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...λήθης φάρμακ'[α]... = “REMEDIES FOR FORGETFULNESS”.
THE USE OF FRAGMENTS OF ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA
IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

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The fragment F 578 from Euripides' *Palamedes* reads: τὰ τῆς γε λήθης φάρμακ' ὀρθώσας μόνος, / ἄφωνα καὶ φωνοῦντα, συλλαβὰς τιθεῖς¹ (“On my own I established remedies for forgetfulness, which are without speech and (yet) speak, by creating syllables”²). If the dubious phrase “remedies for forgetfulness”, which can either refer to remedies that cause forgetfulness or remedies that prevent forgetfulness, is considered within the context of *The Forgotten Theatre* Conference, a very interesting question regarding the issues of Memory and Forgetfulness, which are inseparably linked to the subject of the Conference, can be raised: of what kind could these remedies for Forgetfulness be, so that although they have no voice, yet they speak? The man who talks about these remedies is, most probably, Palamedes, the protagonist of the now lost namesake tragedy, and his lines could metaphorically suggest a possible answer to the above question: one of the strongest remedies is the performance of the fragmented texts. Lines of text written on papyri or found through the writings of other writers have no voice themselves, but if an actor speaks them out, then Forgetfulness disappears.

Theatre directors, dramaturgs and theatrologists approach texts from a different

¹ Cf. KANNICHT 2004, 598.

² Eng. trans. by COLLARD/CROPP 2008, 257.

pathway than classicists and philologists; the former mostly try to find or justify elements of performativity within the texts. Thus, in the case of the fragmented ancient theatrical texts any potential for performance could be one more step away from Forgetfulness and this paper aims at introducing some novel parameters to the discussion about fragments from the point of view of a theatre practitioner. Although the issue of Memory that is implied under the title of *The Forgotten Theatre Conference* is quite big to be discussed here, a possible solution to Forgetfulness is offered and the arguments for it are based on the idea that, in order to keep remembering this part of ancient Greek and Roman theatre that seems forgotten, we could/should use the fragmented texts that have survived in contemporary performances. The fact that because of luck and because of meticulous research we now have in our hands pieces of theatrical texts that were performed on a theatre stage at least once, makes the whole idea of presenting them again on stage really intriguing and exciting. This is the way to enliven the fragments and also a way to fight Forgetfulness. As David Wiles has suggested “If the right frame is created, an incomplete text can be turned into a complete experience for an audience. [...] There is great potential in the classical lacuna [...]”³.

Particularly as far as ancient Greek tragedy and satyr drama are concerned, together they form a theatrical genre still thriving today, whose productions are very popular worldwide; nevertheless, the common textual material that is used and, in a way, recycled globally and annually consists of no more than 33 plays in total written by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, which are all performed continually with greater or lesser success and in different styles. Yet, the plethora of fragmented texts of ancient dramas remains practically unexploited. The surviving fragments of ancient Greek tragedy or satyr drama are pieces of text that have been performed at least once, since there is currently no evidence that the three major tragedians left behind any drafts or plays not presented in classical times. This means that these fragments – and the tragedies and the satyr dramas they come from – have proven their performativity in the theatrical environment for which they had been written, and indeed some of them have been parts of the most famous and popular plays of the three tragedians⁴. Nowadays, when classic scholarship increasingly deals with fragmentary texts, the availability of tragic fragments could challenge the imagination of theatre practitioners, for they constitute an abundant material waiting to be used again in performance.

In the last (VI) part of his essay entitled *Tragic Thrausmatology* David Harvey, referring to the future of the study of Greek tragedy fragments, wonders “Whatever next?”⁵. In

³ Cf. WILES 2005, 189.

⁴ “Unfortunately, we have lost the texts of several of the plays that were actually the most popular and famous over the thousand-year performance reception of Greek tragedy in antiquity. These included, for example, Aeschylus’ *Niobe*, Sophocles’ *Tereus* and Euripides’ *Telephus* and *Andromeda*” (HALL 2010, 337).

⁵ Cf. HARVEY 2005, 46.

his answer he examines the performativity of fragments and describes a few cases of theatrical performances based on them. On the same path, Edith Hall argues that "the place in which fragmentary Greek tragedy has recently become most important is in the contemporary theatre"⁶, and she supports her argument by presenting examples where tragic fragments have been used as basic material for different kinds of staging and performance. Although research continues and occasionally new records are added, it seems that the total number of performances where tragic fragments have been used as performance material is around 40 within the last half century. Part of my ongoing PhD research is the analysis of these performances and from it, three approaches are distinguished apropos how fragments have been used by performance creators (directors, dramaturgs, and playwrights) and have been employed in performance; I have given names to these approaches so that they echo the main objective of the principal creative mind.

The first approach is called Reconstructive because it aims at filling the gaps of the fragmentary tragedies or satyr dramas thus presenting complete reconstructions of lost plays. In this approach, to the surviving fragments of a play more text is added in a seamless way; it can either be new text written a la mode of the old one, or it can be text from other sources of the same period added to fill the gaps, under the guidance of ancient hypotheses and other supportive material. The Reconstructive approach is highly favoured and facilitated by classical scholars, since reconstructions and readings of lost dramas have for long been the subjects of philological research. So, in cases where a performance is based on a reconstructed text of an ancient play, the philologist is the person to turn to and in a way he or she leads the creative team. A typical example of this approach would be David Wiles' work on Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, a reconstruction for performance of Euripides' tragedy with the same title, which David Wiles wrote and directed⁷; another great example is the attempt to reconstruct a full trilogy, like the *Iliadic Trilogy* by Aeschylus⁸.

In the second approach, tragic fragments are used as starting points and from them full-length plays are written in which the older pieces of text are combined with original material and construct plots that depart from the ancient drama, thus creating something that is essentially a completely new play. This approach is called Aesthetic, since its basic aim is the creation of a new play in which fragments are used, but the resulting play does not necessarily follow the ancient one. A playwright is usually the person responsible for the Aesthetic use of fragments in performance, and it is his or her mentality and inspiration that lead the creative process. In 1988, for a unique production in Delphi, Tony Harrison created a play entitled *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* based on fragments of

⁶ Cf. HALL 2010, 338.

⁷ Vd. WILES 2005, 189-207.

⁸ Vd. ANGELIKOPOULOS 2003.

the lost Sophoclean satyr play *Ichneutae* which were discovered in the Oxyrhynchus' papyri⁹; this new play used the found text and the plot of *Ichneutae* and surrounded it by a new plot that commented on current political situation of the time; this is one of the most characteristic examples of the Aesthetic approach. Another example would be the play *The Love of the Nightingale* by Timberlake Wertenbaker, who used material of the Sophoclean play *Tereus* to write her own play about rape¹⁰.

In the third approach, fragments from different plays written by one or more tragedians are combined in a theatrical montage so that novel performance texts emerge. What better name could be given to this approach than Plastic? [the word derives from the Greek word πλαστικός, from πλαστός, from the verb πλάσσειν (“to give form, to shape, to mould, to model”)]. Neither reconstruction nor contextualization is at all an issue in this approach; the fragments are used solely for their face value, their inscribed text, thus allowing various arrangements according to different narratives, ideas, or themes. In this approach the leader is a director or a dramaturg, who decides the theme of the performance and selects fragments to use accordingly. The examples of this approach are far more uncommon and more diverse than those of the previous types and they cover a wide range of performances from representational to postdramatic. A rather extreme form of this approach is Kelly Cooper's *Fragment*, which was presented in New York in 2006 and in which three actors address each other using only lines from Sophocles' and Euripides' fragmented plays having war as a general theme¹¹. Also, another exemplary performance based on fragments from various plays of Aeschylus is *Epigonoï*, by the Greek director Theodoros Terzopoulos, which will be discussed in detail below.

“Fragmentation as a concept and model is crucial for modern and even more for postmodern literature”, argue Anna Lamari, Franco Montanari and Anna Novokhatko in the *Introduction* of their recent volume *Fragmentation in Ancient Greek Drama*¹², where they discuss the subject of dramatic fragments from a philological perspective. In it they relate fragments and fragmentation to contemporary ways of reception suggesting that “[t]he focus has shifted from the fragmented text to the reader's fragmented mind”¹³. During the last fifty years the notion of fragmentation has progressively become more centralised in the fields of the arts¹⁴, particularly since the individual life is lived less and

⁹ Vd. HARRISON 1991

¹⁰ Vd. WERTENBAKER 1989

¹¹ Although no published text exists from this performance, which was presented by Classic Stage Company, a review at the New York Times gives a quite concrete idea about it: <https://www.ny-times.com/2006/03/29/theater/reviews/classic-stage-company-serves-up-ancient-greek-cocktails.html>

¹² Cf. LAMARI/MONTANARI/NOVOKHATKO 2020, 4.

¹³ Cf. LAMARI/MONTANARI/NOVOKHATKO 2020, 5.

¹⁴ Susan Sontag has argued that “It seems as if the fragment is really the art form of our time and everybody who has reflected about art and thought has had to deal with this problem” (COTT 2013, 54-55).

less as a coherent story but much more as a series of fragments, phases, and episodes¹⁵. To reflect this, and after its turn towards abstraction and alienating means of staging, "theatre takes on a fragmentary and partial character [...] trusting individual impulses, fragments and microstructures of texts in order to become a new kind of practice"¹⁶, as Hans-Thies Lehmann has argued. This practice, where narrative fragmentation prevails and the method of collage is favoured, while the co-presence of performers and spectators becomes the epicentre, has been described as postdramatic theatre. Postdramatic theatre offers an adequate sub-structure and provides an excellent environment for exploring the performance potential of tragic fragments while confirming that "the postdramatic impulse, and specifically its manifestations in using Greek tragedy as material, suggests something beyond drama that more convincingly represents a fragmented, decentred world"¹⁷.

The current use of the idea of fragmentation in various aspects of contemporary life provides a link between tragic fragments and the fragmented self. As Edith Hall observes, "fragmentation is a vital key to the current understanding of the notion of the self in the discipline of social psychology"¹⁸. Closely connected to the above are the contemporary discourses on the ubiquitous notion of Trauma: according to Cathy Caruth, who has written extensively about it, "trauma is a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind, [...] a breach in the mind's experience of time, of self and of the world"¹⁹. Furthermore, as Patrick Duggan argues, "the development of trauma theory is underpinned by a history of theatricality, and performativity is inherent within the structure of trauma"²⁰. Finally, as Edith Hall points out looking from a different angle "the strange journey across time taken by the physical fragments of tragedy – their survival – also resonates with the idea of the survivor of trauma that is central both to Greek tragedy and to our contemporary sense of historical identity"²¹. When this whole argumentation is combined, it may suggest a possible use for the tragic fragments as performance material in addressing Trauma by using language and text.

What cannot be overlooked, also, is the specific association of trauma with communication. Firstly, there is the thought that "in its shocking impact, trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma"²². Furthermore, it is a fact "that even though trauma might elude language and communicability, many survivors of trauma speak of the need or indeed

¹⁵ Vd. SZE 2017

¹⁶ Cf. LEHMANN 2006, 57.

¹⁷ Cf. CAMPBELL 2010, 72.

¹⁸ Cf. HALL 2007, 139.

¹⁹ Cf. CARUTH 1996, 3-4.

²⁰ Cf. DUGGAN 2012, 17.

²¹ Cf. HALL 2010, 337.

²² Cf. LUCKHURST 2008, 79.

of the compulsion to testify and to make other people aware of what has been lived through"²³. Thus, it becomes evident that, in order to attend to the performative aspect of trauma theory a particular kind of text needs to be invented or employed. Tragic fragments have strong affinities both with the notion of the fragmented self in trauma and with the textual/linguistic demands which this fragmented self poses. The *Epigonoï* is an example of how the afore-mentioned argumentation can support the use of ancient dramatic fragments in a contemporary production that deals with a specific kind of trauma, the war trauma. According to Nigel Hunt "war trauma is concerned with the responses of people to their war experiences"²⁴ and this phrase suffices to summarise the essence of the *Epigonoï* since the subject of war trauma is vast and delving through the relevant bibliography and resources is far beyond the aims of this paper.

Theodoros Terzopoulos is a Greek theatre director who can very successfully bear the title of the "auteur"²⁵. Since the mid-1980s he has gained international recognition and he has invented a personal method of directing and teaching actors that is now taught in various drama schools and universities around the world. He studied acting at the Berliner Ensemble and since his return to Greece he has directed many productions of ancient Greek drama that have toured internationally. He has experimented a lot with an ensemble of actors who are in most cases permanent collaborators of him and who are committed in carrying out extensive research for the creation of each production. His work on ancient Greek tragedy, even from the early stages of his career, has opened alternative routes to the approach of ancient drama and has placed Terzopoulos among the most reputable international avant-garde directors of our time.

In 2003 he directed a play called *Epigonoï*, which premiered in Germany and a month later it was presented in Delphi, in Greece. The play remained in the repertoire of Terzopoulos' theatre company (which is called "Attis") for at least three more years and it also toured around the world. The "raw material" for this play were fragments from Aeschylus' plays and it was the second time this kind of material was used as performance material in Greece²⁶. Terzopoulos had worked on Aeschylus plays before the *Epigonoï* and he had directed *The Persians* (in 1990 and in 1991) and *Prometheus Bound* (in 1995).

Terzopoulos created *Epigonoï* during a period when people around the world were highly sensitised after the American invasion of Iraq²⁷. Thus, the artistic endeavour of

²³ Cf. STUART FISHER 2011, 114.

²⁴ Cf. HUNT 2010, 8.

²⁵ For a very short bio of Theodoros Terzopoulos, vd. <http://www.theatreolympics2016.pl/en/guests/theodoros-terzopoulos>

²⁶ The director and academic Spyros Evangelatos (1940-2017) had presented *Psychostasia* in 1979, a play based on the extant fragments of the lost plays by Aeschylus.

²⁷ Cf. CHATZIDIMITRIOU 2004, 262-274

the director coincides with a major political event which gives to the performance very specific aesthetic, cultural and political deeper meanings. Terzopoulos here examines the irrationality of war and for his expression he uses some of the surviving fragments of Aeschylus' plays. The variety of fragments that the director used can be seen in the following list²⁸:

Prologue	<i>Carians or Europa</i>	fr. 99
	[unattributed fragments]	fr. 355, fr. 379
	<i>Bassarids</i>	fr. 23a
Parodos	<i>Epigonoï</i>	fr. 55
	<i>Daughters of the Sun</i>	fr. 70
	<i>Prometheus the Fire Kindler</i>	fr. 204b
Heracles	<i>Children of Heracles</i>	fr. 73b, fr. 74, fr. 75
	[unattributed fragments]	fr. 361, fr. 451b
	<i>Net Haulers</i>	fr. 47a
Philoctetes	<i>Carians or Europa</i>	fr. 99
	<i>Philoctetes</i>	fr. 250, fr. 251, fr. 253, fr. 254, fr. 255
	<i>Net Haulers</i>	fr. 47a
Actaeon	<i>Archeresses</i>	fr. 241, fr. 242, fr. 243, fr. 244
	[unattributed fragment]	fr. 372
	<i>Myrmidons</i>	fr. 131, fr. 132, fr. 132c
Achilles	[unattributed fragment]	fr. 350
	<i>Myrmidons</i>	fr. 135, fr. 136, fr. 137, fr. 138
	<i>Glaucus of Potniae</i>	fr. 38
[Prometheus]	<i>Carians or Europa</i>	fr. 100
	<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	lines 167 – 177]
	Ajax	[unattributed fragment]
Exodos	<i>The Award of the Arms</i>	fr. 176
	<i>Thracian Women</i>	fr. 83
	<i>Net Haulers</i>	fr. 47a
Exodos	<i>Daughters of the Sun</i>	fr. 70

The list is not exhaustive, but it gives an idea about the diversity of the textual elements that have been used; among them there are small two-line fragments on one side and long monological fragments on the other, all woven together in such a masterful way

²⁸ The text of the performance has not been published. As far as the list is concerned, the numbering of the fragments follows the numbers found in RADT 1985. The names on the first colon of the list correspond to the relevant Episodes of the play and will be further discussed below.

that it becomes difficult to identify all the plays and all the fragments even if you look for them very carefully. The title *Epigonoï*, which in the original ancient play referred to the sons of the Seven Against Thebes who set out to avenge the death of their fathers, here is used with the meaning of the Descendants, who have fought a war and suffer greatly from it.

The play has the well-known structure of an ancient Greek tragedy. There is the Prologue where Europe, the character from the play *Carians* or *Europa* describes how she bore her children and how Ares is now taking them away from her and kills them in war. The whole space of the orchestra is filled with army boots and Europe also holds two of them during her monologue. What comes next is the Parodos where Europe calls the members of the Chorus on stage, using again fragments of various plays. At this point the only surviving fragment from the play *Epigonoï* is heard²⁹.

Terzopoulos' staging of ancient Greek tragedy can be considered neither ordinary nor traditional. All the elements of his method³⁰ are apparent in *Epigonoï*, namely, the presence of the body and how it is signified by its nakedness, the importance and the exaggeration of breath, the rhythmic connection between text and movement, the geometry of the actors' configurations on stage and, what is the most characteristic element in Terzopoulos' performances, the gesture; the body becomes a unit of movement, and gesture becomes a fragment of the whole³¹. Gestures are very important in Terzopoulos' theatre. Since he primarily works with actors' bodies and then with words, expressive gestures are used so that the internal feelings of a human being, which are usually triggered by manic tension, are conveyed through the specific positions of the limbs, the facial expressions, and the stillness of the actor's body. Gestures allow a body to be displayed in extremis and lead the rhythm of the tragic words, which are now embodied. In the world of *Epigonoï* lamentation for the loss and anger at the divine are expressed through gestures which are connected with the sound that is produced after the end of words. Terzopoulos himself has justified the relation of gestures to deep human feelings and the inner energy of a human being, and regarding the connection between his theatre, the human body, and the creation of gestures he has argued:

[T]he real source of our energy and knowledge comes from the interior of the body, from memories which have been printed inside us from long ago. There exists an inner energy which carries images and repressed memories of other lives and of other eras. Namely, there exists all the knowledge of the world inside our very

²⁹ During the presentation of this paper at the *Forgotten Theatre Conference* in Turin a short video clip was shown to the audience at this point; in it the entrance of the Chorus could be watched.

³⁰ For details about Terzopoulos' method, cf. THEATER DER ZEIT 2019.

³¹ For an in-depth analysis, vd. SAMPATAKAKIS 2011, 103-115.

bodies [...]³².

After the Parodos, one after the other, five characters are presented who tell their stories and focus on their deeds and their sufferings in a form that could be considered as Episodes. There are three heroes from the Iliad, Achilles, Philoctetes and Ajax, who lament for either the loss of a friend and a lover, or the physical pain of an inflicted wound, or the deed that was done during moments of divine madness. Also, there are two heroes from Greek mythology, Heracles and Actaeon, who bring on stage their sufferings as they come closer to the moment of their death. So, although not all heroes have been in war, Terzopoulos uses their stories to speak about the aftermaths of a war.

There is a linguistic play throughout the play which can be represented as follows:

Δ	I	A
I		Δ
A	Δ	H

The sounds of the two words that the Chorus and each of the characters utter to call two gods: Δία (Zeus) and Ἅδη (Hades), are quite similar in Greek and in fact one sounds like an anagram of the other, so when the voices and the sounds mix, the audience is not sure exactly which god is called: ΔΙΑ-ΑΔΗ-ΔΙΑ-ΑΔΗ. Between the stories of the five characters there are short passages when all of them become members of the Chorus and the transitions from one character to the next are through the formation of various geometrical stage configurations of the Chorus. Then, one member of the Chorus says the following phrase which is the introduction to each character's story: Στα δάκρυα μέσα λιώνω. Ποιος θα βλεπε τα πάθη του [...] και δεν θα τον πενθούσε; ("I cry and weep. Who could watch the sufferings of [the name of the character to be presented next on stage] without mourning for him?"). This introductory phrase has been added to the ancient text³³, and it does not come from a particular fragment; it is there to connect the stories together and to start the narration again from the beginning. It is part of Terzopoulos' work to use repetition in order to signify how things keep happening again and again and although people suffer and pay the price for their own mistakes or for gods' revenge, they struggle, and they fight until the moment of their death.

The Episode mostly connected with war is Achilles' lament for the death of Patroclus. All the surviving fragments from the play *Myrmidons* have been used in the performance and here for once in the play the actress who plays Europe becomes a new character, Thetis, the mother of Achilles, and has a long monologue from the unattributed fragment

³² Cf. McDONALD 1992, 163.

³³ It should be noted here that the whole performance is delivered in modern Greek language as is the common practice in Greece for the productions of ancient Greek drama.

F 350; this is the only instance in the play when a female character other than Europe is presented. This part of the play also includes one of its most powerful moments, when the Chorus produces photos of young men who, presumably, have died in war, and accompanies Achilles who cries when he hears how Patroclus has died and later laments over his dead body. During the rest of the performance Europe remains at the back of the stage and watches the Chorus and the characters. The once young beautiful girl whom Zeus abducted and raped, is now an old woman who simply sees the stories of her sons passing in front of her eyes. Her body is covered with what could be a spider's web, a symbol of stillness and old age, thus signifying that the aged mother of western civilisation, who is also the mother of the most catastrophic wars in the 20th century, is unable to react to what happens to her children and she is there only to take care of the victims of all these wars just before they die. She is the present-absent witness of the end of European history, a history full of wars, violence, and losses³⁴.

The hero of the last Episode is Ajax and by the end of his story, what is left after his divine madness is a hand gesture (an open palm with spread fingers) and a sound; Ajax's hand starts moving in a circular movement which is gradually transferred to his whole body, a movement that the other members of the Chorus eventually adopt³⁵. The play finishes with what can be considered as the Exodos; there are no characters anymore, only a Chorus. Repetition, geometry, breath, words [Ο Δίας εἶν' τα πάντα ("Zeus is everything") from the play *Daughters of Helios*] and then silence and the unveiling of the mother figure of Europe. End of the play.

In conclusion, the Theatre of Fragments is not forgotten. Along with initiatives like *The Forgotten Theatre* Conference, there is will and space for bringing again the fragments on stage. The connections between fragments of text and fragments of self are quite strong, while Trauma is a subject that could be successfully explored in a theatrical context using ancient tragic fragments. There are theatre practitioners who are convinced that fragments need not remain for ever on the papyri, but they can have a new life in contemporary performances. The theatrical reliving of the ancient texts is the best proof that the Forgotten Theatre need not remain forgotten any more.

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³⁴ Vd. CHATZIDIMITRIOU 2004, 269-270.

³⁵ During the presentation of the paper at the Conference in Turin a second short video clip was shown to the audience at this point; in it Ajax's gesture, the new formation of the Chorus and the Exodos of the play could be watched.

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Abstract: One of the most powerful ways to remedy the forgetfulness that obscures ancient fragmentary drama, in other words to “establish remedies for forgetfulness” as Palamedes claims to have done for the Greeks in the fr. 578 from the homonymous but lost tragedy by Euripides, is to expose the ancient material to the circumstances of contemporary performance. The surviving fragments of ancient Greek dramas are pieces of text which by definition are out of context since they are dislocated parts of a traumatised ancient play: the connection between text and Trauma is considered to be both literal and metaphorical. Yet, there are elements of theatricality inherent to these fragments and this is why they have been used in contemporary performances in various ways and approaches. Theodoros Terzopoulos has used fragments of lost tragedies by Aeschylus to create the performance *Epigonoï* in 2003 which was first presented in Germany and then toured internationally. From a chorus of five men the suffering bodies of Achilles, Actaeon, Ajax, Heracles and Philoctetes stand out and expose the tragic fate of those who collide with the divine, while the female character of Europe watches the consequences of war, herself a victim of it. In this paper the use of ancient tragic fragments for the creation of contemporary performances will be discussed and evaluated whether it is an appropriate pathway to follow against letting ancient fragmentary drama be forgotten. After presenting and analysing Terzopoulos' *Epigonoï*, the performativity of fragments will be argued along with their suitability as theatrical material for contemporary dramaturgy that explores the issue of fragmentation in life and in the narrative and also the issue of Trauma itself.