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Carmen Gloria Cernadas-Lema

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Abstract: On 5 July 2015, the Greek referendum resulted in the rejection of the bailout conditions proposed by the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. This was a turning point for the EU, leading to speculation about a potential "Grexit". In British society, this translated into a growing fascination with the Greeks, which did not escape the dramatic scene. The interest in Greek plays gave rise to the emergence of a new trend in UK drama: the retelling of Greek tragedies. This movement consists in the adaptation and re-elaboration of these ancient stories onto the contemporary stage. This paper delves into the origins, characteristics, and diverse perspectives of this recent trend in British drama. The sudden surge of interest in Greek tragedy in 2015, which has continued to flourish, is examined in the context of the UK's socio-political landscape. This trend is a response to contemporary realities, making it a dynamic reflection of society. This study focuses on three noteworthy plays, *Beautiful Evil Things* (2022) by Deborah Pugh and George Mann, *Iphigenia in Splott* (2015) by Gary Owen, and *Antigone* (2022) by Inua Ellams. It uncovers common themes and distinct directorial techniques within this artistic movement.

Keywords: UK drama, Greek tragedy, adaptation, contemporary drama, myth, feminism.

Carmen Gloria Cernadas-Lema

Retelling Greek Tragedies: A Contemporary Trend in UK Drama

1. Introduction

In recent years, the British theatrical landscape has seen the emergence of a growing interest in Greek tragedy. This has provoked a dynamic process of adaptation and re-elaboration of these ancient narratives onto the contemporary stage, giving birth to a new trend: the retelling of Greek tragedies. The influence of these classical tales upon modern theatre is palpably exemplified in a recent article by Arifa Akbar, *The Guardian's* chief theatre critic, published on 15 December 2022. This critical review, titled "The best theatre of 2022", meticulously evaluates what are considered to be the best theatrical productions of the year within the United Kingdom. Akbar features two noteworthy productions that are retellings of Greek tragedies. Moreover, the article insists on the recent prevalence of this sort of plays. To be specific, the two examples mentioned are *Beautiful Evil Things* by Deborah Pugh and George Mann, and *Iphigenia in Splott*, by Gary Owen; both of which will also be explored in the present paper.

Due to the relative recency of the trend under analysis and the limited scholarly exploration of its dimensions, the present paper is of significant importance in trying to comprehend the cultural and social implications of this literary phenomenon. The emergence of a new theatrical trend in the UK, characterised by the retelling of Greek tragedies, represents a remarkable cultural event. Since our times are marked by fast societal and technological changes, this wave of interest in the ancient Greek world might signal a paradigm shift within contemporary society. Furthermore, the adaptation of these ancient narratives in the present day suggest a profound re-evaluation of the past. Society has found itself not only revisiting these values but also adapting them to address the complex questions of the modern age.

In order to analyse this emerging trend, the present paper will employ the methodology of Cultural Studies. This interdisciplinary approach investigates the complex interplay between culture, society, and art. It is particularly appropriate for examining phenomena like the resurgence of Greek tragedy adaptations in the UK, as it allows for a holistic exploration of cultural and social implications. Cultural Studies emphasise the examination of the production and reception of cultural artifacts in their broader societal contexts. This method recognises that cultural expressions are not isolated but are deeply connected to the dynamics of the society in which they emerge. Thus, this methodology makes possible an in-depth exploration of how Greek tragedy adaptations reflect and engage with the evolving socio-political landscape of contemporary Britain.

Cultural Studies also encourages a critical examination of the power dynamics, representation, and agency within cultural narratives. In the context of this paper, it offers a framework for scrutinising how the retellings of Greek tragedies provide a platform for marginalized voices, especially women, and challenge established power structures. The recent resurgence of Greek tragedy adaptations in British theatre reflects a societal imperative to reexamine the past and its relevance to the present, alongside a profound recognition of the need to rekindle the importance of humanities in our increasingly mechanised and technologically oriented age. These adaptations serve as a medium through which

contemporary society engages with ancient narratives to address complex modern questions, reevaluating values, and paying attention to the enduring significance of the humanities in a rapidly changing world.

This paper is intended to examine the cause, the main characteristics and the different perspectives of this new trend in British Drama, shedding light on the evolving relationship between the past and the present. To this end, the inception of this sudden interest in Greek tragedy will be explored in the context of the current socio-political scene of the United Kingdom. In addition, three different examples of plays will be analysed, paying attention to their common traits as well as to the different directorial techniques: *Beautiful Evil Things* (2022) by Deborah Pugh and George Mann, *Iphigenia in Splott* (2015) by Gary Owen, and *Antigone* (2022) by Inua Ellams. By examining the interplay between the ancient and the contemporary, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how culture, values, and artistic expression intersect and influence one another in a dynamic and ever-changing world.

2. The "Grentrance": Taking the Greeks Out of the Attic

The boom for Greek adaptations in the United Kingdom started in 2015 and continued to manifest a strong presence last year. 2015 was crucial, not only for Greece but also for the broader Eurozone. On the 5th of July, the Greek referendum culminated in the rejection of the bailout conditions proposed by the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. This watershed moment generated speculations regarding a potential "Grexit", i.e., Greece's withdrawal from the European Union. In this context, the English dramatist and academic Dan Rebellato observed the imminent inception of what he aptly named a "Grentrance" within the realm of British theatre. Rebellato is a renowned figure in the realm of contemporary theatre. Born in London in 1968, he holds the position of Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. Rebellato has been nominated twice for the prestigious Sony Award and shares his insights in the realm of theatre by contributing to *The Guardian Theatre Blog* (Rebellato). According to him, this "Grentrance" was characterised by the strategic use of Greek plays as British theatre's response to the challenges posed by austerity, both within Europe and at home.

It is essential to acknowledge George Rodosthenous as a remarkable name in the sphere of contemporary theatre and Greek tragedy adaptations. Rodosthenous is an academic and theatre practitioner. He currently serves as an Associate Professor in Theatre Directing at the School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds ("Professor George Rodosthenous"). He has edited the book *Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy: Auteurship and Directorial Visions* (2017), a significant work that examines the relationship between classical Greek narratives and their contemporary adaptations in theatre. Rodosthenous counted in 2015 "four productions of the *Oresteia* in the UK, three of *Antigone* in London, and three of *Medea*, one of *Hecuba*, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* elsewhere" (1), pointing out the noticeable upsurge of this kind of productions that year.

Rebellato conveys that a possible explanation for this growing interest in the Greeks is austerity, not only in the economic meaning but in the sense of "unadorned severity". This denotes a stark and uncompromising quality that can be found in Greek plays:

> Stripped of the fuss of naturalism, the flinty poetry of the work presents a series of archetypal conflicts: individuals against the mass, the dissenter against the state, mothers and against children, husband against wife, brother against sister, men against women, women against men, and everywhere human beings against the Gods and against destiny and against their own fundamental weaknesses. (Rebellato)

These "archetypal conflicts" continue to resonate with contemporary audiences: struggles between individuals and the collective, familial tensions and even and even related to the gender dynamics that structure society. They are inherent to the human condition and, for this reason, they can be reinterpreted and adapted to speak to today's public. The appeal of these narratives comes, in part, from this ability to distill fundamental aspects of human existence. However, despite their universality, these retellings do not pretend "some kind of ahistorical human nature", they do not seek to portray a timeless or unchanging human nature. By concentrating on the political and social aspects of their own era, the plays remain relevant and adaptable to different historical and cultural contexts. They "remain political":

> These are conflicts that take place in clustered political worlds, in cities facing political crises in public health, or the conduct of unpopular foreign wars, or the machinations of rival families and factions, in which reputation is as subject to public opinion, to spin doctoring, to brand control as it is now. But they seem to present these conflicts stripped back to a state of bare life. (Rebellato)

As this paragraph conveys, Greek tragedies depict conflicts that occur in organised communities, during times of political crises. These struggles might relate to a variety of issues like public health or unpopular foreign wars, among others. Therefore, this type of plays is not merely about personal dramas; they are deeply rooted in the political and societal dynamics of their times. By delving into these themes, they become relevant to the political challenges and power struggles we face in contemporary society. Furthermore, Rebellato stresses that these conflicts are presented in "a state of bare life", so the absence of excessive ornamentation makes them easier to adapt to different contexts. Austerity policies in Europe, with their focus on fiscal restraint and budgetary cutbacks, have often been criticised for their lack of empathy and their impact on vulnerable populations:

> The Greeks remind us what a cold universe it is if our fate is in the hands of arbitrary and capricious judgments from our jealous and temperamental divinities, whether they sit in Brussels or Parnassus, Frankfurt or Olympus. The Greek tragic austerity is a way of showing us the horror of our own austerity. (Rebellato)

This quotation connects today's mechanised and accelerated world, where economic considerations frequently take precedence over human welfare, to ancient Greek tragedies. In both there are distant and indifferent authorities who take decisions with no concern for the harmful consequences for the most vulnerable population. The lack of empathy in such policies reflects a broader social trend, where the human cost of economic decisions is overshadowed

by the pursuit of fiscal objectives, and the Greek tragic austerity serves as a mirror to contemporary struggles with sensitivity.

The contemporary era witnesses an increasing coldness and mechanisation as well as the collective acceptance of the supposed superiority of science and technology over the humanities and the arts. As Martha Nussbaum conveys in *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010), abilities associated with the humanities and the arts, such as "the ability to think critically; the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a 'citizen of the world'; and, finally, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person" (7) can become lost due to today's widespread obsession with pragmatism and productivity. Perhaps, one of the reasons for this recent attraction to the values of Greek tragedy can be translated as a need for the vindication of the humanities in the contemporary era. Professor Nussbaum is internationally distinguished for her work in Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy ("Martha C. Nussbaum") and she has argued for the importance of literature and the humanities in addressing moral and ethical issues. Nussbaum explained in an interview that "the big problems that those great works put in front of us haven't changed all that much" ("Applying Lessons Ancient Greece"), as discussed earlier in this paper.

One of the elements that helps to foster a more compassionate or empathetic attitude is the sense of community, which Greek tragedy is very prone to provoke. Bryan Doerries emphasised the "palpable sense of relief to discover that they [the audience] are not alone: not alone in their communities, not alone across the world, and not alone across time". This sense of community extends beyond the confines of the theatre, encompassing a shared human experience that transcends geographical, temporal, and societal boundaries. The communal experience of Greek tragedy offers a counterbalance, inviting us to re-establish meaningful connections with one another and with the ethical moral dilemmas that bind humanity across time and space, as well as to be aware of the particular reality that each one lives in their community.

3. Main Characteristics

There are certain traits that tend to appear in these retellings of Greek tragedies and which define it as a discernible trend within the realm of dramatic adaptation. One notable feature is the relocation of the narrative to a modern or localised setting, grounding the play in a recognisable time and space. This choice not only enhances the audience's proximity to the drama but also fosters a heightened capacity for identification with the moral and ethical dilemmas it presents. Furthermore, a significant element of these adaptations involves an emphasis on the more intimate and domestic dimensions of tragedy. Directors often dig into familial relationships and interpersonal dynamics, accentuating elements like "the relationship of a father and his son, brotherly love, incestuous undertones" (Rodosthenous 13). This shift towards the familial and the everyday aims to render the adaptation more pertinent to modern audiences, focusing on relatable human experiences and emotions.

It is also noteworthy that these adaptations confront the darker aspects of human and social existence, delving into themes of death, destruction, punishment, and revenge. The

values of Greek tragedy succeed in connecting with the spectators and making them face these problems. In this way, Greek tragedy serves as a conduit for individuals to engage in introspection, prompting them to contemplate their ethical and moral convictions. These adaptations encourage viewers to reflect "on metaphysical and (in the broadest sense) theological issues – the crucial 'tragic' questions of right and wrong, humankind's place in the universe and relation to the unknowable forces that shape it" (Hall et al. 44).

Contrary to the popular perception of Greek tragedy as "that deranged violence" (Laera), contemporary directors adopt a different approach, seeking to facilitate a deeper connection between the audience and the characters. The aim is to humanise these mythological figures, making them relatable and tangible to modern viewers: this is no longer a god with elevated dilemmas that we would never encounter as mortals. A very illustrative example of this effect on the spectator can be found in the review by Margherita Laera on Robert Icke's *Oresteia* and Anne-Louise Sarks' *Medea*:

> Instead of a cold, heartless assassin, Sarks' *Medea* is a loving mother lacerated by agony and torment. As an audience member, I felt I was being asked to put myself in Medea's or Agamemnon's shoes—I was being asked to see these alien mythological characters as actual people, the kind of people I might have met.

The portrayal of Medea in this adaptation as a loving but tormented mother adds complexity to the character. This approach prompts audiences to step into the shoes of these mythological figures, seeing them as real people with relatable emotions and dilemmas. In this way, they transcend the distance that often separates viewers from the striking characters of ancient mythology. Furthermore, there is a perceptible inclination within these adaptations towards new feminist readings of classical texts. These contemporary productions shed light on aspects that had previously been neglected or consciously ignored in past renditions of the plays. By focusing on the feminist agendas of the characters, these adaptations offer fresh perspectives on gender dynamics, power structures, and the agency of women within the stories. In this way, the retelling of Greek tragedies in contemporary theatre engages with a wider spectrum of issues, providing a space for critical exploration and interpretation.

4. Are Retellings "a Cheap and Patronising Trick"? Adaptation vs Appropriation

Although this paper shows a profoundly positive stance towards this new theatrical trend on the British stage, there are some dissenting voices whose perspective is worth commenting on. The question of retelling Greek tragedies in a modern context has collected scepticism from classicists, who ardently resist the urge to update or adapt these classic plays. This dissident group believe that adapting Greek tragedies is nothing more than a "cheap and patronising trick", in the words of Rupert Christiansen. According to this perspective, directors should instead embrace the inherent pastness of these dramas: "[T]he fact that while a drama must always live in the theatrical presence of the performance, it simultaneously speaks to us from another time and place which doesn't need 'relevance to us' to validate it" (Christiansen). This

viewpoint might reflect a rather reductive and biased stance, one that vehemently seeks to preserve the perceived "purity" of the original work. This ideology inevitably narrows the extensive range of creative possibilities that adaptations can bring to contemporary creative production. While the retellings of Greek plays do not imply that performances faithful to the original text are still being staged, advocating the elimination of these new adaptations does constitute a loss for the contemporary theatre world.

The consideration of whether these adaptations might verge on cultural appropriation deserves a distinct examination. To enter into a theorisation of adaptation, the concept of intertextuality coined by Julia Kristeva must be revisited. This term refers to the process by which a text openly draws on and references others, whether they are from the past, present or textual conventions, as crucial elements in its creation. According to Kristeva, any text "is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). Linda Hutcheon's statement that adaptation is "repetition but without replication" (173) captures the relationship between the adapted work and its source material. The process of adaptation involves revisiting elements from the original narrative while simultaneously avoiding a simplistic duplication. Retellings should not be a copy, but a form of creative dialogue where familiar elements are reshaped to generate something new.

It is essential to recognize that adaptation and appropriation represent different concepts and do not align. Appropriations imply "a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" and they "do not always make their founding relationships and interrelationships explicit" (Sanders 35, 43), they are "associated with abduction, adoption and theft", and their "central tenet is the desire for possession", being a "seizure for one's own uses" (Marsden 1). On the other hand, as Duška Radosavljević conveys, adaptation consists of filtering the reading of an existing work through the writer's own sensibility, their artistic vocabulary or their political views (qtd. in Rodosthenous 6). This process is influenced by their unique artistic vocabulary and political views. Instead of an act of possession, adaptation is more akin to a dialogue between the original work and the interpreter's own creative vision.

In the forthcoming sections, three examples of retellings of Greek tragedies will be analysed in order to discern the characteristics previously presented in this paper: *Beautiful Evil Things* (2022) by Deborah Pugh and George Mann, *Iphigenia in Splott* (2015) by Gary Owen, and *Antigone* (2022) by Inua Ellams.

5. *Beautiful Evil Things*, by Deborah Pugh and George Mann

Co-created by Ad Infinitum's Deborah Pugh and George Mann, the play under scrutiny is narrated by the decapitated head of the mythic Gorgon, Medusa, forever immortalised upon Athena's shield, as she watches the battle of Troy. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Medusa is depicted as a beautiful maid, raped by Poseidon. Although Medusa was the victim, Athena was furious with her and punished her by transforming her hair into snakes as well as giving her the curse of turning anyone who looks into her eyes into stone. Perseus was sent to cut off her head and then gave it to Athena, who put it on her shield (Tatar). In Pugh and Mann's retelling, Medusa's head starts by recounting the circumstances leading to her situation and continues

to tell other horrifying stories featuring women from Greek tragedies as protagonists. Among the prominent figures are the Amazon queen Penthesilea; the seer Cassandra, and the wronged mother Clytemnestra (Akbar, "Beautiful Evil"). All of these female protagonists have been punished by gods, husbands, men and society in general, in classical myths. Although the Penthesilea narrated by the Greek epic poet Quintus Smyrnaeus in *Posthomerica*, is a great Amazon warrior, in the myth she ends up being reduced to the love object of Achilles, who kills her in combat in the Trojan War. Once defeated, Achilles removes her helmet and is captivated by the beauty of the Amazon, regretting that it has been wasted in a war, showing a twisted and toxic idea of love (Kapach). For her part, the prophetess Cassandra has traditionally been portrayed as a madwoman. According to Aeschylus's tragedy Agamemnon, Apollo granted her the gift of prophecy in exchange for agreeing to have relations with him and when Cassandra refused, he condemned her to never have her prophecies heard. She was also raped by Ayax and, at the end of the Trojan War, given to Agamemnon as his concubine and finally killed by his wife, Clytemnestra ("Cassandra"). Indeed, Clytemnestra is another of the protagonists of this adaptation. According to Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, took Aegisthus as her lover while her husband was away at war. When he returned, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus murdered Agamemnon as revenge for having used their own daughter, Iphigenia, as a sacrifice to win the war. In turn, the queen of Mycenae was murdered by her children Orestes and Electra in revenge for their father's death ("Clytemnestra").

This work is an example of an emblematic feminist reading of classical texts. Brave women who have historically been unjustly portrayed in ancient literature are granted a platform for their voices to be heard anew:

> It is an alternative Iliad, of sorts, which foregrounds the heroism of its women, brave and battle-ready even as they are cast out or killed (though some fates are altered). The gods are as vicious as the men but never once do Pugh's heroines become victims. (Akbar "Beautiful Evil")

This production offers contemporary audiences an opportunity to revisit and re-evaluate the portrayal of women in classical narratives, thereby promoting a richer and more inclusive understanding of the enduring power of storytelling.

It is significant that the role of narrator in this innovative feminist reinterpretation of classical myths is entrusted to Medusa, the enigmatic figure capable of petrifying anyone with whom she shares a glance. Faced with the threat of being turned to stone, no one would want to stop and listen to this mythical figure. Nevertheless, in this play, Medusa casts her gaze upon the audience and they look back at her. Pugh and Mann channel the collective voice of several marginalised female characters, endowing the Gorgon with the task of not only recollecting but also recontextualising these myths: "Casting Medusa as an archivist setting the record straight, history is retold with full nuance and colour as seen through a female gaze, and through the most powerful gaze in mythology" (Doyle). As Doyle conveys, the past is retold through the lens of the female gaze, ushering in a deep shift in perspective. Deborah Pugh herself claimed, "what better lens to use than the most infamous female gaze of them

all - that of Medusa". This approach reclaims the narratives of these mythological women and subverts the prevailing narratives and interpretations.

A long time distances the present era from the time of Sophocles and the social and cultural environment in which his works were conceived. Over the centuries, the perception of women has undergone profound metamorphoses, marked by evolving societal norms, ideologies, and gender roles. However, it is not merely a manifestation of presentism, a reductive lens that imposes contemporary values and sensibilities on historical contexts, to aspire to give a new gender perspective of these classical narratives. As Pugh explains:

> These stories were first told and written down at a time when the role of women in society was very different, and very unsatisfactory by modern standards. Many of the first English translations we received were written by Victorian men who, again, had very specific ideas about the roles women should take, subsequent retellings of the stories were then based on these biased translations so that the female characters lost their depth.

Therefore, these translations that Pugh mentions would reflect the perceptions of the Victorian period, distorting the female characters' depth. Narratives can be influenced and transformed by the historical and cultural contexts in which they are presented. It is important to revisit these stories with fresh perspectives in order to fully appreciate the female characters and narratives themselves.

6. *Iphigenia in Splott*, by Gary Owen

As already mentioned, one of the perspectives that directors tend to choose when dealing with an adaptation of a classic text is to relocate the action in a contemporary or localised setting. An outstanding exemplar of this approach is found in the production of Iphigenia in Splott, where the play's title itself indicates its location in Splott, a district in Cardiff. This one-woman monologue, written by Gary Owen and put on stage under the direction of Rachel O'Riordan, shows the difficulties of austerity-era Britain through the protagonist, Effie, a white working-class young woman:

> At the start of the play, Effie introduces herself with a knowing nod to the on-going national media narrative that demonizes the working class and persons in receipt of state benefits. Effie's introduction immediately ruptures any assumptions that this is a heroine cast in the virtuous mould of the self-sacrificing Iphigenia found in Euripides' source text. (Kerrigan)

The protagonist's life and struggles serve as a lens through which to scrutinise the broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics of the period. This localised and contemporary setting allows the production to engage with the challenges, aspirations, and hardships of its specific time and place, creating a unique platform for addressing critical issues. Through Effie's perspective and the context of Splott, the production represents an exploration of the

relationship between personal narratives and the socio-political landscape of contemporary Britain. Effie recounts her daily routine of out-of-control nights and subsequent days of recovery. She is firstly presented as a character who has the agency to make decisions about her actions. However, as details of the context in which she finds herself emerge, she is shown to have very limited choices.

Splott, as reported in the 2014 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, is a constituency that ranks in the top ten per cent of the most deprived areas in the country in relation to factors such as Employment, Health, Community Safety and Education (Kerrigan). In an interview with Exeunt, Owen described Splott as a place where "[people] are struggling and don't have much money, where people are particularly dependent on public services, and in which those public services are being withdrawn". This play is "a scathing indictment of the overpopulated and under-resourced urban environment" (Kerrigan).

In this way, *Iphigenia in Splott* provides a stark and unapologetic reflection of the socio-economic challenges that plague many urban environments. The depiction of Splott as a place where people are struggling with financial difficulties, while also facing the erosion of essential public services, portrays a picture of a community under duress. This representation serves as a potent reminder of the harsh realities that countless individuals endure everyday, where limited resources and a lack of support can transform urban spaces into crucibles of struggle. In this context, this production acts as a powerful critique of the overpopulated, under-resourced urban environment, bringing to light the systemic issues that persist in society. It invites audiences to confront the questions of equity and justice while underscoring the importance of empathetic exploration of the challenges faced by marginalised communities in contemporary life.

Owen was inspired by Euripides' posthumously performed play *Iphigenia at Aulis* (405 B.C.). In the original myth, Iphigenia is the daughter of Agamemnon, commander of the Greek army. In order to embark on the Trojan War, he must sacrifice his daughter by divine order. The peculiar title of Euripides' play is remarkable, including the name of the heroine and the place where the events take place, which is unusual in Greek plays. This links the heroine to a specific place, in the same way that Gary Owen does in his adaptation, linking Effie to Splott: Owen's play foregrounds the individual tragedy of the protagonist, but the tragic experience is, in the most defining moment, inexorable from the natural world, Effie's location and the social context associated with it (Kerrigan). Effie's apathetic attitude is due to the precarious situation that comes with living in Splott. Owen extrapolates this experience to the impact suffered by the areas of the UK hardest hit by the economic crash of 2008. This adaptation "distill[s] our contemporary troubles within it" (Akbar "Iphigenia Splott").

7. *Antigone*, by Inua Ellams

This adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* focuses on modern British Muslim life. In the original story, Creon, the new king of Thebes and Antigone's uncle, has ordered that Antigone's brother, Polynices, will not be buried as he has been declared a traitor to the homeland. Thus, his spirit will wander the earth. Faced with this situation, Antigone decides to put family duty before state duty and decides to bury her brother anyway. Therefore, Creon sends for Antigone

and decides to bury her alive so she can starve, but Antigone ends up hanging herself ("Antigone").

In Ellam's retelling, a British Pakistani Muslim family has to survive in a nation that is increasingly filled with Islamophobic prejudice. Creon is the country's Muslim prime minister. He makes radical anti-terrorism laws. For this reason, the radicalised Polyneices is denied his funeral rights after his death in a confrontation in London. Polyneices, who is also Creon's nephew, is dumped by his uncle in an immigration detention centre and he is stripped of his British citizenship.

The play alludes to topical debates relevant to the lives of British Muslims in the UK today, such as the government's Prevent strategy, the hijab, or the ideas of statelessness and citizenship that recall the story of Shamima Begum, the teenager rendered stateless when Sajid Javid cancelled her British citizenship after she travelled to Syria and joined Islamic State (Gentleman). Tiresius, the seer that in the originl play warns Creon that his decisions will have terrible consequences, becomes "a tech whiz in a hoodie whose seer's gifts come through data analysis" (Akbar "Antigone review"). This reinterpretation of Tiresius as a data-driven seer might reflect our contemporary dependence on technology and data analysis for understanding complex issues and predicting potential consequences. The choice to depict Tiresius in this manner offers an interesting commentary on the intersection of ancient wisdom and modern technology. It suggests that the seer's prophetic abilities, once attributed to divine or supernatural sources, have evolved into a more calculated form of foresight. In our data-driven age, where algorithms and analytics shape decision-making, Tiresius as a "tech whiz" emphasizes the power of information and knowledge in shaping our understanding of the world.

Creon, Sophocles' king of Thebes, is the prime minister that in Ellam's adaptation says "Yes, I can", twisting Obama's campaign slogan to his own ends. The play appeals to politicians of colour, from Sajid Javid to Priti Patel, who betrayed their own communities with hostile policies towards immigration, race and religion (Akbar "Antigone review"). This prime minister struggles to find a place for himself within the Conservative party, becoming increasingly authoritarian to try to compensate for his origins to the electorate, perceived as Islamophobic. As Ellams conveyed, "[h]e's a figure who strips away aspects of his identity in order to speak to the British electorate, to become what he thinks makes an appealing politician" (qtd. in Gentleman).

The portrayal of this prime minister's struggle to reconcile his personal identity with the expectations of the electorate casts light on the complex relationship between authenticity and political expediency. As the character gets rid of aspects of his identity to conform to a certain image of an "appealing politician," the play offers an exploration of the compromises and personal costs that individuals might endure in their quest for public approval. In doing so, it speaks to a broader societal issue—the pressure to conform to a particular narrative or identity that is deemed more acceptable by the masses. The prime minister's journey becomes a symbol of the intricate balancing act politicians often face when trying to maintain their individuality while also adhering to a party's or electorate's expectations.

8. Conclusion

The emergence of a new trend in the British theatre scene, characterised by the retelling of Greek tragedies, marks a cultural phenomenon that offers an intricate web of implications for contemporary society. It started in 2015 and has been escalating to the point that the year 2022 was full of such plays. As noted in this paper, the origin of this recent interest is due to the situation that Greece experienced in 2015, with possible rumours of its exit from the European Union. Furthermore, this movement is not only a creative adaptation of ancient narratives to modern settings, but also a reflection of wider social and political dynamics. It re-evaluates the past and transposes its values into the complex environment of the present.

This paper has identified several key features of this trend, such as the relocation of narratives to contemporary or localised settings, the focus on family relationships and interpersonal dynamics, the inclination to confront the darker aspects of human experience, and the tendency towards feminist interpretations of classical texts.

In addition, the "Grentrance", coined by Dan Rebellato, offers a valuable lens through which to understand the appeal of Greek tragedies in an age marked by austerity and social challenges. These plays transcend time and political contexts, emphasising archetypal conflicts that remain relevant in contemporary societies. The austerity emanating from Greek tragedies attracted the interest of British theatre directors because of their appeal to universal values and situations inherent to the human condition. However, they did not simply want to revive the performance of the old classics on stage, but aimed to adapt these stories to contemporary times.

The specificity of these plays, due to their setting in a time and space totally familiar to the spectator, allows the audience to come face to face with the very austerity (rather in economic terms) that ordinary people live, putting their feet on the ground and away from divine problems. They provide a powerful commentary on the coldness and mechanisation that increasingly define modern life, and prompt critical reflection on social empathy and moral considerations. Notably, the retellings of the Greek tragedies often offer a vindication of the stories, especially from the female perspective. They cast new light on gender dynamics, patterns of power and the role of women in the stories, providing a space for critical inquiry and interpretation that was previously underrepresented.

However, this trend also faces the criticism of those who advocate the preservation of classical works in their original form. The tension between adaptation and appropriation underlines the need to distinguish between these concepts. While adaptation represents a creative dialogue between the original work and the interpreter's vision, appropriation implies a more decisive departure from the informing source into new cultural domains. The choice to adapt Greek tragedies to contemporary theatre is not merely "a cheap trick," but a deep creative exploration of perennial themes that resonate through time.

Three specific examples of retellings of Greek tragedies have been analysed, with emphasis on the characteristics discussed earlier in this paper. Deborah Pugh and George Mann's *Beautiful Evil Things*, Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* and Inua Ellams' *Antigone* offer a unique insight into the potential of this trend to address critical issues, local contexts and contemporary challenges. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the scope of the works examined in this research represents only a portion of the larger panorama. While the selected examples offer a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of this trend, recognising that this

analysis is based on a limited sample is essential. Consequently, to achieve a more comprehensive understanding, future research should consider expanding the sample size to include a more extensive spectrum of productions. A broader selection of plays would allow for a more nuanced exploration of variations within the trend, potentially revealing divergent thematic approaches, stylistic choices, and socio-political commentaries.To conclude, the retelling of Greek tragedies in the contemporary British theatre scene is a multifaceted phenomenon. It operates as a bridge between the narratives of ancient Greece and the concerns of the modern world. Through this process, it not only breathes new life into classical stories, but also provides a reflective space for society to confront its own complexities, empathy and moral dilemmas. This interplay between past and present highlights the lasting relevance of Greek tragedies in the evolving landscape of culture, values and artistic expression. It is a testimony to the power of narrative to connect human experiences across time and space, and demands continued exploration and interpretation in the theatre of today and tomorrow.

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Bioprofile of the author

Carmen Gloria Cernadas-Lema is a Ph.D. candidate currently beginning her Ph.D. thesis at the University of Santiago de Compostela. She holds a BA in English Language and Literature with a minor in French Language and Literature and an MA in Advanced English Studies and its Applications, both from the University of Santiago de Compostela. For her BA thesis, she has studied the connection between traumatic experiences and the healing quality of literature and storytelling. Moreover, in her MA thesis, she has examined the relationship between the short story genre and feminist literature, as well as the postcolonial short story, addressing issues related to gender, identity, and marginality. She has collaborated in *Fósforo*, journal of the Faculty of Philology of the USC, during the academic year 2021-2022, as part of the editorial board.

Contact:
<carmengloria.cernadas@rai.usc.es>
Academia.edu
ResearchGate
ORCID: 0009-0004-3355-3696
Twitter: @carmengloria_cl
Google Scholar
Discourse & Identity Research Group (University of Santiago de Compostela)