

# The History of Ancient Drama in Modern Italy

Martina Treu

## The Classical Heritage

In the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, Italy competes with Greece for its Classical heritage, on historical and cultural grounds: while Greek colonization gave shape to the landscape of Magna Graecia and Sicily, the Latin language and literature played a key role in developing and transmitting ancient models to modern Europe. A proof of this heritage is the large number of Greek and Roman theaters in Italy (224, the highest number in any country).<sup>1</sup> Many of these are still currently in use, and regularly host Classical festivals where ancient dramas, and especially Greek tragedies, are staged more frequently than any other kind of performance.

Year by year, festivals such as the one in Syracuse (initiated a hundred years ago) have slowly gained a wider audience and have turned out to be mass events. And yet, most Italians are still unaware of the various possibilities of staging Classical dramas, besides the traditional ways. The upper and middle classes who form the majority of the audience share a conservative attitude towards Classics which is the result of a cultural strategy, implemented through education. Students are taught to read ancient plays as pure texts, rather than scripts, because their teachers—and scholars too—have long underestimated the dramatic nature and “theatricality” of plays.<sup>2</sup>

Most Italian theatergoers, especially at ancient sites, expect to see a restoration of the supposed “original” conditions of performance; they are generally opposed to modern versions of Classical dramas. A side effect of this attitude has been, until recent times, a lack of incisive and successful adaptations of Greek and Roman plays. In particular, Aristophanes’ topical themes cause problems, as they need to be treated and adapted to the present. In fact, for a long time, his comedies were excluded from all great national theaters, and from most schools, even

though they were published in Italy at the end of the fifteenth century already and soon after translated into Latin and Italian.<sup>3</sup>

As a significant example of the attitude to ancient drama in those early years, it is worth considering one single production dated 1585, the *Oedipus Rex* at Vicenza, as it forecasts in many ways the following history of Classical reception.<sup>4</sup> So does the second case-study we will consider, before we focus on the twentieth and twenty-first century. Vittorio Alfieri deserves special attention as a pioneer of a new conception of Classical theater. He dedicated himself to innovating the language of ancient plays, to enlarging their audience and to increasing their diffusion as texts and scripts. He was also a fine translator of ancient authors, and played some roles in his own tragedies. Further examples discussed also contributed in different ways to the evolution of the reception of Classical drama in modern Italy.

### The Teatro Olimpico

For centuries, the Classics were chosen by the establishment, by the upper classes and by cultural elites, as a mirror and a role model. This is clear from the first documented performance of an ancient drama in modern Italy, which took place in 1585 at the Teatro Olimpico, in Vicenza.<sup>5</sup> Together, the director Angelo Ingegneri and the composer Andrea Gabrieli created a new form of entertainment for an aristocratic audience, based on a Classical text, but sensitive to contemporary trends of performance and music. The architects who built the theater, Andrea Palladio and Vincenzo Scamozzi, also created a unique hybrid between ancient and modern theaters. Many years earlier, Palladio had started his career with a “cultural pilgrimage” to Rome where he studied ancient buildings and Vitruvius’ books on architecture. With this background, he developed his own theories: a mixture of ancient and modern elements became his trademark, the so-called “Palladian style,” which was later replicated, by Inigo Jones and others, all over the world. Palladio’s last work, the Teatro Olimpico, is not only his testament, but a monument to cultural heritage and to the self-assertiveness of a social status: the aristocratic sponsors represent themselves as Classical heroes in the statues and decorations of the building.<sup>6</sup>

The private institution which commissioned the theater, the Accademia Olimpica, still exists today. We may read in its archives that, at its foundation, its members were divided on whether their theater should first present an ancient tragedy, or an adaptation, or a brand new tragedy by a modern author. Finally, they found agreement only by following the authority of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Their choice of *Oedipus Rex* (as an example of a perfect tragedy) reflects the prevalent attitude towards the Classics: strongly conservative, hierarchical, and selective. Not by chance, this tragedy has been adapted and staged here more frequently than any other; we could even argue that the very ghost of Oedipus never left the Teatro Olimpico. He still lives in the stage set made of wood designed by Scamozzi

for the *première* (a perspective view of Thebes, which resembles the “Palladian” Vicenza). It was supposed to last just one night, and yet it is still there. Significantly, it has been preserved, although the theater remained empty for almost three centuries. Performances started again after 1850, and began to take place regularly just after World War II.

The destiny of the Teatro Olimpico may be seen as a symbol of what happened in many theaters, all over the country: for centuries, ancient dramas were read, translated, and studied, but very seldom performed. While a new genre—opera—was born in Florence, at the beginning of the seventeenth century (see Chapter 24), translations and adaptations of Classical plays did not become part of the theater repertoire, nor did they reach the majority of theatergoers. Most companies did not risk their income on Classical subjects, and preferred lighter forms of entertainment which would please less educated audiences. Moreover, the Church was hostile to theater in general (as potentially destructive and disturbing), to the pagan myths of ancient plays, and to ancient comedies for their indecent or outrageous language and content.

### Vittorio Alfieri

For such reasons, until the eighteenth century, only a few courts and aristocratic circles could enjoy Classical plays, extravaganzas, and literary exercises by intellectuals and poets.<sup>7</sup> The main exception was provided by *Merope*, by Scipione Maffei, a tragedy inspired by the Classics, written and first performed in Mantua (1713) and reprised in Venice (1714), before an unusually large and paying audience. The tragedy was published in over 60 editions, translated, and performed all over Europe with great success. It also served as a model to many playwrights, such as Voltaire, or Alfieri. Moreover, the verse used by Maffei, *endecasillabo sciolto* (“loose hendecasyllable,” close to English blank verse), was used afterwards in all Italian tragedies.

Maffei’s *Merope*, despite its success, remained an isolated case until the end of the eighteenth century, when the creation of a new Italian tragedy, inspired by Classical drama, became the goal of Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803). He was a rich aristocrat from the little town of Asti (in Piedmont, his mother tongue was the dialect spoken there). In his rebellious youth, he interrupted his studies and military career in order to travel around Europe. He thus developed an international, open-minded attitude. He regretted the lack of an Italian Classical theater and he intended to fill this gap by creating a proper tragic language and by writing his own Classical dramas, which could actually be staged. When he returned to Italy, in 1775, he began to write original plays, first in French, then in Italian, which were both second languages to him, and to study and translate Latin authors and later, after 1797, Greeks too.

He did not consider ancient plays as texts for reading and study only. Moreover, he was extremely sensitive to theatrical and performative qualities. He directed and acted in some of his own plays, performed in private houses and small theaters, for

selected friends and theater-lovers. He was open to their comments and suggestions, but he wanted to perform his works before a larger audience (Toschi 1993: 42). His first play, either entitled *Antonio e Cleopatra* or just *Cleopatra*, was actually staged in a public theater in Turin in 1775 with great success, although he later repudiated it. In the following years, Alfieri wrote 21 more tragedies in *endecasillabi sciolti*, in an idiosyncratic, magnificent, “excessive” style which would influence other playwrights, and most translators of ancient plays. His dramas are built on grand and heroic characters, dominated by titanic ideas. Most of his plots are based on Latin authors, such as Ovid and Seneca, but Alfieri blended ancient and modern works. This is the case with *Polinice* (which combines Sophocles’ three Theban tragedies, Statius’ *Thebaid* and Racine’s *Frères Ennemis*), but also of *Merope*, *Agamemnone* (based on Seneca’s *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon*), *Antigone*, *Oreste*, *Mirra*, *Alceste prima* and *Alceste seconda* (adaptations of Euripides’ *Alceste*). *Ottavia* is more closely related to Tacitus’ *Annales* (XIV: 50–63) than to the Latin play *Octavia*, once ascribed to Seneca.

Other tragedies were inspired by historical episodes (such as *Timoleone* and *Agide*, both based on Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*; *Maria Stuarda*, *Bruto Primo* and *Bruto Secondo*), or by biblical characters (such as *Saul*). Alfieri also invented the “tramelogedia,” an original mixture of melodrama and tragedy: in *Abele* (1786), he adapted the story of Adam’s sons, from *Genesis*, adding fictitious characters. He also wrote comedies on moral and satirical themes inspired by the Classics, but they were not well received by critics and audiences.

Alfieri’s tragedies did not meet the approval of the literary and academic elites of his time. But their political contents, such as the quest for freedom and independence, or the fight against a tyrant, granted him a larger audience than any other playwright in modern Italy. Moreover, he added to historical plots a large number of adventurous incidents, scandals, intrigues, and passionate loves, often adulterous (which perhaps reflected Alfieri’s own love stories).<sup>8</sup> Some tragedies in particular enjoyed an exceptional success, especially in the so-called “Jacobin period” (1796–1799) when the echoes of the French Revolution, along with Bonaparte, reached Italy: in 1796, for example, *Virginia* was performed at the Teatro Patriottico in Milan, while in 1798 *Virginia*, *Antigone*, *Brutus I* and *II* were staged in Venice and Bologna.<sup>9</sup> In the nineteenth century, Alfieri’s tragedies became a standard, for their style and content; they were part of the repertoire of many companies and they served as models for other playwrights such as Alessandro Manzoni, whose two tragedies, however, do not have Classical subjects.

## The Early Twentieth Century

In spite of Alfieri’s success, his wish that within a century Italy could have a national theater was not to be fulfilled soon. Only in 1913 was the first Classical festival founded in Syracuse: here, Count Gargallo created a Committee for the performance of Classical dramas which later became the National Institute of

Ancient Drama and today is the INDA Foundation.<sup>10</sup> At the Greek theater of Syracuse, productions of ancient Greek dramas have been performed regularly since 1914, while the staging of Roman plays started later, in other theaters and ancient sites in Sicily and Southern Italy.<sup>11</sup>

The list of INDA productions may indicate how social and political factors influence the choice of a play, a director, and actors.<sup>12</sup> The first drama performed at Syracuse was Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1914), followed after World War I (1921) by the second part of the *Oresteia*, *Libation Bearers* (*Coefore*). In 1922, quite surprisingly, the Committee did not choose the third part of the trilogy, *Eumenides*, but they preferred the *Bacchae* and *Oedipus Rex*, and in 1924 *Antigone* and *Seven against Thebes*. The exclusion of *Eumenides* may be connected to the rise of the Fascist movement and to the historical moment, where the crisis of the democratic *polis* on the verge of a civil war was too hot a subject. It is significant, however, that a complete *Oresteia* was performed only after World War II, in 1948, translated by Manara Valgimigli, and in 1960 by Pasolini, when the Fascist regime was over and the possible political references could be better accepted by the establishment. *Eumenides*, however, was never staged in Syracuse as a single drama (without the previous parts) until 2003: even in recent times, apparently, this play is still difficult for directors, because of its peculiar features such as the demonic chorus of Erynies, their metamorphosis into Eumenides, and the problematic "happy" ending.<sup>13</sup>

Another interesting event of those early years was the protest against the Classical festival organized by the local activists of a well-known artistic movement, the *Futurismo*. In 1921, they wrote a *Manifesto* against the performances in Syracuse, in order to attack the exclusive choice of presenting ancient tragedies, and they launched a campaign to renew the repertoire of INDA with new dramas, possibly by Sicilian authors. They did not succeed: on the contrary, in the following decades Greek authors dominated the flagship site of Syracuse, and the other Sicilian theaters too. Moreover, just a limited number of tragedies were repeatedly performed; those which would apparently please the conservative audience and the political establishment. This explains the frequency of *Oedipus Rex* (seven productions), and of the first two parts of the *Oresteia* (four productions each as a single drama, plus four of the complete trilogy, including the 2014 edition split into two parts<sup>14</sup>). But our hypothetical list of favorites, quite significantly, includes other tragedies first staged in the 1920s, and often reprised afterwards: *Antigone* (seven productions), *Bacchae* (six productions), and *Medea* (six productions).

It is also significant that, in the Fascist era and afterwards, tragedies were regularly translated by scholars, but very seldom adapted by poets or playwrights.<sup>15</sup> This could be related to the threat of censorship, but also to the pressure of the cultural establishment, who supported the Fascist regime and held the "monopoly" on ancient texts. In this regard, the most striking case seems *Antigone*: after the 1924 performance at Syracuse, during the Fascist regime and World War II, there were no known versions or adaptations in Italy of this drama, which would be comparable to those written at that time by Espriu, Brecht, Sérgio, and Anouilh

(respectively in Spain, Switzerland, Portugal, and France). The link between the Fascist movement and the Classical theater probably prevented radicals and opponents from writing their own partisan *Antigone*.<sup>16</sup>

## Comedy and Satire

For similar reasons, in Fascist Italy, Aristophanes was not as popular as elsewhere, and seldom staged until recent years: among his comedies, the most frequently adapted are *Birds* and *Clouds*, followed by *Frogs*, whose connection to topical satire seems weaker.<sup>17</sup> Political comedies such as *Knights* or *Peace* have never been performed in Syracuse or as big productions; in war-time and crisis periods they never became a manifesto for protest, as happened in other countries, such as France or Germany.<sup>18</sup> *Knights* was originally meant to be staged in 1924 in Syracuse, but the project failed. That year Mussolini was actually sitting in the audience, and it is easy to imagine his reaction to a possible identification with Paphlagon/Cleon. The comparison was made, years later, by Carlo Emilio Gadda, in *Eros e Priapo*, a text about Mussolini and the Fascist warmongers, written in 1944/45, but, significantly, published only in 1967.<sup>19</sup>

The first comedy ever staged at the Greek theater of Syracuse was *Clouds* in 1927, along with *Medea* and two satyr-dramas: *Cyclops* by Euripides and an adaptation of Sophocles' *Trackers*, respectively translated and written by the scholar Ettore Romagnoli. He was at the time the artistic director of the INDA and he translated most of the comedies and tragedies of those early years. He was a fan of Greek satyr-drama, which, as a minor genre, was very seldom performed.

In the 1930s, the Fascist regime gained acceptance among more and more intellectuals and scholars, while its opponents were killed, exiled or deported for their dissent, their political choices, or their Jewish origins.<sup>20</sup> Most universities, as well as many theaters and institutions, such as the INDA or the Istituto di Studi Romani, became part of the Fascist cultural strategy. The dream of a New Roman Empire, where Italy could be the heir of ancient Rome, included an evaluation of Latin authors and Roman theaters. New productions were conveniently staged all over Italy, first in 1932, then every year between 1935 and 1938, at archeological sites such as Ostia Antica or Paestum.

As a side effect, this new deal gave space also to other minor genres such as adaptations from Theocritus and satyr-dramas, and after the war to regular performances of comedies, by Plautus and Aristophanes, and "hybrid" forms of dramas, such as *Cyclops*, *Alkestis*, and *Iphigenia in Tauris* by Euripides. These experiments also prepared the ground for the renaissance of New Comedy which, in a few decades, would take advantage of some fortunate discoveries. In the 1950s, archeologists found a great number of clay masks and statues possibly connected with characters of New Comedy, on the small island of Lipari, near Sicily. When the papyrus of Menander's *Dyskolos* was published in 1959, Lipari and other ancient sites were prepared to host New Comedies, along with Latin ones, because they and their audience were already used to a wider choice of shows other than Greek tragedy.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, during the 1950s, Aristophanes was still an unwelcome guest in Syracuse and at other official festivals. The mainstream theater kept on privileging the traditional “way to the Classics,” and censorship was still a real threat: in 1957, two years before Karolos Koun was censored for his supposed blasphemy and satire in his *Birds* (Athens, 1959), the Italian Church tried to ban the performance, in the Roman amphitheater of Benevento, of an *Assemblywomen* directed by Luigi Squarzina, the same director who was about to shock Italy with a “hippy” version of Euripides’ *Bacchae* in March 1968, two months earlier than Richard Schechner’s *Dionysus in 69*. The show took place, nevertheless, followed by Plautus’ *Menaechmi*, which was clearly easier to deal with, and created no scandal at all.

And yet, however slowly, Italy too was opening up to changes, and to international influences: in 1958, Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* provided the plot for the most successful Italian adaptation of all times, the musical with a hint of social satire, *Un trapezio per Lisistrata*, by Garinei and Giovannini, where contemporary Italian characters replace the Greek personae.<sup>22</sup>

### Gassman and Pasolini

The year 1959 saw an important development: the INDA chose as the main star of a new *Oresteia*, to be staged at Syracuse in 1960, the actor and director Vittorio Gassman (1922–2000). At that time he was already very famous, and he had played a great part in spreading ancient dramas to a wider audience, through theater and television, with his plays, lectures, and films. The Greek playwrights, Alfieri and Seneca were among his favorite authors.<sup>23</sup>

With the director Luciano Lucignani, who was influenced by George Thomson’s *Aeschylus and Athens*, Gassman created an unconventional show, with tribal ballets, pagan idols, and totems on stage, in order to provoke the audience to the highest degree. Moreover, Gassman and Lucignani commissioned a modern version of Aeschylus’ text from the most talked-about Italian intellectual of those times, Pier Paolo Pasolini, poet, novelist, and later very influential film auteur.<sup>24</sup>

The translation was written in just three months, as Pasolini indicated in his preface, *Nota del traduttore*, and it is, in fact, a poetic adaptation—the first ever staged at Syracuse—criticized by most scholars as “unfaithful” to Aeschylus. Pasolini’s own mission was the “democratic aim” of delivering the trilogy to a wide modern audience. Conservatives and academics, especially, were shocked by Pasolini’s interpretations of the text, by his deliberate choice of a simple rhythm and a plain style, with colloquial and popular expressions. Moreover, he translated most pagan names into their Catholic equivalent: Zeus becomes “God” and Apollo’s temple a “church.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite the scandal, Pasolini kept working on ancient drama for the rest of his life, and created in a decade plays and films where he renewed the language of Classical reception by combining ancient models with ritual and social elements of foreign cultures and with contemporary political themes.<sup>26</sup> In 1963, Pasolini wrote, in the

Romanesque dialect, a free translation of Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, entitled *Il Vantone*. This was recently (in 2009) staged and directed by Roberto Valerio in the style of a musical. In 1966, he wrote the plays *Pilade*, an ideal sequel, or fourth part, of the *Oresteia*, and *Affabulazione*, freely inspired by *Oedipus Rex* and focused on the so-called "Laius complex." Vittorio Gassman directed it in 1976–1977 and again in 1986–1987.

In 1967, Pasolini released *Edipo Re*, his first film based on a Classical drama, with the amateur actor Franco Citti in the leading role, and several stars such as Silvana Mangano, Alida Valli, Carmelo Bene, and Julian Beck. In the script, Pasolini framed the plot of *Oedipus Rex* between a prologue on Oedipus' childhood, set in an autobiographical, post-war Italy, and an epilogue on Oedipus' pilgrimage as a blind beggar, set in a contemporary, industrial, urban context. The central part, filmed in the desert and historical towns of Northern Africa, is a poetic adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, with a final scene inspired by *Oedipus at Colonus*. (See Chapter 25 also for a discussion of Pasolini's films.)

In 1968, Pasolini released both a novel and a film called *Teorema*, freely inspired by Euripides' *Bacchae*. These works were censored and prosecuted for their explicit content: a young and beautiful guest, played by Terence Stamp, who may easily be identified with Dionysus, visits a rich family, fascinates and seduces its members, including the men, and subverts their lives. The Classical source is not cited, but Pasolini wrote "we have both met Dionysus" in a letter to the actress Silvana Mangano, who played Jocasta in his *Edipo Re* and the mother in *Teorema*.<sup>27</sup>

Pasolini produced a documentary in 1969, released in 1973 and entitled *Appunti per un'Orestide africana* (*Notes on an African Oresteia*): here, Pasolini travels to Africa in order to shoot a free modern adaptation of Aeschylus' trilogy. Jazz music by Gato Barbieri, interviews with African students, scenes of funeral rites and tribal dances intertwine, while Pasolini's voice explains his project. In 1970, he released *Medea*, starring Maria Callas. This is a complex and visionary film which starts with a ritual *sparagmòs*, and evokes the victory of modern civilization over ancient, religious, natural values. Like *Oedipus Rex*, *Medea* has non-Classical music, "barbarian" costumes, created by the stylist Danilo Donati, and exotic settings such as the caves of Cappadocia and the castle of Aleppo in Syria.<sup>28</sup>

In 1975, the life and work of Pasolini were brought to an abrupt end by his violent murder, which may be compared to the *sparagmòs* of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae* and was memorialized as a tragic death, in many ways, by writers such as Moravia, Eco, and Testori.<sup>29</sup>

## Recent Years

At the time of Pasolini's death, the reception of Classical drama had spread extensively, all over the world, and in Italy too there had been some important performances, such as the March 1968 hippy version of *Bacchae* by Squarzina, or the 1967 Italian tour of *Antigone* by the Living Theatre.<sup>30</sup> In those years, the gap between



“mainstream” and “fringe” Classical theater became strikingly evident. Today, the former still includes the biggest and most expensive productions of ancient dramas that take place in archeological sites, at Classical festivals and in theaters owned by the State or municipalities; the latter allows experiments on a wider range of texts by small and independent companies, or by single playwrights and directors, mostly independent, often young and frequently not supported by public finances.

Moreover, in the early 1970s, the “Oedipus era” was gradually replaced by an increasing number of performances and adaptations of the *Oresteia*, starting in 1972 with a big international production of the trilogy directed by Luca Ronconi, who would later become a star, and would direct many Classical dramas in his career.<sup>31</sup> In a few years, momentous adaptations were staged by Karolos Koun in Epidaurus, by Peter Stein in Berlin, and by Peter Hall in London; in Italy, among others, the artist, poet, and playwright Emilio Isgrò wrote an ambitious trilogy entitled *L'Oresteia di Gibellina*. He sets the ruins of Troy, and the kingdom of Agamemnon, in the Sicilian valley of Belice which was devastated by an earthquake in 1968. The performance, directed by Filippo Crivelli, was the core of a public plan for the cultural and economic rebirth of the entire area. This project was actively promoted by the Mayor of Gibellina, Ludovico Corrao. The trilogy was staged as a mass-event of theater, dance, and folk music which lasted three summers (1983–1985), involved the entire community, and inaugurated a festival, *Le Orestidi di Gibellina*, still active in Sicily.<sup>32</sup>

The festival has sponsored and hosted many outstanding productions, such as Euripides' *Trojan Women* (1988), directed by the late Belgian director Thierry Salmon, in ancient Greek, with an international all-female cast, and original choral music by Giovanna Marini, or the excellent Sicilian adaptation of *Eumenides* (2004), based on Pasolini's translation, written and directed by Vincenzo Pirrotta. Here, impressively acting and singing, the director played Orestes, but also the narrator in the style of Sicilian *cunto*, a technique of rhythmic musical narration which echoes archaic epic poetry. In this dark, all-men show, visually inspired by Francis Bacon's paintings, Pirrotta perfectly combined the essence of ancient tragedy with the spirit of modern Sicily. He was supported by a powerful chorus of three monster-Erynie, by the voice of a male countertenor playing Athena, and by persuasive music by Ramberto Ciammarughi. This production was nominated for the ETI Theater Award, while Pirrotta won the National Critics Association Award.<sup>33</sup>

One year later, in 2005, Pirrotta created another remarkable show: at the Greek theater of Akrai, today Palazzolo Acreide, a small town in the interior of Sicily, he directed *U Ciclopu*, an adaptation of Euripides' *Cyclops*, written in Sicilian dialect by one of the most distinguished Italian playwrights, the Nobel Prize-winner Luigi Pirandello. The text is dated 1914, but it seems fresh and new. It was very well received also by non-Sicilian and foreign audience members, despite the language, thanks to the overwhelming performance of the lively chorus of satyrs, of Pirrotta as a magnificent Ulysses, and of the other two talented actors as Silenus and Polyphemus (Figures 11.1 and 11.2).<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 11.1** Vincenzo Pirrotta as Ulysses in *'U Ciclope* by Luigi Pirandello, adapted from Euripides' *Cyclops* and directed by Pirrotta in 2005. Source: Vincenzo Pirrotta.



**Figure 11.2** Chorus of Satyrs from *'U Ciclope* by Luigi Pirandello, adapted from Euripides' *Cyclops* and directed by Pirrotta in 2005. Source: Vincenzo Pirrotta.

It is surprising that this show was not reprised in the flagship Greek theater of Syracuse, despite its success. It was completely sold out, and it again received the National Critics Association Award. However, it is worth considering its exceptional context: the theater of Akrai, since 1991, has been hosting the Youth Festival of INDA. Here, hundreds of students from all over Italy gather, for one month, in order to participate in and watch Classical dramas and adaptations. Besides Akrai, other towns, such as Padua, Lovere, and Turin, host similar events.

Schools are an area where the reception of Classical drama has gained more consistency and quality over the years. Most Italian high schools have theater classes, and many focus on the Classics. Workshops on ancient texts with children and teenagers are increasingly important for many professional companies. In particular, Teatro delle Albe/Ravenna Teatro has focused on such workshops for the past 20 years. They are significantly called “Non-school” because they are the opposite of traditional schools and their only rule is “theater.”

Their artistic director, Marco Martinelli, since the 1990s, has not only written and staged several adaptations of Aristophanes, such as *All’Inferno! Affresco da Aristofane*, i.e. “To Hell! A fresco from Aristophanes,” based on *Ploutos* and other comedies, but he has also shared his love for Old Attic Comedy with many thousands of students, who participate with their teachers in workshops all over Italy and abroad. Now Martinelli’s former pupils have grown up, and in recent years they have been guiding workshops in many “difficult” areas of Italy, where social tensions are high because of immigration, poverty, and criminal organizations. For example in Scampia, a suburb of Naples, in 2006, Martinelli directed *Pace!*—an adaptation of Aristophanes’ *Peace*—and other shows. The Scampia project, called *Arrevuoto*, “Upside-Down,” in the Neapolitan dialect, gave life to other workshops, such as the *Capusutta* project in Lamezia Terme, where Punta Corsara staged *Assemblywomen* in 2012 and *Birds* in 2013, or in Mazara del Vallo, a “border” town of Sicily, with a very high Arab population. Here, Martinelli and his pupil Alessandro Renda, inspired by the ancient Greek bronze of the Dancing Satyr, created a new trilogy, starting with a poetic adaptation of Sophocles’ satyr-drama *The Trackers*. This was powerfully staged in 2010 by a multicultural group of 60 teenagers from many different countries.<sup>35</sup>

As we have seen, personalities like Alfieri and Pasolini were pioneers and anticipated trends with their innovative flair. Their outstanding talents made them exceptions. Martinelli and his group have in recent years built a living legacy. With a new generation of pupils, who guide others in their turn, they are revitalizing texts and renewing them with energy, freedom, and creative chaos. Their formula is, in my opinion, “a best practice” in Classical reception, and it deserves its popularity in Italy and abroad. After many successes, such as MCA Chicago, 2005, Diol Kadd, Senegal, and Mons, Belgium, La MaMa Theatre in New York hosted in January–February 2014 a retrospective of their work, and the new version, with 50 youngsters from Harlem and Manhattan, of a 2011 production based on Vladimir Majakovsky’s verses, already staged with 200 participants, and praised by critics, in

Santarcangelo and in Venice.<sup>36</sup> Its title, *Eresia della felicità*, “Heresy of Happiness,” may serve as a motto for all their performances, including those inspired by Classical drama.

### Notes

- 1 A list of all known theaters (with maps and description) is given at [www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id\\_articolo=385](http://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=385) (accessed January 18, 2016).
- 2 Since the 1960s, however, theatrical aspects and reception issues have been given due attention by scholars such as Umberto Albini, Dario Del Corno, Diego Lanza (see, respectively, Treu 2012; Rousseau and Saetta Cottone 2013).
- 3 The most important editions are the Aldine (nine comedies) published in Venice, 1498, and the first complete edition (eleven plays), published in Florence, 1515. In the sixteenth century, Aristophanes was translated into Latin (Venice, 1538), into Italian (Venice, 1545), and also adapted: see Hall and Wrigley (2007: 1–29, 309–342) and Olson (2014: 397–409). In the meanwhile, the surviving plays by Seneca, Plautus, and Terence have been more often translated by scholars and appreciated by theatergoers: although they are now far less performed than the Greeks, they were for centuries the main intermediaries for ancient Greek authors. On Terence, see Mordeglia (2012), and on Seneca, see the collected essays edited by Citti and Neri 2001 and other publications listed at <http://www.permanenza.unibo.it/iniziativa-editoriali/saggi-e-studi> (accessed January 18, 2016).
- 4 See also Chapter 7 in this volume.
- 5 Even earlier, a Classical performance could have taken place in 1571 at Zacinto: it might have been a version of *Persians*, as a symbolic celebration of the Lepanto battle, but we have insufficient information on it.
- 6 On the theater, see [www.teatrolimpicovicenza.it](http://www.teatrolimpicovicenza.it) (accessed January 18, 2016). On the first performance and its cultural sponsors, see Treu (2004, 2007).
- 7 This was the case, for instance, of Pier Jacopo Martello (1665–1727): he wrote several tragedies and comedies, inspired by ancient models and meant to be read as texts, rather than staged, if not for very exclusive audiences. See also Chapter 7 in this volume.
- 8 He spent most of his youth in duels, because of his affairs with married women, until he met Louise De Stolberg-Gedern, the Countess Albany (wife of Charles Edward Stuart, “Bonnie Prince Charlie,” whom she left and finally divorced). They never parted until Alfieri’s death. They traveled across Europe together, hosted distinguished literary circles, and witnessed many momentous events, such as the French Revolution. See Di Benedetto (1998).
- 9 See Toschi (1993: 318–320, 114–115, 122–129).
- 10 In those very years, the early 1910s, the Italian cinema began to develop and Classical subjects became popular: most epic films were inspired by Roman history and culture (such as *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* and *Spartacus*, 1913 or *Cabiria*, 1914), while years later Greek dramas inspired authors such as Ferroni (on his movie *Le Baccanti*, 1961, see Beltrametti 2007: 411–435) and Pasolini.
- 11 The website [www.indafondazione.org](http://www.indafondazione.org) shows some photographs and documents in the section “*Galleria multimediale / Gallery*.” The productions hosted at Syracuse are listed in both sections *Fondazione / Profilo* and *Archivio / Spettacoli* (accessed January 18, 2016).
- 12 See Olson (2014: 945–963).

- 13 See Bierl (2004) and Treu (2000, 2001).
- 14 In 2014, *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides* shared the same night of performance on alternate dates with *Agamemnon* and *Wasps*: see Treu (2014) and [www.indafondazione.org](http://www.indafondazione.org) (accessed January 18, 2016).
- 15 This is the case, for instance, of most Classical dramas by Alberto Savinio such as *Emma B. vedova Giocasta* (1949, freely adapted from *Oedipus Rex*) and *Alcesti di Samuele* (1949, inspired by Euripides' *Alcestis* and by a true story from Nazi Germany, the sacrifice of a Jewish wife for the sake of her husband).
- 16 A modern political version of *Antigone* was staged 60 years after World War II in 2006 (at the German War Cemetery at the Futa Pass) by Archiviozeta: see Treu (2011b).
- 17 Aristophanes' main performances are listed in the databases of [www.indafondazione.org](http://www.indafondazione.org), [www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk](http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk) and [www.unipv.it/crimta](http://www.unipv.it/crimta) (section Database/*banca dati*) (accessed January 18, 2016). See also Hall and Wrigley (2007: 255–256), and Treu (2009).
- 18 See Hall and Wrigley (2007: 247–254) (on the French performances of *Peace*) and pp. 195–208 (on Hack's adaptation of *Peace* in Germany).
- 19 On the 1924 performance, see Treu (2006). Gadda's play was recently adapted by Gennaro Carillo with a prologue from *Knights* (*Una frenesia di scimie*, Naples, 2011: see Treu 2011a). Before that, only two adaptations of *Knights* had been recorded: *I Cavalieri da Aristofane* (Milan, 1980) by Mario Gonzales and *I cavalieri—Aristofane cabaret* (Andria, 2010) by Mario Perrotta. Both shows maximized the effect of satire without mentioning real persons or situations. The former used farce, slapstick, and masks of clowns, as in a grotesque circus, while the latter (a mix of scenes, dialogues, and songs based on *Knights* and other comedies) was granted the most important Italian critics award in 2011, see [www.marioperrotta.com](http://www.marioperrotta.com) (accessed January 18, 2016).
- 20 Only a dozen academics across Italy—out of 1250—refused to take an oath of loyalty to the Fascist Party, see Boatti (2001).
- 21 See Bernabò Brea (2001) and [www.luigibernabobrea.it](http://www.luigibernabobrea.it) (English version) (accessed January 18, 2016). Life-size copies of the masks were made and used for comic productions: Menander's *Samia* (*La donna di Samo*), directed by Prosperi (Tindari and Selinunte, 1979; Segesta 1981), Plautus' *Curculio* (Palazzolo Acreide and Merida, 1991) and *Truculentus* (Segesta 1993), both directed by Sammartano (see Mordeglia 2012: 46). Other masks, cast on ancient models with digital technology, were produced by the University of Glasgow, see Williams and Vervain (1999). The masks were used in *L'Arbitrato* (*Epitrépones*) in Syracuse (2003) and *Dyscolos*. *Menandro in maschera* in Milan (2004), by Adriano Iurissevich (Venezialnsцена) and Elisabetta Matelli (Catholic University, Milan).
- 22 See Olson (2014: 824–8). Years later, there were two productions of *Birds* in 1964—respectively directed by Di Martino at Ostia and by Stilo at Tindari—one of *Peace* at Segesta and one of *Assemblywomen* at Ostia in 1967, one of *Birds* directed by Cobelli and one of *Clouds* directed by Guicciardini in 1968.
- 23 In his almost 60-year career, Gassman offered a huge number of intense interpretations, both in tragic and comic roles, and was directed by Luchino Visconti and many others: for instance, he played in Seneca's *Thyestes* (1953: see Citti and Neri 2001: 82–83), in *Oreste* (1949) and *Ottavia* (1955) by Alfieri, in Aeschylus' *Persians* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (more than once on stage, and in a movie, *Edipo Re*: see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtBkz4g4ozY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtBkz4g4ozY) (accessed January 18, 2016).

- 24 In 1959, Pasolini was already famous as a novelist, poet and scriptwriter, but not at all as a translator of Classics. Even today, significantly, his translations and adaptations from Classical plays are not widely known.
- 25 Pasolini's *Oresteia* became a classic itself and was revisited by many playwrights and directors, such as Elio De Capitani who directed two plays in 1999–2000 (with original music by Giovanna Marini): see Treu (2000, 2001).
- 26 On Pasolini's *Oresteia*, see Castillo *et al.* (2008: 105–15), available <http://www.imagine-project.org/publications/> (accessed January 18, 2016) and Carla's paper in Berti and García Morcillo (2008: 89–115).
- 27 The complete movie *Teorema* is available online at: <http://www.italia-film.co/teorema-1968-streaming/> (accessed January 18, 2016). See Fusillo (2007), and Beltrametti (2007: 369–382).
- 28 On Pasolini's *Medea*, see Berti, García and Morcillo (2008: 89–115).
- 29 See the articles published on November 9, 1975 and on November 6, 2015 in the review *L'espresso*: (<http://www.centrostudipierpaolopasolinicasarsa.it/molteniblog/pasolini-un-ricordo-di-moravia-del-novembre-1975/>, accessed January 18, 2016) Giovanni Testori, in turn, wrote dramas inspired by the Classics, such as *Edipùs*, 1977 and *Sdisorè*, 1991: see Anna Beltrametti's extensive analysis in Pinotti and Stella (2013: 240–254).
- 30 These productions showed, with new evidence, some performance aspects that have gained more and more importance in recent years: see Treu (2009) in Guide to further reading.
- 31 Among his productions are worth mentioning: a most peculiar *solo* version of Euripides' *Bacchae* with Marisa Fabbri (*Baccanti*, 1978), a surprising *Medea* starring the actor Franco Branciaroli in the leading role (1997), the 2002 edition of the Classical festival at the Greek theater at Syracuse (Ronconi created and directed a trilogy on his own, where Aristophanes' *Frogs* completed Aeschylus' *Prometheus* and Euripides' *Bacchae*), see Hall and Wrigley (2007: 261, 267–275). In 2007, he directed at the same time, with a shared cast and a shared stage, two modern scripts inspired by Homer's *Odyssey*: *Itaca* by Botho Strauss and *L'antro delle Ninfe* by Emanuele Trevi, based on Porfirio's commentary: see [www.lucaronconi.it/mostraronconi\\_scheda.asp?num=257](http://www.lucaronconi.it/mostraronconi_scheda.asp?num=257) (accessed January 18, 2016).
- 32 After the *Oresteia*, Isgrò wrote other texts inspired by the Classics, such as *Didone Adonàis Dòmine*, *Medea*, *Odissea cancellata*: see Isgrò (2011), Treu (2015, 2016 in press). In the following years, similar ambitious projects were staged, such as *Progetto Euripide* by Massimo Castri (who directed *Elettra*, 1993; *Ifigenia in Tauride*, 1994; *Oreste* 1995) or momentous productions of the *Oresteia*: in 1995, the research company Societas Raffaello Sanzio staged *Oresteia (una commedia organica?)*, a provocative adaptation by Romeo Castellucci; in Syracuse, Antonio Calenda directed *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers* in 2001 and *Eumenides* in 2003, and Pietro Carriglio chose Pasolini's translation for his *Orestide* (2008). About the *Oresteia*, see also Bierl (2004), Treu (2000, 2001).
- 33 See <https://www.facebook.com/vincenzopirrotta.it/events> (accessed January 18, 2016), Pirrotta (2010, 2011) and Rimini (2015: 120–130). Pirrotta plays himself and explains his technique in the documentary by John Turturro and Roman Paska *Prove per una tragedia siciliana* ("Rehearsal for a Sicilian Tragedy," 2009).
- 34 On that show, see Treu (2006) and Rimini (2015: 130–142). See also Treu (2013a), about the first work by Pirrotta at the Greek theater of Syracuse (2013): an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen*, with modern characters and a brand new *parabasis* which condemns violence against women. For recent Italian adaptations of *Assemblywomen*, and of other plays by Aristophanes, see Olson (2014: 945–963).

- 35 On the Non-school of Teatro delle Albe, and particularly on the “Trittico Ravenna-Mazara,” see Treu (2010, 2013b) and <https://vimeo.com/85579977> (accessed January 18, 2016). After two shows (*I cercatori di tracce* and *Rumore di acque*, 2010), the trilogy is now completed by a documentary on the whole project: *Mare Bianco* directed by Alessandro Renda (*première* on July 21, 2014, at Libero Bizzarri Festival). Trailer available at: <https://vimeo.com/103434395> (accessed January 18, 2016). About *All’Inferno*, the *Arrevuoto* project and *Capusutta*, see respectively Hall and Wrigley (2007: 262–5), [www.teatrodellealbe.com](http://www.teatrodellealbe.com), [arrevuoto.org](http://arrevuoto.org) (accessed January 18, 2016).
- 36 See [www.teatrodellealbe.com/eng/spettacolo.php?id=84](http://www.teatrodellealbe.com/eng/spettacolo.php?id=84) <http://www.olinda.org/teatrolacucina/laboratori-di-teatro/eresia-della-felicit%C3%A0-a-milano> and <https://vimeo.com/150722130?from=outro-local> (accessed January 18, 2016).

### Guide to Further Reading

- Aloni, Antonio, Ferruccio Bertini, and Martina Treu, eds. 2009. *Il Lessico della classicità nella letteratura europea*, Vol. I. *La Letteratura drammatica. Tomo II. La commedia*. Rome: Treccani. An accessible introduction to the reception of Ancient Comedy in modern Europe, with specific contributions by international experts regarding their own country.
- Castillo, Pepa, Silke Knippschild, Marta García Morcillo, and Carmen Herreros, eds. 2008. *International Conference: Imagines: The Reception of Antiquity in Performing and Visual Arts*. Logroño: Universidad de La Rioja, 2008. A new approach to the most typical and recurrent images in Classical reception, with smart examples from modern media and arts, such as theater plays, movies, videogames, cartoons.
- Hardwick, Lorna, and S. J. Harrison, eds. 2013. *Classics in the Modern World: A ‘Democratic Turn’?*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. A brilliant introduction and an impressive collection of international contributions, based on a past “collaborative conference,” regarding the concept and applications of “democracy” in Classical reception.
- Isgrò, Emilio. 2011. *L’Oresteia di Gibellina e gli altri testi per il teatro*, edited by Martina Treu. Firenze: Le Lettere. The complete theater production and a choice of essays on theater, written over 30 years, by a great Italian artist.
- Magagnato, Licisco. 1992. *Il teatro Olimpico*. Milan: Electa. An essential guide, rich in photos, plans and original drawings, on the last masterpiece created by the great architect Andrea Palladio, which hosted the first documented performance of an ancient drama in modern Europe (*Edipo Tiranno*, 1585).
- Treu, Martina. 2009. *Il teatro antico nel Novecento*. Rome: Carocci. A very short introduction on ancient theater and its reception in the twentieth century, for readers approaching the subject for the first time.

### References

- Beltrametti, Anna, ed. 2007. *Studi e materiali per le Baccanti di Euripide. Storia Memorie Spettacoli*. Como-Pavia: Ibis.

- Bernabò Brea, Luigi. 2001. *Maschere e personaggi del teatro greco nelle terracotte liparesi*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- Berti, Irene and Marta García Morcillo, eds. 2008. *Hellas on Screen: Cinematic Receptions of Ancient History, Literature and Myth*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Bierl, Anton. 2004. *L'Orestea di Eschilo sulla scena moderna*. Rome: Bulzoni.
- Boatti, Giorgio. 2001. *Preferirei di no. Le storie dei dodici professori che si opposero a Mussolini*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Castillo, Pepa, Silke Knippschild, Marta García Morcillo, and Carmen Herreros, eds. 2008. *International Conference: Imagines: The Reception of Antiquity in Performing and Visual Arts*. Logroño: Universidad de La Rioja.
- Citti, Francesco and Camillo Neri, eds. 2001. *Seneca nel Novecento. Sondaggi sulla fortuna di un "classico"*. Rome: Carocci.
- Di Benedetto, Arnaldo. 1998. "Vittorio Alfieri." In *Storia della letteratura Italiana* 6: 935–1014. Rome: Salerno Edizioni.
- Fusillo, Massimo. 2007. *La Grecia secondo Pasolini. Mito e cinema*. Roma: Carocci.
- Hall, Edith, and Amanda Wrigley, eds. 2007. *Aristophanes in Performance 421 BC–AD 2007: Peace, Birds and Frogs*. Oxford: Legenda.
- Isgrò, Emilio. 2011. *L'Orestea di Gibellina e gli altri testi per il teatro*, edited by Martina Treu. Firenze: Le Lettere.
- Mordeglia, Caterina, ed. 2012. "Gruppi, folle, popolo in scena." *Labirinti* 144.
- Olson, Douglas S., ed. 2014. *Ancient Comedy and Reception*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Pinotti, Patrizia and Massimo Stella, eds. 2013. *Edipo. Margini Confini Periferie*. Pisa: ETS.
- Pirrotta, Vincenzo. 2010. *Eumenidi. Riscrittura della tragedia di Eschilo*, edited by M. Centanni and S. Rimini. Acireale-Roma: Bonanno.
- Pirrotta, Vincenzo. 2011. *Teatro*, edited by D. Tomasello. Spoleto (PG): Editoria & Spettacolo.
- Rimini, Stefania. 2015. *Le maschere non si scelgono a caso. Figure, corpi e voci del teatro-mondo di Vincenzo Pirrotta*. Corazzano (PI): Titivillus.
- Rousseau, Philippe and Rossella Saetta Cottone, eds. 2013. "Diego Lanza lecteur des œuvres de l'antiquité." *Cahiers de Philologie* 29.
- Toschi, Luca, ed. 1993. *Vittorio Alfieri. Tragedie. Introduzione di Sergio Romagnoli*, Firenze: Sansoni.
- Treu, Martina. 2000. "Coefore – Appunti per un'Orestiade italiana di Eschilo secondo Pasolini." *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* anno XCIII, vol. XVIII, fasc. I: 119–131.
- Treu, Martina. 2001. "Eumenidi – Appunti per un'Orestiade italiana di Eschilo secondo Pasolini." *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* anno XCIV, vol. XIX, fasc.II: 227–238.
- Treu, Martina. 2004. "Edipo e Vicenza: la storia continua..." *Quaderni di Storia* 59: 229–245.
- Treu, Martina. 2006. "Satira futurista e Satiri siciliani." *Quaderni di Storia* 63: 345–730.
- Treu, Martina. 2007. "Vicence à la grecque: Oedipe Roi et le Théâtre Olimpico." In *Les Autorités. Dynamiques et mutations d'une figure de référence à l'Antiquité*, edited by Didier Foucault and Pascal Payen, 327–335. Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon.
- Treu, Martina. 2009. "La commedia antica sulla scena moderna." In *Il Lessico della classicità nella letteratura europea*, edited by Antonio Aloni, Ferruccio Bertini, Martina Treu. Vol. I. *La Letteratura drammatica. Tomo II. La commedia*, 945–960. Rome: Treccani.
- Treu, Martina. 2010. "La festosa invasione dei Satiri in Sicilia." Online review at: <http://dionysusexmachina.it/?cmd=news&id=18> (accessed January 18, 2016).



- Treu, Martina. 2011a. "Una frenesia di simie." Online review at <http://www.stratagemmi.it/?p=1104> (accessed January 18, 2016).
- Treu, Martina. 2011b. "Never Too Late. *Antigone* in a German Second World War Cemetery on the Italian Apennines." In *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, edited by Helene Foley and Erin Mee, 307–323. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Treu, Martina. 2012. "Due Accademici in sala prove." *Stratagemmi. Prospettive teatrali* 21: 33–43.
- Treu, Martina. 2013a. "Una parabasi per le donne. L'Aristofane di Pirrotta a Siracusa." Online review at <http://dionysusexmachina.it/?cmd=news&id=118> (accessed January 18, 2016).
- Treu, Martina. 2013b. "Back to the Demos: An Anti-Classical Approach to Classics?" In *Classics in the Modern World: a 'Democratic Turn'?*, edited by L. Hardwick and S.J. Harrison, 171–179. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Treu, Martina. 2014. "E tutto ad un tratto: il coro!" Online review at <http://www.stratagemmi.it/?p=5964> (accessed January 18, 2016).
- Treu, Martina. 2015. La Medea 'scancellata' di Emilio Isgrò, in «Un compito infinito». *Testi classici e traduzioni d'autore nel Novecento italiano*, edited by F. Condello and A. Rodighiero. Bologna: Bononia University Press: 263–276.
- Treu, Martina. 2016 (in press). *L'arte di Emilio Isgrò tra epos e teatro: dall'Orestea di Gibellina all'Odissea cancellata*, in *Il racconto a teatro*, edited by G. Ieranò and P. Taravacci, *Labirinti*, Università degli Studi di Trento.
- Williams, Richard and Chris Vervain. 1999. "Masks for Menander: Imaging and Imagining Greek Comedy." *Digital Creativity* 10(3): 180–182.