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The Human Body as a Source of Political and Personal Inspiration and
Conflict in American Adaptations of Ancient Greek Drama.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present thesis is to compare and contrast the ways in which contemporary American theatre illustrates and alludes to the element of the human body. For the purpose of this analysis, four American plays that have been directly inspired by ancient Greek tragedies are going to be examined regarding their references to the existence and suffering of the human body. The main interest focuses around the plays of Richard Schechner - *Dionysus in 69* (1968), David Rabe - *The Orphan* (1973), Charles Mee - *Agamemnon 2.0* (1994) and Cherrie Moraga - *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2000). The thesis aims to prove how the aforementioned authors have used over the past years the image of the human body in order to raise awareness around several political and social issues.

The first chapter focuses on Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in 69*; the play which laid the foundation of the modern perception of corporeal imagery by art. More specifically, it explores how the human body is glorified and celebrated through the birth giving act, as far as the representation of the female body is concerned, and through the implications of sexual activity in the representation of both male and female bodies throughout the play. This analysis explores how Schechner transgresses the image of the human body as an object for sexual pleasure and how, inspired by the plot of *Bacchae*, he used corporeal imagery and a variety of rituals in order to address the issue of violence and sexual pleasure as inherent characteristics of the human nature.

Chapters Two and Three analyze the plays of David Rabe – *The Orphan* and Charles Mee - *Agamemnon 2.0* respectively. Both Charles Mee and David Rabe rewrite Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Inspired by the movement against the Vietnam War, the play of David Rabe is a harsh criticism against violence and the cost of war, in general. Rabe creates strong, empowered characters and uses their political beliefs in order to make his own political statement against war. Written almost exactly two decades later, *Agamemnon 2.0* by Charles Mee reflects the author's strong antiwar beliefs and feelings against the Gulf War. Mee creates a poem in dramatic structure and reflects upon the importance of learning by past mistakes, such as previous wars. In order to meet his purpose, Mee gives voice to great "historians" of the past; Herodotus, Thucydides,

Homer and Hesiod. The present thesis aims to identify the reasons for the authors' approaches to violence as both plays depict the horror of war through a series of violent images and reflections of the human body. Using these images and inspired by ancient Greek tragedy, the authors question the values of their contemporary American society.

On the other hand, in the most recent play, Cherrie Moraga in her adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, depicts in detail the female body as an object of desire both for males and females. In addition, physicality in the play is enhanced by the perception of the female body as a consecrated object of admiration due to birth giving. Finally, the "enslaved" human body as presented by Moraga will be used as a stepping stone to explore the importance of corporeal references especially when it comes to actively requesting for minorities' rights.

To sum up, the present thesis highlights the importance of the human body in some works of the contemporary American theater, which are inspired by the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides. This is accomplished by examining the representation of male and female body, the prose that describes it or the stage directions that refer to body posture in the aforementioned American adaptations of ancient Greek drama.

PROLOGUE

For the purposes of the present analysis, I am going to read four different American adaptations of ancient Greek tragedies. Starting with *Dionysus in '69* (1968) by Richard Schechner, I will explore how this play has set an example regarding the representation of the human body and sexuality in the twentieth century. My study will continue exploring the antiwar polemics as have been expressed on stage by David Rabe's *The Orphan* (1973) and later on, by Charles Mee in his dramatically structured poem, *Agamemnon 2.0* (1994). I am going to focus on the vulnerability of the human body as presented in these two works and I will explore how human suffering is used in order to create a strong antiwar polemic. I am going to conclude my analysis, assessing how human and more specifically the female body is defined in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2000), by Cherrie Moraga.

The aim of my analysis is to explore differences and similarities among the plays and identify whether there is a common pattern in which the aforementioned American playwrights illustrate the human body. More than just a thematic study, however, this interpretation will focus on these four plays in terms of how they use physicality and corporeal images in order to express a strong antiwar meaning. Finally, I will explore to what extent these embodied expressions of political thought have contributed to shaping the popular understanding of human physicality.

The aforementioned plays redefine the accepted norms of American society throughout the second half of the twentieth century, by giving a voice to previously unrepresented minorities. The American civil rights movement was led by the young and the working class people and what was highlighted at the time was the pressing need to represent those voices in literature and theatre. The sixties, when *Dionysus in '69* was written and performed, was a turbulent decade. This was a decade marked by important political events around the globe, but I am going to consider only those that took place in the two countries that have a significant importance for this analysis, Greece and the USA:

The year 1968...brought an end to the ideological settlement of the early post-war period. Greece itself, the ancestral home of both democracy and tragedy, had just fallen victim to a brutal military dictatorship which, until its collapse in 1974, banned many of the ancient plays. International sympathy with the oppressed people of Greece certainly helped awaken interest in their theatre...1968 was

fundamentally to challenge both international alignments and power relations between different ethnic groups, sexes (and up to a point socioeconomic classes) within individual countries. Struggles framed in the media as clashes between authoritarian and radical forces were fought all over the world; young people were openly challenging the establishment run by their parents and grandparents... Protest movements, led in many cases by students and other young people, and urging pacifist, civil rights, anti-racist, and women's liberationist causes, were perceived as achieving unprecedented successes: the fatal showdown between police and anti-war demonstrators at the Democratic Convention in Chicago in August was felt to have forced the US government to announce a halt to the bombing in Vietnam. (Hall 7-8)

Exactly what Hall describes is what we observe in the plays. Strong, sexually empowered characters of all races and genders who are unashamedly fighting for equality. My purpose will be to explore what this equality means, to develop a clear understanding of the representations of the human body within these plays, and finally to observe how these portrayals have been transformed in recent years.

More specifically, the human body is depicted as a victim of war and the plays deal with different aspects of its suffering caused by the war. Human physicality regardless of race, sex or age is presented as threatened by war, alienation, exclusion or a personal internal conflict. My intention is to explore how the plays prove that self-destruction is caused by the war, even when this war takes place thousands of miles away, as in the case of Vietnam. *The Orphan*, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* and *Agamemnon 2.0* develop strong criticism against the idea of hatred and breeding hatred into future generations. The children of the family of Atreus; Electra, Iphigenia and Orestes are forced by the circumstances to hate their parents and are condemned because of their family's sinful past. On the other hand, in *Dionysus in '69*, Pentheus is killed by the Bacchae because of his refusal to worship the newly introduced god Dionysus and Medea kills her son in Moraga's play, to stop him from leaving her in order to live with his father.

In summation, I intent to explore the common themes through which the human body is presented in these four plays. Some of the themes that are profound in the plays are human sexuality and pleasure, suffering and illness, war and catastrophe, and punishment and revenge. These themes are eminent in some of the plays and are used to address contemporary issues of gender, identity and equality. For the purposes of my analysis, I will have to consider some of the vast political and social changes that have altered the world we live in. Starting with Schechner and advancing with the cultural

developments of the next decades, I will try to explore the important role and influence of artistic expression in forming contemporary beliefs regarding the human body.

The human body is not going to be seen only as the unifying element between the four plays. On the contrary, I intend to examine the various implications that the image of the body takes in the plays and interpret the authors' purposes of attributing these values to the human body. Some of the major implications of the image of the human body are being described by Shepherd in the introduction of his book *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*:

(theatre)...engages those values which are held personally and culturally. Theatre is a practice in which societies negotiate around what the body is and means. Negotiation around bodies is important, I think, because many ideas about what is good, right, natural and possible are grounded in assumptions about what the body is, what it needs, how it works. Social, moral and political values attach themselves to body shape, size, colour, movement. They also inhabit distinctions made between body and non-body, whether that be mind, spirit, object or society.

(1)

As many of these ideas are presented or challenged in the plays through the image of the human body, my purpose will be to identify the criticism that is often conveyed by these images.

Another major element that is going to be addressed is the relation of the plays with the ancient Greek tragedies by which they were inspired. This relation is going to be addressed mainly in terms of themes and characters and not in terms of form. Specifically in the case of *Dionysus in 69* the parallels between the play's production and the rituals of the ancient Greek tragedy are going to be explored. As a result, the development of staging tragedy is going to be explored as these four plays consist four examples of four different ways in which tragedy can be adapted. Consequently, it is going to be proven, how plays such as the ones examined in the current analysis have altered the popular belief and image of tragedy in the modern world. As Richard Schechner states:

For the last hundred years or more, Greek tragedy has been understood as an outgrowth of rites celebrated annually at the Festival of Dionysus. Those rites have been investigated both in their relation to the god Dionysus and in their relation to the primitive religion of the Greeks... This new conception of Greek

tragedy has had a very wide effect upon our understanding of the sources of poetry in our tradition, and also upon modern poetry itself, including theater and music. (Performance Theory 1)

All in all, my analysis intends to address a variety of issues related to the representation of the human body as depicted in the aforementioned plays. In order to succeed in this purpose I will have to take into account the civil rights movements of the sixties and seventies, the historical setting of every play and the influence of the plays by the ancient Greek tragedy and its themes. Last but not least, I need to be able to analyze theatrical plays as a form of art that “consciously exhibits the body” (Shepherd 6) and combines rituals, dance, movement and voice.

1 THE HUMAN BODY IN RICHARD SCHECHNER'S *DIONYSUS IN '69*

1.1 Introduction to the play

Dionysus in '69 (1968) is a surprisingly innovative, controversial, provocative play. The play, which was first performed almost fifty years ago, is now consigned to theatre history yet it has greatly influenced the perception of ancient Greek drama ever since. The focal point of this analysis will be the human body in Richard Schechner's play, paying particular attention to how this is used as an expressive medium for a variety of purposes. In order to examine the corporeal imagery of *Dionysus in '69* we are going to make specific references to the split-screen documentary, directed by Brian De Palma and Richard Schechner in 1970. According to Froma I. Zeitlin, this documentary was made from the filming of two different performances of the play, which was directed by Richard Schechner and performed by The Performance Group at The Performing Garage in 1968-9.

For the purposes of this analysis, I am going to address the representation of the human body in physical as well as political terms. In many cases, the human body will be examined hand in hand with political, personal and emotional expression because of the great value and influence of the corporeal images of the play. David Wiles explains the great impact of *Dionysus in '69* in the following words:

Dionysus in '69 opened up a new era. With Schechner, we see the human being as ego, as mere psyche, being stretched on the one hand towards the human being as a naked physical body, on the other hand towards the human being as part of a collective process. (262-3)

1.2 The title of the play and its corporeal implication

A thorough analysis regarding the corporeal imagery of the play must first and foremost begin with its title. Interestingly, the title of the play has a dual symbolic meaning and implication. Primarily the title designates the year in which the play was

performed. The year 1969 bears an important significance in American history as it marks the end of the turbulent decade of the sixties during which the U.S. endured a number of political, social and cultural challenges and changes. The Vietnam War as a part of the Cold War and the fight of the U.S. against the Communist threat, the shocking assassination of President J.F. Kennedy, the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, the Civil Rights Movement and the Sexual Revolution are only some of the well-known events that are reflected in the play. However, as I have previously mentioned, the purpose of this analysis is not to relate the play itself to its political and cultural context, but to identify the influence of these events on the way that the human body is treated and presented throughout the play. As a result, the audience must not only focus on the actions that are being directly produced on stage, but also on the words that describe or clearly imply physical imagery. For example, Schechner has very deliberately chosen this title to imply a sexual act in which it is implied that God Dionysus could be involved. This insinuation can be enhanced if we take for granted that Dionysus, being the God of wine, tragedy and ecstasy, is associated in the minds of the audience with sexual freedom, wine and orgiastic actions, according to ancient Greek mythology. Therefore, the title foreshadows the theme of the play before dialogue ever begins.

1.3 The birth ritual as an act of sexual equality and freedom

The title of the play refers both to the year of its first production, as well as to god Dionysus. The title of the original ancient Greek play, by which Schechner was influenced, is *The Bacchae*. The Bacchae were the female followers of the god Dionysus. When Schechner rewrites Euripides' play, he uses a male name in the title. The presence of the god Dionysus in the title "relocates" the god in Schechner's contemporary American reality and history. The change that happens to the title is actually repeated many times throughout the play. In the images of the play, there is a constant transition between the male and the female body, the corporal and the political. If we follow the plot of *Dionysus in '69* it is easy to identify this perpetual transition in terms both of images and script.

The beginning of the play is dominated by the male characters of Dionysus and Pentheus who perform two parallel monologues in order to present themselves and their political beliefs to the audience. However, in the very first minutes, the attention shifts to the female figures performing the birth ritual, which reminds the audience both of an orgasm and a birth giving. According to Froma Zeitlin, Schechner was inspired for the birth ritual by “an Asmat rite of passage in New Guinea” (59). The birth ritual is an extreme scene in which, the actor performing Dionysus, crawls half naked between the legs of five female actresses and over the bodies of five male actors, lying prone on stage. Dionysus himself claims that this is a birth giving process, however, the ritual, happening in the very beginning of the play turns out to be critical of the play’s symbolisms. Just like the title, the ritual actually indicates that the whole play is going to be a symbolic bridge between sexual pleasure and societal rules and conventions which aim to restrict it. Although the ritual is indeed an inspired representation of a birth giving process, it also reminds the audience of a passionate sexual act, as is intelligently implied by the presence of male actors underneath the women’s legs. This implication of a sexual act reflects the pansexuality that god Dionysus represents, according to ancient Greek mythology. Moreover it addresses the sexual revolution that started in the sixties in the U.S. and the whole western world. A series of political acts at the end of the sixties led to the need to create theatre that, relieved from the constraints of the past, would express contemporary reality. The passage that follows explains the importance of the landmark changes that had started affecting the life of women back in the sixties and seventies:

Yet the story of feminism’s rediscovery of Greek tragedy does not make full sense unless it is set in the context of the slightly earlier ‘hippie’ movement, and in particular the so-called sexual revolution. The feminism of the 1970s could not have happened without the (hetero) sexual liberation of the 1960s...By 1969 millions of women were able to control their fertility in a manner unprecedented in history. The sexual revolution had been further facilitated by the decriminalization of both abortion and homosexual activity in many countries (in Britain these landmark legislative changes were both made in 1967): such social developments created a need for theatre which talked freely about sexual drives and relationships. (Hall 10)

However it is crucial to remember that *Dionysus in '69* was extremely provocative and influential also because of the male bodies that appeared naked on stage. We should not forget to consider the cultural context in which the play was performed. Despite the fact

that the sexual revolution had already started, the audiences' reaction to nudity varied in the different parts of the country. According to Zeitlin, the members of the Performance Group "were arrested and jailed on the charge of corrupting the morals of the good people of the State of Michigan" (68). As Zeitlin continues: "It may be difficult, now after so many years ... to imagine the shock value of unadorned naked bodies, especially those of men" (68).

The idea of sexual liberation is evident in the passionate and vivid interaction and movements of the bodies of the actors and actresses during the birth ritual. It looks like it does not actually make any difference if the person having Dionysus' body among their legs is male or female. The symbolic birth-giving act of the god and of the play itself, is a process which is not directly influenced by gender.

The bodies of the performers appear half naked on stage from the very beginning of the play. Both male and female bodies simultaneously become sexually intriguing and asexualized. Actors and actresses appear semi-naked or even totally naked on stage, bearing strong sexual connotations and attempting to create to the audience a pleasant erotic feeling. On the other hand, the script and the performance transgress gender roles, depriving the characters of the play of sexual normativity. The bodies are stripped of their typical gender roles and by being naked on stage they are subjected to equal treatment. The emphasis lies on physicality as well and not only on sexuality. Women are not exclusively presented as the objects of male desire. On the contrary, Pentheus is punished because of his curiosity to see the Bacchae.

Even the leading role of Dionysus was at times played by a woman. This happened because after a series of performances many of the members of the group had started to reflect their real feelings through the roles they performed. Zeitlin explains:

while the group constituted itself as a democratic entity, with all sharing in its decisions, it was also inevitable that their creative work would reflect their off-stage dynamics, 'its antagonisms as well as its affinities'. As a result, the entire performance became the vehicle for projecting the interplay of personal forces within the Group onto a mythological plane. It was therefore inevitable that internal conflicts would arise, whether between members of the group or in an individual. (62-63)

The person who experienced this problem the most was Bill Shepard, who initially played the role of Pentheus. He faced the side-effect of incorporating the role to such a great extent that he could not differentiate his own feelings from the feelings of

Pentheus. As a result, he had begun to feel “anxious and depressed.” Shepard explains in his book, describing his experience:

My symptoms of dissociation both inside and outside the production, feelings of increased isolation from everyone around me, and the conflicts between incompatible elements of my own personality were increasing. Instead of being overjoyed at the Group’s apparent success, I was withdrawing more and more into myself. (143)

In order to solve this problem that had arisen, the Group decided to rotate the actors in different roles (Zeitlin 63). Although there is not a recorded version of the play with actresses performing the two leading roles, we can imagine that this would add to the idea of equal treatment between men and women as expressed in total by Schechner’s work. Moreover, that could have led to an artistic result even more reminiscent of the ancient Greek tragedy in the case of female roles being played by men.

Interestingly enough, just before the birth ritual, the actor William Finley, talking to the audience, bridges for the first time in the play art and reality in a short sarcastic reference to his own birth:

Good evening, my name is William Finley, I am the son of William Finley, carried for nine months by Dorothy Reinwhite and delivered by a doctor, whose name I cannot remember. I have come tonight for several important reasons: the first and most important of which is to announce my divinity, the second is to establish my rites and rituals and the third is to be born, if you’ll excuse me. (Schechner)

Only a few seconds later, after the birth ritual has begun, while Dionysus is actually being pulled by the women between their legs and dragged towards the other side, he concludes: “And my name is William Finley and what you are seeing is in fact a birth. And here I am. Dionysus once again.” Finley’s words make clear what we have already mentioned regarding the playful balance between sexual implications and pagan rituals in this play. The pagan ritual of the birth giving process can be easily perceived as a passionate orgiastic act. The way that it is presented proves that Schechner leaves its interpretation open for his audience. However, in order to follow the societal and theatrical conventions that would consider an orgiastic act, represented on stage, highly inappropriate, Dionysus ironically exclaims that what the audience has just observed, was actually a birth giving act.

Last but not least, placing the birth ritual in the very beginning of the play expanded its symbolic meaning, according to Froma I. Zeitlin, who quotes Shephard in her essay about *Dionysus in '69*:

The 'birth ritual', as Shephard observed, was essential 'not only in our work but also in our collective existence', because it 'gave us the opportunity of experiencing and expressing our common bonds in a non- rational and symbolic form ...It became an expression of both our sexual dynamic and its realization in creative form.' Even more, its placement at the beginning of the play transformed the ritual into a kind of 'symbolic procreation'. As performing artists, 'the child of our labors' was supposed to be 'the performance itself', renewed and recreated each time. (61)

Another interesting statement that epitomizes this dilemma between sexuality and art is expressed by Pentheus when, at the very beginning of the plot, he announces that he has returned to put things back in order. Referring to the Bacchantes Pentheus says: "Priestesses of Bacchus they claim they are, but it is really Aphrodite that they adore" (Schechner). This statement foresees what happens later at the end of the play. The ecstasy dance that follows, inviting the audience to participate, is the answer by the Performance Group towards the constantly implied threat of war seen as the inevitable fate of human nature. The conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus and Bacchae's violent killing of Pentheus symbolize the war in the play. However, the Performance Group and Schechner wanted to give to Pentheus, who represents the human nature in the play, a chance to escape his tragic fate. Love, sexual intercourse, passion or even spiritual connection is the option given to Pentheus as an alternative to escape his conflict with Dionysus:

In *Dionysus in '69* there is a scene about halfway through that starts when Dionysus offers Pentheus "any woman in this room"... Pentheus is left alone in the center of the room. Almost every night some woman comes to him and offers help. The scene plays privately between them, and ends with the woman rejecting Pentheus (or the actor playing Pentheus?) and going back to her place. The performance resumes and Pentheus, defeated, is sacrificed. Once it did not happen that way. In the words of William Shephard, who played Pentheus: The one time the sequence was completed was when Katherine Turner came out into the room ... The confrontation between us was irrational ... What happened, was that I recognized in one moment that the emotional energy Katherine was spending on me literally lifted me out of the play, as though someone had grabbed me by the hair and pulled me up to the ceiling. I looked around and I saw the Garage and the other actors and said, "It finally happened." (Schechner *Performance Theory* 52)

Pentheus is offered the chance to escape his fatal encounter with Dionysus' followers. This represents the hope that the man can control his future with his actions, a theme that was also very common in ancient Greek tragedy. This hope contradicts the idea that someone's fate is controlled by fate or by the gods' will. Of course this is a feature added by Schechner to the play, as the ancient tragedy accepts the idea of the inevitable fate of the human nature and represents Pentheus as a victim of Dionysus' rage.

As it has been extensively analyzed, the birth ritual has numerous implications which reflect the cultural beliefs of the play's era about sexuality and social equality between men and women. Moreover, what is of great importance is the physicality of the bodies that participate in the birth ritual. The ritual consists of a combination of sexual pleasure and pain in which male and female nudity play a crucial role. Last but not least, the verbal struggle between Dionysus and Pentheus epitomizes the question of the inevitability of human fate and represents the eternal conflict between God and man, a theme which was very common in ancient Greek myths.

1.4 The ecstasy dance

Just after his "birth," god Dionysus invites the audience, the actors and the actresses, to mingle in an ecstatic, collective dance, under the sounds of the pipe, the drum and the rhythmic clapping of the performers. In this dance bodily movements play a crucial role. Actors and actresses, following the example of Dionysus, stand up and invite the people of the audience to dance, clap and laugh in a participatory experience and in a process of coming together with the members of the group.

First and foremost, I intend to focus on this dance, because this is the first moment in the play when we actually "see" the audience participating and being included in the dramatic action. This ecstasy dance is what Zeitlin describes as a test putting into practice the main principle of Environmental Theatre:

Richard Schechner used concepts from anthropological theory and studies of primitive ritual to develop the idea of an Environmental Theatre, which was to be realized through his Performance Group. *Dionysus in '69*, its one major success, was to prove the perfect vehicle for testing the principles of his theatrical vision as a communal experience (53).

According to the records of the performance by Shephard, this experiment was proven to be successful every single night the play was performed. The participation of the audience and their willingness to interact with the group was so intense that “the group eventually had to discard most of their inclusionary efforts, except for the ecstasy dance towards the beginning of the play, which followed the ‘birth’ of Dionysus” (Zeitlin 55). Therefore, this is not only the first moment in the play when we observe the audience interacting with the performers. The ecstasy dance is also the only point of interaction between the Performance Group and the audience that the actors continued to perform throughout the staging of the play.

It is interesting to follow the example that Zeitlin mentions in her analysis of the play, regarding the experiment of Total Caress, the scene towards the end of the play that was supposed to reenact the “peacefully sensual behavior of the bacchantes in Euripides, as the messenger reports it, before they are disturbed by the intrusion of men” (55). Quoting Shephard’s descriptions of the scene, during which “the performers were supposed to engage various members of the audience in sensory- exploration dialogues, in order to lead members of the audience toward greater freedom of interpersonal expression” (55), Zeitlin describes in detail the difficulties that the group faced in keeping up with their commitments regarding audience participation. As Schechner mentions: “As audience became accustomed to moments where they could freely interact with performers, the theatrical event became less and less controlled by the Group” (Zeitlin 56).

Obviously the idea of interacting with the performers successfully reflected the needs of the audience of the play. Although *Performance Theory* was written by Schechner many years later, the situation he describes mirrors the situation of the era of the play:

We live under terrible stress. Politically, intellectually, artistically, personally, and epistemologically we are at breaking points. It is a cliché to say that a society is in crisis. But ours, particularly here on the North American continent, seems gripped by total crisis and faced with either disintegration or brutal, sanctioned repression. (31)

Last but not least, what we can recognize in this ecstasy dance is the respect with which Schechner goes back to human history of evolution, inspired by his travels and the rituals of the tribes he met during them. Moreover, what Schechner tries to

approach behind the rituals is the inner human nature itself. Schechner employs nakedness and music because he wants to give voice and movement to feelings, fears and passions both of his audience and the performers. What Schechner does, is common practice on theatrical stage according to Simon Shepherd:

Theatre requires special things of bodies, and makes demands on audience as much as performer. It generates and manipulates pleasure in relation to bodies. Through this pleasure it engages those values which are held personally and culturally. Theatre is a practice in which societies negotiate around what the body is and means. Negotiation around bodies is important, I think, because many ideas about what is good, right, natural and possible are grounded in assumptions about what the body is, what it needs, how it works. Social, moral and political values attach themselves to body shape, size, color, movement. They also inhabit distinctions made between body and non-body, whether that be mind, spirit, object or society. (1)

To conclude, it is proven that the ecstasy dance is one of the most influential parts of the play. The records by Schechner and Shephard describe the importance of the ecstasy dance for the development of the play and the feelings that occurred to the audience and the performers during its enactment. However, we should admit that it is a rather dull scene to watch in *Dionysus in '69* film. The fact that the value of the dance cannot be perceived when watching it in the film, is an additional element proving that theatrical action as an interactive experience shared between the audience and the actors. The importance of the ecstasy dance is closely related to the fact that dance is one of the most vivid, intense and inherent expressions of the human body that has come down to us, travelling through the millennia of human history. Schechner explains this view in *Performance Theory* in great detail:

Ritual is one of several activities related to theater. The others are play, games, sports, dance and music...Together these comprise the public performance activities of humans. Anthropologists... [argue that]... theater – understood as the enactment of stories by players – exists in every known culture at all times, as do the others genres. These activities are primeval, there is no reason to hunt for “origins” or “derivations”. There are only variations in form, the intermixing among genres, and these show no long-term evolution from “primitive” to “sophisticated” or “modern”. Sometimes rituals, games, sports and the aesthetic genres (theater, dance and music) are merged so that it is impossible to call the activity by any one limiting name. (7)

Considering Schechner's explanation for the importance of dance, ritual and theatre for artistic creation it is evident why the ecstasy dance was so warmly welcomed by the

audience. Schechner's play aimed at inviting the audience to share a communal experience with the performers. Therefore the ecstasy dance, reflecting so many different primitive instincts of the human nature, was the ideal condition for the performers to meet the audience and vice versa.

1.5 Nudity as the natural state of the body

As we already mentioned, the ecstasy dance, which lasts around ten minutes is a sexual, human, recreational, creative and artistic celebration which could mainly be appreciated by the audience attending the play at the time. The ecstasy dance introduces in the play another element closely related to our analysis, which is male and female nudity. Every detail related to the issue of nudity in the play can be clearly observed in the film *Dionysus in '69* directed by Schechner and Brian de Palma.

According to Zeitlin nakedness was the solution to the problem of the costumes that should be worn, especially by the women of the chorus, to avoid looking cheap:

Although nudity was not a part of the play at the start of its performance, this is the one aspect of Schechner's production that has left the most lasting impression . . . on Grotowski's advice, [the Performance Group] gave up what he called a cheap 'striptease' and took the risk of appearing naked in these scenes [the birth and the death rituals] and in the ecstasy dance, with invitations to the audience to follow suit. (68)

In this central moment of the ecstatic dance the men and women of the chorus start getting totally naked on stage (William Finley, performing Dionysus, and the other men taking part in the birth ritual undress down to panties a few minutes earlier). What is particularly interesting to notice, when watching the film, is the fact that members of the audience are also taking off their clothes in order to take part in this dance.

However, we should try to understand the conditions under which this nakedness happens. Despite, or maybe because of, the fact that this is supposed to be an ecstasy dance, the stripping occurs naturally and is far less sexually intriguing than other parts of the play. The naked bodies here are used as mediums that help the audience and the performers connect. They are presented in their natural state of being, in a celebration of the human body relieved from social, cultural or religious constraints.

Schechner has managed to present his characters in this way, by following the main principles of the Environmental Theatre:

Within the counter-culture of the 1960s the body was given value on the basis of its naturalness, the thing humanity had in common, in a society increasingly mechanized, mediated and repressive. In the theatre this led to ... prioritizing of performance as a place where people could experience liberation from the everyday repressions which constrained and distorted their bodies. (Shepherd 2-3)

To conclude, among its other numerous symbolisms, the nakedness of the bodies during the dance, indicates the vulnerability and fragility of the human nature. In a decade during which the American society had started counting the casualties of a war happening thousands of miles away, the naked human bodies force Americans to confront the reality of the human nature and existence. The depiction of the human body in the play follows that of the human life. The bodies are initially presented full of energy and life, however as the plot proceeds, they are subjected to decay. The play ends with Pentheus' body consumed by the Bacchae, an act of symbolic meaning indicating death as the inevitable end of human life. Reflecting the expanding Anti-War Movement, *Dionysus in '69*, presents passion and love making as a form of opposition against war. War in the play is, as always, initiated by authority which is here represented by Dionysus. Pentheus' internal struggle of trying to accept the new religion and become a part of society fails and develops in a war against Dionysus.

1.6 The political implications of the death ritual

The sacrifice of Pentheus can be perceived in two major different ways. The first reflects his personal inability to meet his needs and understand his human identity. In that case the term "political" reflects Aristotle's idea of man being "a political animal", therefore, part of a society. As Aristotle states in the second chapter of the first book of his *Politics*: "it is evident, then, that the city belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. He who is without a city through nature rather than chance is either a mean short or superior to man" (4). Pentheus tragically fails to become part of the community and he is killed as a punishment for his failure. Pentheus is also punished because he failed to suppress the internal instincts

that human beings struggle to suppress throughout their lives. He did not resist in Dionysus' call for a sexual encounter and he also wanted to observe the Bacchae on the mountains. Last but not least, by rejecting the new religion introduced by Dionysus, Pentheus ignored what all human beings are finally obliged to accept: the fact that their lives are driven by their animalistic instincts, especially when it comes to the basic aspects of human life such as birth, death or sexual satisfaction.

However the punishment of Pentheus, expresses another important aspect of political criticism, which is political criticism against authority. In this case, Pentheus, does not simply represent any human being opposing God's will. On the contrary, he represents authority and power over a group of people. In the beginning of the play Pentheus arrogantly introduces himself as the king of Thebes, the son of Echion and Agave and demands that the citizens of Thebes follow his orders. In the end of the play, he pays for his arrogance by being killed. Pentheus has to be punished not only because he did not follow the rules and the norms of society, but also because he failed as a leader to understand and represent the needs of his people. Therefore, he is being replaced by Dionysus.

The political, social and cultural criticism made by Richard Schechner regarding this point cannot be neglected easily. In the end of the play, Dionysus was presented throwing a pre-election campaign for the US Presidential elections of 1968. He was announcing his candidacy for the forthcoming elections and started sharing pins with his name written on them. The whole play ended triumphantly with him marching in a demonstration-like parade. Dionysus therefore replaces Pentheus in the representation of authority, as well. Schechner uses the characters of Dionysus and Pentheus in order to address the issue of two inadequate forms of authority. Pentheus is the leader who fails to catch up with the needs of his citizens and as a result his political career is destroyed. On the other hand, Dionysus, is initially presented as a benevolent god, who brings pleasure and happiness in society. However once he gains the power and the trust of his citizens (here represented by the Bacchae and the audience) he unveils his real face. He is a dominant oppressor, who does not dare to kill anyone who objects, in order to establish his rights. Finally, Dionysus is presented towards the end of the play as the person (both man and god) in charge of the religious, as well as, the secular and political authority of the city of Thebes. The fact that authority shifts during the play clearly implies the political shift in the American reality of the sixties and we can

therefore understand that Schechner develops a severe criticism of the political influence on humanity in general and personal life in specific.

1.7 Conclusion

In *Dionysus in '69* the human body is the “raw material” (6) as Shepherd would suggest which Schechner uses in order to construct and develop the play’s action. Many different actions and aspects of the body, are presented in the play. The body is first and foremost perceived as “the casing for an emotional inner life” (Shepherd 6) and as an empowered machine defending human biological needs for satisfaction or pleasure. It can also “work mechanically as a puppet” (Shepherd 6) as it happens in the case of Bacchae who, following Dionysus command, devour Pentheus. Last but not least, the human body is presented naked in the play giving an image that is both powerful and vulnerable, erotic and asexual, at the same time.

2 THE SUFFERING OF THE HUMAN BODY AS AN ANTIWAR

POLEMIC IN DAVID RABE'S *THE ORPHAN*

2.1 Introduction to the play

The Orphan (1973) by David Rabe is a play which conveys strong social truths and criticism of the politics of its era. Examined in the twenty-first century, the play appears surprisingly contemporary. The author masterfully revises Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as a critique against violence and the cost of war, employing for this purpose disturbing physical images of the human body. I propose to analyze Rabe's *The Orphan*, in terms of how the need for personal and social reform is expressed through the corporeal images in the play.

It is particularly interesting to follow the history of the stage production of *The Orphan* as given by Philip Kolin in his book "*David Rabe: a Stage History and a Primary and Secondary Bibliography*" where he devotes a whole chapter to *The Orphan*, analyzing the reception of the play by theatre critics. According to Kolin, the play was not initially received with great enthusiasm. There were some positive remarks and most opponents did believe in Rabe's writing potential, mainly because of his two previous influential plays, *Sticks and Bones* (1971) and *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (1971). Kolin argues that what many critics found "distasteful" about *The Orphan* was "the liberty Rabe took with the Greek characters, their times and cultural ethos. Most criticism seemed to center on Rabe adding two Clytemnestras and minimizing Electra's role (or, worse yet, having her use a telephone)." (Kolin n. p.) However, this "liberty", which Rabe took with the Ancient text, is what has actually produced a massive play in terms of bodily images and social and political criticism.

The idea of the human body will be approached in this play in a different way. The body will be considered as a political tool to enhance every person's political responsibility towards the community. Rabe's concern about personal responsibility is prominent throughout the whole play. As he states in an interview with Joe Adcock, on the 5th of March 1974 for the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, he "just used the myth [of

Agamemnon] in order to express his real concern “about generations, about idealism and the lack of it, about the betrayal of the young by the old, and then the vengeance of the young on the old” (Kolin np). The situation that Rabe describes is indeed, as he says, a theme “basic to all families,” so he implies that the focus should not be on the ancient story but on its modern adaptation.

2.2 The characters

Kolin emphasizes that *The Orphan* is a play which had been reworked at least six times and transformed by Rabe before its final production by the Manning Street Actor’s Theatre of Philadelphia. The most obvious difference between the first professional production by Joseph Papp in 1973 and the next production in 1974 is that the characters of Calchas and Apollo have been replaced by a character called “The Figure.”

The Figure, in the final version of the play, appears as an agent of catastrophe. He foreshadows death and disaster taking Apollo’s and Calchas’ role. He is the divine voice who gives orders and expects the other characters to follow them. He is responsible for Iphigenia’s murder, as he urges Agamemnon to “lie to her” and “trick her” (Rabe 100) in order to bring her to Aulis for her sacrifice. Moreover, in the second act of the play, The Figure constantly encourages Orestes to seek for revenge: “You think you are innocent, yelling at the air, believing that you are ordained and extraordinary. I will make you real, Orestes. The murderers of Agamemnon die at the hands of Orestes” (Rabe 150).

In his final contemporary version of the *Oresteia*, Rabe creates five more characters, apart from The Figure, who do not exist in Aeschylus’ tragedies: The Speaker, The Girl, Becky, Jenny and Sally. These five new characters represent society and replace in the modern play the chorus of the ancient Greek tragedy. In addition, Rabe adds the character of Clytemnestra Two, who is Clytemnestra ten years older, and is used to represent Agamemnon’s wife after he has returned from the Trojan War. Interestingly, Rabe repositions the characters in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* altering the interaction patterns among them, yet following the basic elements of the plot. Most

significantly this results in both Clytemnestras on stage together, acting simultaneously in a substantial number of scenes.

In my opinion, the most interesting character of the play is that of Clytemnestra. Her double representation in the play finally offers to her tragic character a chance to express her feelings not only as the cruel wife who has cheated on her husband and later on murdered him. The fact that Rabe creates a second character of Clytemnestra is actually a symbolic political and feminist statement. Transgressing millennia of patriarchy, Rabe gives voice to one of the most notorious women in ancient Greek mythology. It seems that with this second voice Clytemnestra manages if not to justify, at least to explain her actions. Rabe reminds his audience of the myth which wants Agamemnon to have killed both Clytemnestra's infant son with Tantalus and his own daughter, Iphigenia. Therefore her character is nearly tragic if we consider the cruelties that she has suffered because of Agamemnon. All in all, Clytemnestra in Rabe's version of the *Oresteia* is less cruel compared to other versions of the play.

To conclude, the first three nameless characters in Rabe's play create a firm basis for the plot. They set the context of the play, narrating the story of the family of Atreus and numbering the atrocities and homicides that its members have committed against one another. They constantly interact with the members of the family of Atreus and in many cases, Atreus' family follow their commands. By focusing on some of the main characters' actions, we are going to achieve an insight into the meaning of the corporeal images of the play.

2.3 The Human Brain and Body against the Irrationality of War

The physical images and references used by Rabe in this antiwar critique can be separated in three major categories. The first, which is going to be analyzed in detail, focuses on scientific aspects of bodily functions which are mainly expressed in the play by the character called The Speaker. The second, exposes the brutal nature of humans by a series of comparisons between human and animalistic behaviors. The final category, closely related to the second, is the largest. It comprises of harsh physical images of suffering male and female bodies, often closely related to the cruelty caused by war.

The Speaker, “a young woman dressed elegantly” (89), represents science and particularly human biology in the play. In her speech there are numerous references to bodily functions. She appears to be constantly attempting to rationalize the irrational and cruel intentions of the other characters, by giving them a biological explanation. The first act of the play starts and ends with her own words describing the process of pregnancy:

In a place like this we all begin. Deep within the dark of another’s belly. The smallest and the largest cells collide and multiplying ten thousand times possess one beating heart. Think of time as a pool. Do we speak to the past? Or merely look at it? Is it right? Left? Up? Down? (90)

Later on, in the first act, it is again The Speaker who narrates Agamemnon’s past, accusing him of a double infanticide and foreseeing his death being stabbed in “a fish net” by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. According to The Speaker, Agamemnon is responsible not only for Iphigenia’s sacrifice, but also for murdering Clytemnestra’s infant boy and her previous husband, Tantalus.

The Speaker is the only character throughout the play to view the human body scientifically and examine its functions. Consequently, The Speaker is the character most associated with the representations of the body in Rabe’s play. Additionally, The Speaker develops the idea of historical awareness within the play, exploring the notion of the relativity of truth in history. Furthermore, The Speaker moves from the past to focus on the future and time itself. She presents the audience with the triviality of human existence by stating that: “With every tick of the clock, the distance of the width of space increases by hundreds and hundreds of thousands of miles. With every tick of the clock. It is a black immensity in which we float like singular particles of dust ... bits of air... molecules in peculiar exile”(106).

The Speaker’s reasoning makes the atrocities taking place or described throughout the play, sound even more repulsive. Rabe wonders how it is possible for humans to make the same violent mistakes after so many centuries of human evolution on earth. This enquiry is mainly expressed by detailed descriptions of the function of the human brain: “The activity of the brain is mainly electrical ...At each instant of our lives, in all the different parts of our body, some millions of neurons are firing, all the impulses leaping to the brain” (111).

The first act of the play is less violent in comparison to the second. Thus we observe that the role of The Speaker, representing the strength of wisdom, good will and rationality is more prevalent in the first act. Additionally, Rabe expresses personal responsibility regarding one's own fate, in the explanations of The Speaker about cerebrum functions:

Unlike the human heart which betrays its action by beating, the brain, laboring to solve the most complex of problems, is totally, utterly silent...It is the task of the brain ... to sort these billions of impulses, to establish priorities amid this popping... to pronounce decisions amid these. To deliver insights within this crackling, hissing skull. (116-17)

However, there is one last and very important element of the human nature which is described by The Speaker as “the most common defense of all,” as “some awesome ritual by which bodies are piled up to the invisible.” It is the idea of the human sacrifice which has “lurked down the primeval street, in the primeval forest, over the primeval sea” along with “terror and magic” (121). The theme of human sacrifice is repeated multiple times in the play. This sacrifice if perceived literally as the act of killing mainly refers to Iphigenia's sacrifice in Aulis. Agamemnon has also “sacrificed” earlier Clytemnestra's infant. Clytemnestra sacrifices Agamemnon to avenge Iphigenia's sacrifice and propitiate Artemis. Finally, Orestes avenges his father's murder by killing his mother with his own hands. This infinite circle of blood and sacrifice proves to be vain. This situation as presented by The Speaker and later on as analyzed by Orestes, creates the crucial need for an alternative peaceful solution.

2.4 Orestes and Agamemnon Facing Personal and Political Responsibility

A tentative analysis of the first act shows that humanity and logic prevail over the power of war and violence, which dominates the second act of the play. Both the audience and the characters, in the first act, are aware of the crimes that have been committed. Despite the fact that, from the very beginning of the play Orestes is aware of his destiny to commit matricide, he appears unwilling to accept his role as a murderer and tries to avoid it. One possible interpretation is that Orestes' effort to avoid

committing matricide represents the vain struggle of humanity to avoid destruction and war.

Even in the second act, Orestes appears trying to transform his fate, to discover the truth in his family's past and remain faithful in his pacifist beliefs:

Yet I must remain calm. I will remain calm. For it is my belief that the truth, if pursued with patience, reveals itself. (134) I will go to the marble statue of Aegisthus in the park, where the flag of Clytemnestra waves before the temple on which the ideals of our land are carved. I will destroy the flag of our mother; I will shatter the stone likeness of Aegisthus. Upon the monument to the ideals of our land which they have abandoned, I will put flowers. (137)

Orestes is trying really hard to understand things about his family history. In Orestes' effort to discover himself between the pages of his family history, we can identify Rabe's philosophy about the human nature and existence. Orestes statement: "I say there are certain things that, if I am to remain a human man, I must not ever cease to know them. What are they? Please, tell me!" (158), indicates Rabe's quest for humanitarian values, possibly missing from American citizens. Last but not least, Rabe engages with the idea of human reproduction and evolution, using powerful descriptive images of the human body. Orestes and Electra thank their mother and father for bringing them to life: "each with all our arms and legs, our two ears and eyes, ten fingers, ten perfect toes. Mother's womb was so good to us" (154). Later in the play, Rabe articulates his strong humanitarian beliefs and praises human development from primitivism to organized and political societies. Through Orestes words about his ancestry, Rabe expresses his hope regarding personal development:

Our blood runs back to Tantalus, but we are not like him. No, no, we move away from him, up from him. We progress. We advance so far away he is unknown, the other end of time. Not kind and good as we, his eyes are mean. But we are no longer like him. (155)

In contrast to the image of movement and progress, the bodies of Aegisthus and Agamemnon are presented like fragmented statues. The images of their broken statues imply their inability to feel, empathize and consequently their inability to progress because of their cruelty. Agamemnon is the general and Aegisthus is the politician and they are both equally unable to learn and improve, mainly because they do not seem to regret for any of the crimes they have committed. Here we can identify another analogy

with Schechner's play regarding the incompetence of authority, which is personified in the characters of Aegisthus and Agamemnon and Dionysus and Pentheus, respectively.

However, there has been a number of critics, who according to Kolin, were not in favor of Rabe's contemporary approach of the play. More specifically, what they did not like were the modern costumes that dressed Agamemnon like an army general:

The critics had a field day at Rabe's expense in explaining the contemporary significance of Rabe's Greeks being dressed in modern costumes. Agamemnon was outfitted like a general and waved a whiskey bottle, a true embodiment of a warmonger, but for the critics this modern transformation of the tragic king was a sign of poor or confused taste. (n.p.)

Another major theme that is reflected in *The Orphan* is the idea of personal responsibility for one's actions. As it has already been mentioned, the character of Orestes is initially, at least, presented as an agent of peace. This image is also enhanced by the difference between Orestes and the character of The Figure, who is clearly presented as an agent of violence. The notion of violence is prevalent in The Figure's case even from the way that he is dressed: "He wears a toga woven with bones over the white T-shirt; he wears a bone necklace and a half-mask molded to the contours of his own face" (97). He also carries bones which symbolize death and disaster and foreshadow the catastrophe of the family of Atreus. The same image, metaphor for death, we are going to observe later on, in our analysis of Mee's play. Mee describes one of Clytemnestra's dreams and repeats the image of walking around in the house carrying bones as a symbol of death.

Following the development of the plot and consequently the development of the characters, we can identify how the character of Orestes manages to combine several "identities." Initially he is ignorant, naive, unaware and unable to believe or understand his fate. Later, he could be characterized as a detective or a student, who imitates the process of learning, by studying history from school books in his effort to resolve an old crime. He finally develops into an activist, a thoughtful member of society who is ironically presented to have strong, clearly formed and pacifist political beliefs. That is his last stop, before being drifted by violence and committing, what he had been trying to avoid throughout the whole play, his mother's murder.

Therefore, Orestes becomes an ambiguous character. His motives seem to be clear, however he is unable to follow his beliefs and stick to his own values. Orestes is

the “dubious hero” that Savran explains in his analysis. Orestes has managed from the very beginning of the play to get the spectator’s empathy and understanding. That happens because he repeatedly rejects the idea of murdering his mother. However, the audience’s empathy will shift when Orestes becomes another agent of violence in the play. In my opinion, what is being described by Savran as “a highly theatrical realism” provokes a double dialogue. A dialogue both between a person and society, as well as a “personal discussion” with one’s own self. Dramatic action creates a process of self-reflection which questions personal beliefs, thoughts, feelings and actions.

Having set up this dubious hero, Rabe carefully and shrewdly works to turn the spectator’s empathy and understanding toward him. Well before the final curtain, however, Rabe breaks the spell; and the spectator, newly aware of his complicity, is forced to question the values he has been seduced into supporting. This dramatic strategy (which has striking similarities to that used by more conventional tragedians) is used in concert with a highly theatrical realism to provoke a double confrontation, of self and society. (Savran 195)

Another useful characterization of Orestes, given by Rabe himself, is included in Kolin’s analysis regarding the critical reception of *The Orphan*. Kolin is citing parts from an interview that David Rabe had given to James Childs:

Orestes for the playwright [Rabe] represents “the youth of today.” Speaking of the play as a whole, Rabe observed: “It’s an interesting play I’ m attempting to present a remembrance of things in the mythological past through the eyes of memory and the presence of today’s reality and relativity.” (Kolin np)

In these few words Rabe manages to explain the main themes that his play addresses. These are memory’s function as a filter that embellishes the stories of the past and the relativity of historical narratives. Rabe underlines the need for objectivity and accuracy in historical narrative. The same quest for truth and objectivity is also addressed by Mee in his play *Agamemnon 2.0* which is analyzed in the next chapter. Interestingly enough, both playwrights address the need for pluralism and objectivity in the same way. They both have multiple characters in their plays narrate a series of historical events. Moreover, they both add extra characters to Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*. In Rabe’s play fourteen characters in total act or are just present on stage without moving; they speak or remain silent, they argue or reconcile, they fight for their beliefs or against the beliefs of others, and last but not least, they kill or get killed. And the main reason for this “parade” of characters is the celebration of pluralism in political thought.

To conclude, among the many characters, this part of the analysis focuses on the two male protagonists, Orestes and Agamemnon. The first, Orestes, representing the younger generation is initially full of hope and good will, feeling that he will manage to alter the tragic fate of his family. The second, Agamemnon, is presented as an ignorant beast, a war machine who mainly cares for success in the battlefield. He fails to meet the needs of his family, he kills his daughter and therefore causes the rage of his wife. What these two characters share is not only the common blood and their tragic fate, but also the fact that they are doomed to face an existential crisis when confronting the results of their actions.

2.5 Reflections of *Dionysus in '69* in Rabe's *The Orphan*

It is interesting to note that, unlike Schechner's *Dionysus in '69*, where the expression of an antiwar sentiment is combined with naturalistic images of sexuality and physical pleasure, in Rabe's play we rarely find images implying pleasure in bodily acts. Sexual pleasure is expressed in a twisted, even sadistic form. The satisfaction of the rapist is closely linked with the violence of the act of rape itself.

The most striking parallel between the two plays is found in the beginning of the second act of *The Orphan*. The second act starts with the grown up Orestes who is being born between the legs of Clytemnestra One and Clytemnestra Two. Orestes is born in a scene reminiscent of the birth ritual by which Dionysus is born in Schechner's play. Orestes' birth is accompanied by a series of violent images. First of all, according to the stage directions, Orestes appears "wary and wrapped in the placentalike gory net in which his father died" (126). The knife emerges between Clytemnestra One's legs while the two women are giving birth to the same child. Furthermore, Agamemnon's murder is symbolically followed by the birth of his son. The theme of child birth is not emphasized in *The Orphan* in order to celebrate reproduction, life and hope as an opposing force of virtue and light against the darkness of war, death and destruction. On the contrary, Orestes' birth is stigmatized by his father's murder. Birth, violence, and death are presented as inherent elements of human nature. If the stories of Orestes and Agamemnon are combined together they create the circle of life which is also created by the representation of the image of the human body in *Dionysus in '69* (see 1.6). The Speaker wonders about Orestes: "Is it with rage and venom that he steps into

his world? Is it with love or dread that he arrives?”(127) repeating again the idea of personal responsibility in someone’s life.

On the contrary, birth in *Dionysus in '69* is a powerful and vivid representation of life and hope. The play starts with this image and as we have extensively analyzed in section 1.3, the so-called birth ritual reflects sexual intercourse not only as a process directly connecting to child bearing, but also as an act of pleasure. Moreover, in Schechner the process of birth giving is immediately associated with the pagan traditions and rituals of the god Dionysus. Another positive interpretation is offered to the birth ritual because of the fact that it is followed by the ecstasy dance and is therefore directly connected with a joyous atmosphere.

Additionally, we can identify other important elements that the two plays have in common. It is important to note their “physical” theatrical style and the avant-garde staging. Kolin recites a review by Joshua Ellis, referring to the first production of the Orphan, which explains that:

The Orphan was being produced by a company and director that followed a performance theatre style; this physical (non-verbal) theatre was not to be liked or disliked but “felt and experienced.” Consequently, Ellis advised his student readers—future members of the audience—to “get involved, and for this reason, it is suggested that you wear casual clothing to Vasey Theatre.” (n.p.)

This quote clearly indicates another prominent similarity between the two plays which is the wish by their authors’ and directors’ to engaged audience participation. Apparently this is not something that can be succeeded only with words or some advice like the one that Ellis gave to his students. The responsibility of encouraging the audience to actively or critically participate in dramatic action lies with the performers and the stage director.

By what can be clearly observed in *Dionysus in '69* (1970) film, directed by Richard Schechner and Brian de Palma, the performing stage was not a theatre but an actual garage and the audience sits on the floor on stage or on the scaffoldings that surround it. The central stage is kept open for the ecstasy dance and the birth ritual. All the actors and actresses welcome the spectators when they arrive at the garage with the words: “Good evening, Sir! May I take you to your seat?” Last but not least, when Dionysus is chasing Pentheus, the second runs around on stage, stepping around the audience and passing among their legs, over their heads or

behind their backs. In the last review that Philip Kolin quotes in his section about the play, Ernest Schier makes clear that *The Orphan* followed the path that *Dionysus in '69* had opened, regarding performance techniques:

Schier recognized Rabe's ability in *The Orphan* to "handle many complex deeply interwoven characters and situations." Impressed by the staging, Schier complimented Medley's ingenuity in having the audience sit on bleachers directly on the stage and in using the curtain to cut off the auditorium from the stage. Schier's opening sentence left no doubt in anyone's mind that he still had the highest regard for Rabe: "There may be no other playwright in American writing against violence with as much passion and sense of commitment as David W. Rabe." (Kolin n. p.)

This review addresses both the thematic value of the play, as well as the innovative elements included in the performance. By reading it we also identify the other common theme that the two plays share, which is the criticism against war.

I would like to conclude the analysis of the characteristics that these two plays have in common by the most interesting fact which is quoted in Kolin's book which is Rabe's interpretation of his own play. As many critics compared *The Orphan* with Rabe's two earlier plays on Vietnam *Sticks and Bones* (1971) and *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (1971) the critic Clive Barnes concluded "that *The Orphan* was the last play in Rabe's "Vietnam Trilogy." Although it is true that *The Orphan* has a lot of war images, only two refer directly to the Vietnam War. Most of the other atrocities are attributed to the War of Troy. Kolin quotes:

Rabe himself admitted that although he saw parallels among the characters of these three plays his original intention was not to write a unified trilogy. Moreover, in a 1972 interview with Jerry Tallmer of the New York Post, Rabe denied that *The Orphan* was about Vietnam: "There is no reference to Vietnam in the play, not specifically. There may be one. But if I hadn't been there I wouldn't have written it." (n. p.)

The fact that Rabe recognizes war as an influence, but at the same time questions the play's direct relation to the Vietnam War, explains the depth of Rabe's political and philosophical thought, as well as the complexity of his writing skill.

2.6 Concluding remarks

In essence, *The Orphan* is a play that combines on stage ancient tragedy with modern American reality and invites the audience to emotionally participate in the action. David Savran introduces Rabe's interview for his book *In Their Own Words*:

Eschewing simplistic answers to complex personal and social problems, each of Rabe's plays plumbs the experience of the well-meaning but shortsighted individual caught within a deranged and destructive society. His Vietnam plays are not narrowly antiwar; they do not argue a political point so much as chart the dynamics of the disparate but interrelated pathologies that produce a situation like Vietnam: male violence, racism, xenophobia, misogyny. (194)

This dense description of Rabe's work includes a great number of elements that exist in *The Orphan*. In *The Orphan*, there is not only one, but many shortsighted individuals. Agamemnon, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra can only consider the immediate result of their actions. All of them fail to understand the catastrophic aftermath of murder. Only Clytemnestra, who is slightly more compassionate and sensitive in this version of the play, opposes war as a solution. It is only Orestes who unsuccessfully attempts to resist for a while the irrationality of murder.

Rabe employs for his narrative a series of characters who add their own perception of the American reality of the seventies. In a final analysis what matters is that Rabe approaches the images of the human body with respect and pluralism and attempts to reproduce a society in crisis, bridging the ancient tragedy and the myth with his contemporary real life. In doing so, he focuses "at personal rather than social confrontation" (Savran 195), expressing the hope that personal development and progress will eventually empower individual citizens to realize themselves and change society (Savran 195). In essence, the whole meaning of the eternal quest with which *The Orphan* deals, can be summarized in Rabe's statement:

I do feel that people can alter themselves. The world may be falling apart, but weather it does or not, you are going to be separated from it, and therefore its fate ultimately is not your concern. Your own development, your own soul is your concern. I would never say that the world's not going to fall apart. But you can work on your life within it. Perhaps if enough people did that, it would change society. If you decide that you'll change only if the world changes, you're going to be in big trouble. (Savran 203)

3 THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL AWARENESS IN *AGAMEMNON*

2.0 BY CHARLES MEE

3.1 Introduction

Charles Mee is a playwright and historian who has rewritten and adapted a lot of ancient Greek tragedies. His plays are greatly influenced by his career as a historian. In Mee's plays history is the setting in which actions occurs. Among others, Mee rewrites the first part of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* producing *Agamemnon 2.0* (1994), a poem in a dramatic structure and a remake of the homonymous tragedy. The play reflects Mee's strong antiwar beliefs and feelings against the first Gulf War. This chapter is going to focus on how these feelings are presented by a series of bodily related images and metaphors which are widespread through the play.

Before we proceed in our analysis of the corporeal images of the play it is interesting to have in mind Mee's beliefs regarding adaptation. This will help us understand better how Mee adapts Aeschylus' play and what he wants to achieve with this adaptation. Mee argues that "there is no such thing as an original play" and in his website he invites his readers to "feel free to take the plays from this website and use them freely" as a resource for their own work. Referring to his beliefs regarding adaptation Mee states:

None of the classical Greek plays were original: they were all based on earlier plays or poems or myths . . . Sometimes playwrights steal stories and conversations and dreams and intimate revelations from their friends and lovers and call this original. And sometimes some of us write about our own innermost lives, believing that, then, we have written something truly original and unique. But, of course, the culture writes us first, and then we write our stories...And so, whether we mean to or not, the work we do is both received and created, both an adaptation and an original, at the same time. We re-make things as we go.

We can therefore understand that Mee believes in what we could call the political and historical unconscious of the human nature. He explains that human beings are greatly influenced by the community in which they belong. As a result, the product of their artistic creation will be greatly influenced by history and popular beliefs as well. In a section titled “What I like” in his website, Mee states:

My own work begins with the belief that human beings are, as Aristotle said, social creatures—that we are the product not just of psychology, but also of history and of culture, that we often express our histories and cultures in ways even we are not conscious of, that the culture speaks through us, grabs us and throws us to the ground, cries out, silences us.

I don’t write “political plays” in the usual sense of the term; but I write out of the belief that we are creatures of our history and culture and gender and politics—that our beings and actions arise from that complex of influences and forces and motivations, that our lives are more rich and complex than can be reduced to a single source of human motivation.

The idea of incorporating and expressing our “culture” in “our stories” in artistic expression is depicted in *Agamemnon 2.0* by the characters of Herodotus, Thucydides, Homer and Hesiod who represent the history of the past. The four historians combine two elements that are crucial for our analysis: history and the representation of the human body. In addition, all four of them are presented as having a serious physical disability implying that history and war, as a common characteristic of human history on earth, traumatize the human body and consequently the human existence. Last but not least, the value of history and historical awareness is evident in the play and Mee clearly emphasizes the importance of learning by reviewing past mistakes. Moreover, memory functions as a vague political context which is constantly questioned both by poetic expression and history.

3.2 The Human body traumatized by history

Mee’s play opens with four figures wearing grey coats. They are Herodotus, Thucydides, Homer and Hesiod. The four historians give us the first example of the representation of the human body in Mee’s play. As mentioned earlier, they are all presented as having a serious physical disability. Herodotus is a quadriplegic, Thucydides is a dwarf, Homer is blind and Hesiod is an epileptic. Their presence

symbolizes the presence of history in the play. Moreover, their presence indicates from the very first moment that Mee is going to take into account historical facts in his process of reinterpreting Aeschylus' play.

The fact that each one of the historians faces a different physical disability implies the need for pluralism and objectivity in historical narrative. Mee implies that because of their disabilities the four historians are unable to understand and express a complete image of the historical reality. However, their opinion is not undermined because of the fact that it is not complete. On the contrary, their role and their words are particularly important not only for the plot of the play, but also for expressing Mee's political beliefs. Last but not least, it can be implied that the cause of the historians' disability is their "encounter with history." Most of the historical facts, presented in the play, are cruel and sad narratives that clearly represent the suffering of the human body. A series of wars, disasters, slaughters of soldiers, and images of women being raped complete the story of Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra. The four historians incorporate the suffering of the human beings whose stories are being described in the play.

3.3 The role of the four historians in the play

Mee's reference to the four historians is a recourse to authority. Mee not only pays his respects to history but also embodies history in his text by "resurrecting" the four historians. Thucydides, Homer, Hesiod and Herodotus set the context of Mee's play by creating a patchwork of historical narratives. What can be initially perceived as a series of irrelevant stories is employed by Mee in order to create the feeling of multiple historical narratives. Each one of the four historians narrates his own story in order to set the context for the main story, that of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, to begin.

Homer is the historian who underlines the importance of memory and the need of humans to remember and write history. He narrates the first story included in Mee's play, which is the story of the poet Simonides. Simonides' friends were all killed by an earthquake while they were having dinner in a palace. The poet Simonides was the only to survive, because he was outside at the moment of the earthquake. Homer, who

narrates the story, explains that this unfortunate event was the reason “of mankind's desire to remember exactly how the world has been at one moment or another.”

Herodotus, known to be the father of history, is the historian who introduces the story of the family of Atreus:

Ten years ago,
the sons of Atreus
Agamemnon and Menelaus
left this spot
for Aulis
where they sailed for Troy
in search of Helen,
stolen from her husband Menelaus
and taken home to Troy by Paris.

Herodotus also expresses many of Mee's political beliefs and arguments. Later in the play, he supports Agamemnon and underlines the difficulty of his decision to sacrifice his own daughter for the sake of the war. Agamemnon is described by Herodotus as “Caught in this dilemma between private love and public duty.” Herodotus is the only one of the four historians who describes a series of serene images during a period of peace with “fires still burning in the fireplaces because someone meant to come right back.” Ironically, just after this series of images Herodotus is the one who welcomes Agamemnon when he comes back from the Trojan War. Throughout the whole play, Herodotus makes no strong negative comments against war, however his last words in the play form a solid political statement regarding the importance of history:

What was true then

is true today.

When the fabric of the civic order is torn,

no one is safe.

This is how it has been,

and ever will be.

Hesiod is among the four historians the one who is most profoundly influenced by his encounter with history. In the very beginning of the play he narrates another story that describes his meeting with a woman “dressed in black” who can be perceived as a personification of history. Hesiod says that while he was walking in a deserted village in midafternoon, he “felt the presence of someone looking at him.” It was that woman with the black clothes who “was bent almost double halfway between standing and sitting” and was “rocking her body back and forth.” The image of the woman dressed in black is an image of grief and brings in mind the image of a mother mourning for the loss of her children. It is interesting to notice the body posture of the woman. She is described as “bent almost double” as if she cannot cope with the weight of all the responsibilities sitting on her shoulders. Concluding his story, Hesiod expresses the same need to learn from past mistakes which is prominent throughout Mee’s play:

Sometimes
when I am by myself
I carry on a dialogue
with the past,
listening carefully
for the voices of those who have left us.
I touch the stones
with their inscriptions of past fates
inscriptions partially erased
yet still discernible.
I call up the shades
these silent bodies
silent souls
so they might feed on our compassion

and I might learn the source

of our present woes.

Unlike Herodotus, Hesiod recognizes and repeatedly confronts human cruelty in Mee's play. Moreover, he does not support king Agamemnon when he appears. On the contrary, the audience is getting ready for Agamemnon's entrance with a cruel statement by Hesiod which indicates that violence is inherent to human nature. Implying that Agamemnon is a cruel and primitive man, an animal-like being that is unable to control his inner instincts and violence Hesiod says:

Clutching a weapon

from the depths of sleep

comes easily—

it's in our blood,

the same gesture with which

Ice Age man took hold of his ax of stone.

Thucydides is the most wry and morose among the four historians. He constantly makes provocative comments and questions the main characters of the play. He also engages with the idea of relativity in historical truth. His two first statements in the play express his difficulty to believe and compromise with what he is being told. When Hesiod says: "There's some comfort in the memory of it," Thucydides replies: "if it's true" and he continues: "What one remembers and what is true are so seldom the same." It seems that Mee uses the character of Thucydides more than the other three historians in order to express some of his own political beliefs. Apparently, this happens because, among the four historians of the play, Thucydides is the one whose work about the Peloponnesian War is considered to be the first accurate description of a war in human history. Therefore, being a historian, Mee identifies himself with Thucydides.

In addition, Thucydides is extremely critical towards the Messenger once he appears on stage and he calls him a savage and a cretin once the Messenger describes the atrocities that king Agamemnon's soldiers committed in the battlefield: "What a lie to say that fortune favors the bold. Fortune favors the cretins and the madmen. Fortune is on the side of the savages." Agamemnon himself does not escape Thucydides' strong

political criticism as he ironically states about him that: The power of a public man is measured by how much blood and treasure he has the authority to waste.” Last but not least, Thucydides describes one of the most powerful images of the human body that Mee has included in his play. This image introduces the idea of the vanity of the human existence and prepares the audience for the images of catastrophe that are going to follow later on in the play. When the Messenger has completed his first description of the war, in a severe criticism against the irrationality of seeking for power, Thucydides states:

The body is nothing
but a product of semen and of blood
which then becomes a meal for death
a dwelling place for suffering
a tavern for disease.
A man may know all this
and yet
from lack of judgment
drowning in a sea of ignorance,
he yearns for love, for women, and for power.

To conclude, the fact that Mee starts his play by presenting them to the audience is not only an act of respect. Considering Mee’s profession, it can also be seen as an “invocation to the muse,” which, for Mee, is history. History is personified, incorporated and incarnated in the play with the presence of these four historians. In fact, Mee produces a very interesting incarnation of history. He offers to his audience a broad and objective image of history by choosing four different characters to act as history’s agents. For Charles Mee history is something that cannot be excluded from theatrical creation. With *Agamemnon 2.0* he tries to raise audience awareness regarding the political importance of their actions. As Mee states in his interview about theatre with Alisa Solomon:

What we really mean by history is the historical condition-politics, economics, society and the interaction of those things, and how they shape individual and collective lives. But most of our theatre excludes that understanding of history, so it actually makes us stupid and ignorant of the conditions under which we live because it focuses on psychological interactions. It sets a frame of discourse in which you cannot have historical perspective, and therefore makes it impossible to arrive at political understanding. (71)

Mee is particularly interested to develop historical understanding in *Agamemnon 2.0*. Following the example of the ancient Greek tragedians, whose plays were strongly influenced by the politics of their times, Mee creates a play that develops the political thinking of the audience. In *Agamemnon 2.0* he includes a series of historical references, the most prominent of which is the existence of the four historians.

3.4 Conclusion

To conclude, Mee sets a political example about how history must be seen and narrated. He celebrates pluralism and objectivity, by avoiding the narrative of historical “facts” by a single person. For this reason he includes in his play the characters of the four historians. Historical facts are narrated by all four of them, as well as by Clytemnestra, Agamemnon and the Messenger. *Agamemnon 2.0* expresses a powerful, strongly political argument against the irrationality of war. Mee, therefore, implies that art should be universal, crossing boundaries and respecting other political views, beliefs or historical narratives. Although his play contains powerful, shocking or even appalling war images, he does not make any direct references to any political person or belief. Mee’s political thoughts are expressed by the characters of the play and in a recourse to authority by the four historians. Showing great respect to historical tradition, Mee goes back to the roots of historical narratives, in an ingenious attempt to redefine how history should be written. Last but not least, the suffering of the human body is presented in an abundance of images that mainly depict the characters of Clytemnestra, Agamemnon and the Messenger.

4 THE WORSHIP OF THE FEMALE BODY IN MORAGA'S *THE HUNGRY*

WOMAN: A MEXICAN MEDEA

4.1 Introduction

Cherrie L. Moraga's play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2000) bridges masterfully the myth of Medea with the traditions of Central American mythology. Moreover, Moraga combines in her play the Christian tradition and some of its rituals with the Aztec rituals and myths. Inspired by Euripides and his *Medea* she bridges myths that come from different parts of the world in order to voice strong criticism of the modern American society. By combining cultural, sexual and societal minorities, Moraga creates a totally new imaginary political setting. The resultant play is one of significant value and importance, which crosses racial and gender boundaries and sheds light on a wide range of inequalities and social injustices.

My analysis will focus on the corporeal elements used by the author to celebrate female nature. Moreover, I will compare some themes of the play, such as infanticide, the parent – child relationship or birth-giving with those of the previously analyzed plays. Chac-Mool's relationship with his mother will be analyzed in detail, as the path that leads Medea to her son's murder. Last but not least, I am going to refer to the bodily images which indicate the double exclusion that Medea's character faces in the play, by being a lesbian as well as a citizen in exile.

4.2 The Political Meaning of infanticide

A major theme addressed in the play is the theme of infanticide. The theme of infanticide creates a series of striking images of the human body in Moraga's play. Our analysis is going to focus on the political, cultural and social significance of these images. Moraga presents infanticide as an act of societal rebellion which has a political rather than personal significance. Transgressing the popular perception of the myth of

Medea as an act of revenge and hatred or severe mental disorder, Moraga unveils the myth's deep political connotations. By making reference to the ancient text of Euripides, she rediscovers the political meaning of Medea's deed. In doing so she presents Chac-Mool's murder as an act that would protect and prevent him from becoming an agent of misogyny, machismo and patriarchal beliefs. Moraga repeats in her play the theme of sacrificing one's offspring for the sake of ideology. She combines the pattern of Abraham's sacrifice with the indigenous traditions of the Aztec and Chicano culture.

However, what is of great importance is that Moraga approaches infanticide differently, especially if compared to the other authors we have analyzed so far. Schechner wants Agave to kill her son, Pentheus, in an act of frenzy while being possessed by the spirit of Dionysus. Rabe in the first act of *The Orphan* presents Agamemnon being desperate by the fact that he is forced to kill his daughter:

I will beg her not to die. I will beg the knife not to kill her- her skin not to open, her heart to go on beating, though you, Priest, hold it in your hand. She is my child! Iphigenia! (100)

In *The Orphan*, as previously mentioned, Agamemnon is accused of a double infanticide. Rabe's Agamemnon, however, refuses to accept his cruel act: "I simply tossed him. I did not know his head would crack open on that wall" (115). In these words, Rabe formulates a political critique against authorities and governments, represented by Agamemnon, who do not take responsibility for their actions. However, Agamemnon's character in his play remains ignorant until the end.

On the contrary, Moraga depicts Medea as a confident woman who is totally conscious of her actions. In order to understand the political importance of Medea's action in Moraga's play, it is important to remember that in Euripides' text, the act of infanticide is the climax of the plot and there are many reasons, analyzed during the play, that lead Medea to this point. Moraga however emphasizes the act of infanticide by reversing the time sequence of the play. Moraga's Medea in the beginning of the play is well aware that she has killed her son.

In order to understand infanticide as sacrifice, we should first explore the idea of sacrifice as inherent in most of the dominant cultures, traditions and religions throughout the world. Ancient Greeks used to offer libations and sacrificed animals to

their gods in order to thank them or win their favor. So did the ancient Aztecs in the festivals they held in order to honor their gods and especially the god Sun, who was considered to be of great importance for the Aztec culture. The Aztecs are, also, known for sacrificing humans as well as children in order to honor and worship their gods. This sacrifice was not always considered to be a punishment, as we would imagine nowadays, when the person sacrificed was a member of the community.

It turns out, therefore, that sacrifice is a ritual deeply rooted in human tradition. The human sacrifice has also been described by The Speaker in Rabe's play as "the most common defense of all" (see 2.3). The same idea about the Chac-Mool's sacrifice is definitely initiated by his mother's Aztec-Mexican origin and is seen as an obligation towards her beliefs and her tradition. However, the bloodless sacrifice of Chac-Mool, reminds the readers of the Christian version of sacrifice. According to the Christian religion, when the mass takes place, it is actually the body and the blood of Christ, who is sacrificed for humanity's sake, which are consumed by the people.

Another image regarding infanticide seen as a political act is presented in scene eight of the second act in Mama Sal's discussion with Medea. Medea actually asks her grandmother how much of the herbs is needed to poison Chac-Mool. What is surprising though is Mama Sal's reply: "No, Medea. You don't have to do this." The audience would expect Mama Sal to react and discourage Medea from her horrible action. However, the focus of the answer is on Medea and not on her action. Mama Sal's words imply Medea's obligation to act against the alienation of her own son and Mama Sal with her advice, as older and wiser, tries to relieve Medea from her duty.

The next scene of the play is even more enlightening regarding the idea of infanticide as a sacrificial act, especially when Medea addresses Coatlicue:

Coatlicue,
this is my holy sacrifice.
I would have preferred to die a warrior woman,
like the Cihuatateo
women who die in childbirth
offering their own lives
to the birthing of others.
How much simpler things would have been.

But what is the cultural significance of this combination? What life do I have to offer to my son now?

... But the road I must walk is sadder still. (88)

Here Medea is totally aware of her situation, the outcome, as well as the consequences of her action. She is worried about how her son will be manipulated and finally excluded by the patriarchal state of Aztlan and she describes her action as a road that she “must walk” (88). Although she laments her son, she does not really seem to regret her action. After Chac-Mool’s death, Moraga creates a powerful image which combines Christian and Aztec religious traditions and death rituals. Chac-Mool passes out in his mother’s arms in “a pieta image” (91) and Medea builds an altar by harvesting the blue corn, on top of which the Cihuatateo women leave the body of the dead child. This combination of different traditions when Moraga describes the act of infanticide implies that the cruelest expressions of the human nature, like infanticide, are common in different cultures throughout the planet. Medea’s myth appears as a common connecting bond between the Cihuatateo women who along with Coatlique and the myth of La Llorona symbolically “accompany” Medea in her trip from happiness to destruction and insanity. Moraga uses plenty of mythical figures to help Medea justify her actions. Moraga transforms the use of the myths adding those deriving from her own cultural heritage. As Helene Foley states:

These legends create a timeless origin for the power of female fertility that is perpetually followed by female division, loss, and oppression. The Hungry Woman’s desire is insatiable; the lesbian desire between Medea and Luna nearly destroys their bond as it wavers between passion and sisterhood. Yet this partially mad and divided Medea’s decision to kill her son finally entails both a doomed commitment to a firm lesbian identity and a symbolic non-Euripidean reunity with Chac-Mool. (217)

This symbolic unity with Chac-Mool is achieved in the end of the play when Chac-Mool returns to embrace his mother and take her with him in an act of forgiveness and reconciliation. As Medea appears to share a really close as well as democratic relationship with her son throughout Moraga’s play, the act of infanticide becomes even more tragic. Medea is described as a really supportive mother, who helps Chac-Mool develop his teenage personality. This is an element absent from Euripides’ *Medea* because of lack of social and cultural context. As Foley suggests regarding the mother - child relationship: “The sympathetic Chac-Mool, a major character in the play, makes

Medea's killing of her son far more vivid and complex than in other versions (of Euripides' Medea)" (215-16). This complexity of the murder of Chac-Mool is a result of his interaction with his mother throughout the play and climaxes in the scene when the murder actually takes place. However, in the end, Chac-Mool returns and poisons his mother in order to save her from her sad reality. Moraga offers an alternative ending to Euripides' version, which emphasizes the political importance of Medea's action. The fact that Chac-Mool forgives his mother clearly indicates that he "understands" the political meaning of her deed.

4.3 The Female Body Used as a Means of Social Criticism

Moraga's Medea is a midwife, therefore by definition a person who "brings life" and a "curandera," which in Spanish means a "healer." The symbolisms of Medea's profession are used by Moraga to enhance the theme of tragic irony. Medea is both a person who helps women give birth and someone who will eventually kill her own child. The female body is celebrated throughout the play as the object of desire both of men and women. Possibly because of Medea's lesbian identity, birth-giving is not depicted as the essence of female existence. Compared to the previously analyzed plays, the description of birth-giving is strikingly negative. In the first act, Medea describes her job in a really appalling image of the female body: "Work! I suck off the seven-pound creations of other women! That's all! I catch their babies and I throw them back at them" (16).

Another major theme that should be carefully examined is Medea's lesbian identity. Medea's sexual orientation acquires a dual purpose in the play. First and foremost, it reflects Moraga's personal aim to represent lesbian and queer minorities in the USA and criticize their multiple marginalization by society. Second, it can be perceived as a tribute to the female body and female identity in general. The female body is presented in the text in a provocative way and is celebrated not only for its beauty and the sexual desire it triggers, but also as an irreplaceable means for child-bearing.

Although Moraga chooses to present Medea as a lesbian, this does not narrow the play's address down to an exclusively queer audience. On the contrary, Moraga

following Euripides' example, questions the institution of the family as the core of the modern society. Euripides, when addressing the male Athenian audience, presented the prototype of a foreigner. Medea's character did not follow the cultural beliefs regarding women in the Athenian society. Medea was not the example of wife and mother that an Athenian man would like to have. That is not only because she finally murders her children, but also because she eloquently expresses her political opinion and appears to be politically active in a male dominated political world.

Respectively, Moraga presents another indifferent and ignorant father, like Agamemnon in Rabe's play, who views women as reproduction machines. Talking about Jason's new wife, Medea makes an ironic comment reflecting Jason's beliefs: "Indian enough. And young enough. She'll have a litter of breed-babies for him" (17). Moraga's purpose is to question the "regularity" of the family institution nowadays. Indifferent parents are represented here by Jason, who becomes interested in his teenage boy, only when the boy is old enough to offer him the "status" of having a grown up son.

After Jason's encounter with Medea, when he asks her to let Chac-Mool go with him to Aztlan, in the third scene of the second act of the play, Moraga uses Medea's words to express her fierce criticism towards what we usually define as "normality":

It's normal to send your five-year-old child and his mother into exile and then seven years later come back to collect the kid like a piece of property. It's normal for a sixty-year-old Mexican man to marry a teenager. It's normal to lie about your race, your class, your origins, create a completely unoriginal fiction about yourself... (75)

However, Moraga does not try to represent a narrow-minded prototype of same-sex parenting. Moraga's aim is to challenge patriarchy and she successfully does it by presenting in detail the relationship between Chac-Mool and Luna and Chac-Mool and his mother, as two personal rapports separate from the love affair between Luna and Medea. Despite the fact that Medea and Luna face many problems in their relationship, this does not seem to negatively affect Chac-Mool and the balance between him and the two women. Moraga does not attribute the difficulties that the homosexual couple of Medea and Luna faces, exclusively to the reluctance of society to accept its existence. This does not only add to the universality of the play, but also could be seen as a criticism towards human affairs regardless of sexual orientation. Except for some

instances, when Medea has an argument with Jason or Luna, Moraga carefully avoids using labels to describe her characters' sexual preferences.

Moraga's political criticism however expands further. The most interesting examples, worth being quoted, are those in which she includes historical events in her imaginative societal setting. Mama-Sal in many cases acquires the role of the prophet and the historian. Generally Mama-Sal is the voice of wisdom in Medea's story. She clearly describes discrimination against Native Americans and Mexicans and she is the one who tells her grandson stories about the Cuban Resistance and the Nazi regime: "the only thing los gringos cared about was the language you used, the bible you carried, y la lana que tenia en tu pocket" (22).

Mama-Sal, following Moraga's belief that anything can be related to politics, goes so far as to politicize the social criticism regarding the status of women in the state of Aztlan. She describes as a period of happiness the short time when the diaspora of the India-Mestizos came to an end and explains that inequality was reborn when men restricted women to domestic life and excluded queers from their societies (24). Luna also describes the feeling of suffocation that women may get in their households in one of the most vibrant and realistic images of the whole play:

"I can't. I feel I can't breathe like all the shit in the house, the plates with the stuck-on egg ... the unmade bed, the towels on the floor of every room in the house...that all of it is conspiring against me, suckin' up all the air in the apartment." (35)

Many of the bodily images of the play are given by Luna, who addresses issues of sexual orientation, identity and exclusion. She often faces Medea ironically because she refuses to accept her lesbian identity, despite the fact that they have been living together for the past seven years. She describes their sexual intercourse in passionate details and invites Medea to choose between her and Jason. Luna believes that Medea feels more comfortable having Chac-Mool with her. Luna blames her partner for feeling uncomfortable about their affair: "and we got nothing to disguise what we are to each other. Maybe for you, Chac-Mool somehow makes us less lesbian" (47).

The political criticism delivered by Medea, on the other hand, is against patriarchy and is directly related to the issue of infanticide. Moreover, Medea's criticism focuses against society that is excluding her because of her sexual preferences.

The third scene in the second act is full of insults towards Jason. Medea judges Jason's infidelity, his indifference for his son and last but not least, his marriage to a girl who is a lot younger than him.

To conclude, the play addresses a variety of contemporary social and political issues such as homosexual love and parenting, marginalization of the queer or racial minorities and inequality in the way society treats women. In addition, Moraga manages to state a strong argument against birth giving perceived as the essence of the female existence. Finally, the writer raises audience awareness regarding the patriarchal beliefs that are incorporated in western civilization.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

Moraga writes an accomplished adaptation of Euripides' *Medea* which manages to rework most of the elements that appear in Euripides' play in a unique and radical way. Moraga successfully reinterprets Euripides especially regarding the themes of the play. This analysis, therefore, proves how Moraga altered the original myth and by borrowing themes from the indigenous cultures of Central and South America managed to create a play that expands the meaning of the act of infanticide. Moraga's corporeal images in the play reconstruct the image of the female body in modern society which in many cases is being physically distorted in an effort to match strict social and cultural criteria for beauty.

Many of Moraga's political and civic concerns are expressed by the character of Chac-Mool. The thirteen-year-old child heroically tries to combine his love and affection towards his mother with his effort to become an independent young man. Taking into account psychological and sociological theories Moraga approaches the crucial topic of becoming an adult in the postmodern reality of the late twentieth century. Chac-Mool is a bridge which connects many different realities. Fatherhood and motherhood, adulthood and childhood, the present and the past, the Aztec and the Chicana/o culture with contemporary USA, are only some of them. Last but not least, Chac-Mool is represented as the Messiah and as his mother's only hope for "salvation" from misogyny and machismo. Following the example of Dionysus and Orestes he

expresses his hope that he will be able to somehow change the world: “I’m gonna go back to Aztlan, and make’ em change, Mom. You’ll see” (85).

CONCLUSION

The current analysis compares and contrasts the ways in which Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in '69* (1968), David Rabe's *The Orphan* (1973), Charles Mee's *Agamemnon 2.0* (1994) and Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2000) represent the human body. It is consequently proved that American authors, who were inspired by ancient Greek tragedies, have reconstructed the image of the human body over the past fifty years, serving political and social issues and raising audience awareness. The aforementioned adaptations of the tragedies present the human body in various ways which have been analyzed in detail.

In particular, I have examined how Richard Schechner glorifies the human body celebrating sexual activity combined with human suffering and humiliation. This analysis proves that *Dionysus in '69* is a play that constitutes a turning point for the history of the modern American theater. My thesis demonstrates how the male body is in cases presented as asexual, despite the fact that it is depicted half naked on stage. Moreover, this analysis outlines how Schechner explores the boundaries between the vulnerable human condition and a sexual representation of the male and female body on stage.

Regarding *The Orphan* by David Rabe, this analysis focuses on showing how the play bridges reality and tragedy on stage, by inviting the audience to emotionally participate in the dramatic action. It is explained how Rabe approaches the images of the human body with great respect. By relocating ancient tragedy and myth in his contemporary reality, Rabe demonstrates pluralism in a society which is in deep crisis. In a final analysis, it is shown how Rabe expresses through his play his inner hope that personal development and progress will eventually lead to self-awareness, empowering individuals and causing a societal change.

In Mee's play, *Agamemnon 2.0*, a political example is set about how history must be seen and narrated. The current thesis proves how his play expresses a powerful, strong political polemic against war. It is explained how Mee, by giving voice to four of the greatest ancient historians, makes a political statement regarding the importance of historical accuracy. Showing great respect to historical tradition, clearly influenced by his career as a historian, Mee goes back to the roots of historical narratives, in an

ingenious attempt to redefine how history should be written. The present analysis highlights the importance and universality of Mee's work. Mee avoids naming or criticizing any political beliefs. He does not imply that only authoritarian regimes can have a destructive impact in society. Having all of his characters express a different political argument, he offers space to pluralism and represents a democratic state disguised as royalty in his play. However, as the action of the play clearly indicates, even democratic states can suffer by the casualties of war.

The final chapter of this thesis, addresses the play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2000) by Cherrie Moraga. This analysis highlights how Moraga celebrates female existence and her lesbian identity by the representations of the female body in her text. It is explained in detail how Moraga reinterprets Euripides' text and alters the original myth by borrowing themes from the indigenous cultures of Central and South America. My analysis demonstrates how Moraga uses powerful images of the female body to express a protest against machismo and patriarchy. The universal value of the play is acknowledged by explaining how Moraga expands the meaning of infanticide and declares the need for equality for sexual and racial minorities.

The present thesis examines the portrayal of the human body in literature as presented through adaptations of the ancient Greek classics by American theater. It is ultimately proved, how corporeal representations go hand in hand with both political and social ideologies, resulting in plays with a huge record in theatre history which reflected an utmost necessity for social change. My purpose was to identify how the aforementioned plays influenced the reception of the image of the human body throughout the past five decades.

Moreover, being particularly interested in the way that the body is presented in the modern world of constant media bombardment, I wanted to investigate to what extent this difficulty of realizing one's own identity through the human body, has been expressed in artistic creations of the past. It is therefore proven, that the image of the body has been extensively used by American drama as a medium for the expression of social, sexual, cultural and political beliefs. Last but not least, I have examined the differences and the similarities in the corporeal images between the plays and I have approached the analysis of the human body not only in terms of its physical representation, but also as a vessel for the human soul.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Σκοπός της παρούσας διπλωματικής εργασίας είναι η σύγκριση και η αντιπαραβολή των τρόπων με τους οποίους το σύγχρονο Αμερικάνικο θέατρο απεικονίζει το στοιχείο του ανθρώπινου σώματος. Η παρούσα διπλωματική φέρνει στο φως τη σημασία του ανθρώπινου σώματος μέσα από έργα του Αμερικάνικου θεάτρου τα οποία αντλούν έμπνευση από τραγωδίες του Αισχύλου και του Ευριπίδη. Το ενδιαφέρον εστιάζεται γύρω από τα έργα των Richard Schechner (*Dionysus in '69* - 1968), Cherrie Moraga (*The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* - 2000), Charles Mee (*Agamemnon 2.0* - 1994) και David Rabe (*The Orphan* - 1973). Η εργασία αποδεικνύει την ευρεία χρήση από τους προαναφερθέντες συγγραφείς του στοιχείου του ανθρώπινου σώματος στο πέρασμα των χρόνων με σκοπό την εξυπηρέτηση πολιτικών και κοινωνικών ζητημάτων και την ευαισθητοποίηση του ακροατηρίου τους γύρω από αυτά.

Ο Richard Schechner εξυμνεί το ανθρώπινο σώμα υπονοώντας τη σεξουαλική δραστηριότητα, σε ένα έργο σταθμό στην ιστορία του σύγχρονου θεάτρου, που έθεσε τις βάσεις στην σύγχρονη αντίληψη της απεικόνισης του σώματος από την τέχνη. Το αντρικό σώμα παρουσιάζεται χωρίς να δίνεται έμφαση στην σεξουαλικότητά του, παρά το γεγονός ότι εμφανίζεται στη σκηνή ημίγυμνο. Ο Schechner εξερευνά τα όρια ανάμεσα στην ευάλωτη ανθρώπινη υπόσταση και την ερωτική αναπαράσταση του ανδρικού αλλά και του γυναικείου σώματος.

Σε διαφορετικό μήκος κύματος, τα έργα των David Rabe (*The Orphan*) και Charles Mee (*Agamemnon 2.0*) αποδεικνύουν την φρικαλεότητα του πολέμου μέσα από την βία που υφίσταται το ανθρώπινο σώμα. Τόσο ο Charles Mee, όσο και ο David Rabe ξαναγράφουν την Ορέστεια του Αισχύλου χρησιμοποιώντας μια σειρά από βίαιες εικόνες που απειλούν την ανθρώπινη φύση. Το έργο του David Rabe, είναι μία σκληρή κριτική κατά της βίας και του κόστους του πολέμου. Ενώ το έργο του Charles Mee αντανάκλα στις αντιπολεμικές πεποιθήσεις του και τα συναισθήματά του έναντι του πολέμου στον Περσικό Κόλπο. Η παρούσα διπλωματική εργασία, εντοπίζει την πολιτική σημασία της απεικόνισης του ανθρώπινου σώματος και εξηγεί πώς, εμπνευσμένοι από την Αρχαία Ελληνική Τραγωδία, οι συγγραφείς επανεξετάζουν τις αξίες της σύγχρονης τους Αμερικανικής κοινωνίας.

Από την άλλη πλευρά η Cherrie Moraga στην διασκευή της Μήδειας του Ευριπίδη, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, απεικονίζει το γυναικείο σώμα ως αντικείμενο πόθου τόσο για το αντρικό όσο και για το γυναικείο φύλο. Επιπλέον, το στοιχείο του σώματος ενισχύεται από την αντίληψη του γυναικείου σώματος ως αντικείμενο θαυμασμού λόγω του τοκετού. Τέλος, το «υποδουλωμένο» ανθρώπινο σώμα αποτελεί εφιαλτήριο για τη διερεύνηση της σημασίας του σώματος στην ενεργή διεκδίκηση των δικαιωμάτων φυλετικών και σεξουαλικών μειονοτήτων.

Εν κατακλείδι, η παρούσα διπλωματική εργασία αναλύει την πολλαπλή σημασία του τρόπου με τον οποίο απεικονίζεται το ανθρώπινο σώμα στα προαναφερθέντα θεατρικά έργα. Η εργασία εξετάζει λεπτομερώς το πώς το αντρικό και

το γυναικείο σώμα απεικονίζεται στις Αμερικανικές διασκευές του αρχαίου Ελληνικού δράματος, αναλύοντας σε βάθος την πολιτική και κοινωνική σημασία αυτής της απεικόνισης.