

Theo Angelopoulos' *The Traveling Players* and The Transformation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

Andrew Horton, describing the films of the Greek director, Theo Angelopoulos, claims that the “films are filled with echoes and fragments from Greece’s long classical past (...and that) the innovation of such a past suggests a contrast with a supposedly glorious ‘golden age’ (Horton (1997a) 33). In Angelopoulos’ last completed film, *The Dust of Time* (2009), the search for family and home associated with the crossing of boundaries thematically echoes *The Odyssey* as does *Landscape in the Mist* (1988), about two young children in search of their father, with references to Telemachus’ journey. *Ulysses’ Gaze* (1995) is another explicit exploration of the ancient narrative of war and wandering and the modern history of the Balkans. In the latter, the protagonist, A, travels from Greece to Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and Bosnia during the bloody war. Angelopoulos’ first film, *Reconstruction* (1970), about a guest worker who kills his wife and her lover upon his return to his Greek village, echoes the events in the *Agamemnon* and the theme of the consequences of war upon the soldier’s return.

Similarly, Angelopoulos’ complex film, *The Traveling Players*, follows a troupe of traveling actors, whose names, Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon, Aegisthus, Orestes and Electra, immediately evoke the events of the complete *Oresteia* trilogy. The troupe bring the play, *Golfo the Shepherdess*, to various regions of Greece and are witnesses to political and military events during the period from 1939, just prior to World War II, to 1952, just after the end of the Greek Civil War. The troupe’s participation as passive witnesses to the historical events and the audience’s own passive participation in contrast to the agency of the Aeschylean actors highlights the irony of the film and its historical resonances. Indeed, Dan Georgakas (1997b) 30 argues that this film, in conjunction with *Days of '36* (1972), *The Hunters* (1977), and *Alexander the Great* (1980),

represent Angelopolous' "massive 12 1/2 hour rethinking of contemporary Greek history, and at its core was the tale told in *Traveling Players*."

In this presentation, I compare *The Traveling Players* to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (and briefly to Costa-Gavras' *Z*) in their cinematic and literary techniques, particularly the use of the long take to express narrative elision and metonymy, the contrast between the agency of the film characters and the ancient Greek representations, and the manipulation of time in each work. I argue that Angelopolous explicitly echoes the techniques of the classical text and transforms the text into a powerful interrogation of modern political identity. The presentation includes film selections to illustrate my argument (selections from scenes 2, 5, 6, and 7) and a comprehensive plot comparison of *The Traveling Players* and the *Oresteia*.