

Takis Zacharatos: "I didn't choose Margarita. She chose me"

An interview about power, oppression, freedom, trauma and the people who shape us — but also about a Margarita who, as he says, ultimately chose him. Takis Zacharatos on "a".

Maria Kryou

By: MARIA KRYOU
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Miss Margarita_Takis Zacharatos(c) Dionysis Koutsis

Takis Zacharatos encounters for the first time the world of Roberto Ataide's " Miss Margarita " on the stage of the Petit Palais , directed by Vasilis Myrianthopoulos (from 16/10), and talks about a role he never imagined he would play. He talks about power, oppression, freedom,

trauma and the people who shape us — but also about a Margarita who, as he says, ultimately chose him.

"Miss Margarita" was written about the Brazilian dictatorship. What made you say "yes" to this play?

I was even younger when I saw the play and I didn't really understand what it was. It's completely different to see something as a spectator and completely different to read it with the perspective of performing it. As soon as I got the text, in Tachtis' translation, I didn't believe it. I said: "These are what I say to my friends. These are what bother me. These are what make me angry". And that won me over. In my performances, apart from the fact that they can be glamorous, there have always been points that had something sharper. I like that very much. Here Margarita is a tragicomic figure. I see her completely Almodóvar-like, she has a tragicomic element. She jokes, she goes downstairs, she shouts, she teases, she says things.

In the end, do you feel that you didn't choose Margarita?

I think Margarita chose me. I felt that I was in a phase of demystification and maturity of many things. And Margarita, in her own way, demystifies. Just like I demystify things that I might have seen differently in the past. Now I don't like some things. I want others. And through the masterclass that Margarita is giving, I feel that it makes me better both as an artist and as a person. That's what I want. Because, while she essentially tells them "be like me," in reality she tells

them: "Don't be like me. Look at what I went through, but don't dare believe that I don't have a problem. Look at the problem." And that's very powerful.



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The play is about oppression. What was it that shocked you the most?

What struck me in an interview with Ataide is something that has a direct connection to what we are living through today. That is why the work is so timeless. It is as if it were written even now. He was asked what man's greatest fear is and he answered: "To take responsibility for his freedom". It is very easy to let someone else decide for you. To take responsibility for your freedom. Freedom gives you the ability to do what you want.

And where is the power in all this?

Power is everywhere. A question arises for me: What would we be like if we had not had the power of parents, teachers, a coach, a partner, friends, relationships and later work since childhood? What would we be like if we had never had these burdens that strain our authentic self? You get used to this "strain" and at some point you consider it normal.

But is there a reaction within us at some point?

There is always an internal reaction. Like when your leg hurts. It may be numb, but you understand that it is numb. But we easily get used to it and end up moving like victims.

"I never thought I would fall in love with Miss Margarita"

Have you encountered such situations in your life?

I remember, years ago, when I was touring Crete. While walking, I heard two ladies talking. One was saying to the other: "This story has to end. You have to divorce him." And the other was responding that her husband had hit her and caused her injuries.

I couldn't imagine hearing something like that. And yet, this is something that a person can get used to: the abuse of power. And it can even be very insidious. Today we have so much access to information and it's no coincidence that there is this need for people to find ways to better understand themselves. I think it's an era that asks us to escape from stereotypes and from all these supposedly "right" things.

Why do you think a work written in the '70s remains so contemporary?

Because he talks about technology, school, religion, family. You come into the world pure, with nothing written on you, and suddenly others start writing things on you. Without asking you. My own question is: what would each of us be like if we grew up truly free? If we could choose for ourselves how we would like to live? In which family? In which school? What would we want to become? Children have this honesty. Only children carry it. And yet, many times even there the parent comes and "steps on their necks", in a way.



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So what does it mean to raise a child with freedom?

I have a friend who I love very much and I was lucky enough to be close to her family and her children since they were babies. When they were growing up, I would say to her: "What a great job you've done." And she would say to me: "I let them disagree." She wouldn't say to them, "Don't talk to me like that." Because she thought that if they grew up and someone told them,

"Don't talk to me like that," they wouldn't be afraid to speak up. It's very important to give your child the right to disagree, to express themselves, and to say what's bothering them. That way, they gain the courage to speak up and not become a victim later on.

Did you, as a child, have this courage?

Look, I was and am a kid who couldn't follow the rules. I was very lively at school. And I felt a lot of identification with the author when I read his story and saw that he was also being kicked out of school. I also felt that some things were stupid. I would sit and listen to class and think: "What stupidity is this? What a waste of time is this? I could be down at home playing."

I liked the report, I liked the story, but I couldn't understand some of the other classes. Maybe it was the way they taught you. In high school, I was very lively. Out of six teachers, three loved me and three hated me. I could never fit into a mold. And I don't like being labeled. I don't like having a specific status. When they ask me what I do, I say, "What you see."

Man by nature wants to be important and stand out. I believe that he only stands out when he discovers who he is and what he wants, not what others want.

What does family mean to you?

Over the years I realized how wonderful it is to grow up in a family that doesn't judge. In my family I didn't feel that pressure. Leaving the family was difficult. My parents were strict, but at the same time they gave me

freedom. You could do your crazy thing, but there were limits and trust. It wasn't "do whatever you want". It was "do your crazy thing, but you'll be where we agreed". And I think sports were very important to me.

Why do you consider sports so important?

I think that if a parent can do anything for their children, it's to get them involved in sports. You learn to compete, to struggle, to lose, to win. It's an education that makes you a better person. I did track and field, 60 and 100 meters, and then apparatus and volleyball. Sports taught me to concentrate, to do something and complete it, but also not to compare myself. To admire the other. What we call "noble competition".

Do you think it's necessary for a child to follow all these social forms? To definitely study, to go to a university, to learn five languages?

No. This child may be happy doing something else. There are many "shoulds". Someone has to go to university, they have to study, they have to learn languages. But they may want something completely different. Humans by nature want to be important and stand out. I believe that they stand out only when they discover who they are and what they want, not what others want. When you serve the wants of society, of mom, of dad, someone else decides for you without having defined your own wants. And that's where the disaster lies.

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October's theatrical premieres

Does this also apply to personal relationships?

Of course. When you don't know what you want, you can make the wrong choices in your life. Even with your partner. Your friends may tell you "he's the one for you," "marry him," or "he has money." And you marry him. Then you start to wither. When others choose for you, you follow a path that may seem right, but it's someone else's path.

How do you react when you feel like someone is making decisions for you?

I, subconsciously, always did what I wanted. When I felt like I wasn't having a good time, that I wasn't respected, or that I was going to be miserable here, I couldn't stand it. I would leave. It's happened to me in a job that I had signed up for that I felt like my soul was being ripped out. One time I hadn't been paid and I went to the dressing room and cried. I looked at myself in the mirror and said: "Let me tell you something? We got married. There are still three months left." That was the click. Nothing lasts forever. In three months I'll be gone. I can't stand the oppression.

Was your path to theater clear from the beginning?

I wanted to go to drama school. But the hairdresser opened for me and said: "It will suit you". And something happened to me. It bothered me, because I

wanted to be free and I found myself with a shop, employees and obligations. I didn't want that. And yet, Roula Koromila came and then told me: "I haven't gone to drama school. You wouldn't have been able to stand it. You would have left". And you know what? What I'm living this year is like studying at drama school. I have great collaborators.



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What is it that you have loved most about Margarita?

I have a quality: since I was a little kid, these very cruel people loved me. Miss Margarita might not have wanted anyone. She would have called me to her office to give me candy. Maybe because I observe people and don't judge them, these people feel with me that they can be themselves. To show me their sensitive side. I have met many Miss Margaritas who, in front of me, were scared little children. And because I saw this crack and they allowed me to enter their "sanctuary", where no one entered, I also saw their other side. Their soul. Margarita is a victim who became a perpetrator.

How do you explain Margarita's need to control everyone?

This is how she has learned, because that's how she has to. And she makes another student misbehave and pays for it. This has made her have no contact, not allow anyone to touch her, not live her life in essence and be locked in her kingdom. A kingdom that is also a prison. And the terrible thing is that she recognizes this cage. She wants it, because in it she feels safe. This is how she has learned. This is how she has to. But she reacts there. There is this "I can't stand it", "I can't".

Is this what you want to show in the show?

Of course. My goal is to make the torment of power as understandable as possible. How it can creep in, like a pre-drug, and then you can't react. If you understand where it starts, you can ask yourself: "What would I have been like if I had had different parents? If I hadn't gone to this school? If I had been able to choose?" That interests me very much.

Margarita is a timeless teacher who has existed throughout the centuries. Today she teaches us, tomorrow she will teach others, then our children and our children's children. She never dies. She is always there, in some way, to tell you: "This is how it is, my friend."

How did Tachtis' translation work for you?

Tachtsis did a very nice translation. He kept the "pishno", the essence. The original work has a huge madness. It goes, comes, repeats, regresses. But Tachtsis' translation gave it a more theatrical and more substantial form. He kept what really needs to be heard. And that helped me a lot.

How hard is it for you to surrender and not be in control?

It's an exercise. My exercise this time is to have no control at all. And that's very important to me, because usually in my work I'm different. I check everything. The texts, the photos, everything. But here I feel something different. The text is so essential that I don't care so much about the wig or the rest. I don't care about the wig. The essence is the speech. I believe that with a spotlight and nothing else, "Miss Margarita" stands. Everything else helps you enter an environment, to enter her world. But the speech is what holds the show together.

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Piraeus Municipal Theater: The curtain rises for the 2026-2027 artistic program

Did you choose the director?

Yes. As soon as Mr. Kanellopoulos told me who would direct, I immediately said: "Myrianthopoulos". I knew him and I knew that we could communicate. For me it is

very important that we see the same "score". To have the same perspective. And that is very nice both with the collaborators and with the children of the show. To start from the same point.

Is this the second time you've collaborated with Vasilis?

Yes. We had done "The Gambler". It was a great success, but more, I think, the success was the relationship between us. That's very important. There has to be communication and trust.

Tell me about the collaborators and the image of the show.

I have Yiannis Mourikis, who has been one of my favorite collaborators for years. He has made this wonderful set and I really look at it and I am happy about it, because then, when the show is staged, you don't see it anymore. The same with Marios Karavasilis' costumes. The audience sees them, but you don't see them in the same way. The set has something of a public service, with the files, but at the same time it is reminiscent of a courtroom, a school, a psychiatric hospital. It has this severity. And there is also something almost macabre, as if bodies are being transported. It is an environment that perfectly serves what Margarita says.



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Is there a lot of irony in the play?

Too much. And it's like he's saying to them, "Wake up." I can't tell you this out loud, but I'm saying, "Wake up." And there's that scene with the skeleton that's amazing. At one point he says, essentially, "One day you're all going to be like this." And you look at the skeleton and you think, We fight about race, about sex, about ageism, and in the end we're all like this. The futility. If you look at the skeleton, you're like, "Well, a lifetime goes by and I'm wasting my time." Instead of being happy, dancing, doing things, saying, "I love you," I'm sitting around doing stupid things.

Why do you think Ataide chose a teacher to symbolize power?

This figure could be a soldier, a doctor, any man of authority. But the author made her an educator. And perhaps this has even greater power, because everything starts very early. From school. Since you are a child. Margarita is a timeless teacher who has existed throughout the centuries. Today she teaches us, tomorrow she will teach others, then our children and our children's children. She does not die.

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My Mother's Sin by Vizyenu comes in November to the Kefallinia Street Theatre

The concept of power also exists in the workplace.

Of course. And it's terrible to see teachers who are bored. Because that's a job. It's not "I'm going to get my paycheck." No job, to me, should be like that. And when I see people everywhere saying "okay kid, here's my monthly salary," I can't see it. That's another Margarita. How many Margaritas and how many people who aren't Margaritas are there in a job? And what's the point of doing the job if there's no joy? You pay the bills. Who pays you for your joy?

What is the biggest form of power that scares you today?

Freedom on all levels is what we started saying from the beginning. Margarita doesn't dare to come out of the cage. There shouldn't be any reactions. And that's what scares me. That this is happening worldwide. It's like everything is happening somehow mechanically. And the sterile knowledge of school as well. What she herself says: "You have to learn this." Freedom is on all levels. And yet, she doesn't dare to come out of the cage. There shouldn't be any reactions. And that scares me.

Does the show have music?

Yannis Xanthoulis wrote lyrics and the music was composed by the great Dimitris Papadimitriou. I am so happy that there are those who have come to this. Myrianthopoulos came, the contributors I mentioned above came, Elena Gerodimou came as assistant director, Melina Mascha in lighting. Papadimitriou came in a passage and pointed out to me: "Remember that it is a score". He helped me a lot. Because all the notes must be heard. If you shout from the beginning, the other person does not hear. Something aggressive, if you say it sweetly, can be much more toxic.

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The new theaters of Athens, which are renewing the city's scene

Have you finally fallen in love with Margarita?

I have loved her. And I think it is a masterclass from Ataide. I disappear. I do not exist on stage. He said that

I am the reason. It is Ataide, Myrianthopoulos and her. I do not exist. And the reason is so beautiful that it takes you by itself. It takes you by itself.

In a monologue, how important is this?

Too much. The right stressed word and tone change everything. It's not just what you say. It's how you say it. You emphasize it verbally but also stylistically. And that plays a very important role, especially in a monologue. That's why Dimitris Papadimitriou's advice was very important to me: to think of the work as a score.

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Yann Fabre takes over the Stathmos Theater with four sharp monologues

Do you consider this role a risk for you?

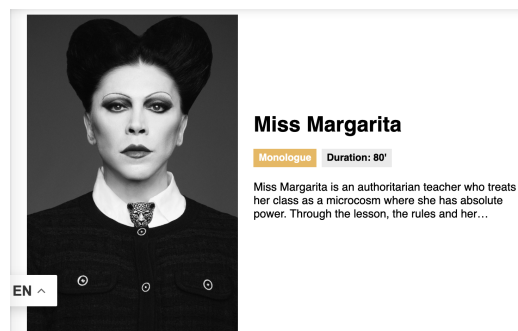
Nada Sabetoklou also asked me if it's a risk. I say it's a flow. It's not a risk. Risk against what? In that I have nothing but me? But it's always you. It's just that here you don't have the orchestra, you don't have the disguises, the makeup that can protect you a little. Here you're down. I don't have time to drink water. But it intrigues me that I'm doing this. It's something I've never done before.

Do you feel that this role can open up another path in your work?

You know what? I'm just going with the flow. I'm like, "Let's go now." I don't want to be afraid of it. I want to live it.

If you had to say just one sentence about this entire experience, what would it be?

I didn't choose Margarita. She chose me. And maybe that's the best thing that can happen to an actor. For a role to come that you didn't expect. For it to find you at the right time. For it to move you. For it to make you see your work and yourself differently. I said it again, I didn't think I would fall in love with Miss Margarita. But in the end, I've come to love her. And I've surrendered to her.



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