

**13<sup>TH</sup> CONFERENCE OF THE  
FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DES ASSOCIATIONS D'ETUDES CLASSIQUES  
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**Preferred Panel:** Turning Points in the Reception of Classical Antiquity

**Title of Paper:** 'From Ritual *Sparagmos* to Deconstruction: Classical Fragments in Modern Adaptations of Greek Tragedy'

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**Paper Outline**

The fascination with the Dionysiac *sparagmos*, however much contested in classical scholarship, permeates the creative reception of Greek tragedy in the last decades. For the theatrical avant-garde of the late 1960s and early 1970s the *sparagmos* was a means to celebrate sexual liberation, socio-political resistance and transgression of cultural boundaries as well as to explore the origins of Greek tragedy and western theatre, in general. According to Erika Fischer-Lichte, in Klaus Michael Grüber's landmark production *Die Bakchen* in the Berlin Schaubühne in 1974 the *sparagmos* and *ōmophageia* of Pentheus' body became a metaphor for the mutilated Euripidean text and the futile struggle of modernity to reconstitute the fragments of antiquity. The rupture of the classical text is also typical of later rewritings of Greek tragedy, such as Tony Harrison's *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* (1980), Heiner Müller's *Medeamaterial* (1982) and Caryl Churchill's take on the *Bacchae*, *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986). Yet, these plays mark a departure from the nostalgia for the lost integrity which characterises previous 'ritualist' adaptations of Greek tragedy and meet with the pursuits of deconstructive criticism. My paper will attempt to theorise this more recent tendency in the rewriting of Greek tragedy. These plays, I argue, do violence to the classical text in order to problematise the gender, authority and power relations which are embedded in the notion of textual order itself. Thus, by introducing new forms of textuality, these plays offer alternative ways of negotiating self and identity. The move from the ritual *sparagmos* to the deconstruction of the classical text provides a turning point in the twentieth-century reception of Greek tragedy.

(266 words)