Tragic Emotions – Then and Now

It is by now widely recognized that emotions are not unchanging essences but are at least in part shaped and constituted by the social environment.\(^1\) Over the past two decades or so, important studies have illuminated the nature of Greek and Latin emotion terms, and shown how they differ from what are purportedly their modern English equivalents.\(^2\) With respect to tragedy in particular, scholars have naturally focused on Aristotle’s affirmation (along with similar claims by Gorgias and Isocrates) that the emotions properly aroused by tragedy are pity and fear.\(^3\) There has been less attention, however, to whether Greek tragedies presented in modern translations would arouse the same emotions, which is to say, their modern analogues, or rather a distinct set of affective responses. Still less attention – in fact, none at all – has been accorded to possible differences between the presumed response to tragedy on the part of ancient Greek audiences and that of modern Greek audiences to versions staged in modern Greek. The present chapter addresses just this question. I may note that this chapter is part of a larger project comparing ancient and modern Greek emotion terms in general, a task which to the best of my knowledge has never yet been undertaken in any form.

For the response to ancient Greek drama, we necessarily depend on the testimony of classical witnesses such as Aristotle, both in his *Poetics* and in his detailed account of the *pathē* that is, the term commonly renders as “emotions,” in his *Rhetoric*. To access the emotions aroused by modern Greek versions, I have conducted a survey, by way of questionnaires, of audience responses to two performances of tragedies focused on Oedipus’ story, as well as interviews with the

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\(^1\) I would like to express my deepest thanks to David Konstan, who encouraged me to undertake this project and supported it at all stages, as well as to the organizers of the conference, ‘Emotions between China and Greece’, 17–18 October 2019 in Shanghai, and especially Huan Yang. I am grateful too to the audience at the conference for their constructive feedback. Finally, I wish to thank the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolida, especially Nikos Katsaraios and Alkestis Papademetriou; the director of the modern Greek play *Oedipus the King* Konstantinos Markoulakis; the translator Yannis Lignadis; and the composer Minos Mastas, for granting me interviews concerning the modern Greek production of *Oedipus the King*, produced by the company *Athenian Theatres* (*Αθηναϊκά Θέατρα*) in the summer of 2019.

\(^2\) See for example, Kaster (2005); Konstan (2006); Cairns (2018).

\(^3\) See Munteanu (2012).
major figures involved in the production. Here, I discuss the results of my research on one of the shows, a modern Greek adaptation of *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles staged in the ancient theater of Epidaurus on 12 and 13 July 2019. The questionnaires are deliberately minimal in nature, since they were distributed at the performances, as the audience left the theater. The same questions are presented in modern Greek and English, to accommodate both native and foreign spectators (for the questionnaire see the appendix).

Behind this apparently straightforward approach lie several large issues. For example, Aristotle invokes pity as pertinent to tragedy, an emotion that entails a distance between the dramatic character and the spectator. Modern theater-goers and critics speak rather of a variety of emotions, including pity but also, and far more often, sympathy or empathy, sadness, love, etc. Do the modern terms for emotion imply something more like identification? Are the views of modern spectators more complex than those of ancient spectators, at least as Aristotle presents them? We must allow, of course, for the possibility, indeed the likelihood, that an ancient audience would have experienced a comparable range of affective responses. One indication is the variety of emotions expressed by characters within the tragedies to events and narratives, for example, the messenger speeches that communicated actions that took place offstage. Nevertheless, we may provisionally trust the affirmations of Aristotle and other contemporaries as to the predominant emotions that tragedy elicited. The hope is that a comparative study of the modern and ancient Greek emotional vocabularies in a controlled context such as the theater may contribute to our understanding of the emotions in classical Greece, as well as to the project of the comparative study of emotions across cultures.

The reason for choosing *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles is that this play is one of the most famous and popular dramas in antiquity as well as worldwide in modern times. Paul Woodruff quotes a communication between Sir Richard Jebb, “the greatest Sophocles scholar,” and the British novelist George Eliot concerning Oedipus’ play: “When Jebb asked Eliot how Sophocles’ play had influenced her work, she responded, ‘in the delineation of the great primitive

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4 The interviews with the director Konstantinos Markoulakis, the translator Yannis Lignadis and the composer Minos Matsas were conducted in Greek. The translations into English are mine. The other version of the Oedipus story was a free adaptation by Robert Wilson performed at Epidaurus on 21 and 22 June 2019. An appointment for an interview was cancelled by him at the last moment.

5 For approaches to reactions of modern audiences to ancient Greek plays see, Easterling (2005), Budelmann (2010), Budelmann/Easterling (2010), and Budelmann et al. (2013).

6 See Kiritsi/Konstan (2010), with special attention to Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*. 
In addition, Sophocles’ play served as the prime example for Aristotle’s aesthetic theory of the best tragedy, an issue to which I return below.

In the Poetics, the earliest known work of drama criticism in Western tradition, Aristotle defines tragedy as “a mimesis of an action which is elevated, complete and of magnitude . . . ; employing the mode of enactment, not narrative; and through pity and fear (ἔλέου καὶ φόβου) accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions.” Aristotle specifies that “what is fearful and pitable can result from spectacle, but also from the actual structure of events, which is the higher priority and the aim of a superior poet. For the plot should be structured so that, even without seeing it performed, the person who hears the events that occur experiences horror and pity at what comes out as one would feel when hearing the plot of the Oedipus.”

Aristotle adds that “tragedy’s most potent means of emotional effect are components of plot, namely reversals and recognitions (αἱ τε περιπέτειαι καὶ ἀναγνώρισεις) . . . Reversal is a change to the opposite direction of events . . . and one in accord, as we insist, with probability or necessity: as when in the Oedipus the person who comes to bring Oedipus happiness, and intends to rid him of his fear about his mother, effects the opposite by revealing Oedipus’ identity.”

The play Oedipus the King opens with Oedipus surround by supplicant citizens of his city who beg him to find a solution to the plague that is afflicting the city. Oedipus expresses his pity for the suppliants: “I want to give every form of assistance. For I would be callous if I did not feel pity at such a supplication . . . Pitable children, you have come here with desires known and not unknown to me . . .” Later in the play Oedipus mentions his tears, which are moved by pity because of the suffering of his people. Patrick Finglass, in his commentary on Oedipus the King, notes that Oedipus’ “human concern for others – the characteristic that marks him out as an able ruler and profoundly sympathetic man – will turn out to be one of the causes of his destruction. An Oedipus indifferent to the suffering of his people would never even have begun the investigation that ends so disastrously for him.”

From the beginning, the play poses implicitly the question, “who is to blame for the plague?” The chorus in the first choral song of the play too sings about the numerous dead bodies of the citizens who died due to the disease:

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10 Vv.11–13; see Finglass (2018) 45, 170 and 185.
11 Vv. 66; see Finglass (2018) 107 and 187–188.
“death, beyond death the city’s reckoning: beyond pity, children lie on the
ground unmourned, bearing death to the living, while wives and gray-haired
mothers stream to the bank of altars, exhausted by their sadness.” 13 Pity is a
“crucial casual element” in the play and in Oedipus’ life, 14 starting with the
pity that Laius’ slave felt for the exposed baby Oedipus and continuing with the
Corinthian shepherd who rescued him, who states that his motivation for sav-
ing Oedipus’ life and handing him to the royal couple in Corinth was pity. Pity
reaches its climax when Oedipus has blinded himself and his appearance pro-
vokes the pity even from those who previously might have hated him. The
blind Oedipus begs Creon to show pity to his daughters and care for them in
the future. 15

What caused Oedipus’ destruction? Was it his own hamartia – that is, error – and if so what kind of error was it? Was it his hubris or arrogance? Oedi-
pus’ “over quick suspicion” of Creon and Tiresias and his belief that they are
plotting against him is not only a characteristic of tyrants, as Ruth Scodel has
pointed out, but also an aspect of Oedipus’ proud and overconfident charac-
ter. 16 The chorus in the second choral song of the play (vv. 863–910) empha-
sizes the hubris of the tyrant, as manifested in Oedipus’ behavior to Creon and
Tiresias. Oedipus’ hubris, in combination with his quickness to anger, was evi-
dent as well in his encounter with Laius and his cohort. Does an awareness of
these aspects of Oedipus’ character temper the pity that might otherwise be
evoked for him? The role of Apollo and his prophecies is also crucial in Oedipus’
life. Douglas Cairns has argued (commenting on lines 374–377) that “Apollo is
actively involved in the events that are unfolding in the play and will be in-
volved – in an adversarial way – in Oedipus’ downfall: it is Oedipus’ moira [des-
tiny or portion] to fall at hands of Apollo, and Apollo is seeing to it that this will
in fact happen.” 17 Does this condition affect the audience’s emotional response
to the catastrophe?

Keeping in mind these fundamental questions, posed by highly competent
scholars, about how the ancient tragedy might have been perceived by its origi-
nal audience, let me now turn to the modern Greek production of Oedipus the

14 Cf. vv. 326–7, when Oepidus supplicates Tiresias to help him and his people to discover the
cause of the plague by appealing to the priests’ pity; see Finglass (2018) 48 and 276: “by the
gods, do not turn away when you have understanding, since all of us here prostrate ourselves
as suppliants before you.”
15 Vv. 1178, 1295–6 and 1508; see Finglass (2018) 50, 564 and 611.
King. It was directed by Konstantinos Markoulakis, who had engaged with Oedipus on stage twice before: the first time, when he played the role of Oedipus and the second time that of Jocasta, Tiresias and the shepherd. Markoulakis’ writes about the play:

[Oedipus the King] is arguably, the first suspense thriller in western theater (the Anglo-Saxons describe it as a whodunit play). Unwinding the tangle of events, the hero, masterfully, reaches the center of the labyrinth, where the persecutor and the persecuted are the same person. The scene – like quicksand – is constantly changing, the unanswered riddle is constantly transformed: “how can we save ourselves from the plague?,” “Who killed Laios,” “Am I the slayer?” “Who am I?” This last question is the one that makes this play also the first ever existential drama in western theatre. The hero attempts to answer the riddle using his mind, his reason, assets that people – especially western people – have deified: reason, reflection, rationality. They are all we have, and they have launched mankind, but they are not enough. If one decides to raise this question, one has to be prepared for the answer. And the truth, the poet says, “is offered in exchanged for death.” Oedipus is the First Man in our drama: Adam. His fate makes us humble . . . Some call it Fortune, others Divine Judgment, others Destiny, and others simply regard it as the mask of the Universe, so completely indifferent about humans . . . And when everything is over, when all has come to light, I cannot take my eyes off of the first image: an infant, a baby only a few days old, cut off from his mother’s affection, abandoned in Cithaeron, his womb and grave. And a shepherd approaching.18

Markoulakis’ view of the play reflects a modern perception and suggests a possible range of emotional reactions distinct from what an ancient audience might have experienced.

The universality of Oedipus’ story, its thriller-like nature and existential dimension, according to the director, was made visual in the production by the use of a number of little baby figurines made of clay, which were scattered on the stage. The figurines served two purposes in the production, a philosophical and a dramaturgical. They represented a fate or supernatural power that predestines the lives of all of us before our birth. We can make choices and direct our life here or there, but supernatural powers may be stronger than we are. The figurines also were intended to remind the audience of Oedipus’ life at various stages, above all his infancy, which was always under the influence of the prophecy. Apart from the clay figurines, the stage and the props used in the production are very plain.

When I asked Markoulakis what emotional responses he expected from the modern Greek audience and how far or near they might be to Aristotle’s views on pity and fear, he responded as follows:

18 Markoulakis (2019).
In Aristotelian *eleos* (pity) – *oiktos* in modern Greek – I would also include sympathy, compassion (συμπάθεια and συμπόνοια), and a sense of understanding for our tragic hero, which means that we walk with him, we follow him through his life. In the Aristotelian emotion of fear, I would also include awe (δέος), and we, as spectators, learn from Oedipus’ experience. What do we learn: to be humble and modest in connection with the universe and the world around us because it always exceeds us. At the end of the play we stand by Oedipus’ side and I think that the spectators feel the same.\textsuperscript{19}

The translator, Yannis Lignadis, produced a high quality modern Greek translation of the play which combined learned registers of modern Greek with a certain number of colloquial expressions, but also preserved a great number of ancient Greek lines. He argued that at certain moments in the text Sophocles’ language is better left untouched. However, when he retained ancient Greek lines, he also translated them in modern Greek so that the actors uttered both versions, the ancient and the modern. I asked the translator what the primary were emotions that he felt on reading the original play and whether his translation conveyed the same emotions to the audience. He responded that he always feels awe and admiration for Sophocles’ language and style, as well as pity (οίκτος), awe, and admiration for Oedipus’ character, as for many other Sophoclean characters, such as Antigone and Ajax. Lignadis stressed that at the beginning of the play the emotions of awe and admiration prevail in respect to Oedipus, while at the end he feels pity (οίκτος), sorrow and pain (οδύνη) for Oedipus’ destruction. Lignadis also underlined that during Oedipus’ last scene, where the tragic hero expresses his self-pity (αυτοοικτιρμός, αυτολύπηση), a common emotional term in modern Greek, but not a change of mind or regret (μετάνοια) for his life, he also feels love for Oedipus. In this the translator agrees with the director’s view, that we, as spectators, do not reject Oedipus after his destruction. Lignadis also believes that the content of ancient Greek pity as expressed in *έλεος* and the modern Greek *οίκτος* is much the same, but the two differ in the degree of intensity, and that the way a modern audience expresses it is different from the ancient.

Modern Greek culture, as it has evolved, according to translator, places greater emphasis on the interpretation of feelings than in understanding them and feeling them. This poses a challenge to the translator. For him, Lignadis

\textsuperscript{19} Konstantinos Markoulakis, interview by Stavroula Kiritsi, July 13, 2019 “Στο Αριστοτελικό έλεος συμπεριλαμβάνεται η συμπάθεια, η συμπόνοια, η αίσθηση της κατανόησης του ήρωα, δηλαδή βαδίζουμε μαζί του· και στον Αριστοτελικό φόβο, συμπεριλαμβάνεται το δέος, η γνώση η δική μας, που μαθαίνουμε από το πάθημα του Οιδίποδα που γίνεται για μας μαθήμα. Και ποιο μάθημα παίρνουμε εμείς από τον Οιδίποδα; Να έχουμε ταπεινότητα και σεμινότητα σε σχέση με το σύμπαν, με τον κόσμο, με τη ζωή που μας περιβάλει και πάντα θα μας υπερβαίνει.”
affirmed, the direct emotional response to a play is the critical thing, and matters more than what he described as the “intellectual” understanding, whereby the audience seeks to explain the action rather than to feel it. That is why he considers as very important the “emotional involvement” of the audience in the appreciation of a play. And this is what Lignadis tried to evoke in his version.

Let me just mention a few examples that indicate the translator’s strategy in the rendering of ancient Greek pity into modern Greek. He uses terms and expressions such as sorrow, a sigh, suffering with another, pity, and lament. In modern Greek έλεος (pity) has the meaning of compassion (other modern Greek terms used to express pity are ευσπλαχνία and συμπόνια), and under the influence of Christianity and the idea of God’s compassion (ευσπλαχνία) for mortals the Greek word also carries the sense of compassionate love. Έλεος may also mean mercy or charity (ἐλεημοσύνη), the moral or material support for those in need.

20 Yannis Lignadis, interview by Stavroula Kiritsi, September 15, 2019 “Τα συναισθήματα που νιώθω είναι πάρα πολλά κάθε φορά που διαβάζω ένα κείμενο αρχαίας τραγωδίας και κυρίως του Σοφοκλή. Αν έπρεπε να συνοψίσω τα συναισθήματά μου για τον Οιδίποδα, θα έλεγα νιώθω δέος για τη γλώσσα του κειμένου και για τη δραματουργική τεχνική. Ο Οιδίποδας, αυτός ο αντιφατικός ήρωας, όπως και όλοι οι κεντρικοί ήρωες του Σοφοκλή, χαρακτηρίζεται από ένα αισθήμα θαυμασμού και οίκτου, συναισθήματα τα οποία φαίνονται μεν αντιφατικά άλλα είναι οι δύο όψεις του ιδίου νομίμου. Ο λόγος που θαμάζει τον Οιδίποδα είναι ο ίδιος που σε κάνει να τον οικτίρεις. Για τον Οιδίποδα νιώθω οίκτο, θαυμασμό και στο τέλος του δράματος μια αγάπη . Στον κομμίν ο Οιδίποδας αυτοοικτίρεται χωρίς όμως να εκποιεί το μεγαλείο του. Είναι ένας αξιοπρεπής και δυναμικός θρήνος, ο οποίος διατηρεί το θαυμασμό αλλά και την αγάπη για τον Οιδίποδα . Οι Σοφόκλειοι ήρωες συνειδητοποιούν [τι έχει συμβεί] αλλά δεν μετανοούν . Στον σύγχρονο Ελληνικό πολιτισμό, έτσι όπως εξελίχτηκε, χρησιμοποιούμε πολύ τον ορθολογισμό και προσπαθούμε να εκλογικεύουμε τα συναισθήματα και τις πράξεις μας και ο συναισθηματικός ανθρωπισμός έχει χαθεί ίσως . Ο σύγχρονος οίκτος και ο αρχαίος έλεος είναι ο ίδιος, αλλά είναι διαφορετικός ο βαθμός της έντασης τώρα [στην σύγχρονη εποχή] . Η συναισθηματική κατανόηση ενός έργου είναι πολύ πιο σημαντική από την διανοητική κατανόηση. Πολλές φορές μπορεί να νιώθεις συναισθήματα και μετά να μην μπορείς να τα περιγράψεις ακριβώς ή να δικαιολογήσεις τον λόγο που ενώσεις αυτά τα συναισθήματα . Για μένα είναι πολύ σημαντικό το θέμα της συναισθηματικής εμπλοκής του ακροατηρίου”.


23 Lignadis (2019) 35 “συμπάσχω στὰ πάθη σας,” an addition to the script by the translator to stress the meaning of the existing line in the original, v. 58.


need. In modern Greek, too, οίκτος has the meaning of “the feeling of sympathy towards somebody who suffers or is in an unpleasant, disturbing condition.”

Still in modern Greek, the word λύπη (sadness) is commonly used to express not only sadness and emotional pain but also compassion and sympathy, a sense close to pity. These nuances are subtle, and bear, I believe, on the way the director translator viewed the modern production.

The composer of the music of the modern Greek production, Minos Matsas, shares the views of the director and the translator about Oedipus’ character and story. In my interview with him, I asked what feelings he wanted to communicate with his music to the spectators, and whether those feelings were different in each stasimon, depending on the action in the act that preceded it. Matsas responded that his music followed the dramaturgical evolution of the play and it extended the action musically. Sophocles himself, in the text, gives the instruction, the suggestion, for the style of lyric parts, which change according to the meaning of the text.

The composer did not use any particular modern music style in composing the music of the play. However, as he said, as part of his family heritage – he hails from Epirus, a region of northwest Greece – sounds of Greek folk music and lamentations that are popular there might have played a role, subconsciously, while he was composing the music, especially in the fourth stasimon and in the exodos. For the fourth stasimon the translator notes: ‘having as an example the fate of Oedipus, the chorus contemplates with sadness the variability of fate and the instability of human beings. His song is an anthem and a lament for the tragic greatness of Oedipus.’ Matsas stressed that the main emotion that he wanted to convey in this stasimon was compassion (συμπόνια) for Oedipus’ fate and downfall. In this stasimon the chorus sang like a church choir, performing together a song which was reminiscent of a formal lamentation. Their instruments were placed on the ground.

26 Babiniotis (1998), s.v, έλεος, οίκτος.
27 Babiniotis (1998), s.v. λύπη.
28 Minos Matsas, interview by Stavroula Kiritsi, June 18, 2020 “Από το Σοφοκλή υπάρχει η οδηγία, η υπόδειξη, για τη στιχουργική που αλλάζει ανάλογα με το νόημα του κειμένου. Σε κάθε χορικό ακολουθία την οδηγία του Σοφοκλή για το ύφος της μουσικής, η οποία συμπίπτει με αυτό που λέγεται.”
29 Lignadis (2019) 27, “έχοντας ως παράδειγμα την μοίρα του Οιδίποδα, ο Χορός συλλογίζεται με θλίψη την μεταβλητότητα της τύχης και την αστάθεια των ανθρώπων. Το τραγούδι αποτελεί ύμνο και θρήνο για το τραγικό μεγαλείο του Οιδίποδα”; the translation is mine.
30 Minos Matsas, interview by Stavroula Kiritsi, June 18, 2020 “Ο χορός έχει ακουμπήσει τα όργανά του στο χώμα θρηνεί και σχολίαζε την ανθρώπινη μοίρα και τη μοίρα του Οιδίποδα. Είναι ένα απολύτως χορωδιακό μέρος αυτό.”
So much for the views of the director, translator, and composer of the modern version, which sought to be faithful to the original, even to the extent of retaining some verses in classical Greek, but at the same time was intended to affect emotionally a public that was accustomed, perhaps, to over-intellectualizing their response to tragedy, especially a famous one often studied in school. Besides, there was the concern that the very terminologies for the emotions in modern and ancient Greek, which at first blush look so similar, carry different meanings, with ancient pity or eleos shading into compassion or empathy, very different values in respect to audience response. How, then, did the spectators at the modern production themselves react, and how did they describe the emotions that the performance elicited in then? As I indicated above, I and my team distributed questionnaires at both shows, which took place on successive days on the 12th and 13th of July; 700 were distributed in total of which we collected 365 as the spectators left the theatre (it is worth noting that it was dark by this time). The number of the questionnaires to be distributed was agreed upon in advance with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolida, under whose jurisdiction the Epidaurus theatre lies. The total number of the spectators who attended the two shows was approximately 18,000, with slightly larger attendance on the second evening than on the first. The seating capacity of the Epidaurus theatre is today approximately 11,000.

A single A4 printed sheet included on either side the questionnaire in Greek and English. The questionnaire itself briefly informed the spectators about the project, entitled “Audience emotional response to Ancient Greek Drama”, and explained its purpose. We posed only three questions. The first asked the gender of the spectator. The second question was: “What is your emotional reaction to the Oedipus’ story, as presented in this production?” Appended below this question was a list of common emotional terms, including pity, anxiety, relief, sympathy, hatred, envy, sadness love, fear, and shame; the last box simply read “other,” which the respondent could fill in at will. The third question was: “What provoked your emotional response?” Here too we offered several possibilities, include Oedipus’ story, the directing, the character, the acting, the plot, the staging, or (again) something else, to be filled in by the respondent. The spectators could tick more than one emotion and more than one cause for their emotions. Finally, there was a space at the end of the questionnaires for additional comments. Of the responses that were collected after the show, 60 were in English and 305 in Greek; in both cases, more women than men responded.

The ranking of the emotions (by number of times ticked) in the English results is as follows: sadness, sympathy, pity, anxiety, love, relief, fear, shame, hatred, envy and, in the category ‘other’, horror, remorse, resignation to fate, justice and
interest. The order of the causes of the emotional reactions was: Oedipus’ story, the acting, the staging/costumes, directing, plot, characters, and finally music. The ranking of the emotions in the Greek results are as follows: οίκτος-pity, λύπη-pity/sadness, συμπάθεια-sympathy, αγωνία-anxiety, αγάπη-love, φόβος-fear, and in the category “other,” δέος-awe, συμπόνια-compassion, θλίψη-sorrow, αδυναμία-weakness, οργή-anger, βαθύς πόνος-deep pain, όνειδος/ντροπή-shame. The order of the causes of the emotional reaction was: Oedipus’ story, the acting, directing, plot, characters, staging/costumes, music, and the modern Greek translation. As we see, the responses varied to some extent between the native Greek speakers and those who responded in English. The modern Greek emotional responses are more diverse, and in many cases pity-οίκτος appears not only on its own but also together λύπη-pity/sadness, συμπάθεια-sympathy and αγάπη-love. To some extent the difference doubtless reflects the fact that the Greek audience was responding directly to the language of the play, while those who responded in English chiefly followed the English subtitles that were provided. Given this difference, as well as the relatively small sample of English responses, no conclusions can be drawn as to this distinction.

But what about the comparison between the collective responses of the modern audience and the emphasis on pity and fear that we have seen in the ancient Greek sources, and also in the interpretations of the play by some modern scholars? Can we say that there has been a shift in the emotional landscape between ancient and modern times? Here, we enter a caveat that is unavoidable at this early stage of the investigation: any statistics drawn from the sample are wholly provisional, given not only the relatively small numbers but also the absence, necessarily, of controls concerning the conditions under which the responses were solicited. This was not a laboratory environment, and we recognize as well that the audience at such a performance is not representative of modern Greek society at large. Also, the scales were in a sense loaded by the preselection of emotions listed. But there are nevertheless certain cues in the tables we have drawn up (two sample tables are reproduced in the appendix) as to patterns of emotional reaction to the tragedy, and these are informative of possible distinctions between the ancient and the modern Greek emotional repertoires and habits of expression. I thus present some tentative observations, which I hope will be a spur to further research in this area and, more broadly, to a more systematic comparison between the emotional vocabularies of ancient and modern Greece.

Pity and fear seem to retain their primacy among the responses to the Oedipus tragedy, but nuances suggest some distinctions. As we have noted, pity shades into sympathy, in both the English and the Greek responses. Whereas Aristotle understood pity to require a certain distance from the suffering person,
empathy implies rather identification: the stress is on feeling what the character in the drama feels, rather than feeling something in response to the other’s condition. Fear too emerges prominently in the questionnaires, but it is often paired with anxiety or pain, and suggests a kind of nervousness in the face of another’s misfortune, rather than the sense that the fate of the protagonist represents the kind of existential catastrophe to which we are all vulnerable – which I take to be at the heart of Aristotle’s understanding of this emotion in relation to tragedy.\textsuperscript{31} Shame, hatred, and envy are low on the scale. When it comes to the eliciting causes of the emotions, Oedipus’ story stands out, followed by aspects of dramaturgy: this is very much in line with Aristotle’s account, but there is one hitch in the way that the questionnaire was formulated that will require further clarification. This is the fact that among the causes of emotional response were listed both “Oedipus’ story” and “plot,” and it may be that an insufficient distinction was perceived between these two categories. Much more work is needed to flesh out these preliminary soundings into a full analysis.

One final point: the chapters in this book triangulate among three languages: classical Greek, classical Chinese, and English, the language in which all the entries are written (one chapter, by John Kirby, also deals with classical Sanskrit). But another language lay implicitly in the background, and that is modern Chinese, the native tongue of many of the contributors. The organizers of the original workshop believed that there should be at least one contribution by a native speaker of modern Greek, as a way of highlighting the inevitable interference that centuries and indeed millennia in the history of a language produce. There has been some recent work on the Byzantine Greek emotional vocabulary, and efforts, still in their infancy, to compare it with the classical language.\textsuperscript{32} Necessarily, such studies are text based. The method adopted in this chapter makes use of different instruments and test conditions. These will be refined as I continue my research in this area. For now, I am pleased to have had the opportunity to bring modern Greek too into the cross-cultural dialogue on Greek and Chinese emotions.

\textsuperscript{31} See Konstan (2020).
\textsuperscript{32} See Hinterberger (2013).
Appendix

a. The questionnaire in Greek and English

ΕΡΩΤΗΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΟ για Επιστημονική Έρευνα:
«Οι συναισθηματικές αντιδράσεις των θεατών σε σύγχρονες παραστάσεις αρχαίου δράματος»

Αγαπητοί θεατές,

Σας παρακαλούμε βοηθήσετε στην έρευνά μας, αφιερώνοντας λίγα λεπτά από το χρόνο σας, για να συμπληρώσετε ανώνυμα το ερωτηματολόγιο που ακολουθεί, αφού έχετε παρακολουθήσει την παράσταση. Τα αποτελέσματα του ερωτηματολόγιο θα χρησιμοποιηθούν μόνο για ακαδημαϊκή έρευνα, με θέμα τα συναισθήματα που προκαλούν στους θεατές σύγχρονες παραστάσεις αρχαίου δράματος. Η βοήθειά σας θα εκτιμηθεί. Παρακαλείστε να παραδώσετε το συμπληρωμένο ερωτηματολόγιο κατά την έξοδό σας στα μέλη της ομάδας μας, που θα βρίσκονται εξω από το θέατρο και θα φορούν χαρακτηριστικές κορδέλες με την ένδειξη ΟΙΔΙΠΟΔΑΣ. Αν δεν ενδιαφέρεστε να συμπληρώσετε το ερωτηματολόγιο, παρακαλείμαστε να το πάρετε μαζί σας και να το αφήσετε στον κοντινότερο κάδο απορριμάτων, εξω από το θέατρο. Αγαπάμε και προστατεύουμε το περιβάλλον και τα μνημεία μας.

Σας ευχαριστούμε

Οι ερευνητές: Δρ. Σταυρούλα Κυρίτση (Πανεπιστήμιο του Λονδίνου), Καθηγητής David Konstan (Πανεπιστήμιο Νέας Υόρκης, Τμήμα Κλασικών Σπουδών)

ΑΡΧΑΙΟ ΘΕΑΤΡΟ ΕΠΙΔΑΥΡΟΥ «ΟΙΔΙΠΟΔΑΣ ΤΥΡΑΝΝΟΣ» σε σκηνοθεσία Κωνσταντίνου Μαρκουλάκη (12 και 13 Ιουλίου 2019)

- ΦΥΛΟ (Παρακαλώ επιλέξτε ανάλογα)
  □ Άνδρας □ Γυναίκα □ Άλλο

- Ποια είναι η συναισθηματική σας αντίδραση στην ιστορία του Οιδίποδα, όπως παρουσιάστηκε στην παράσταση; (Παρακαλώ επιλέξτε ένα ή περισσότερα συναισθήματα)
  □ Οίκτος □ Συμπάθεια □ Λύπη □ Αγωνία
  □ Φόβος □ Μίσος □ Αγάπη □ Όνειδος/Ντροπή
  □ Ανακουφίση □ Φθόνος/Ζήλεια □ Άλλο (παρακαλώ αναφέρετε τι συγκεκριμένα;)

- Τι προκάλεσε την παραπάνω συναισθηματική σας αντίδραση; (Παρακαλώ επιλέξτε μία ή περισσότερες απαντήσεις)
  □ Η ιστορία του Οιδίποδα □ Οι χαρακτήρες του έργου

Stavroula Kiritsi

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QUESTIONNAIRE for the Research Project:

“Audience emotional response to Ancient Greek Drama”

Dear Spectators,

Please assist us in our academic research project by taking few moments to fill out, anonymously, this questionnaire after viewing the show. The results of the questionnaire will be used only for academic research, in connection with our project concerning audience emotional responses to modern productions of ancient Greek drama. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated. You are kindly requested to hand in the completed questionnaire to members of our team, who will be standing outside the theatre and wearing sashes with the indication ΟΙΔΙΠΟΔΑΣ (OEDIPUS). If you are not interested in filling out the questionnaire, please take it with you and drop it in the nearest rubbish bin outside the theatre. We love and protect our environment and our monuments.

Thank you

The researchers: Dr Stavroula Kiritsi (University of London), Professor David Konstan (Classics Department, New York University)

ANCIENT THEATRE OF EPIDAURUS “OEDIPUS THE KING” directed by Konstantinos Markoulakis

(12 and 13 July 2019)

- GENDER (Please tick your answer)
  - Male  □  Female  □  No answer

- What is your emotional reaction to the Oedipus’ story, as presented in this production?
  (Please tick one or more options)
  - Pity  □  Sympathy  □  Sadness  □  Fear
  - Anxiety  □  Hatred  □  Love  □  Shame
  - Relief  □  Envy  □  Other (please indicate)

- What provoked your emotional response?
  (Please tick one or more options)
  - Oedipus’ story  □  The characters  □  The plot
  - The directing  □  The acting  □  The staging/ costumes
  - Something else (please indicate)

Any additional comments:
(b) Tables with the results of two questions in English and Greek. The questions are the same in both languages: What is your emotional reaction to the Oedipus’ story, as presented in this production?
References


