

- 16 From David Greig, 2000, *Oedipus*, p 1. I am grateful to David Greig for allowing me access to his as yet unpublished text.
- 17 Liz Lochhead, 2002, theatre babel's *Thebans* - Oedipus, Jokasta and Antigone, after Sophocles and Euripides, London, p 3,4:
 for death is everywhere
 death blights our crops they blacken in our fields
 death has ravaged our herds and flocks
 the burning pyres of their blebbed and blistered remains
 send up a pall that chokes us
 our babies abort themselves unborn
 we elders anaesthetise ourselves with alcohol
 we young folk pervert our lives with poisons...
 new diseases daily invent themselves
 the spores of mutating pestilence
 in each polluted gasp of air we breathe.
- 18 Ngugi, *op.cit.*, p 90.
- 19 Greig, *op.cit.*, p 27.
- 20 See further, Lorna Hardwick, 2000, *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* ch. 5 and 6 and 'Classical Texts in Post-Colonial Literatures: Consolation, Redress and New Beginnings in the work of Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol 9 no 2, Fall 2002, pp 236 -256.
- 21 Greig, *op.cit.*, pp 53-4.
- 22 Greig, *op.cit.*, p 45.
- 23 Greig, *op.cit.*, p 50.
- 24 Source: Introduction to published text of Liz Lochhead, 2000, theatre babel's *Medea*, after Euripides, London.

**TRAGEDY AND THE HERO IN INTERCULTURAL
 PERSPECTIVE.
 KING OEDIPUS REWRITTEN BY TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM
 (EGYPT, 1949) AND HELENE CIXOUS (FRANCE, 1977)**

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Some time ago I spoke at the conference of the *Festival of Experimental Theatre* in Cairo about the specific *Westernness* of the Aristotelian drama model, i.e. the way his theories about the perfect tragedy, already marked by 'rationalism'¹, developed in the western part of Europe after the 16th century. Doing away with the epic properties of Greek tragedy (prologue and chorus), the dramatic dialogue absorbed all action and defined character, while the plot structured the representation of reality not only within the universal laws of probability and necessity but, more particular, in a socially acceptable and strictly logical way (*bienséance* and *vraisemblance*). In this way aesthetic and ethical categories of the text melted together. At the end of the 19th century the softly purring motor of the well-made play had indeed dismissed all 'demonic forces' of ancient tragedy, as Nietzsche remembered them in chaos, pain, suffering and the experience of the senseless. While an optimistic bourgeois society projected the teleological, linear narrative model on every theory and text available, promising liberation and progress (Lyotard's *Grand Récits*), Aristotle's poetics survived in realistic drama, soon to be found no longer adequate.

I also discussed a Western, European theatre tradition that showed, in its history of the rewritings of classic texts, an ongoing process of re-interpretations that was, some time after the Second World-war, taken over by theatre-directors in a deconstructive reading and performance of the old dramas. It appeared that just in this act of appropriation itself, western cultural heritage was mastered and recognized as a part of our cultural identities. A far-away cultural past, once domesticated, played its own part in the present, defining an open global, but at the same time, most pointedly local identity.

I was most surprised to see that a comparable process had taken place in Egypt, where in a mediating way not only foreign plays were adapted but where also new theories and political strategies were tried in dramatic writing and in theatrical practice, 'swallowing and digesting' the strange material in order to assi-

milate it in its own culture. In what appears to be an intercultural dialogue between this part of the East and parts of Europe during the last century, the successive drama-modeling, drama-versions and theatrical performances show ideological shifting and changes in space and time, cultures choosing their own historical moments and social impetus as point of attack. Cultural differences then can be discovered out of this complicated dramatic interplay and intermingling of social and cultural phenomena.

Here, I want to focus on these cultural differences which seem to inspire and create two versions of Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. French Algerian author Hélène Cixous wrote in 1977 a libretto-text for an opera with the title *The Name of Oedipus, Songs of the forbidden Body*². The drama of Tawfik al-Hakim³ was mentioned in the book of Nehad Selaiha on *Egyptian theatre*⁴ in which she exasperatedly remarks on the "almost claustrophobic obsession with the incestuous figure of Oedipus which (had) haunted or rather bedeviled, all treatment of Greek themes in the Egyptian theatre". Reading his *King Oedipus* I was prepared for all sorts of differences: those between a male and a female (even feminist) perspective; those between two times (there is a lapse of thirty years) and of course, what is supposed to be, the most important one: the difference between 'Easterners' and 'Westerners' as Al-Hakim called it. What I found was an amazing form of 'sameness'. Sameness showed at the more ideological and intellectual level of the text in the construction of new mental spaces concerning the incest-taboo, god and masculine rationality. Difference was reflected in the dimension of Fate, the concept of the tragic and in the act of narration itself, structuring specific possibilities for an effective communication.

Sameness: taboo, God, male-ness

1. What is most remarkable in both rewritings is the insertion of scenes, dismissed by Sophocles, after the discovery of their impossible relationship. Oedipus and Jocaste as a loving wife and husband have to confront themselves with a multitude of other positions in their family: killer of his father, married to his mother, brother of his sons and daughters, abandoned child; lover of her son, wife to father and son, mother to her children and grandchildren. In both texts the outcome of this confrontation ends in the death of Jocaste, but neither Cixous nor Al-Hakim accepts any guilt or responsibility for their Oedipus. Instead, there is an astonishing denial in the Egyptian Oedipus; he wants to overcome the situation as soon as possible and go on with his life, including his marriage with Jocaste. But his Jocaste recoils and dies. Like Al-Hakim's Oedipus, Cixous' Jocaste accepts her incestuous love for her son, as love only later, lately forbidden. Her husband

/son needs time to reconsider but accepts in the end his unspeakable love for his wife who is also his mother.

Keeping herself on the side of the mythological material of the Theban cycle which for anthropologist Lévi-Strauss reflected the troublesome process to come to knowledge: born out of one (the earth) or born from two (male and female), Cixous stresses this space between myth and tragedy: 'In reality myth was what took the place of analysis in former times. The myth of Oedipus (...) was of great importance. (...) Stronger than the social, myth is always outside the law, like the unconscious. Only afterwards there is a story, which signifies there has been a clash between the in-law and out-law'.⁵ Before the material is put into a narrative structure, in the mythical realm the law has to be discovered. As for Al-Hakim's remarkable confrontation with the incest-taboo, he draws a comparison with another of his plays (*The sleepers of Ephesus*), in which a struggle arises, not between man and fate, but rather between man and the 'sublime unseen forces', which are greater than man, like Time, Reality, Space etc.⁶ Two lovers share hidden blood ties: "Learning about the truth of their relationship it destroys what they had in common".

2. Both authors also share an undoing of the metaphysical elements of Sophocles' tragedy. Al-Hakim does not present or represent God in the play, no (divine) oracle and no earth-god / the Sfinx turns out to be a lion. The absent God is nevertheless omnipresent in his divine revelation and the human believers in which he is reflected. A comparable mental domain is created in Cixous' discursive space of the *Name of the Father*, as the first hierarchical term (Logos) in all cultural institutions of a patriarchal society: religion, philosophy, science, arts etc. Both realms conflate in Oedipus' characteristics which turn out to be a version of his 'tragic flaw': hubris, rationality, intellect and, one could say, a typical male disconnection with spiritual powers for Hakim and with the other world of the unconscious for Cixous. But their op/positioning is different: against the curiosity and intellect of the hero, Hakim places not only divine revelation but also, on a personal, human level, the powers of the heart – seen as more true than those of the mind. The fact that Oedipus would want to know what is not knowable, seems a form of excess.

In the questioning of *what* he should want to know, Cixous turns to the source of hidden knowledge in the unconscious and in the body, 'more ancient than the gods'. Of course her critique points to the Western Cartesian mind/body opposition, deconstructed by Nietzsche and Freud, but her rewriting of Sophocles' text is also an attack on the Freudian Oedipal theory, that dismisses

the acceptance of the mother as the origin of life and love. Sharing a male/female oppositional outlay Cixous and Al Hakim create a comparable chain of further connotations in mind-body, ratio-emotions, inner-outer and private-public. But attacking male rationalization in Oedipus, as Cixous foregrounds in her text, is different from criticizing rationality (as a domain of male experience), as in Al-Hakim's evaluating -system. He confronts this rationality, being western, with religion as the other domain. What Al-Hakim describes as characteristic of the Greek tragic hero: the existential loneliness of western man without god, he refuses to accept for his world: 'My feeling is that the Easterner always lives in the two worlds I mentioned... That is the last fortress for us to shelter from Western thought which lives in a single one, the world of man alone. It is nothing other than the feeling of Islamic philosophy (...) that stands on two pillars: the intellect and the religious dogma.'⁷ Since the world of God and the community is sacred, no man is allowed to attack these domains. Thus, a free human being, cannot move against the will of God or the logic of history and consequently discover, as western ideology would have it, a new aspect of his identity.

Difference

Fate, the tragic, tragedy as genre

1. In this ongoing debate in the Arab literary domain, in the 60s, the impossibility of an existential conflict or of a split consciousness for an Islamic 'hero', implies the impossibility of Islamic drama (as long as drama is still defined as conflict). Algerian scholar Aziza⁸ uses in his debate a quote of French Orientalist Massignon: "The world, more grander and perfect than the artistic form, is only a mechanic puppet, whose lines are moved by the Master, just as he wants it. It is as if we were in a puppet theater. (...) Freedom is, what Muslims concerns, subjected to the will of God ..." And of course a Dutch scholar knows this paradigm of Calvinistic predestination all too well. And maybe Massignon projected this harsh protestant model into Islamic thinking. But given the absolute power of a Christian God, who decides, whatever the believer does or doesn't do, the God of Islam allows a free willing subject, but only within the boundaries of the heavenly Will, which shall be done in the end. Since God can thus be no partner in the play, Egyptian author Yusef Idriss describes the Arab hero as a man who is confronted with a real or recognizable problem of daily-life, in a struggle between himself and others, who he can master by healthy pragmatism and a strong will. His heroism is a perfect victory against the blows of Fate. And he is the better of his peers. He outsmarts them, his intelligence saves him.⁹ A Greek hero on the other hand suffers a cruel Fate, guilty against his will; his intelligence or his stupidity is of no importance.

2. While different western theories about the end of tragedy (George Steiner, Richard Wagner) focus on the loss of a religious or ideological unity in society and, as a consequence, that of an experience of the tragic, in the world of Islam the gods are still there, at least as 'something greater than and above man', present but even more absent. In combination with the heroic faculties of the Arab hero that point to a superb potential of problem solving, every possibility for a tragic experience in the western sense seems to disappear - the tragic problem is tragic because simply it cannot be solved. And more or less at the same moment that in the West tragedy as genre seemed to become a historic impossibility, the East started to re/invent a tradition of the tragic genre. It is not that Al-Hakim is not aware of this. He mentions the ideological shifting from the metaphysical dimensions of western tragedy into 'acts of will' and dividing 'oppositional emotions' in the work of Corneille and Racine as an end of a European tradition. And he is absolutely not sure about the outcome of his own experiment with his *King Oedipus* as an Arab tragedy.

Like Aristotle, Arab scholars seem to read inter-textual in and from their own discourse on tragedy. Drama theory and practice speak with each other. Friederike Pannewick, a German scholar of both Arabic language and literature and of drama and theatre⁹, gives a fascinating exposé of this debate. The poetical prescriptions of the Greek philosopher, translated by Andalusian scholar Ibn Rush in the 11th century, are in this discourse often essentialized, 'culturalized', that is analyzed as foreign to Arab mentality. Whereas the struggle of the hero possibly belongs to the religious /ontological domain, the discussions about formal and structuring aspects of the drama-text seem to me more part of an aesthetic choice. The difference then between a Greek mentality and an Arab one, crystallizes in a 'natural' choice for the dramatic or the epic genre, that is stylistics in a specific structuring of the plot. In terms of the Syrian theatre-scholar Abdalfattah Rawwas Qal'agi (1988), Greek mentality showed itself in "a condensation and concentration of life for a representation on the stage, bounded by time and place", and Arab mentality in a "treatment of life in its real dimensions, (...) the dramatic action unifies life in its real expansion without a short-cut and condensation."¹⁰ The first theoretical explanation that offers itself is the big difference between narrated time and time of narration in drama and the more extensive combination of these 'times' in the epic genre. One could also think of the discussion between filmmakers Eisenstein and Vertov, who both claimed a greater veracity for their films, Eisenstein offering a montage of loose scenes held together by the theme and Vertov offering 'life' as the product of a non-stop camera-activity.

Also recognizable is the argument of a Greek 'fictional' ordering of life as it should/could be, against the so called Arab 'real', anti-illusionistic (Brechtian) presentation of life as it is. And if we connect 'mentality' with literary taste, maybe the ancient art of the story-teller as an specific epic form is close to Arab ears. But the actual deconstruction of the dramatic model during the last century seems able to transform the cultural differences into historic ones. In global aesthetic developments the category of time more than that of place are of crucial importance, as we will see.

Form=content

Returning to our texts about Oedipus and the way the authors structured their narrative, we should consider the real *act of narration*. We see that the Egyptian writer adopts the western drama-model in its latest form, the strict realist one with three acts in different scenes, while Cixous chooses for a total open text form. It is a text fluid in short dialogues and interior monologues, there is a poetic interplay of doubled voices of the characters and the chorus, memories are retold, dreams recalled and long silences persist. Although the storyline slowly becomes clear, the female writer escapes plot and action and unfolds the past events in a poetic evocation of situations: 'like the pulsing of the unconscious, it will be a text, a body decoding and naming itself in one slow long push; the song of women being brought into the world, of a woman (...) experiencing herself as many, the totality of those she has been, could have been or want to be'¹¹ In this loose structure, her text touches, audibly and visibly, those desires 'outside the law', still present in the mythological material, opening it towards an experience of the heterogeneous, the incongruous and 'otherness' as the hidden of (western) culture. Al-Hakim chooses in the same way his 'right' form. Realist theatre is the ultimate illusionistic form: it is 'here and now' and knows exactly its own 'time and place'. Therefore the writer is not only legitimized but also forced to strip the story of what he calls 'superstitious belief' that Arab or Islamic mentality would scorn: the monstrous Sphinx, and the insertion of this other part of the Oedipus story, that of the happy family, living their private life inside the palace till its downfall; the family-atmosphere in the life of Oedipus being pivotal for his choice. This ultimate humanization/personification of the mythical material, turning an archaic story and characters into a drama of a well-to-do bourgeois family is of course also a phenomenon of the late nineteen thirties and forties and, especially, of French literature.¹²

I found it intriguing that an experienced drama-writer such as Al-Hakim should turn so far away from the Oedipus-mythology to put on stage the destruc-

tion of a happy family – a fall from grace. A happy family in my culture is a topic for comedy or, ... melodrama. In the opening scene we see a nice father, a sweet mother and impeccable little children playing together the ur-scene of the oedipal family: daddy tells mammy and the children about this one big event; his adventure with the sphinx. When all is discovered the grieving husband picks out his eyes in order not to see his dead wife. In the introduction to the English translation of his plays W.M Hutchins writes: "When Al-Hakim follows Sophocles and has Oedipus blind himself the act seems to be motivated by the grief of a loving husband, not by an avenging fury".¹³ It is clear that Al-Hakim does not accept the guilt that Sophocles, the Greek juridical system, Freud and Western culture bestow on the poor king-son. Or does he refuse the hidden anxiety of Western culture about even imagining the possibility of a mother-son relationship? Because this is what happens: he makes this love-relationship visible and thinkable in the same way that thirty years later, French Feminist Hélène Cixous defends this same love in a provocative deconstructionist text. And both versions invite us to rethink the laws of society and of the literary genre that wants to reflect on that reality. Both texts show us a hero who does not fulfill his duty: a non tragic hero who is pivotal to the new perspectives.

Hero and flaw

The category of the Western hero knows a mythological positioning and a literary theory sharing many characteristics. In the old myths he is someone in between the world of the gods and that of human beings: a mediator, a trespasser going over boundaries, a saviour, one who makes the world turn. We recognize him in Hercules, Prometheus, Jesus Christ and German mythology (used by Wagner). His outstanding status and his crossing of boundaries are reflected in Aristoteles' figuration of the protagonist: better than us but with some flaw (*hamartia*), able to come to insight (*anagnorisis*) about his responsibility concerning his actions and true to his nature: a man is intelligent and courageous, a behavior not to be expected by a woman or a slave...

Considering Tawfik Al-Hakim's Oedipus character it appears that our hero is of course King of Thebe but also a cheat and a liar. With Tiresias, acting like corrupt and businesslike politicians, they created the big lie: there never was a Sphinx only a lion. Not much better than us, perhaps slightly worse, Oedipus is a willing victim in the hands of Tiresias who wanted to undo the prophesies that a son would kill his father, by accepting a stranger on the throne of Thebe. In the end all his calculations prove wrong; he brings destiny exactly where God wanted it. Oedipus is driven by an insatiable search for knowledge, truth and his origins. Eager to know and violent in his behavior against his opponents his tragic

flaw is made clear by a series of remarks of the Priest:

-You don't prevent us (from returning to God)... You can't, - but you are always investigating what you ought not and always asking questions which you should not pose... Heavenly revelation is for you a subject of scrutiny and exploration.

-We have sought another to go to the Temple at Delphi to ask gods guidance in what is right for us... (p. 86)

And Oedipus himself, answering Creon who returns from Delphi:

I love nothing more than searching...My whole life is nothing but a search. So long as god - as you say- is the one ordering me now to search and investigate, you will find me thoroughly obedient. Do you hear me Highpriest? (p. 88)

Even Jocaste dying, reflects on this drive:

Joc.: Oedipus! You whom I cherish more than myself. Don't try to lighten the effect of the catastrophe on me.... The actuality is as you described it, but the truth Oedipus.... What shall we do with the screaming voice of truth?

Oedipus : The truth? I have never feared its face a day.... Nor been alarmed by its voice.

Joc. : (as though addressing herself) For how long have I cautioned you against that... I have worried about it for you... you who have spent your best days chasing after it...from city to city in order to grasp its veil until she turned on you at last, bared a little of her terrible face and screamed in her resounding voice. It devastated the palace of our happiness and brought us in a state you see. (pp. 116,117)

And as a farewell the Highpriest concludes the argument:

If you wish to draw near to god and light the lamp in your soul. But you have preferred to light the candles in your intellect which have gone out be the first gust of wind...(p. 127)

His kingdom taken, his desire to know punished, it makes a very lonely world. All that Oedipus rests is his family. It becomes clear why Al-Hakim needed this happy family-life in order to give his hero the power to grow above himself. In a

astonishing speech Oedipus declares his world:

Joc. : Oedipus!... My.... I don't know what to call you.

Oed : Call me anything you like, for you are Jocasta whom I love. Nothing will change what is in my heart... So let me be your husband or your son.. Names or epithets cannot change the love and affection rooted in the heart.

Let Antigone and the others be my children or siblings. These terms cannot change the affection and love I harbor for them in my soul. (...)
(p. 116)

And (as though addressing himself)

Oed : What a destiny! I am a hero because I killed a beast they claimed had wings. I am a criminal because I killed a man they showed to be my true father. I am neither a hero nor a criminal... I am just another individual upon whom the people have cast their fictions and heaven its decrees...(p. 117)

Compare these utterances with:

Joc. : His entire life spent amid threats, deaths, and murders of his kin. Among those he loved, while causing their ruin...

I wanted to deliver him from *names*

All the names that pass for gods

That impose themselves by fraud,

That we adore and obey as 'pure beings'

Father, mother, truth, life, death, fault, debt, wife, truth,

Husband, king, birth, what man can say which he is.

It is the words that rule

I wanted to free him (p. 295)

O, my love

Whom to mutter your names

My lover mother, my fool (p. 296)

The text comes from Cixous (1994), where Jocaste conducts the process of liberating Oedipus from this world of investiture of names as organizing social functions; in theoretical terms: a liberation of the violence and repression of the Symbolic Order, decided through names, kinship and law. But it is in the other space, outside the laws of the Father, in that of the Mother that these socially and sexually framed words can acquire other meanings connected with positions of love. For Cixous' Jocaste and Al-Hakim's Oedipus a perfect and absolute love is

not longer forbidden, a love that fights against the deep rooted collective mechanism. It is clear that Cixous, by inscribing a voice for Jocaste also makes the Queen the hero of the play; she is the one who mediates between Oedipus, his past and his present, who guides him through this horrible silence, in which he can no longer speak. Together with Tiresias and the chorus she re/creates him for himself and for us. When we all know what has happened, and that occurs very soon in her play, they start to describe this *male* personality: the archetypical western Man, vulnerable in his heroic aspirations:

Chorus: He is a man. As with all men
His desire is
Always the same:
To stand great and pure in his children's eyes, after his death
To be, in the children's eyes the only king /
For you it is not enough
He is a child. Never adored enough.

Jocaste: No, Not a child. He is the father he never had
The father without fault, without threat, the boundless father
He would have liked to have. Powerfull and gentle like a mother.
And the city is his daughter.... (p. 262)

And as for his desire for knowledge:

Oedipus: I must go to what I fear most
What I dread beckons me
I am not
A man of doubt and disguises (p. 262)

When Oedipus in the last scene of the text cries out, and accepts his love for Jocaste, his wife and mother, Jocaste has already died, or better, has faded away in the arms of her mother/lover who has come to take her. The too-late as an aspect of the category Time Al-Hakim mentions. And again there are curious analogies with the Jocasta of the Arab writer. His Jocaste also has her domain in the palace, her husband and children. But there are people outside, and Jocaste cannot forget them: 'What would they say if we continue this abnormal life after today. I am no longer fit to stay. Darling there is only one solution for me: to go' (p. 117). And so she dies, in bed. 'Above all a wife', Nicole Loraux writes about Sophocles' Jocaste, ending their life in bed as all married heroines. Their marriage bed. 'And the remote sanctum where they meet their death is equally the sym-

bol of their life – a life that finds its meaning outside the self and is fulfilled only by the institutions of marriage and maternity, which tie women to the world and lives of men. It is by men that women meet their death, and it is for men, usually, that they kill themselves'.¹³

Conclusion

How do we explain the astonishing similarities between the two texts? One explanation is that Cixous has been influenced directly by the version of Al-Hakim. And of course they share a background: the northern part of Africa as the other side of the Mediterranean and an intellectual education in France. And if Cixous has read the text of Al-Hakim, this text must have been so attractive to her that she has let herself be inspired by this daring transgression of the incest-taboo and the guiltless guilt of the hero, admitting his love for his mother-wife. And there is another reason for her to write this alternative option for the tragedy: her text follows directly after her *Portrait of Dora* in which she attacks the Freudian Oedipal-theory. An interesting explanation for the similarities is also offered by classical scholar Lorna Hardwick in the aftermath of my lecture. Dealing in her work with the aspect of post-colonial reconstructions of the classics, she mentioned the notions of femaleness and the associated challenges to the primacy of rationality in my analysis of the texts of both Cixous and Al-Hakim: 'There are interesting affinities between the use of the 'feminine' as a term of abuse and the construction by western orientalist chauvinists of Eastern thought and traditions of 'soft' and female. The way in which non-European productions subvert the association between non-rationalistic approaches and 'softness' and marginalization are important I think.'¹⁵ If we take her remark seriously we must turn towards another mental space shared by more 'others' in a dominant western discourse. And in that sense all sorts of new meetings are possible.

NOTES

¹ Stephen Halliwell writes in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Volume 1, Cambridge, 1989, p.175: "Aristotle allows the genre the power to stir deep emotions of pity and fear by displaying human fallibility and instability in the setting of actions whose momentum is one of ethical seriousness. But in doing so, he deprives it of the scope to move to the edge of, and even outside, the realm of rational understanding, or to dramatize events whose meaning cannot be encompassed by the logic of probability and necessity." The argument is repeated in Hans-Thies Lehmanns *Postdramatisches Theater*, 1999. See also Mieke Kolk, *Facing the War, Visions of Death; From Epic Structures to Postdramatic Theatre* (forthcoming).

- 2 H. Cixous, *The Name of Oedipus/Songs of the Forbidden Body*, in *Plays by French and Francophone Women*, edited and translated by Christiane P. Makward and Judith G. Miller, Michigan, 1994.
- 3 Tawfiq Al-Hakim, *Plays, Prefaces and Postscripts, Volume I: Theatre of the Mind*, translated W.M. Hutchins, Three Continents Press, 1981.
- 4 Nehad Selaiha, *Egyptian Theatre : A Diary 1990-1992*, Cairo 1993, p.137.
- 5 Verena Conley, *Hélène Cixous : Writing the Feminine*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1984, pp. 155-156.
- 6 Tawfiq Al-Hakim, 1981, p. 283.
- 7 Tawfiq Al-Hakim, 1981, p. 87.
- 8 M. Aziza, *Al Islam wal-masrah*, Kairo, 1971.
- 9 Friederike Pannewick, *Das Wagnis Tradition, Arabische Wege der Theatralität*, Wiesbaden, 2000, p. 112.
- 10 Pannewick, o.c., p. 85.
- 11 H. Cixous, *Aller à la Mer*, in *Modern Drama*, 27, 1984, p. 546.
- 12 Al-Hakim mentions himself the Oedipus' versions of St. George de Bouhelier, Jean Cocteau and Andre Gide. I suppose that the rewritings of the Greek classics by Anouilh, Giraudoux and Marguerite Yourcenar would be even more adequate to reflect this collective moment which represents the 'Zeitgeist', inspiring an artistic community to comparable thematic motivations, artistic forms and imagery.
- 13 Tawfiq Al-Hakim, 1981, p.7.
- 14 Nicole Loraux, *Tragic ways of killing a woman*, Cambridge, M, 1987, p.23, p. 106.
- 15 Lorna Hardwick mentions Wole Soyinka's discussion of the contrast between Western and Yoruba thought patterns and cosmology, brought out in his version of *The Bacchae* of Euripides and most recently in Nigerian productions of Greek plays. An adaptation of Euripides *The Women of Troy* in a Yoruba setting *The Women of Owu*, by Femi Osofisan recently had its world-premiere.

GREEK MYTHOLOGY IN ARAB TRAGEDY. A RETURN OF THE MYTH OR TO THE MYTH?

Younes LOULIDI

Beyond any doubt, Tawfiq Al-Hakim has been the first Arab author to have introduced Greek mythology in Arab theatre. He wrote his *Pygmalion* (1942) after his visit to France (1925-1927), where he became convinced that any attempt at becoming a 'serious' author had to lead him to the roots of Greek theatre. It was in Paris that he discovered through French translations the dramatic writings of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, based as they were on mythological stories. These myths were a primary tool for him, since they allowed him to develop the type of conflict he liked so much to express, the one between man and the different forces inhabiting the universe. From then on, it became clear to Al-Hakim, that any attempt at integrating the theatre into our Arabic society and culture, implied on the one hand, a movement towards the origins, towards the ancient Greeks, and, on the other, a projection of their mythic stories, belonging to another society, into our oriental ethic and intellectual values¹. Therefore, after having written his *Pygmalion*, he turned to the most famous of all Greek myths and in 1949 he wrote *Œdipe Roi*, not unexpectedly, since he had read the Sophoclean version and has seen it staged in French theatres, and since, at the same time, he had also read *Œdipe* by André Gide and *La machine infernale* by Jean Cocteau. Both of these writers tried to integrate the modern world into the human epic experience, but Al-Hakim tried to distinguish himself from all those who had adapted or revisited this myth in Western literature. In his opinion, all mythic symbols that the Arabic mentality could not understand had to be eliminated, but at the same time, he also wanted to frame this myth into a more Islamic atmosphere. Therefore, he chose not to stage a purely Greek Oedipus, but rather a more human version of him. Unfortunately, he only succeeded in staging an Oedipus who had poor human and heroic qualities and who solved no riddle at all, since there was no Sphinx. Moreover, once he knew that he was the son of Jocaste, he insisted that both of them remained husband and wife.

After his *Pygmalion* and *Œdipe*, Al-Hakim turned to the famous myth of Electra, one of the great foundational stories of the West which ran across western theatre and which was immortalized from the earliest Greek texts on, to *Mourning becomes Electra* by Eugène O'Neill (1931), *Electre* by Gide (1937) and *Les Mouches* by Sartre (1943), passing by the Italian version of Vittorio