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Croatian Drama of the Second Half of the 20th
Century: T. S. Marović and M. Gavran**

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**Examples of Greek Mythology and History in Croatian Drama
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Abstract

The author discusses the so-called “Greek” dramas by two Croatian playwrights of the (postmodern) second half of the 20th century: Tonči Petrasov Marović (1934-1991) (*Antigone, the Queen of Thebes; Themistocles*) and Miro Gavran (1961-) (*Creon's Antigone*). The dramas have been written in Croatian language, and – to the author's knowledge – they have not been translated into English language. The author analyzed about 40 dramatic texts written in Croatia in the observed period and came to the conclusion that Croatian drama was under considerable influence from foreign – especially Greek – literature, history and culture. The most prominent among the playwrights using Greek elements were Matković, Brešan, Marović and Gavran. The author suggests that the dramas containing foreign elements and intertextual appropriations in Croatian drama might be classified into four types. According to that classification Marović's *Antigona, Queen of Thebes* (1980) and Gavran's *Creon's Antigone* (1983) predominantly belong to the mythological method, while Marović's *Themistocles* (1983) – considering prevailing elements – belongs to the methonimical (metahistorical) method.

The impulses for literary appropriations or borrowings of the elements from another national (here: Greek) literature and history seem to be more complex than a simple literary or creative decision or borrowing process: they derive from the intellectual reception and the experience of the ancient culture, but also from the historical, social, political and ideological circumstances that hold sway at a particular time in the “home” or receiving literature.

By reflecting itself in the reality in which we live, or by returning us to the life of literature and historiography – the impetus from ancient Greek literature, mythology and history, the one that may be found in the Croatian drama of the second half of the 20th century – often functioned as means of camouflaging intellectual protest and subversive reactions to ideology and politics.

Keywords: Croatia, playwrights, Marović, Gavran, Greece

Studying the works of Croatian playwrights from the second half of the 20th century for a number of years I have gained insight into the corpus of about 40 drama texts written by Miroslav Krleža, Marijan Matković, Ivan Slamnig, Antun Šoljan, Tonči Petrasov Marović, Luko Paljetak, Ivo Brešan, Miro Gavran, Lada Kaštelan, Mislav Brumec et al. The corpus of the observed texts showed the approaches and means by which the influence, borrowing or interaction with other/foreign literatures, histories and cultures had occurred or been achieved in an individual work of Croatian literature. This body of writings drove me to the conclusion that it was possible to determine and apply a typology of the appropriation and usage of these elements. On the basis of this I have suggested, in several scholarly articles, that (at least) four different methods/ways in which such influence occurs can be applied. And yet, having continued such research in great detail, it became apparent that the components of such a typology could be increased.

Therefore, I offer a general division of the methods in which the aforementioned (intertextual – in broader sense) procedure can be characterised:

- a) **intertextual method** (in the narrow sense) – choosing primary texts (hypotext, paratext, genotext) from the world literature (from the ancient era up to the 20th century literature) in order to create new ones, the secondary text (hypertext, metatext, fenotext); e. g. Ivo Brešan using Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for his play *Predstava Hamleta u selu Mrduša Donja/The Performance of Hamlet in the Village Mrduša Donja*/, or Euripid's and Racine's *Fedra* for his play *Anera*, or Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* for his (political) play *Julije Cezar/Julius Caesar*/; Mislav Brumec using E. A. Poe's work for his play *Smrt Ligeje/The Death of Ligeia*/.
- b) **mythological method** – the use or the borrowing of the figures and fabular sets that belong to (biblical, Greek, Roman or other) mythology and religion; e.g. Miro Gavran using Sophocles' *Antigone* for his play *Kreontova Antigona/Creon's Antigone*/; Marijan Matković using Greek mythology for his trilogy *I bogovi pate/Even Gods Suffer*/; Luko Paljetak using Greek mythology for his play *Orfeuridika /Orfeuridice*/.
- c) **metonymical method** (in some cases it could be called motivic or /meta/historical) – choosing relevant motifs related to most prominent and important historical events, persons and their lives and deeds, that is – related to the culture some dramatic/literary work has been derived from; “metahistorical” here means that a work has not been based on the historical facts but on an experiment or the manipulation upon those facts; e.g. Miroslav Krleža using the biography of the physician Aretaeus of Cappadocia (4th century AD) for his play *Aretej/Aretaeus*/; Antun Šoljan using the biography of the Roman emperor Diocletian (3rd/4th century AD) for his play *Dioklecijanova palača /Diocletian's Palace*/.

- d) **quotation method** – the borrowing/appropriation of quotations by which the playwright refers to the primary text as a stable and ascertainable source; in that way both the metaliterary and the metacultural/multicultural connotations come into light, having been offered by a new dramatic text; e. g. Krleža using the verses from Dante's *Inferno* at the end of the 1st scene of his *Aretaeus*.

Many Croatian dramatic texts from the mid 20th century to today that have roots in classical literature, myth and history – combine aforementioned components: M. Krleža's *Aretej (Aretheus)* combines metonymical (c), mythological (b) and quotation (d) method; A. Šoljan's *Dioklecijanova palača (Diocletian's Palace)* combines metonymical (c) and mythological (b) method; Tonči Petrasov Marović's drama *Antigona, kraljica u Tebi /Antigone, Queen of Thebes/* combines mythological (b) and intertextual (a) method – alike Gavran's *Kreontova Antigona /Creon's Antigone/*; Luko Paljetak's *Orfeuridika /Orfeuridice/* is based on a combination of mythological (b) and metonymical (c) method.

In this work the focus is primarily put on the use of elements of Greek mythology/tragedy and history in *Antigone, Queen of Thebes* and *Themistocles* - plays written by the poet and dramatist Tonči Petrasov Marović (1934-1991), and – on the other hand – on *Kreontova Antigona/Creon's Antigone/* written in the early 1980's by the contemporary playwright Miro Gavran (1961-). I have selected these two playwrights as very prominent representatives of Croatian drama of the observed period, with the works based on the same pretext (Sophocles' *Antigone*).

Marović's play (with various titles) *Antigona, kraljica /Antigone, the Queen/* or *Antigona, kraljica u Tebi /Antigone, Queen of Thebes/* – or *Antigona, kraljica u tebi /Antigone, Queen in You,* as in Croatian “u tebi” means “in you”/ – as well as the play *Temistoklo /Themistocles/* are both illustrations or a *locus* of the metaliterary and metahistorical.

In his volume of poetry from 1984 *Osamnica*¹ Tonči Petrasov Marović concludes his poem “Historia, ae, f.”² with the following verses:

*Historici
Nedostatak/nadomjestak
antigonā.³*

*(Historians
Privation/substitute
of antigones)⁴*

¹ “Osamnica“ might be translated into English as “a house in solitude“.

² The impetus for writing this paper was the 25th anniversary of the death of Tonči Petrasov Marović (Mravince, 1934 – Split, 1991).

³ T. P. Marović, *Osamnica*, Zagreb, Centar za kulturnu djelatnost, 1984, 68.

⁴ Note that “antigonā” in Marović's verse was written with the small initial letter!

I believe that these three verses can be used as the link between what are probably the two most important expressive and thematic spaces in the creative process of this poet; as Marović was not only a poet when writing poetry, but also when writing prose and drama.

In his “Predgovor” /Introduction/ to the Marović’s collected works (*Odabrana djela*, Split, 1992) Tonko Maroević, a good connoisseur of Marović’s work – placed emphasis on the importance of studying thoroughly the “Greek impetus“ in T. P. Marović’s writing. That is why my intention here has been to study the (poetic) reception of Greek motifs in Marović’s dramatic works. They are both illustrations, or a *locus*, of what we had mentioned earlier: the metaliterary (taking into account Sophocles’*Antigona*) and the metahistorical (taking into account the historical personage of Themistocles). Both Marović’s plays are from the early 1980’s; to be more precise, the first (with two different published conclusions) is from 1980, and the second is from 1983 (yet published in 1984). As can be concluded from their titles, both plays relate to ancient history. Both are also written in verse, which may indicate that Marović, having chosen such a form, had their metametrical potential and function in mind. An interest in ancient culture is not only characteristic of Marović’s drama: it is omnipresent in his poetry and prose as well. Marović – based on what those who were close to him had reported – once travelled to Greece, which left a powerful emotional and creative impression on him. And yet, having experienced Dalmatia (according to interpreter Tonko Maroević) as “prima pars Graeciae“,⁵ it was not necessary for a cosmopolitan such as Marović to travel to and visit historical sites which would inspire his work and revive – if I dare say so – his sense of wonder and enchantment with the classical world. Marović’s sense of the cosmopolitan is the characteristic of a poet who has all *loci* of all his stories in mind, as well as in a passionately experienced cosmos.

Marović’s interest in antiquity is expressed even in his early works: in his drama *Golubovi i dječaci* /*Doves and Boys*/ from 1958 which did not see the stage, and in which a return from the world of the dead is the central theme, with allusions to the classical myth of Orpheus and Euripides’ *Alcestis*.⁶

Furthermore, the title of his volume of prose from 1978 is also the title of one of the stories found therein: *Demokritov kruh* /*Democritus’ Bread*/. The basis of this story is to be found in Diogenes Laertius; the author here attempts to reconstruct the final moments in the life of “mudroga Demokrita, čuvara razgovora“ (*Democritus the wise, guardian of dialogue*). Dialogue will have a significant meaning in Marović’s work as I will show a little later.

The aforementioned volume of poetry titled *Osamnica* (1984), in much of its text – from the third to the fifth cycle of poems – focuses on classical, to be more precise: ancient Greek, and mythological personages. Another interpreter

⁵ Tonko Maroević, “Predgovor“ in: Tonči Petrasov Marović, *Odabrana djela I.*, Split, Književni krug, 1992, xxii.

⁶ Compare. Nikola Batušić, “Rane drame Tonča Petrasova Marovića“, *Književno djelo Tonča Petrasova Marovića*, zbornik radova sa znanstvenog skupa, ed. Ivo Frangeš, Split, Književni krug, 1997, 74-81.

of Marović's dramatic works, Anatolij Kudrjavcev,⁷ stated that the author believed he could find the answers in (this) antiquity to many of the questions which are a modern man's concern as well: while Antigone speaks of government and the general good, the second dramatic text speaks of an individual's actions in the circumstances of history.⁸ I consider it interesting that in Marović's poetry we could find a poem "Antigone's No" in which Marović mentions "sick Thebes" and Creon whose condition of being "walled in the state,/ forces him to get out of it/ as an assassin rabbit that is getting out the briar".⁹ Political allusions in this poem are evident. The first play on Antigone is an "apocryphal tragedy (as it is described in the subtitle to the text), whereas the second – *Themistocles* – termed a "dramatic history", is based on the writings of Plutarch and Herodotus (Marović mentions the allusion to Plutarch and Herodotus in his notes to this play). The first drama is written in a poetic mode, whereas the second tends towards realism and is more traditional in structure. Both dramas – as mentioned earlier – are written in verse: the verse form in the first consists of shorter lines, while the second is composed in lines of fifteen syllables, with occasional lines consisting of twenty syllables.

The drama *Antigona, kraljica u Tebi /Antigone, Queen of Thebes/* belongs to the aforementioned mythological method (b) in borrowing some elements from other literatures; the intertextual aspect of its borrowings from Sophocles is something which can be discussed further, at least as it concerns the main characters taken from the original text by Sophocles.

What we are dealing with here is a "story after a story", that is – after Sophocles. Transferring Sophocles' thought of ideological and cultural aspects into that of another time – Marović's late 20th century, distances this author not only from a Greek masterpiece, but also from a French "reprise" – Anouilh's *Antigone* (1940). The original text is stripped bare and its fable becomes a palimpsest of a pattern from a classical myth in which a female character, who is no longer manipulated, is at the centre (like in Sophocles' and Anouilh's play): in Marović's the main character becomes a manipulator of the spaces of

⁷ Videlicet: Anatolij Kudrjavcev, "O dramskim šetnjama Tonča Petrasova Marovića", *Književno djelo Tonča Petrasova Marovića*, collection of works, Split, Književni krug Split, 1997, 92-98.

⁸ Themistocles, the leading man of Athens, managed to convince his countrymen that silver should be used for the public good, i.e. to construct a fleet of two warships, triremes as he – according to the story – correctly interpreted the Delphic oracle when it claimed that the faith of Athens lies in "walls of wood". Themistocles's decisions had far-reaching consequences for the outcome of the war and a consequential role at the Battle of Salamis 480 BCE, when he smaller, yet swifter Greek triremes – half of which were Athenian – overcame the much larger yet slower Persian fleet. A beautiful description of the Greek victory over the Persians at Salamis can be found in the herald's speech in Aeschylus' play *The Persians*. It is a known fact that Aeschylus participated in this battle.

⁹ Compare. Tonči Petrasov Marović, "Bolesna Tebo/ Edipovo oko viška/ ipak nije treće mu oko/ Kreontova zazidanost u državu/ sili ga da iz nje iziđe/ kao zec ubojica iz kupine/ Antigonino ne svojom pašicom/ opisivaše Zemlju nas/ s kraja na kraj vremena/ koje je li sad/ kad/ bolesno/ je/ nebo", in: T. P. Marović, *Odabrana djela I., Pjesme /Selected Works I, Poems/*, Split, Književni krug, 1992, 247.

power. Marović presents Antigone in a different light than the norm, thus – the image of the heroic and tragic figure of Antigone, based on Sophocles' original text. The Antigone in Marović's text has been pardoned by Creon, and is now an old woman and a tyrant who has lost any feeling or mercy for "mediocrities": she has killed her namesake, the daughter of her sister Ismene – before whom she "has no shame",¹⁰ and has sewn the lips and eyelids shut of Tiresias' daughter Manto. Her efforts to maintain power have no bounds and she has likened herself to a god. Here are some of her words from Marović's text:

*Pa što! Umrijet ću, ko i svi.
Ali ko i svi nikad nisam bila,
Opstojala. Bila sam Netko!
ANTIGONA! Makar i Stara, makar i ostarjela.
Bila sam kako nikad nitko u Tebi bio nije.
Bila sam bog! A jer i bozi umiru,
Umrijet ću i ja. Pa što?¹¹*

*(So what! I will die, just as everyone else.
Yet I was not like everybody else,
I survived. I was Somebody!
ANTIGONE! Although I am old, although I have aged.
I have been like no other in Thebes.
I was a god! And as the gods also die,
I will die as well. So what!)*

Marović uses a chorus here to comment on the actions in the drama, and by using archaic verb tenses and syntax he has attempted to create the illusion that this is a literary sequel to Sophocles' text. Ismene's reticence and inferiority (in Sophocles' text) is transformed here into strength of character and moral insight founded upon wisdom and forgiveness:

*Antigono, sestro moja jedina i draga,
Ne mrzim te, usprkos svemu, ne mrzim,
Samo te vidim, samo vidim da te vlast opsjela,
Da te zla žudnja za vlašću otkotrljala niza te,
Da u tom kotrljanju nesta čovjeka,
Nesta sestre u tebi,
Da si kao svezana za kotač mahnit,
Što se ne da više zaustavit.
Da si tek kraljica, ne sestra, ne osoba;
Stroj, ne srce!¹²*

¹⁰ T. P. Marović, *Antigona, kraljica u Tebi*, in: *Odabrana djela II.*, Split, Književni krug, 1992, 181.

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

*(Antigone, my only and dear sister,
I do not hate you, despite everything, I do not hate,
I only see you, I only see you possessed by power,
That the evil desire for power has rolled over you,
That in this rolling over humanity has disappeared,
The sister in you has disappeared,
It is as if you have been tied to a furious wheel,
Which can no longer be stopped.
That you are only a queen, no sister, no person;
A machine, no heart!)*

In the 1980's, in the social and political context of the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija – SFRJ) of a time in which the public criticism of power could not be easily enacted, Marović – a proud, bitter man, intellectually, poetically, and also politically outside of and against the prevailing political currents (we need to mention that he did not consider himself part of the intellectual and creative circle related to *Razlog* and *Krugovi*, prominent Croatian literary magazines of the time), theatrically presented the common assumption that a man must be put into power (especially in a repressive political system) in order to ostensibly prove his worth as a man; what he has concluded here is that even a noble nature can be transformed into that of a monstrosity. His Antigone – one of the greatest moral authorities in the history of literature – has been transformed from the embodiment of justice into a sinner, and this was wrought by her political position; Antigone is no longer a heroine and has thus succumbed to the euphoria of power, rage, brutality and the abuse of speech: Antigone is always something in our dark heart, according to Tonči Petrasov Marović. Making recourse to Frye's interpretation of the hero, she has declined from the high mimetic mode and has become a figure of the ironic hero, which means that we are now witnessing a tale full of frustration and absurdity.¹³

Marović's play *Themistocles* is in accordance with the methods in typology I had mentioned earlier, which is based on metonymy and historical motif: in this instance the author selects a relevant historical occurrence, viewing it metahistorically through the prism of his own times, and furthermore – of his own space, i.e. through (and against) the social context, circumstances, and world-view of the times in which he lives. The leading man of Athens, whose role in the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE was important for the Greek victory over the technically more powerful Persians – despite his accomplishments, was banished from Athens as a result of a political cabal, and this led him to seek assistance and protection which he eventually received. Torn between self-sacrifice, patriotism and loyalty to his countrymen, and – on the other hand

¹² *Ibidem*, 182.

¹³ Compare. Miroslav Beker, *Uvod u komparativnu književnost /Introduction to Comparative Literature/*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 1995, 87.

– his attempts to protect himself, or: better to say, what *remained* of his dignity and his family – Marović’s Themistocles collapses under the weight of a personal moral chaos, attempting to place past and present on a scale, or, to be more precise, the price of the present paid for by what had occurred in the past. His death was by poisoning while asleep (by his own hand or by that of another – it is difficult to say). In the dramaturgy of this play characterised by a lack of action and dynamics, as some critics say, dreams have a special role in informing us about Themistocles’ state of mind. In order to understand this sense of non-drama, yet with the aim to focus on the ontological aporia in Marović’s thought, I will here quote Themistocles’ digression on the *diá-logos* – *dialogue*, which is “a wonder that happens always and everywhere” (Marović), and *dialektikē*, *dialectic*:

*Bez te riječi, onoga što se njome poima i misli, kralju dobri i umom
uzvišeni, malo se što može razumjet dokraja, gotovo ništa što s nama je u
nekoj svezi, ništa što za nas vrijednost ima i za što smo spremni život
žrtvovati...¹⁴*

*(Without this word, what is termed by it and what is thought by it, the king
of those good and of sublime mind, little can be consequentially
understood, almost nothing in close connection to us, nothing which has
any value for us and for which we would sacrifice our own lives...)*

Dialogue thus plays a significant role in Marović’s world-view – which is evident in his already mentioned (2. 2.) short story in which Democritus, “the guardian of dialogue“, is at the centre – the author believes that dialogue is essential to a meaningful and full life; this is an idea which is also found in his drama *Themistocles* in which the main character says:

*A razgovor je čudo koje se zbiva svagda i vazda
Kada dva čovjeka misli izmjenjuju slobodno i izravno
Poput gledanja ljudskog: oči u oči, riječ na riječ,
Pa je misao, ta čast bića, smisao i shvaćanje,
A susret i odnos između ljudi – sreća.¹⁵*

*(Dialogue is a wonder which occurs everywhere and always
When two men exchange thoughts freely and directly
Like watching the human: eye to eye, word on word,
And thus word, this honour of all beings, is meaning and understanding,
And meetings and relationships among men are –
happiness.)*

¹⁴ *Temistoklo*, pg. 53.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 59.

These words are spoken by Themistocles toward the end of the third act, after Artabanus and his wife Susa were massacred by the royal guard.¹⁶ Thus, after this horrific scene, this misplaced and inappropriate philosophical digression on dialogue and dialectic functions as a form of self-mockery of one's lack of insight which grew through experiences of violence and political absurdity. This sense of the absurd is included and heralded in Themistocles' very name: parts of this name (in the Greek: *themistós* – righteous, and *kleos* – glory) provide the meaning "he who is righteously glorious."¹⁷

Scepticism towards history, repressive government, power etc. in Marović's literary interpretation becomes resignation, disappointment, sarcasm. Irony and paranoid actions – reaction to the actions of rulers and potentates – reach their culmination in nonsensical and desperate mindlessness. The speech of the stylised and dignified world of demigods and togas is replaced by a patois, laced with profanities, word play, lascivious and coarse (verbal) escapades as well as scenes that the author has a tendency to overuse – scenes in which his protagonist experience nausea, which are certainly to be understood as the physiological manifestation of shock, illness, repulsion, impotence as well as an individual's final emotional and physical collapse. (I personally sense that Marović's own physical illness and feeling of powerlessness find their reflection in such naturalistic dramatic scenes.)

In 1964, in his passion play *Obrazina /The Visor/* Marović's hero "štipa i škaklje sfingu" (*pinches and tickles the Sphinx*) which – as Kudrjavcev writes – becomes a passive participant and metaphysical sign,¹⁸ and speaks to her softly: "Je li tako, slatka, gizdavogranitnoumilna moja – historijo – utvrdo – histerijo?"¹⁹ (*Is it so, my sweet, exquisite-granitic-affectionate – history – fortress – hysteria?*)

In the wider context of his understanding of history, historiographers and writers of chronicles, of the Sphinx is linked to the character of Antigone, who has her place not only in Marović's drama but in his poetry as well (e. g. in his verse dialogue "Edip i Antigona" /"Oedipus and Antigone"/ as well as "Antigona i Kasandra" /"Antigone and Cassandra"/). Power is something which Artabanus, commander of the royal guard – as he says himself – finds "disgusting"²⁰, yet in order to enact it and maintain it he will make recourse to the cruellest means and methods.

What can be pointed out here is Marović's sense of bitterness and dismay at those who wrote history, who – often foreigners – betray the truth, who falsify and manipulate and also play with the relationship between "the spirit, justice and the absolute", to which Marović alludes in the IV cycle in his collection of poetry *Osamnica*:

¹⁶ Compare. *Ibidem*, 60.

¹⁷ B. Klaić, *Rječnik stranih riječi*, Zagreb, Matica hrvatska, 2004, 1337.

¹⁸ Kudrjavcev, cif., 93.

¹⁹ Kudrjavcev, cif., 93.

²⁰ The character of Artabanus the king admits to Themistocles: *Vjeruj mi, Temistoklo, vlast mi se gadi!* (*Believe me, Themistocles, I am repugned by authority!*); cif., 73.

*kada bude sve
ili dosta toga
gotovo
doći će oni
koji jednako ne znaju
nisu*

*ispisat će
po svojoj mrtvoj mjeri
po-vi-jest
umjesto istine*

- - -

*(when all
or much of it has been
completed
they will arrive
who also do not know
who are not*

*they will write
in their own dead measures
hi -sto-ry
instead of truth)²¹*

At the core of Marović's work – and not only in his plays – is an emotion which is, as Anatolij Kudrjavcev writes – sufficient on its own and which escapes the ravishes of time. This interpreter of Marović's work also claims that there is a lack of a scenic quality in this drama, providing the evaluation that: "Marović attempts to use contemporary human criteria to measure a distant Greek past and to turn mythology into life, and what occurs is definitely the truth: history and mythology only becomes a heap of absurdities and misunderstandings."²²

Tracing what is implied in the title of my paper, I would state the following: the mythological method (b) in works of literature (which results in the creation of new meanings based on the constellation of its characters and the story that has been provided beforehand – in mythology and religion), as well as the metonymical/(meta)historical (c) approach, which I base on the use of moments, situations and personages from history, historical factography (which should be certain and registered without prejudice) or pseudo-factography (falsified and unreliable) – these two methods may be imagined as two intertwining ontological circles, which take from one another (as if in symbiosis) that which each of them finds necessary.

²¹ Marović, *Osamnica*, Zagreb, Cekade, 1984, 68.

²² Kudrjavcev, cif., 96

Thus history – as story, tale and fable – becomes either a collection or confusion of absurd and unnecessary occurrences without the structure, the constellations and components of inherent meaning, the relationship between characters, as well as a comprehensible ethics as can be found in myth. Marović’s “history“ of Antigone is perhaps an imitation or sequel, the extension of a myth into reality, the real world or its written interpretation – a historical tale – in which moral authorities eventually transform into what the leaders in history in many cases were. His Oedipus from his dialogue in verse “Edip i Antigona (ruka i rame)“ /Oedipus and Antigone (Arm and Shoulder)/, from his volume *Osamnica*, says to Antigone, his “shoulder, merciful and farsighted“:

*Jer su prokleti
Slijepi vlastohlepci
Za sve kadri
Izim za dobro*²³

*(For they are cursed
Those blind powermongers
Capable of all
Except for good)*

Themistocles on the other hand, one of the great men in history, responsible for the victory and survival of an entire people, will be modified into a grotesque heap of poisoned flesh of no use to anybody. And it seems as this was the fate of the many "Themistocles" in the ritual cycles of history.

It seems that Marović’s point of departure and destination are not his own, Marović’s Antigone, nor Anouilh’s, nor anybody else’s Antigone, but the “true“, original Antigone of Sophocles – with whom we have long been acquainted, fictional and literary, the model of a just, prudent and consistent victim who is always a “substitute“– according to Marović – for historians, as it has already been said at the beginning of this paper:

*Historians
Privation/substitute
of antigones*²⁴

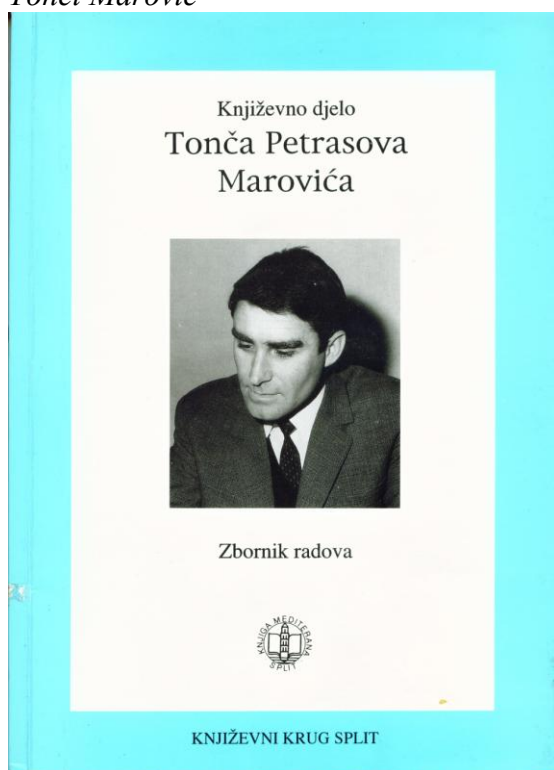
Historians are thus seen in stark contrast to the primary, literary model, the idealised, “paper“ Antigone, the necessary shoulder to lean on – as we make our way through the history which someone will write; and it may be written in goodwill and realistically or retouched according to the tenets of whoever might have ordered it. We need this shoulder so that we do not lose ourselves in chaos, and the callousness and aimlessness of (historical) events. Marović’s

²³ *Osamnica*, Zagreb, Cekade, 1984, 44.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 68.

plays, although they might be (according to the judgement of certain interpreters) of questionable dramaturgy, and perhaps overly poetic and symbolic, as they are based – to quote Meletinsky²⁵ – on the cyclical, the ritual-mythological or historical repetition – are unquestionably intriguing, lucid and full of foreboding.

The title page of a collection of scholarly articles dedicated to the work of Tonči Marović



(Split, Književni krug Split, 1997)

Although a consensus is lacking on how Miro Gavran's dramatic works should be evaluated, what remains a fact is that his plays ostensibly show the application of Aristotle's unities;²⁶ what is entirely clear is this author's sure sense of dramatic structure which is most evident in the way he precisely determines when a dramatic reversal is to take place, yet maintaining the attention of the audience. The experience of reading and the study of drama, dramaturgy and literature generally, find their reflection in Gavran's work as creative experiences. Thus, it is not only in the construction, but in the selection of the "historical" characters (who are not actually historical), which have granted Gavran's dramaturgic gift with great commercial success, not only on the local stage but also abroad, perhaps even greater than at home.

²⁵ F. M. Meletinski, *Poetika mita*, transl. into Serbian by Jovan Janićijević, Beograd, Nolit, s. a., 345. English translation of Meletinsky's book (*Poetics of Myth*) has not been available to me (H. P.)

²⁶ Compare. Jasen Boko, "Dramsko pismo Mira Gavrana", *Kolo*, Zagreb, 7, 1997, 2, 293.

Kreontova Antigona /*Creon's Antigone*/ from 1983 is one of Gavran's "serious" plays (meaning those that are not comic). In those it is evident – already on the basis of their titles – that they are connected to other writers of literature and/or characters; the titles of which Gavran's plays (already a long list) ostensibly display how burdened and affluent his works are with literature and an awareness of the literary: e.g. *Čehov je Tolstoju rekao zbogom* /*Čehov said Good Bye to Tolstoy*/ from 1989, *Shakespeare i Elizabeta* /*Shakespeare and Elizabeth*/ from 1992, and *Otelo sa Suska* /*Othello from the Island of Susak*/ from 1997 – are all titles which contribute to what we have been stating here. Certainly, there are many of Gavran's dramas (such as *Noć bogova* /*Night of Gods*/ from 1986), the titles of which show no direct allusion to other works of literature, although the text itself is about the relationship between Molière and Louis XIV²⁷. In all the works enumerated here the author Gavran has dealt with four historical and literary epochs: ancient history, the Renaissance and in particular the Elizabethan period, Classicism and the late 19th century – although it is difficult to see whether or not he sees these epochs as problematic. What actually informs Gavran's polemic with historians is the way in which he places fiction as the only truth against their theory of fact.²⁸ The characters from these epochs are represented in images of "Gavran's dramatic fiction", as Gordana Muzaferija states, as a "falsified historical reality"²⁹; they become "images of *life's reality*", and the world of the text is offered as the *only truth*".³⁰

The metaliterary or the understanding of literature as self-conscious manipulation, as "literature which only thinks of itself" is often the point of departure or the framework of Gavran's dramaturgic and creative procedure, and is also one of two connected and combined characteristics of his texts. Besides the metaliterary, the metatext is also evident in his work which can be interpreted as the presentation of the new from an existing text, as the use of the foretext/genotext from which (primarily) elements (extracts, names of characters, combinations of segments of a fable) have been taken and planted within the texture of a new work. Two examples of this are Gavran's dramas *Kreontova Antigona* and *Otelo sa Suska* (certainly metatextual "extractions" from Sophocles' *Antigone* from 442 BCE and Shakespeare's *Othello* from 1604). What we need to bear in mind here is that writers (in this case: Sophocles and Shakespeare) and their works (*Antigone* /*Othello*) – either the works themselves or the protagonists from them – do not need to represent the

²⁷ All the dramas by M. Gavran mentioned here use the same number of actors as there are characters in the play: *Kreontova Antigona* is a drama with two characters, as is the case in *Shakespeare i Elizabeta*; in *Noći bogova* there are three protagonists, while in *Čehov je Tolstoju rekao zbogom*, which is a replica of Edward Albee's classic *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, there are four characters. This drama has a more complex construction than the others in Gavran's work.

²⁸ Gordana Muzaferija, „Povijest nekanonski čitana u dramama Mire Gavrana”, *Republika*, Zagreb, 59, 2003, 3, 23.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, in italics – G. Muzaferija.

actual writers or the *actual* characters in the new dramatic works composed at a much a later date.

For the purposes of this work, I concentrate on Gavran's text *Creon's Antigone*. Gavran's Antigone is certainly a character borrowed from Sophocles' play, which in this play (by the author we know) cites lines from the renowned original play; yet she does not represent "Antigone" alone, nor is the text which is manipulated here only an intertextual experiment. Gavran often provides commentary in which he suggests that his audience should not view his characters as great historical or literary personages, but as people. He does not write "true historical facts" but "the truth of the human heart".³¹ In comparison with Antigone in that play, Molière in Gavran's *Noć bogova /Night of Gods/* is not exclusively a writer of comedies; Shakespeare in Gavran's drama *Shakespeare i Elizabeta /Shakespeare and Elizabeth/* is not only the greatest Elizabethan playwright etc. They are the products of Gavran's variations of reality, distanced from historical stories and the legends about them, or distanced from the literary works in which they functioned as characters. Gavran himself fills his creative experience with the experience of texts he has read by the masters from which "one is to learn", and whose works are models of dramaturgy, exemplars. And yet, literary characters, as well as those who created them, are more than literature. They are a primary component of the structure of the text, and thus they have their function within it; outside their structural matrix – Antigone outside of Sophocles' text, Othello outside of Shakespeare's, and Molière or Shakespeare as writers forcibly removed from the canonised and dusty histories of French and English literature – take on the role of life, and not only of a literary (and expected) structure. Although he has based *Kreontova Antigona* on Sophocles's *Antigone*, a colossal tragedy on the nature of power and leadership, justice and injustice, human and divine law. This Croatian author has made this drama "contemporary" by placing its action in our day and age, and also plays with the drama itself by questioning Sophocles' authorship. This type of self-referentiality – directing attention to a dramatic text or the poetics of a certain author – is also present in *Shakespeare i Elizabeta*, when the duke, Elizabeth's adviser, comments on the works of drama by this great Englishman: "Njegove drame ne poštuju ni osnovne principe kojima su se rukovodili stari klasici. Kod njega je sve tako kaotično i neuredno."³² (*His works do not even respect the general principles which the old classical writers used. Everything in his work is so chaotic and messy.*)

In Gavran's text Creon himself is the author of the text which we accept as Sophocles'. Antigone is to act out the role which Creon has written for her, the most sublime and most heroic, with which she will enter history. There is no guilt here, it is not that Antigone buried her brother Polynices without permission and thus angered her ruler: here the punishment is something to be

³¹ *Ibidem*, 26. From Gavran's note to *Ljubavi Georgea Washingtona /The Loves of George Washington/*.

³² Miro Gavran, *Odabrane drame*, Zagreb, Mozaik knjiga, 2001, 183.

“enacted” similarly to the one we find – as Gordana Muzafherija states – in Kafka’s *Process*.³³ Creon elaborates on why he wrote this drama:

*Zato sam napisao svojevrstu dramu, u kojoj ćemo svi mi iz kraljevske obitelji odigrati svoje uloge (...) Drama je tako napisana da ja u njoj, ja koji u stvarnosti želim vašu smrt, u predstavi je doživljavam kao nesreću. Ožalošćen sam i tugujem za vama.*³⁴

(This is why I have written a specific drama, in which all of us from the royal family will have our own role to play (...) The drama is written in this way so that I, I who truly desire your death, can experience your death in it as a misfortune. I am in grieving and I mourn for you.)

While recounting to Antigone the contents of “his” drama which he hands to her and from which she is to learn her part, Creon evaluates a passage from this text with a sense of irony:

*Zar nije savršeno?! Oslobađam se petero najopasnijih protivnika, u očima naroda tek sam malo kriv i mnogo nesretan.*³⁵

(Isn't it perfect?! I am freeing myself of five of my most dangerous enemies, in the eyes of the people I am only a little guilty and very unhappy.)

Creon chooses Antigone because she is an “ordinary girl”; she is – according to the ruler – above all others: they will adore and admire her, legends will be spread about her, plays will be written, she will become “an idea, one day – when saying Antigone – people will be saying much more than a single name”.³⁶ At the end of this drama Antigone believes that her suicide will make it possible for Creon to make a monument to himself from this tragedy. Creon laughs with a sense of triumph and says to the dying Antigone that her role will now be taken over by her sister Ismene, a twin who the audience will believe is Antigone; she will take her place because she “loves to live”. Ismene will be the only member of this family to survive this tragedy, as she – as Creon claims – “fears him the most”.

The classic text here loses its authority as a prototext; manipulation and injury to authorship brings the authority of the author into question and what is usually considered to be the correct view (thus far) of the fate of one of the most illustrious of all ancient heroines. Antigone “leaves” the matrix of this mythic tale we all know and becomes a character whose identity will be taken

³³ Compare. Gordana Muzafherija, “Kreontova Antigona Mire Gavran (u kontekstu preobražaja mita od Sofokla do Glowackog”, *Dometi* (in: *Suvremena hrvatska drama u osamdesetim i devedesetim godinama*), Rijeka, 10, 2000, 1- 4, 66.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 12.

³⁵ Gavran, *cf.*, 13.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 14.

over by her scared and mediocre sister, who will continue to live, while Antigone, in her authenticity, passion and moral consistency, will go to her death aware of how she has been humiliated and betrayed, which will only make the irony of her fate and significance – as was arranged by Creon – as well as her tragedy all the greater.

It seems that historicity itself offers the possibility for the contrast and conflict of characters; their constellations protrude from a historical or political/ideological context. Yet here historicity serves as a method to accentuate an individual psychological profile and the role of every character in the play. In Gavran's "metaliterary" texts history is inseparable and inextricably linked to literary texts, and this includes their authors and protagonists.

I believe that in Gavran's dramatic texts, especially in those which I consider metaliterary (and those that include historical personages such as writers and rulers related to literature – we can call metahistorical), that we could *de facto* speak of three different "truths": historiographical, "history" in literature, and the "real" truth (reality, the kind in which we live). In this sense Pirandello's concept of truth ("real" truth) on the one side, and mimesis ("history" in literature) on the other are complimented by Gavran with a third historiographical reality: canonised history, which is depending on what has been provided –re-coloured or not, written either as the historian wanted to write it or how he was told to write. And it seems that this kind of history, re-coloured and/or romanticised – is what Gavran takes either reservedly or discards entirely. Moreover, it seems that it is the ontological meeting point of Tonči Petrasov Marović and Miro Gavran's plays.

In some aspects of Gavran's plays the metaliterary elements involve quotation method (d) as the citations from renowned texts are used as "fodder" for a new interpretation, underlined by a new time. It is thus that Antigone, in Gavran's debut work from 1983 (which was his graduate thesis as well!), "rehearsing" in front of Creon, reads from Sophocles' text a key passage on the violent government and the humility of terrified subjects:

*Zar ikada bih mogla veću slavu steć
Od ove, što sahranih brata rođenog?
I svi bi ovi tu odobrili mi čin,
Kad jezika im ne bi sapinjao strah.
A nasilnička vlada mnogu pozna slast,
Pa stoga riječ i djelo slobodno je njoj.³⁷*

*(What greater glory could I have gained than by
Properly burying my own true brother?
These men would say it pleases them – if fear
Did not lock up their tongues. But one-mans rule
Brings with it many blessings – especially*

³⁷ Gavran, cif., 15.

*Because it can do and say whatever it wants.)*³⁸

Reading “Creon’s” play, Antigone exclaims that it is “wonderful” yet that she cannot understand “kako jedna životinja može napraviti tako dobro umjetničko djelo“ (*how an animal could create such a great work of art*). The literary word is here understood as a product which has certain ethical prerequisites that are inherent to it and from which something good is to emerge – as well as a “good“ work of art, because – as Antigone says in another passage: “(...) ljepota bez dobrote ne može živjeti“ (*beauty without goodness cannot live*). According to Creon, the words of his subjects must be clear; in the opposite case a lack of clarity in the words of his subjects might represent their discontent, which might be a sign of their strength and finally – of rebellion and peril.

The word in this drama is a medium of self-discovery, and of revealing the Other, a means of communication which only receives meaning when positive emotions and empathy are in the foreground, as this will influence the reception of what has been heard, on how the message is received. Sophocles’ text is cited here:

*Nikad, pa ni sad
nijedna tvoja riječca nije našla put
do srca mog, a niti moja k srcu tvom.*³⁹

*(This talking is a great weariness: your words
Are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine
Seem so to you.)*

The entire drama between Antigone and the ruler is based on a *verbal agon*, the provocation of another’s thought and the eventual confession, with an awareness of the truth which one in the dialogue held within but could not admit. Here Antigone initiates the maieutic process; she determines the rules of the dialogue. The drama ends with Creon’s laughter and Antigone’s death, yet with no possibility that the dialogue might continue as the ruler had put to death anyone who could have continued it. And for him – it seems – there was little motivation – neither existentially nor intellectually – to remain in the company of Ismene, who – as Gavran’s Creon claims – is “the most harmless and most stupid”.⁴⁰

Among the works of Croatian playwrights, especially those from the (postmodern) second half of the 20th century, there is a series of works which

³⁸ *Sophocles: Antigone*, translated by Reginald Gibbons and Charles Segal, Oxford-University Press 2003, pg. 75, lines 554-558).

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 15. The translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* in Croatian: Gavran used the translation by Bratoljub Klaić (*Sofoklo, Antigona*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1991, 39). English translation used here was done by Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald Dudley, https://mthoyibi.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/antigone_2.pdf

⁴⁰ Gavran, *cif.*, 11.

evinced the influence of the poetics of world literature, including ancient (Greek and Roman) mythology and history. Marović and Gavran have been only two examples among them.

Taking our cue from the concepts of Julia Kristeva who proposed the text as an arena in which other texts permeate and transform, it is possible to conclude that so-called hypotexts – by structuring themselves into new texts – are then re-read and re-interpreted. The characters in the plays by Marović and Gavran, which we have observed here, offer themselves – I would say – to the possibilities of re-interpretation, re-reading, as a confirmation of the existential “equality” between the man from ancient history with the man of modern times. They are outside time and are thus for all time: their historicity is not the subject of drama; the focus is on the fate of these characters, their ideas, idealism or ethics which have spread their wings over time itself. The legend of Antigone, for example – serves as means by which the writer concludes something of importance on the human condition; analogies in myth and history, the moral or, perhaps, immoral “reincarnations“ of more or less significant literary personages represent an artistic affirmation of Giambattista Vico’s (1668-1744) cyclical course.

The word in the texts which we have been analysed here functions in order to either affirm or deny the truth; if it is unpleasant – friendship ensues, but if it represents flattery – enmity and illusion are the result. What we are dealing with here is the demystification of literature and history as “paper” products which only serve the purposes of analysis and study; for Marović, yet also for Gavran, literature and history are much more. They offer material for “awareness“, in order to destroy the illusion that literature and history and their authors are untouchable authorities – a literary work for instance can be easily substituted or ascribed to somebody else (just as *Antigone* can be ascribed to Creon, in Gavran’s case); literature may be self-referential, self-ironic as the work and its author both leave their sequestered realm and enter our reality: the dramatic element of another kind of literary reality is only heightened by this. And this second reality – taking the works of Marović and Gavran as a touchstone – is Aristotle’s more superior *mimesis* which is “more true” than the reality in which we live and in which it has its origin, as its density and structure represent an impetus or an intertextual point of departure. In this paper I tried to show how intertextuality functions in a particular literary text or genre (the dramatic text) – with special reference to the postmodern era, to which Marović and Gavran belong, and in which we witness the reflection of the formal and thematic elements involved in the original and national (traditional) culture and literature (here used or applied as the so-called pretext onto another culture through creating new literary works – very often characterised with appropriations, allusions and borrowings). The impulses for literary appropriations or borrowings and the various elements which define another author’s or national literature’s voice/text are more complex than a simple literary or creative decision or borrowing process: they derive from the intellectual reception and the experience of the new or what is “outside” literature itself, but also from the historical, social, political and ideological

circumstances that hold sway at a particular time in the “home” or receiving literature.

By reflecting itself in the reality in which we live, or by returning us to the life of literature and historiography – the impetus from ancient Greek literature, mythology and history, that one found in the Croatian drama of the second half of the 20th century – often functioned as means of camouflaging intellectual protest and subversive reactions to ideology and politics. That impetus enriches this very life by offering itself in variations, and thus in a plenitude of interpretations.