



# Classical Encounters on Screen: Ancient Greece in Theo Angelopoulos' Final Two Films

Anastasia Bakogianni<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The modern Greek film director Theo Angelopoulos selectively borrowed plotlines, characters and motifs from Greek myth, epic and tragedy and creatively adapted them in his new cinematic works. This article examines Angelopoulos' final two films, *The Weeping Meadow* (*To λιβάδι που δακρύζει*, 2004) and *The Dust of Time* (*Η Σκόνη του Χρόνου*, 2008), through a classical lens to unpick their synthesis of both overt and indirect ('masked') receptions. Drawing on developments in Classical Reception, Adaptation Studies and Media Studies, it unmask the complex nature of the films' tangled encounters with the classical past and the challenge they pose to the canonical status of ancient Greece both within the modern Greek state and beyond. Angelopoulos' oeuvre challenges the viewer and demands that we reevaluate our relationship with the classical past and our own ideological baggage, thus serving as an important corrective to the unthinking acceptance of old certainties and established hierarchies.

Throughout his long career, during which he completed seventeen films, the modern Greek director Theo Angelopoulos (1935–2012) repeatedly appropriated the myths, texts and history of ancient Greece and enlisted them in the service of his distinctive new cinematic works. The classical elements, however, form but one strand of the rich tapestry that makes up his oeuvre.<sup>1</sup> In films like *The Travelling Players* (1975),

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<sup>1</sup> For classical echoes and themes in Angelopoulos' oeuvre see in particular the work of A. J. Pomeroy, *Then It Was Destroyed by the Volcano*, London, 2008 and his article 'The sense of epiphany in Theo Angelopoulos' *Ulysses' Gaze*', *Classical Receptions Journal*, 3.2, 2011, pp. 213–26. See also, K. Zacharia, "'Reel" Hellenisms: Perceptions of Greece in Greek Cinema', in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. K. Zacharia, Aldershot, Hampshire, 2008, pp. 321–53; M. C. de Miranda Nogueira Coelho, 'A odisseia do olhar de Theo Angelopoulos', in *Cinema: lanterna mágica da história e da mitologia*, ed. A. Reich Corseuil, et al., Florianópolis, 2009, pp. 141–72; P. Michela-

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✉ Anastasia Bakogianni  
a.bakogianni@massey.ac.nz

<sup>1</sup> School of Humanities, Media and Creative Communication, Massey University, New Zealand, Albany, Auckland 0632, New Zealand

*Alexander the Great* (1980), *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) and *The Weeping Meadow* (2004), to name but a few examples, there are many 'complicated' encounters that raise thorny questions about history, society and culture, as well as testifying to a profound engagement with the very concept of adaptation.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Angelopoulos' films never straightforwardly lay claim to being adaptations of ancient Greek literary and/or dramatic models. This approach is radically different from that of Greek directors, like George Tzavellas (1916–1976), and especially the Greek Cypriot Michael Cacoyannis (1922–2011) who celebrated their films' classical pedigrees. In the former's *Antigone* (1961) and the latter's Euripidean trilogy [*Electra* (1962), *The Trojan Women* (1971) and *Iphigenia* (1977)] the connection with ancient tragic texts is openly proclaimed in the credits.<sup>3</sup> Both directors deliberately invited comparisons to their ancient Greek source texts but Angelopoulos adopted a more 'playful' attitude both alluding to and drawing back from establishing overt connections to the classical past.<sup>4</sup> But it is precisely when the links to the classical past are not obvious, but subject to negotiation that the opportunity arises for the close re-examination of the very processes of reception.

André Bazin argues that the practice of adaptation is an old one and that themes and stories are constantly circulating between different media.<sup>5</sup> These 'memes, micro-units of cultural knowledge and practice'<sup>6</sup> circulate within our culture, each new iteration further strengthening the meme's hold on our cultural memory. Ancient Greek memes have proven highly successful. By focussing our attention on what is 'added' rather than on what is 'lost' during the process of reception and adaptation we can broaden our horizons and escape becoming obsessed with the question of fidelity.<sup>7</sup> Linda Constanzo Cahirs argues the process of adaptation

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Footnote 1 (continued)

kis, *Greek Tragedy on Screen*, Oxford, 2013, esp. pp. 153–9 on *The Travelling Players*; A. Bakogianni 'Women in Captivity: The Human Cost of Armed Conflict from the Trojan War to Modern Greek Cinema', in *Brill's Companion to Ancient Greek and Roman Warfare on Film*, ed. K. P. Nikoloutsos, Leiden 2023, 273–91 on reception and gender questions in *The Travelling Players* and *Restoration* (1970).

<sup>2</sup> On complicated encounters see M. Stewart and R. Munro, 'Introduction', in *Intercultural Screen Adaptation: British and Global Case Studies*, ed. M. Stewart et al., Edinburgh, 2020, pp. 1–7 (4). For an analysis of Angelopoulos' films in the context of Greek Cinema, see V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, New York, 2012. For an in-depth analysis of Angelopoulos' cinematic language, see V. Karalis, 'An Essay on the Ocular Poetics of Theo Angelopoulos', in *Realism in Greek Cinema: From the Post-War Period to the Present*, London and New York, 2017, pp. 157–90. For the director's close engagement with philosophical ideas (including ancient philosophy) see V. Karalis, *Theo Angelopoulos: Filmmaker and Philosopher*, London, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> In the opening credits of Tzavellas' *Antigone* and the closing credits of Cacoyannis' trilogy.

<sup>4</sup> On play as an active form of interaction with the classical past, see J. Harrison, 'The Interaction of Play and Other Receptions', in *Playful Classics: Creative Responses to the Classics*, ed. J. Harrison et al., 2024, pp. 261–8 (261).

<sup>5</sup> E. F. Hanssen, 'Imaginary Museums, Material Refractions: André Bazin on Adaptation', in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. Bruhn, et al, 2013, pp. 133–53 (144).

<sup>6</sup> T. Leitch, 'What Movies Want', in ed. Bruhn, et al., 2013, pp. 155–75 (167). On memes and participatory culture, see L. Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*, Cambridge, MA, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> D. Cartmell '100+ Years of Adaptations, or, Adaptation as the Art Form of Democracy', in *A Companion to Literature, Film, And Adaptation*, ed. D. Cartmell, Malden, MA and Oxford, 2012, pp. 1–12 (8–9).

always involves altering (sometimes radically so) ‘the structure or function of an entity so that it is better fitted to survive and multiply in its new environment’.<sup>8</sup> Texts that have been adapted again and again (and classical texts are prime examples of this process)<sup>9</sup> are culturally successful and this guarantees their further proliferation.<sup>10</sup> Such an approach is particularly suited to an examination of Angelopoulos’ own highly creative adaptations of classical models and his critique of the modern state’s valorization of ancient Greece.

## The Modern Greek Framework

Modern Greece offers us a rich field for such investigations, because of its claim to a ‘special relationship’ with what it views as its classical heritage.<sup>11</sup> For modern Greek artists the dialogue with ancient Greece remains a cultural nexus of ever-shifting interconnections that necessitate constant renegotiation. Even when it is, at least on the surface rejected, because even a refusal to engage with ancient Greece still requires the adoption of an ideological position vis-à-vis its cultural capital in the modern state. Like many modern Greek artists seeking to establish themselves in the shadow of the classical past, Angelopoulos’ relationship with ancient Greece was fraught.

Theo Angelopoulos’ oeuvre is steeped in modern Greek culture. The director and his collaborators offer audiences a thoughtful chronicle of the country’s turbulent history. By his own admission Angelopoulos was also all too aware of how deeply embedded ancient Greece is (and remains) in the modern state:

Here in Greece, Homer and the ancient tragedians were in my time part of our school education. Ancient myths inhabit us and we inhabit them. We live in a land full of memories, ancient stones, and broken statues.

Interview (1999)<sup>12</sup>

Despite this acknowledgement, Theo Angelopoulos’ reception of ancient Greek literature, history and mythology in his cinematic oeuvre is deliberately oblique and ‘masked’.<sup>13</sup> In Angelopoulos’ films, traces of ancient myths and Greek Tragedy are

<sup>8</sup> L. Costanzo Cahirs, *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, Jefferson, NC, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Classical receptions scholars have long argued that reception begins in Antiquity when adaptation was an accepted practice of long standing. L. Hardwick, *Reception Studies Reception Studies, Greece & Rome*, New Surveys in the Classics no. 33, Oxford, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> J. Bryant, ‘Textual Identity and Adaptive Revision: Editing Adaptation as a Fluid Text’, in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. J. Bruhn, et al., London, 2013, pp. 47–67 (50).

<sup>11</sup> On the origins of these ideas, see M. Herzog, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., New York, 2020 (chapter 1) and S. Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece*, Redwood City, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Unpublished interview to the Merchant-Ivory Department of Public Relations on the US release of *Eternity and a Day*. Quoted in T. Angelopoulos, ‘An Enormous Family Photograph’ Interview by M. Demopoulos and F. Liappa (in Greek), in *Theodoros Angelopoulos*, ed. I. Stathi and A. Kiriakides, 41<sup>st</sup> Thessaloniki Film Festival, Athens, 2000, pp. 181–7 (192). Author’s own translation.

<sup>13</sup> For ‘masked’ receptions see A. Bakogianni, and R. Apostol, ‘Face to Face: Locating Classical Receptions on Screen’, in R. Apostol and A. Bakogianni, 2018, pp. 1–16 (3–6).

felt indirectly in terms of themes and moving vignettes; like shadows that drift across the surface of his films. Angelopoulos generally prefers to submerge any references to ancient narratives into his storylines rather than to directly adapt or recreate them. His dialogue with the classical past is therefore a complicated and contested process and one that requires a knowledgeable audience to decode. This gives rise to the question of whether we, as classicists, are (mis)reading classical references into the filmic text of Angelopoulos' movies; or whether we are in fact uncovering a classical subtext that adds yet another layer to his challenging filmography that requires active viewership.<sup>14</sup> For the present investigation, we are concerned with the last two films he completed in particular, because they have not been analysed as closely from a classical perspective.

Ancient echoes reverberate across Angelopoulos' cinematic oeuvre enriching its complexity.<sup>15</sup> The director did at times reincarnate ancient characters, but they always wore modern Greek masks and clothing. They thus require from their audiences a deeper engagement with the director's narrative strategies and symbolism before these disguises can be cast aside to reveal their ancient connections. In this paper I trace echoes of specific ancient models in Angelopoulos' *The Weeping Meadow* (*Το λιβάδι που δακρύζει*, 2004) and *The Dust of Time* (*Η Σκόνη του Χρόνου*, 2008).<sup>16</sup> This means moving beyond direct lines of influence towards a new 'synthesis', which is a word Angelopoulos himself used to describe his own work. The classical is no longer prioritized but simply another element in a rich tapestry of transmedial connections. From a reception standpoint the classical echoes are not only deeply embedded in these new works, but they also help weave them more tightly together.

Between them Angelopoulos' last two movies span the history of modern Greece during the turbulent twentieth century. *The Weeping Meadow* covers the first wave of refugees fleeing the Russian revolution (1917) to the end of the Greek Civil War in 1949. *The Dust of Time* places Greek history within a wider global perspective and considerably broadens the geographical canvas of the story, which now takes place in Italy, Russia, Kazakhstan, Germany, the United States and Canada. The two lovers at the centre of the story fall in love in Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city, and a key location in the first film. But this first meeting is left to the audience's imagination. The film concentrates on the tumultuous events of the second half of the twentieth century right up until the beginning of the new millennium. *The Dust of Time* goes so far as to raise the possibility that history itself might be drawing to a close or becoming irrelevant at the close of the millennium.<sup>17</sup> But such an analysis lies beyond the scope of the present investigation except from when it touches upon

<sup>14</sup> The subtitle of Horton's 1999 book on Angelopoulos '*A Cinema of Contemplation*' is particularly apt, because the director's films resist easy viewing and labels. A. Horton, *The Films of Angelopoulos: A Cinema of Contemplation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Princeton, NJ, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> As Pomeroy 'Epiphany' (n. 1 above) and Coehlo 'A odisseia' (n. 1 above) have aptly demonstrated.

<sup>16</sup> T. Angelopoulos, *The Weeping Meadow*, Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation ERT S. A., 2004 and *The Dust of Time*, Theo Angelopoulos Films, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> In a key scene in the film the audience is confronted with a room full of broken television sets and the image of a searching angel. On the 'proto-nihilism' of Angelopoulos's late films, see Karalis 'Filmmaker and Philosopher' (n. 2 above), p. 91.

Angelopoulos' creative appropriation of ancient Greece. While I acknowledge that the history of modern Greece is a dominant theme in both films, as indeed it has been throughout Angelopoulos' oeuvre, this paper deliberately focuses on Angelopoulos' critical engagement with ancient Greece.

### 'What's in a Name?'

In contrast to this famous Shakespearean line,<sup>18</sup> ancient Greek names do indeed matter. They are invested with cultural authority, particularly famous ones, like that of Helen. In modern Greece, the daughter of Zeus and Leda, and the wife of Menelaus, whose abduction sparked off the Trojan War, is still commonly referred to as 'η ωραία Ελένη' (the beautiful Helen).<sup>19</sup> In Angelopoulos, the figure of Eleni (Helen) is particularly prominent in his last two films.<sup>20</sup> The near identification of Helen with ideal female beauty is of course not exclusive to Greece, but in his final two films Angelopoulos skillfully draws on this trope to undercut his viewers' expectations, especially for those modern Greek audience members who are ideologically invested in the 'special relationship'. Significantly, only women bear classical names in these two films: Eleni (the protagonist in both films, although there is a younger Eleni, too, in *The Dust of Time*), Danae (Spyros' sickly first wife in *The Weeping Meadow*) and Cassandra (Spyros' sister in the same movie).<sup>21</sup> Women come to embody the past, they carry its seeds within them and it affects them negatively almost as a kind of curse, certainly a burden, the burden of the past.<sup>22</sup> Her name proves to be a sign, a 'nomen omen' of her ultimate fate. The Eleni in *The Dust of Time* dies just as the celebrations for the new millennium begin leaving the future open-ended. Angelopoulos believed that 'there is never a final word on anything',<sup>23</sup> so it is fitting that his last completed film ends so ambiguously.

<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (II.2, 1-2). Juliet is trying at this point in the play to deny the importance of Romeo's family name, which of course proves impossible. On the importance of Shakespeare Studies as a model for thinking about the concept and practice of adaptation, see J. Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, London and New York, 2006, pp. 45–6.

<sup>19</sup> That is why the Greek poet Yanis Ritsos created such a stir when he presented the readers of his collection *The Fourth Dimension* (1972) with an old and decrepit version of a Helen who had lost her beauty. English translation: Y. Ritsos, 'Helen', *The Fourth Dimension*, trans. P. Green and B. Bardsley, London, 1993, 253–72.

<sup>20</sup> A. Horton, 'Theo Angelopoulos' Unfinished Odyssey: *The Other Sea*', in *The Cinema of Theo Angelopoulos*, ed. A. Koutsourakis and M. Steven, Edinburgh, 2015, pp. 275–91.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Angelopoulos' *The Travelling Players* (1975), a creative adaptation of the story of the House of Atreus. In the film, only Orestes is referred to by his ancient name. The other characters' classical names were only used in the script.

<sup>22</sup> A similar preoccupation with the power of Helen's name and the burden it places on the women who carry it can be detected in *Duas Vezes com Helena* (*Twice with Helen*), a Brazilian movie released in 2001. The protagonist, like the Eleni figures in Angelopoulos' final two films, becomes entangled in a triangular affair that proves fatal.

<sup>23</sup> Angelopoulos in a 1999 interview, quoted in D. Fainaru (ed.), *Theo Angelopoulos Interviews*, Jackson, 2001, p. 135. See also Karalis 'Filmmaker and Philosopher' (n. 2 above), p. 18.

Angelopoulos' interpretation of the mythical Helen follows one of the main strands of her reception, as a woman driven by the power of *eros*.<sup>24</sup> He described his female protagonist in *The Weeping Meadow* as 'the Eleni of myth, the Eleni of all myths who is pursued... but who also pursues absolute love'.<sup>25</sup> The director thus consciously referenced the myth of Helen of Troy in his last two films, but re-casts it as a modern tragedy.<sup>26</sup> There is an air of tragic inevitability to the story of the twentieth-century Eleni(s), even though in Greek epic Helen returns to Sparta to once more live with Menelaus as his wife (*Odyssey* 4). In a key scene towards the end of *The Weeping Meadow*, the heroine keeps repeating 'My name is Eleni'. During her years of imprisonment, she clings desperately to her ancient name, trying to maintain her sense of identity and her connection to her own past. Notably, for the French release of the movie the title was changed to *Eleni*.<sup>27</sup> The power of Helen's ancient name is an integral part of this modern Greek cinematic recasting of the heroine of Greek myth and literature.

Helen's decision to follow Paris had tragic consequences, famously depicted in Homer's *Iliad* and in countless receptions since then. So does Eleni's love for Alexis in *The Weeping Meadow*. Their forbidden love also has an incestuous quality. They were brought up together as brother and sister. In addition, Spyros, Alexis' father, marries Eleni. Therefore, technically at least, she becomes his new stepmother.<sup>28</sup> Eleni and Alexis' relationship is thus doubly incestuous, as she is both his adopted sister and his stepmother. The theme of incest in the film echoes the Theban mythical cycle and the famous story of Oedipus' incestuous marriage to his mother Jocasta.<sup>29</sup> But it is the violent political upheavals and their uprooting that complicate the life of Angelopoulos' protagonists, and not a prophecy as in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (429-25 BCE) where the protagonist is exposed as an infant because he was destined to kill his father Laius.

The story of the 'cursed' couple Eleni and Alexis plays out against the bigger canvas of the history of modern Greece. In a key scene in the film a train goes by full of soldiers heading to the borders to repel the Italian invaders in 1941. They enthusiastically chant a battle song about returning Greece to its former glory. The

<sup>24</sup> Mainstream filmic receptions of Helen tend to focus on the themes of love and desire. R. Blondell, "'Third Cheerleader from the Left": From Homer's Helen to *Helen of Troy*', in *Ancient Greek Women in Film*, ed. K. P. Nikoloutsos, Oxford, 2013, pp. 51–72; B. Vivante, 'Gazing at Helen: Helen as Polysemous Icon in Robert Wise's *Helen of Troy* and Michael Cacoyannis' *The Trojan Women*', in *Ancient Women in Film*, ed. K. P. Nikoloutsos, Oxford, 2013, pp. 19–50; M. M. Winkler 'Helenê kinêmatographikê; or, is this the Face that Launched a Thousand Films?', *Nuntius Antiquus*, 12.1, 2016, pp. 215–57.

<sup>25</sup> <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2005/01/14/trilogy\\_the\\_weeping\\_meadow\\_2005\\_review.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2005/01/14/trilogy_the_weeping_meadow_2005_review.shtml)> (last accessed 18 December 2024).

<sup>26</sup> In the surviving corpus, Helen appears as a character in Euripides' *Troades* (415 BCE) and his *Helen* (412 BCE).

<sup>27</sup> Also in Chile and Spain: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0366721/releaseinfo?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_dt#akas](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0366721/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas) (last accessed 18 December 2024).

<sup>28</sup> The marriage is never consummated. Eleni runs away with Alexis immediately after the ceremony, still dressed in her wedding gown.

<sup>29</sup> Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 BCE) in which Phaedra, wife of king Theseus, develops a passion for her stepson Hippolytus is another possible classical connection. In that play, however, the young man does not share his stepmother's feelings, and her passion leads her inexorably towards suicide.

'Great Idea' of an enlarged Greece that encompassed its ancient colonies was one of the key causes of the Asia Minor disaster in 1922, when the Greek army had to retreat in defeat after extending itself too far. The ideological battle between Right and Left after the end of the German occupation in 1944 erupted into armed conflict in 1946 bringing further suffering to an already devastated nation. Angelopoulos offsets the personal stories against these historical events thus challenging his audiences to engage with these deeply traumatic moments in modern Greek history.

The motif of destined, but doomed love also lies at the heart of the second film in which Eleni meets and falls in love with Spyros, the name of Alexis' father in *The Weeping Meadow*, which demonstrates once again the importance of names. This time it is Spyros' turn to become Eleni's soul mate. But once more, there is another rival for her affections, her friend in exile the Jewish-German Jacob Levi. In this film Eleni abandons Jacob despite his pleas, and begins a desperate search to find Spyros in New York. In turn, Spyros, who married someone else in the intervening years, pursues Eleni to Canada, where she travelled in search of their son. The son is in fact the nameless director whom we encounter at the beginning of *The Dust of Time*. He is trying to finish work on a film about the life of his parents, but past personal traumas and present difficulties have caused delays.<sup>30</sup> The burden of the past is not easy to escape from or even to articulate. Capturing it on film is a difficult process fraught with problems, as Angelopoulos self-reflectively demonstrates in a film about the process of making a film out of and about past traumas.

In *The Weeping Meadow*, Spyros (both adoptive father, and husband of Eleni) pursues the young couple relentlessly. Like an ancient Greek hero obsessed with his personal status in the community, Spyros returns again and again to the theme of shame. He laments that he is no longer respected as the leader of the village, but pitied instead. He dies of a heart attack after tracking the lovers down in a shantytown next to a railway station in Thessaloniki. Alexis is riven with guilt over the death of his father.<sup>31</sup> He is convinced that he was the cause of his death and is thus 'cursed'. Eleni and Alexis also pursue a reunion with their twin sons Yannis and Yorgos, but like Hecuba's rediscovery of her son Alexandros/Paris their reunion with their children does not have a happy ending. The twins' parents are forced to leave them again thus forever destroying the family. War will bring about the final separation as the two brothers fight on opposite sides, one supporting the Left and one the Right in the Greek Civil War of 1946–1949.

In *The Dust of Time*, the love triangle is reformed and repeated, but only up to a point. Eleni does reunite twice with her lover Spyros after several separations forced upon them by political developments. Unlike the first Eleni who only tried to help a friend by sheltering him from the authorities, this Eleni espouses strong communist beliefs and was imprisoned in Greece because of her outspokenness (these events are narrated by Spyros during their first, brief, reunion). She escaped and Spyros finds her again in modern-day Kazakhstan. As an American Greek who has entered

<sup>30</sup> The director's daughter (she is also called Eleni) runs away and he searches for her. His desperation increases after reading her diary, which reveals her deep feelings of despair. The director is also deeply worried about his mother's fragile health (the older Eleni).

<sup>31</sup> There are correspondences with Haemon's guilt for attacking his father in Sophocles' *Antigone*.

the Soviet Union under a false name he brings further danger to both his beloved and himself. He is imprisoned and she is sent to Siberia. Their love therefore comes at a very high price, as most mythical tales of *eros* in ancient Greek culture and literature, which viewed erotic passion as both dangerous and transgressive. This second reincarnation of Helen in Angelopoulos' final film does eventually find a measure of happiness with her beloved. It is Jacob, the spurned lover, who suffers the most because of his devotion to Helen. But in this film, the two male rivals eventually come to an understanding and grow to appreciate each other and the love they share for the same woman. Such a rapprochement would not have been possible in the case of Menelaus and Paris. Paris' death paves the way towards the eventual reconciliation of Helen and Menelaus. Even her second Trojan lover, Deiphobus, has to die so that there are no living male rivals for the position of Helen's husband.

Helen leaves behind not only Menelaus, but also their daughter, Hermione. On screen, Helen's motherhood is often either omitted altogether or deliberately downplayed, to avoid drawing attention to the abandonment of her daughter.<sup>32</sup> The focus is on Helen as an object of desire. Angelopoulos departs from this stereotypical portrayal of Helen in modern popular culture by emphasizing her role as a mother.<sup>33</sup> Both modern Greek Elenis are forced to leave behind their children in his last two films. The children of the refugee generations all suffer abandonment. Their parents are forced by circumstances to give them up starting with Eleni's own abandonment in *The Weeping Meadow*. Spyros and Danae found her crying, all alone as a three-year old, during the frantic rush to leave Odessa. The Eleni of *The Weeping Meadow* was also forced to give up her twin sons. The twins are given to a rich family in Thessaloniki, because they are the result of a teenage pregnancy that would have scandalized the community. Later the reunited family is once again broken apart when first Alexis leaves for America and then their mother is dragged away at night, while they sleep, and imprisoned for several years.

In *The Dust of Time* Eleni must send her son away when he is only three years old, so that he could have a better life with Jacob Levi's sister. Given that at this point in the story they are prisoners in a Siberian gulag this decision appears justified, if very painful for both parties. This complex web of tangled and broken relationships leaves the younger generation with a painful legacy. The director's troubled daughter, also named Eleni, is the product of a broken marriage and runs away from home. She also exhibits strong suicidal tendencies. In what has become a visual cliché in cinema, she stands alone on a bridge gazing longingly at the traffic whizzing past below her, her desire to end it all by throwing herself off this bridge palpable. Later on, she does give voice to her desire to die, but only to her beloved grandmother and namesake. Arguably, Angelopoulos displaces the suicide of the younger Eleni onto Jacob, the older generation thus making way for the younger.

<sup>32</sup> K. Day, 'Pussy Politics: Women and Power in the Homeric Patriarchy', in *Screening Love and War in Troy: Fall of a City*, ed. A. Augustakis and M. S. Cyrino, London, 2022, pp. 97–109 (105).

<sup>33</sup> In *Troy: Fall of a City* (BBC/Netflix, 2018), Helen is caught up in two love triangles. In addition to having two men fight over her, she also competes with her teenage daughter for Paris' affections (Episode 1). This reinforces her portrayal as a narcissistic whose choices harm others, including her own daughter. M. E. Safran, 'Sympathy for Troy's Jezebel: Helen as Antihero', in *Screening Love and War in Troy: Fall of a City*, ed. A. Augustakis and M. S. Cyrino, London, 2022, pp. 51–64 (56–8; 62–3).

## Journeys into Exile

<sup>34</sup>Enforced exile and emigration breed a strong desire either to return home or to find a new home. Classical patterns such as the *nostos* theme emerge again and again in Theo Angelopoulos' films.<sup>35</sup> The displacement of people and their search for a home dominate Angelopoulos' oeuvre. Exile and the desire to find or to return home drive the narrative forward and haunt the characters in *The Weeping Meadow* and *The Dust of Time*.<sup>36</sup> The films thus engage with the thorny subjects of the enforced nature of much of the Greek diaspora in the twentieth century driven as it was by war and poverty. In the twentieth century the Russian Revolution (1917) and the Asia Minor Disaster (August–September 1922), that followed the conflict between Greece and Turkey (1919–1922),<sup>37</sup> forced long-standing Greek emigrant communities to flee their homes in the Black Sea and Asia Minor and to 'return' to Greece or to find another country to take them in. Greece was overwhelmed by a tide of exiles that it struggled to absorb, while desperate refugees who had lost their homes and the majority of their possessions struggled to survive and to re-build their lives. This dark chapter of Greek history was downplayed for a long time,<sup>38</sup> but in his cinematic oeuvre Angelopoulos sought to reinstate it to its rightful place.

The opening titles of *The Weeping Meadow* roll against the background of old photos of Odessa, followed by family portraits of the Greeks who were forced to flee the city before the advance of the Bolsheviks. Some of the people in the photos appear more faded than the rest suggesting that many did not even survive to become exiles. It is a 'lost' world that belongs irrevocably to the past and cannot be re-created. Many of the Greek refugees the viewer encounters in the film long to

<sup>34</sup> On the metaphor of the journey as a useful way for thinking about the adaptation process itself, see C. Della Coletta, *When Stories Travel: Cross-Cultural Encounters between Fiction and Film*, Baltimore, 2012, p. 9–10.

<sup>35</sup> Pomeroy 'Epiphany' (n. 1 above), p. 223. On the importance of the *nostos* theme in ancient Greek literature, see M. Alexopoulou, *The Theme of Returning Home in Ancient Greek Literature: The Nostos of the Epic Heroes*, Lewiston, N.Y., 2009. On the modern Greek poet George Seferis' use of Homeric *nostos* to investigate the impossibility of returning to the same place one left in his poem 'The Return of the Exile' (Ο γυρισμός του ξενιτεμένου, 1938), see M. Alexopoulou, 'Nostos and the Impossibility of "a return to the same": From Homer to Seferis', *New Voices in Classical Reception* 1, 2006, pp. 1–9: <<https://fass.open.ac.uk/sites/fass.open.ac.uk/files/files/new-voices-journal/issue1/Alexopolou.pdf>> (last accessed 10 October 2024). Angelopoulos was a great admirer of Seferis (1900–1971). On the motif of the 'return' in Angelopoulos' *Eternity and a Day* (1998), see D. Papanikolaou, 'Repatriation on Screen: National Culture and the Immigrant Other since the 1990s', in *The Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700*, ed. D. Tziouvas, Farnham, 2009, pp. 255–69 (262–3).

<sup>36</sup> On the concept of the 'perpetual traveler' in Angelopoulos' last two films, see Karalis 'Filmmaker and Philosopher' (n. 2 above), p. 145–6. On this idea in Antiquity, see R. Garland, *Wandering Greeks: The Ancient Greek Diaspora from the Age of Homer to the Death of Alexander the Great*, Princeton, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> On the Asia Minor Disaster and the Greek-Turkish exchange of populations, see R. Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Cambridge, 2013, pp. 91–103; M. H. Dobkin, *Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City*, London, 1972; and A. İğsız, *Humanism in Ruins: Entangled Legacies of the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange*, Redwood City, CA, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> An ongoing project that is engaging with this dark legacy is <<https://www.eliamep.gr/en/projects/homeacross-space-memory-and-the-legacy-of-the-1923-population-exchange-between-greece-and-turkey/>> (last accessed 28 December 2024).

return home, but such a *nostos* is clearly impossible. Pushed out by the Red Army or the Turks they search for their own ‘Ithaca’, like Spyros the modern-day Odysseus of Angelopoulos’ *Voyage to Cythera* (1983). In Angelopoulos’ cinematic oeuvre, however, such epic journeys rarely have a happy ending.

The main action of *The Weeping Meadow* begins with the arrival of the refugees from Odessa to their new home in northern Greece. Among them are the protagonists of the film, Eleni and Alexis as young children. They are forced to flee again after Spyros marries Helen, and once more the family is destroyed and remade but becomes ever smaller. The young lovers begin their own journey in search of a new home. Thessaloniki, ‘the city of refugees’, as Nikos the musician from Smyrna labels it, becomes their refuge for a time, but Alexis dreams of a better future in America. He joins a group of musicians heading there for a tour, hoping to find a more hospitable homeland. He takes his leave of Eleni and his two sons on the waterfront against the background of the ship that will carry him there. This moving vignette echoes the ancient mythological story of the thread that Ariadne gave to Theseus in order to help him navigate the Labyrinth. Only in this modern version of the myth the thread from Eleni’s unfinished red scarf for Alexis fails to guide her lover back to her (see Fig. 1).

The thread is not long enough, and he is lost to her, like Hector was lost to Andromache. The last farewell between the Trojan prince and his wife and son in Book 6 of the *Iliad* is another possible classical reference for this moving scene in Angelopoulos’ film. In an interview, Angelopoulos mentioned the parallels between this scene and the story of Penelope in the *Odyssey*.<sup>39</sup> But Penelope, famous for her wifely devotion and the trick of Laertes’ shroud, which she unwove at night to avoid remarriage, is arguably less important as a classical connection because she was reunited with her husband even if it took twenty years. In contrast, Alexis fights and dies in the War in the Pacific in the vain hope of gaining American citizenship that would have allowed him to bring his family over from Greece. But his desire to find a home and to be reunited with his family is frustrated. His original home has been irrevocably destroyed, and his search for a new homeland fails. In *The Weeping Meadow* the refugees’ desire to return home/create a new home remains unfulfilled, a chimaera with tragic consequences.<sup>40</sup>

In *The Dust of Time* all the protagonists are on a journey, perpetual exiles moving from one place to another, always in search of a new home.<sup>41</sup> Helen, for example, moves from Greece to Kazakhstan (as a political exile), to Siberia (as punishment for consorting with an American), to Austria (exchanged as an undesirable citizen), to Italy (waiting for a visa for the next stage of her journey), to New York (in search of Spyros), to Toronto (in search of their son) and then back, to the United States. Her final journey is to Berlin to visit her son and granddaughter. This constant motion reminds the viewer of the impact of twentieth-century geo-politics on

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Daniel Graham included on the DVD.

<sup>40</sup> On the failure of the ‘American dream’ in the film, see also Karalis ‘Filmmaker and Philosopher’ (n. 2 above), p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> On the precarious nature of any ‘arrival’ for a migrant, see M. Oikonomou, ‘Manteia, Mediality, Migration’, in *Classics and Media Theory*, ed. P. Michelakis, Oxford, 2020, pp. 291–312 (309).

ordinary human lives. Politics, in the wider sense of the word, destroy the lives of Angelopoulos' protagonists.

The anonymous director in *The Dust of Time* gives voice to this feeling of the impossibility of ever returning home: 'My only home is and was the stories I tell', 'everyplace I feel like a stranger lost'. But crucially, he cannot communicate this key aspect of his psyche to his ex-wife during their fight when she reveals that she left him because of his obsessive devotion to his work. Rather he utters it as a kind of brief soliloquy, a deeply personal comment overheard only by the film's audience. Without belabouring the point Angelopoulos is suggesting that the exile and the broken familial bonds he experienced as a young child have shaped the man and rendered him incapable of forming deep relationships even with his own daughter.

The physical translocation of the characters over the course of the film is strongly reflected on the aural plane, especially on the linguistic level. The audience hears Greek, English, Italian, German and Russian spoken in the film reflecting its enlarged geographical canvas. Sudden shifts in time in the film serve to further fragment the story and reinforce this feeling of rootlessness, of perpetual exile both in space and time. Angelopoulos offers us no answers only an acknowledgement that there are no *deus ex machina* resolutions to these modern tragedies. The past holds no answers (like the genre of Greek Tragedy itself).

## The Power of Women's Lamentation

The trauma of exile is compounded in both films by the grim presence of death. Most of the key characters in the films do in fact die. Only Eleni survives at the end of *The Weeping Meadow* to mourn the dead like a modern-day Antigone or an Electra, arguably Greek Tragedy's mourner par excellence.<sup>42</sup> Both tragic heroines raised powerful voices of lamentation in Greek Tragedy that have echoed down the centuries and inspired countless adaptations. In Antiquity, Helen was denied this opportunity because ancient Greeks placed greater value on family than on erotic passion. In the first film in the trilogy, all the main male characters die: Spyros, the musician Nikos, who helped the couple when they fled their village, and Alexis himself in the battle for Okinawa.

Contravening the conventions of Greek Tragedy the audience witnesses these first two deaths, the former a particularly violent one as Nikos is shot and dies in front of his friends. The death of one half of the tragic couple is, however, narrated reminding the audience of the power of language to advance the narrative even in the visual medium of film. Eleni learns this tragic news of her beloved's death only after she is released from prison in 1949. A train takes her and a group of other women to one of the last battlefields of the Civil War. A soldier gives them the sad news of the death of their male relatives and they are allowed to collect their corpses for burial. One of Eleni's sons, Yannis, served in the Greek army, who were loyal to the Greek Right, the winning side in the Greek Civil War. It is his body that Helen first discovers. But

<sup>42</sup> On the importance of this aspect of the tragic heroine in the history of her reception, see A. Bakogianni, *Electra Ancient and Modern: Aspects of the Tragic Heroine's Reception*, London, 2012, pp. 195–7.



Fig. 1 Screenshot of the farewell scene from *The Weeping Meadow*

the body of his twin brother lies in a forbidden zone, because he fought for the Left. The theme of two brothers fighting each other to the death references the story of Eteocles and Polynices depicted in Greek Tragedy in Aeschylus' *The Seven Against Thebes* (467 BCE).<sup>43</sup> Their sister Antigone famously disobeyed Creon's edict and buried her brother even though he fought against his city as depicted in Sophocles' *Antigone* (c. 441 BCE). Angelopoulos' Eleni follows in the footsteps of this tragic heroine by going in search of the body of the second twin, the one she is encouraged by the state authorities to forget.

The film concludes with a powerful scene of lamentation, an ancient practice still alive in modern Greece.<sup>44</sup> Braving the army patrols Eleni is finally reunited with the body of her son Yiorgos. She discovers his corpse on the top floor of a house mostly submerged in a lake. She slowly crawls towards him begging him to 'Ξύπνα μάτια μου' (Wake up my darling). She laments 'Δεν έχω κανέναν πια' (I have no one anymore), no one to think about, no one to care for and no one to love.<sup>45</sup> Yiorgos' corpse thus becomes the symbol of everything she has lost. Finally, she has no more words left, or more accurately words can no longer contain all her grief. Eleni's wordless scream<sup>46</sup> concludes and embodies the modern tragedy of this 'cursed

<sup>43</sup> Part of a thematically linked tetralogy, which also included *Laius*, *Oedipus* and the *Sphinx*.

<sup>44</sup> See Margaret Alexiou's seminal study originally published in 1974. M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 2nd edn., rev. D. Yatromanolakis and P. Roilos, Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> Eleni's cry could be an echo of the Homeric Andromache's lament for Hector, who is her last adult family member (Il. 6.429–30). There is a crucial difference, however, she mourns him before he dies at Achilles' hands, but Eleni is mourning her two dead sons at the end of Angelopoulos' film.

<sup>46</sup> Another famous scene of maternal grief in Greek Cinema based on a classical model is Michael Cacoyannis' *The Trojan Women* (1971). When Talthybius reveals to Andromache the news that her son,

couple', but also of the modern nation itself. Angelopoulos and his collaborators offer us a tragic take on the turbulent years from the end of the First World War to the bitter divisions of the Civil War that caused so much suffering. The director thus invites his audience to view twentieth-century modern Greek history itself as an ancient tragedy. In Angelopoulos' films there are echoes not only of specific Aeschylean, Sophoclean and Euripidean plays, as outlined above, but also of the Greek myths upon which these ancient plays are based.<sup>47</sup> The director also references the Homeric epics both in terms of their emphasis on the human cost of war as well as in terms of motifs and rituals. Angelopoulos' reception of these ancient models, however, is highly distinctive, and is always in the service of the modern story.

## Landscapes and Internal Spaces

Angelopoulos' approach to directing draws on the practices of the European art-house school of cinema. He uses highly stylised, one might say poetic, elements to stress the artificiality of the medium and to invite the spectator to decode the symbols embedded into his filmic text. Some of these symbols echo classical stories or motifs. The dominant visual motif in *The Weeping Meadow* is water, specifically the sea, and the river across which the refugees travel. Eleni and Alexis spend several key scenes gazing at the sea, which will eventually separate them. The river is also a constant background to life in the refugee village and eventually it overruns the community of exiles completely forcing them to flee once more. Water, usually associated with life, has negative connotations in Angelopoulos' final two films. In *The Weeping Meadow*, where oceans separate the lovers, first the Atlantic and then the Pacific. Eleni discovers the body of Yiorgos on a house in the lake and this powerful visual of the lake concludes the film. Water is thus closely associated with death in the film. In *The Dust of Time* Jacob chooses to die by throwing himself into the river, inverting the gender stereotype of the spurned woman drowning herself.

One of the most memorable scenes in *The Weeping Meadow* is the funeral of Spyros (see Fig. 2). His coffin is rowed down the river on a raft accompanied by Alexis and Eleni. Many of the villagers carrying aloft black flags follow behind in several boats forming a solemn procession on water. The scale of this scene gives it an epic quality reminiscent of the funerals described in the *Iliad*, particularly those of Patroclus in the epic's final two books (Achilles' is described in *Odyssey* 24.35–94) thus further emphasizing Spyros' epic qualities and his association with

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Footnote 46 (continued)

Astyanax, has been condemned to die by the Greeks her first response is a non-verbal one; a scream that increases in volume and intensity until it becomes literally unbearable. A. Bakogianni, 'The Anti-War Spectacle: Denouncing War in Michael Cacoyannis' Euripidean Trilogy', in *War as Spectacle: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Display of Armed Conflict*, ed. A. Bakogianni and V. M. Hope, London, 2015, pp. 291–311 (296). For a different perspective, see A. Valverde Garcia 'A Greek Tragedy Against the Abuses of Power: *The Trojan Women* (1971) by Michael Cacoyannis', *Modern Greek Studies, Australia & New Zealand* 19, 2018, pp. 327–43.

<sup>47</sup> Karalis argues that Angelopoulos revived 'the feeling of the tragic as the ancients understood it': 'Filmmaker and Philosopher' (n. 2 above), p. 44.

an older, vanished world and its values. Another possible classical connection is to Charon ferrying the souls of the dead on the river Styx. In retaliation for Eleni and Alexis' betrayal of Spyros the villagers punish the couple after his death by hanging the flock of sheep they have inherited upside down on a large tree next to their family home. This shocking scene (see Fig. 3) is a visual symbol of the curse the villagers want to place on the lovers.<sup>48</sup> This echoes ancient religious practices of animal sacrifices, which were usually conducted in the open, on the grounds of ancient sanctuaries usually at an altar positioned in front of the temple.<sup>49</sup> In the film, the house arguably becomes the temple and the tree the altar, but the motivation behind this modern sacrifice is a malevolent one.

The camera draws the viewer's attention to the blood of the dead animals that has soaked the ground below the tree. Blood pollution called for a ritual of purification in ancient Greece to avoid bad fortune. In the end, Alexis and Eleni, too, pay in blood for the death of Spyros. Only their own blood can expiate that of the father; Alexis and his sons have to die to repay with their own blood the earlier death. But the community, too, is punished. The night of the funeral cataclysmic rains cause a flood and the villagers are forced to evacuate their home once again. This biblical-style flood perhaps meant to be interpreted as divine punishment, forces everyone to abandon their home for a second time. They row away on boats and rafts once again in search of a new home, like the famous wanderer Odysseus, only these modern versions can never return to Ithaca/Odessa and the audience never finds out the ultimate fate of the villagers. We only hear that Cassandra blocks the reunion of Alexis and Eleni in America and contributes to his decision to enlist in the army, in the hope of gaining citizenship.

In *The Dust of Time* some of the visually most impressive scenes are shot against snowy landscapes, in particular the reunion of the lovers in icy Kazakhstan and the sequences in Siberia where the human protagonists are dwarfed by the inhospitable natural background. Manmade spaces and symbols are set against these vast natural landscapes. Eleni and Spyros travel in a tram wagon, while outside a crowd is gathered around a statue of Stalin to mark his death.<sup>50</sup> Even in the unforgiving Siberian landscape mankind has carved its own spaces including shelters to protect it from nature's harshness. In *The Dust of Time* mankind's impact on the natural environment is emphasized. In a key scene, the role of man-made boundaries is highlighted when the political prisoners, among them Eleni and Jacob, are evicted from the USSR and end up on the Austrian border. The man-made barrier separates the exiles

<sup>48</sup> Another possible connection is to a cinematic reception of Greek Tragedy, Lars von Trier's *Medea* (1988), in which the audience is confronted with the dead bodies of her two sons hanging from a tree.

<sup>49</sup> At a Greek *thysia* (sacrifice) the sheep's throats were cut and their carcasses were sometimes hung from a tree, but their blood would have been collected beforehand. G. Ekroth, 'Animal Sacrifice in Antiquity', in *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, ed. G. Lindsay Campbell, Oxford, 2014, pp. 324–54 (325–6). It would not have been allowed to soak into the ground as happens in *The Weeping Meadow*.

<sup>50</sup> The discarded statues of Stalin in *The Dust of Time* echo a scene in *Megalexandros* (the story of an Alexander who is not Alexander the Great) where the viewer sees the head of Alexander after his murder by the villagers, both are a kind of *sparagmos*, reminiscent of the dismemberment of King Pentheus in *The Bacchae*.

from their soon-to-be former home, but it an important border. An old man at first refuses to cross, because he sees it as a betrayal of his ancestors. His granddaughter takes him by the hand and leads him across. Once again there can be no return, the journey must continue onwards.

Famous landmarks in the city of Berlin also serve to spatially orient the audience in a number of key scenes in *The Dust of Time* and to demonstrate humankind's impact on the world, erecting buildings and creating symbols to reinforce particular worldviews. The film ends with a sequence set against the famous Brandenburg Gate in the snow (see Fig. 4). A neoclassical building, the gate also conjures ancient associations of military victory (*nike*), but our focus in this scene is on the human protagonists Spyros and the younger Eleni. It is their very human drama that captures the viewer's attention. In contrast with the scene of grief that concludes *The Weeping Meadow* there is laughter at the end of *The Dust of Time*. There is perhaps a glimmer of hope that the burden of the past can be relinquished even if only temporarily. The older Eleni is dead, but grandfather and granddaughter are united and move forward joyfully into the new millennium.

Angelopoulos was very aware that all art is interlinked 'Everything comments on something else'. An example of how such fruitful associations can arise is a scene in *The Weeping Meadow* that plays out in a striking internal space. The director came across a photo of the National Theatre in Athens, where refugees were housed after the Asia Minor Disaster (see Fig. 5).<sup>51</sup> He translocated that image to a theatre in Thessaloniki, the city of refugees to which Eleni and Alexis flee in the hopes of starting over. Nikos guides them there and offers them a place to stay in the true spirit of *xenia* (hospitality). This repurposed public space is now partitioned with white sheets offering an illusion of privacy. People and their belongings are crammed in, reflecting the Greek government's desperate efforts to house the influx of refugees after the exchange of populations with Turkey. Performances are suspended to accommodate a harsher reality and yet art in the form of music saturates the film, as shall be discussed. Spyros follows the lovers and loudly vents his anger and bitterness in this theatrical space/refugee shelter. He resembles (and of course is) an actor on stage, a modern-day Achilles ranting over the loss of Briseis, focusing on the shame this loss has brought him. Ancient Greek literature, theatre and film meet and become irrevocably entangled in this key scene and the classical connections strengthen its impact on knowledgeable members of the audience.

<sup>51</sup> Angelopoulos does not discuss this extensively in the interview (DVD). But from how he represents the theatre in his film it is likely that he is referring to this anonymous 1923 photograph, which shows the refugees using sheets to help subdivide the boxes and upper galleries usually occupied by the audience, in order to turn the theatre into a temporary emergency shelter. For a discussion of the pedagogical value of such images as a means of engaging with the question of the role of theatre in society, see G. Van Steen, 'A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Casting the Spotlight on Modern Greek History through Theater', in *Classical Reception for All? Performance Reception Pedagogy in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. A. Bakogianni, CW 112.1, 2018, pp. 683–93 (685–92).



Fig. 2 Screenshot of the funeral on the river, *The Weeping Meadow*

## The Music of Time

In Angelopoulos' last two films, music becomes a way of making sense of life and its traumas, both personal and national. In an interview he gave to Daniel Graham, the director admitted that music played an integral role in all his films, but particularly the later ones.<sup>52</sup> Eleni Karaindrou's haunting musical theme, composed especially for *The Weeping Meadow* saturates the viewer's senses. Our protagonist is after all an accordion player, who in the film is credited with composing this musical theme. This leitmotif is repeated throughout the movie, weaving it together on the aural plane. Alexis's musical talent wins him a spot among a group of musicians lead by Nikos, another refugee from Smyrna, who likewise survives thanks to his musical talents.<sup>53</sup> But even music is not exempt from personal and historical pressures. Political events can and indeed are seen to overcome the fragile beauty of music and the solace it offers. One scene in *The Weeping Meadow* exemplifies this lesson. The musician friends of the couple are serenading them on the beach, celebrating their love. But then they are interrupted by shots. The victim is Nikos, their band leader, whom Eleni has been hiding from the authorities because of his vocal support for Trade Unionism. The beautiful music comes to a discordant stop as violence and death take centre stage.

In *The Dust of Time* an eclectic mixture of different styles of music is used to signal the enlarged geographical canvas of the story: from European classical music

<sup>52</sup> M. Mera, 'Modernity and a Day: The Functions of Music in the Films of Theo Angelopoulos', in *European Film Music*, eds. M. Mera and D. Burnand, Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2006, pp. 131–44 (132–33).

<sup>53</sup> Nikos reveals that he studied at the prestigious conservatoire in Smyrna. In Greece he could only get work as an itinerant travelling musician; yet another victim of the Greeks' expulsion from Asia Minor whose prospects in life irrevocably changed for the worse.



**Fig. 3** Screenshot of the blood sacrifice in *The Weeping Meadow*

(Bach and Tchaikovsky), to modern pop and rock music (Bowie, the Doors). The later are the younger Eleni's musical choices which clash with those of the older generation. The clash of generations is thus played out on the aural plane, too. The importance of music is demonstrated in a key scene when a piano tuner is asked to repair an old organ in the camp, but it proves unnecessary. Wonderful music pours out lightening the burdens of Eleni and Jacob, albeit briefly. Music and art in general endure even in a labour camp in Siberia or among the communities of Asia Minor refugees. Art can temporarily trump political ideology, but as in the earlier film this state of affairs never lasts.

Art also offers a small measure of consolation in both films, not only in the form of music, but also of dance. Worried about Alexis' devotion to her Eleni dances with strangers on the pier in her wedding dress in *The Weeping Meadow*. This appears, at least to a degree, to relieve the psychological burden she labours under. She also dances with Spyros one last time (their postponed wedding dance), while Alexis plays the accordion. This partial reconciliation proves transitory; after a while Eleni stops dancing and disengages from Spyros. The point is driven home, when the police arrive to break-up the dance because it was organized in support of the Trade Union movement. In *The Dust of Time* Jacob dances one last time with Eleni before he commits suicide.<sup>54</sup> Their dance is halted when Eleni begins to feel unwell. All these interrupted performances of music and dance remind the movies' audiences of the beauty and redemptive potential of art, only to foreground its limitations. Outside forces always seem to intrude. Acknowledging the fragility of art, however, does not diminish its place in the world.

<sup>54</sup> The waltz they dance is refigured in an earlier scene of an orchestral rehearsal, yet another example of the key role music plays in Angelopoulos' last (released) film.



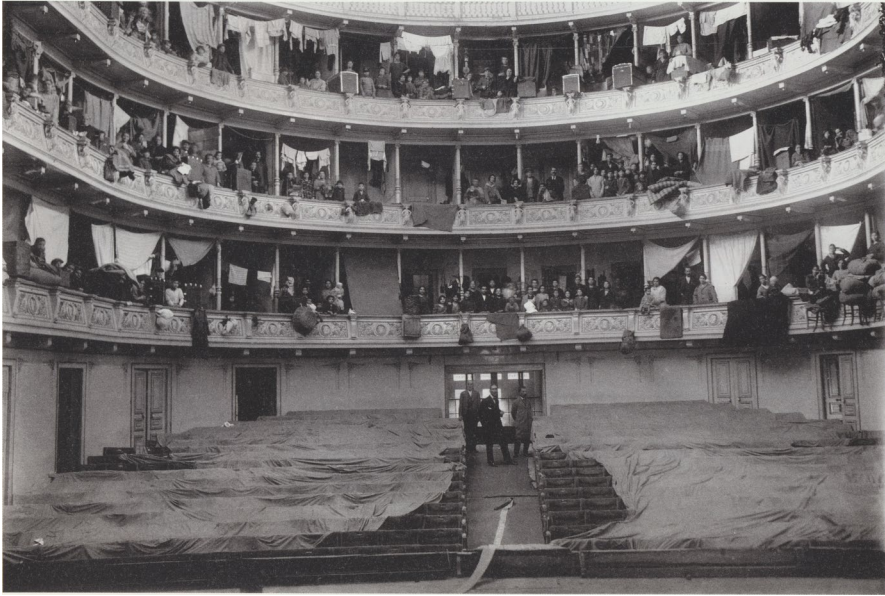
Fig. 4 Screenshot of the ending of *The Dust of Time*

## A Question of Audience

In his films Angelopoulos and his collaborators created a new mythology for modern Greece, one that while acknowledging the importance of the classical past ultimately moves beyond it to create new myths for a new age. For Angelopoulos cinema ‘may be the last important form of resistance to the deteriorating world in which we live’;<sup>55</sup> his cinematic oeuvre is designed to trouble and provoke its audiences. His films urge viewers to reflect on the impact that historical upheavals, in particular war and state oppression, have on ordinary human beings, unfortunately an ever-topical theme. In his last two completed films Angelopoulos offers spectators a personal assessment of the twentieth century and Greece’s place within it.<sup>56</sup> In my discussion I deliberately sought to draw the reader’s attention to the encounters with classical sources/models in Angelopoulos’ final two films, but obviously there are many other possible associations and perspectives. Ultimately, it is a question of audience on a number of levels. As a classicist I am deliberately chasing after these classical elements, but I am also aware that I am part of the process of forming new connections. One of the most fundamental tenets of Classical Reception is that the audience is an integral part of the process of reception. When we draw attention to the classical threads in Angelopoulos oeuvre we are adding further layers of

<sup>55</sup> Angelopoulos quoted in A. Horton, *The Films of Angelopoulos: A Cinema of Contemplation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Princeton, NJ, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> See Theo Angelopoulos interview with Daniel Graham, included on the DVD of *The Weeping Meadow* released by Artificial Eye (2005). Angelopoulos believed that ‘the most important duty of filmmakers was to become *mythmakers*, to compose a mythopoeia for their people and their adventure in history’. Karalis, ‘Filmmaker and Philosopher’ (n. 2, above) 144.



**Fig. 5** The National Theatre in Athens in 1923. Out of copyright

meaning, while simultaneously reinforcing these connections. The additional benefit of examining the mechanics of this process is that it leads us back to the beginning of Reception Studies as a theoretical and methodological approach, and Classical Reception in particular. We are thus forced to question the very process of reception and how we understand and practice it.

Angelopoulos' deliberate distancing of the viewer from the action of his films makes this approach to the analysis of his oeuvre a particularly fruitful one. The length and slow pace of his films encourage a contemplative reading of his cinematic texts. An admirer of Bertolt Brecht Angelopoulos believed in the value of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (the deliberate alienation of the audience).<sup>57</sup> His reception of ancient Greece is designed to provoke and to draw attention to the artificiality of his films. It is also deliberately selective and fragmentary. His films appropriate ancient stories, themes and characters and repurpose them in thoroughly modern narratives. If classical scholars focus solely on what is 'wrong' with a reception, forever comparing them to our ancient sources, then we become hopelessly embroiled in the question of fidelity.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> In an interview Angelopoulos gave to Dan Fainaru he claimed that his overtly Brechtian period ended with *The Travelling Players* (1975), but elements of it can be detected in his later films, too.

<sup>58</sup> Adaptation Studies offer us an interesting perspective on this burning issue. It challenges the very viability of this investigative route. J. Bruhn, A. Gjelsvik and E. F. Hanssen, "'There and back again': New Challenges and New Directions in Adaptation Studies", in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. J. Bruhn, et al., London, 2013, pp. 1–16 (5); D. Cutchins, 'Bakhtin, Translation and Adaptation', in *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*, ed. K. Krebs, New York, 2014, pp. 36–62 (52).

A more thoughtful comparative approach, on the other hand, one that investigates the commonalities and differences between two or more ‘texts’ (including in different media), and the dialogic two-way (or more) process in which they engage, is particularly well suited to the analysis of Theo Angelopoulos’ multifaceted and challenging cinematic body of work. His films do not offer their audiences a realistic, linear narrative, but rather a surrealist chronological puzzle that the viewer has to assemble in order to interpret the action and to form an opinion about the ‘meaning’ as well as the value of the classical elements embedded in its filmic subtext. Angelopoulos might be drawing on ancient narratives, themes and characters, but ultimately he problematizes them by situating them in the present. The past (both recent and remote) informs the present, but is this a good or a bad thing? Angelopoulos lets us decide for ourselves just as the ancient Greek tragedians did. Ultimately, Theo Angelopoulos’ reception of Antiquity was marked by his desire to explore in cinematic terms the recent turbulent history of his native country. He questioned the privileged position that ancient Greece holds in modern Greek culture by inviting his audiences to re-examine their connection to the classical past and their participation in the ongoing dialogue between past and present. A valuable lesson for all of us engaged in the study of the Graeco-Roman classics.

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**Data availability** The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

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