according to the critic who perceived the vague allusion, the performance succeeded only in accentuating its defects, especially in colour coordination, as the overall method of presenting Shakespeare remained unchanged: heavy sets, slow pace, long pauses, artificial intensity, sense of grandeur and an acting style that focused on outward expression (Georgiou 224; Rigas 168). Nor did the production project any specific view of the play whose interpretation was left up to the divided critics. A leftist critic saw Richard as a weak king who brings destruction upon himself because he has "no higher ideals to light up his way and inspire him" (Rigas 168). A critic of the moderate centre enumerated the wrongs Richard is charged with (taxes, war, confiscation, disregard for the common people) and found in the play an echo of current history: "such dramas always hold great truths and are contemporary in different conditions, of course, and different forms in their expression" (Rodas 3). A conservative critic set politics aside and viewed the work as an expression of human pain: "This element of human suffering is the dominant one and regulates to the end all the lights and shadows" (Theatrikos 2). Yet, the division of opinion among critics, who apparently base their views on a reading of Shakespeare's text, reflects the ideo-political polarization of the civil-war period more than it indicates any influence of the particular performance. None of these critics engages in a dialogue with the *director's* view or suggests that there was a view to take up. Like *Henry V*, *Richard II* had failed to make an impression.

The reasons for the failure can be seen, again, in the manner of staging Shakespeare and the audience attitude, which was changed by the war. When *Richard II* was staged, the historical context had altered once again. The German troops had withdrawn in October 1944, but, soon afterwards, the long-simmering conflict between the communists and the nationalists broke out, and, by the



King Richard II, National Theatre of Greece, 1947
Dir. Dimitris Rondiris. (Courtesy of the Theatre Museum, Athens)

spring of 1946, the country was immersed in civil war. The conservative government that resulted from the general elections of that year set out to crush its ideological opponents, erstwhile recognized as defenders of Greece in the resistance against the German and Italian invaders but now pursued as enemies of the nation. The years that followed 1946 were marked by armed confrontations between communists and nationalists in the provinces, ideological persecutions and the spread of fear. The country's government was only formally "democratic". In practice, political freedoms were significantly curtailed, and state violence was legalized through the so-called "emergency measures" instituted to punish preventively "anti-national" intentions (Alivizatos 386–89). Such ideologically motivated measures relied heavily on the notion of a nationalist conscience and aimed at inspiring awe and fear in the minds of the Greek citizens. The state regime and the conservative segment of the press cultivated a fear of terror causing harm across the board and forcing a formerly free-thinking people to turn inwards towards self-censorship. Those silenced were not only extreme leftists, but also moderate liberals. In 1947, "white terrorism" (the illegal arrest, torture or assassination of communist sympathizers) was widespread and, though the concentration camps on barren islands had not yet been filled with political prisoners or "displacements" as they were called, an immobilizing climate of fear, timidity and withdrawal had settled in (Tsoukalas 579–81).

The extent to which the general climate had changed by 1947 and the effect it had upon theatregoers may be seen if we take a look at a production of *Julius Caesar* staged a couple of years earlier by the United Artists, a newly formed company with a socialist orientation. In a theatre packed with supporters of the communist party, the actors had been welcomed on stage amidst enthusiastic applause and cheering. The agitation which occurred after right-wing hooligans stormed into the theatre while the performance was in progress⁷ discouraged neither the company nor the spectators who protected the actors. There was optimism, despite the ideological polarization, and people felt free to express their opinion and their feelings. The chronological gap between these two theatrical events – the staging of *Julius Caesar* in 1945 and of *Richard II* in November 1947 – is small, yet, the difference in the actual conditions was great, as was their effect on the audience, which now reacted differently to stage presentations: it was more reserved about expressing feeling and less apt to sit patiently through long performances. Commenting on the four-hour run

⁷ On the day of the premiere, about 500 hooded persons equipped with drain pipes and stones rushed into the Lyricon Theatre hall shouting: "Communist pigs, you shall die". In a short time, the stage was turned into an actual battlefield with the actors, dressed as Roman soldiers for the performance, fighting in earnest to defend themselves (Vastardis 413–14).

of *Richard II*, the critic Alkis Thrilos notes the change of attitude in members of the audience and recommends textual cuts:

Shortcuts and deletions are in a sense irreverent and arbitrary. But what else can be done? The patience of the audience is not the same today as in the past; the time that today's nervous audience is willing to devote to a theatrical performance is not the same as it used to be. (1977b: 383)

As his output during the whole civil war period shows, Dimitris Rondiris failed to take the audience's change in mood or attitude into consideration. Repeating his old style of staging (supported by the work of his pre-war collaborators in dress and stage design), he aimed to re-create memories of the late 1930s when his long, full-text performances appealed to the educated and the aspiring middle class. The conditions had altered radically more than once in the course of the intervening six years and had affected both the National Theatre as a theatre company and the people who attended the performances. In terms of numbers, Rondiris had a secure audience in 1947, as most of the private theatre companies were in a state of disorientation and the National Theatre was the only theatre with expensive productions of classic plays. Yet he could not establish contact with the spectators, whose short applause made him anxious lest he might not have enough time to come to the podium at the end of the premiere performance to receive his due.⁸ His cliché style of staging and his manner of ruling the National Theatre had alienated him from the audience as well as from the majority of critics, who had stood by him before the War. He was no doubt largely responsible for the fact that, during the civil war years, the public stage was entirely removed from contemporary reality.

When in 1969, the British group Prospect Theatre Company performed *Richard II* in Bratislava, it elicited a remarkable response, as Ian MacKellen recorded and critics later cited (Hoenselaars 24). Such a response, which was beyond any intention on the part of the production, suddenly rendered the play relevant, for the audience had reacted to it in the context of Czechoslovakia's political situation in the aftermath of the Prague Spring of 1968. A similar type of response was elicited by Krystyna Skuszanka's production of *Measure for Measure* in the Polish industrial centre of Nowa Huta in 1956. As Kujawińska informs us, the production aimed, through the use of stage aesthetics, to criticize the restriction of individual freedoms under a totalitarian state marked by the vigilant presence of police and army. During the performance, when the actor playing the old Duke pronounced the lines, "Hence hath offence his quick celerity,/When it is borne in high authority", the audience broke into an

⁸ The critic Alkis Thrilos observes: "As soon as the first clap was heard he rushed to the stage. [...] Doesn't he feel that he wrongs and demeans himself when he doesn't wait to be called insistently by the audience?" (384).

unprecedented applause, expressing thus its understanding of the lines in connection with the situation in Poland at the end of its experience with Stalinist totalitarianism (123). Such responses were possible because the political conditions had increased people's sensitivity about social issues and also because the performances had been artistically effective. But the National Theatre of Greece could not produce performances that could make contact between the stage and the audience. The plays, no doubt, held a potential in the context in which they were staged: *Henry V* could have inspired patriotism and *Richard II* could have been supportive of the monarchy. Yet, whatever potential existed was never successfully made use of. The reasons, as I have shown, are to be located in the complex inter-relationship of staging style, audience and context.

In pre-War times, the National Theatre, like Greek theatre in general, had been unable to express an authentic voice on the stage or to assimilate creatively the models it had imported from Western Europe. Theatre, especially subsidized theatre, bore little or no relationship to contemporary reality. In the 1940s, when the social, political and economic conditions changed radically more than once as a result of historical developments, Greek theatre had no solid basis it could fall back on. The privately owned companies showed some flexibility in adapting to the new conditions, but the state-subsidized stage for the most part did not. The performances of *Henry V* and *Richard II* belong to two distinct periods of the 1940s – the period before the Civil War (before 1946) and the period after it. In the private theatres, these periods are rather clearly demarcated in terms of repertory, staging methods and aims, but, at the National Theatre, the differences between 1941 and 1947 are virtually indistinguishable, apart from the presence of new actors in the latter year. In 1945, a year of post-Liberation effervescence in which Athens experienced a theatrical renaissance,⁹ the National Theatre, responding to the call for the democratization of the public stage, had made a bold attempt (under the direction of the politically moderate intellectual George Theotokas) to re-organize itself around a more progressive, more nationally pertinent and more widely appealing programme. Unfortunately, the rise to power of the conservative, pro-royalist party put an end to practically all initiatives in the theatre and certainly to all plans of renewal at the National Theatre. After 1946, the private theatre companies turned to contemporary Greek drama while the National Theatre, cleared by Rondiris of all actors affiliated with leftist politics, sought vainly to recall its pre-War past with elaborate yet stale performances of the classics. The audience of *Richard II* in 1947 was different from the audience of *Richard III* in 1939. Owing to the Resistance Movement, people were generally more socially-conscious

⁹ Between the end of the Nazi Occupation and the beginning of the Civil War, various attempts were made to renew the Greek stage aesthetically and ideologically. The English bard played a leading role in this project, as he headed almost every attempt at theatrical renewal (Krontiris 2007, chs. 3, 4)

in 1947 but also more reserved due to the climate of fear that the nationalist state had created. Intellectuals and artists were no exception. Although communication with the rest of Europe was re-established after World War II, there was a drastic reduction in the cultural exchange between Greece and western Europe. The cold-war climate affected artists, who could survive only if they stayed away from politics. Karolos Koun, for example, the Greek equivalent of Giorgio Strehler, avoided any engagement with current ideo-political and social conflicts, choosing for the repertory of his Art Theatre contemporary foreign plays that dealt with existential or psychological problems (Kalaitzi 265–72). Talented theatre people affiliated with socialist ideas, like Yiorgos Sevasticoglou, who favoured adaptation of Shakespeare for the masses (Savas 469), either fled to the eastern block or were imprisoned. In this context, the National Theatre under Rondiris represented not only the apolitical segment of post-War theatre, but also the conservative establishment and the more general state of cultural decline that Greece experienced during the civil war years and even later.¹⁰

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¹⁰ For a more detailed account of Shakespeare during the civil war years, see Krontiris, forthcoming.

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