

This paper will argue that an examination of the dramatic activities of British amateur, semi-professional, and touring companies beyond the West End of London in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century offers important insights into how Greek tragedy functioned as a particularly pertinent vehicle for certain socio-political, cultural and (broadly speaking) educational projects of the time. This paper therefore explores the socio-political roles that Greek tragedy was called upon to play by those who sought to engage a wide public through performances in various contexts in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; it also, where possible, documents the ways in which these audiences experienced and responded to these attempts to engage them with performances of Greek tragedy. This period has received little attention in the literature in Classical Reception Studies, and this paper therefore seeks to contribute to current debates by offering new research—drawing on evidence which is not easily accessible, lying scattered in archives, newspapers, and biographies—which valuably contributes to our understanding of the period.

The driving forces behind these activities were theatrical practitioners (such as Penelope Wheeler), literary figures (such as the poet John Masefield), and undergraduate classicists (for example, the Balliol Players and the Holywell Players). The paper will first discuss Wheeler's establishment of her semi-professional Greek Play Company to take Gilbert Murray's translations of Greek tragedy on tour far across Britain in the years up to and following WWI. This enterprise grew from her experience of performing in several Greek tragedies at London's Court Theatre (1904-1907) and the Gaiety in Manchester (from 1908)—key companies in the repertory movement in Britain—and it expanded into her performances for British soldiers at Le Havre during WWI. The paper then considers Wheeler's involvement with Masefield's amateur Boars Hill Players, which from its establishment in 1919 sought 'to create a better England' by engaging local communities in verse drama, including Greek tragedy. I will compare the Boars Hill productions and their cultural agenda with the similarly socially idealistic student drama groups who from the early 1920s toured Greek tragedies in English translation 'for the most part in districts where plays are not often seen'. The post-war, self-avowed 'missionary' enthusiasm which fired such literary and theatrical figures and groups of classical undergraduates to share what arguably had hitherto been a largely elite cultural activity with non-classically educated public audiences far from London foreshadowed the frequent BBC Radio broadcasts of much Greek drama in translation to a non-specialist audience from the mid-1920s. This activity on the air, which was part of the BBC's policy to offer the best of the 'nation's cultural wealth and political debate' to a national (and international) audience, therefore extended the socio-political purpose of the earlier theatrical ventures to a mass, public audience.