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The Uncanny Chorus: The Untamed Woman as Freud's *Unheimlich* in Euripides's *Bacchae*, Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* and Charles L. Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1*

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ABSTRACT

"Does being female constitute a "natural fact" or a cultural performance," Judith Butler wonders in her book *Gender Trouble* (xxviii). The theorist merges two concepts in this statement: that of femininity and that of conformity to culturally constructed conventions as a performance. To her, abiding to these rules creates a repetition of acts that constitute the idea of gender, because they are established as unbreakable. Thus, social norms are imbued with a sense of theatricality, since they are an 'act', the same attribute that Aristotle praised as integral to tragedy and its essential difference from other literary genres. However, there is a question as to what follows the breach of this "ritualistic repetition" (186) of gender roles, that inevitably transforms them into something unfamiliar and strange. According to Sigmund Freud, though, these are the main sources of the production of the type of fear he refers to as *unheimlich,* the feeling of uncertainty formed when a formerly familiar object, person or situation is simultaneously similar to and different from what it used to be.

Investigating the ancient Euripidean tragedy *Bacchae* and two more of its contemporary adaptations, Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* and Charles L. Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1,* this dissertation will attempt to answer the question of how gender becomes a source of the *unheimlich*. Pentheus, the Theban king who formulates and applies the law in the *polis*, oppresses his people by enslaving them, both metaphorically and literally in Soyinka's case. The god of wine, Dionysus, enters the tragic lieu to transform it from a place of limits to one of liberation. By introducing his worshippers -barbaric, Asian women called Bacchae- he releases to the centre of the *polis* what was hidden in its recesses, forcing the inhabitants, and specifically their king, to bear witness to the violent aftermath of his oppression. The Bacchae, who embody the *unheimlich* in the three plays by opposing conventional gender performance, are there to demonstrate the dire consequences of oppression. Having remained concealed by the orders of the king, they welcome slightly deranged Pentheus and help his mother tear him to pieces. I will try to argue that the *unheimlich* women, oppressed and marginalised for too long, demand the destruction of the old regime and the rise of a new order of harmonious acceptance.

Praised be this good unruly spirit who gives wings to asses and milks the lioness, who comes upon all that is today and all rabble like a storm wind-
-who is hostile to thistle-heads and hair-splitters and all wilted leaves and weeds:
praised be this good, free storm spirit, who dances in bogs and depressions as upon meadows!

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

We are the rocks, we are soil, we are trees, we are wind, we carry the birds, the birds, we are cows, mules, we are
Solid elements, cause and effect, determinism and objectivity, it is said, are lost, *matter. We are flesh, we breathe, we are her body: we speak.*

Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*

INTRODUCTION

Dionysiac worship in the ancient Greek culture was the beginning of theatre as a genre. Theatrical representation of mythological events took place in the context of religious ceremonies and theatre steadily took the form which is even recognisable today. Despite the long tradition of tragic representation, the twentieth century provided the audiences with the revolutionary concept currently known as *adaptation*. Playwrights started toying with antiquity, its themes and their affiliation with their contemporary condition. Right then and there, the social and historical events began to infiltrate the productions of ancient Greek drama, causing it to be revised and retold to mirror the concerns of their contemporary audiences. According to Julie Sanders, "A culture's mythology is its body of traditional narratives. Mythical literature depends upon, incites even, perpetual acts of reinterpretation in new contexts..." (63). A successful adaptation, therefore, uses the theoretical, historical and sociopolitical environment of its era of production, much like the initial dramas utilised the body of mythological narratives.

This dissertation is an exploration of fear and its relation to the idea of gender as portrayed in the *Bacchae* (405)[1] of Euripides and two of its later adaptations: Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1973) and Charles L. Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1* (1993). I will try to show that Freud's *unheimlich* is closely related to the fear produced by the tragedy and, most importantly, by the subversion of gender identity and, primarily, female identity in its plot. Focusing on the portrayal of the figures of Dionysus, Pentheus and, most significantly, the Chorus and the female

figures, I will attempt to demonstrate the fluidity of gender as one of the plays' central themes and underline its closeness to the idea of the *unheimlich*. As will be illustrated, the social upheaval displayed in them is the aftermath of the loss of gender as a polarity. The "hidden and the dangerous" (Freud 134) is released into the *polis* and is associated with the dissipation of oppression and the concept of the integrity of the 'self'.

Theatrical representation has been the source of mediation of the mythological past to the audience for centuries. The re-enactment of mythological events and the worship of god Dionysus were brought together in the Dionysiac ceremonies, celebrated in spring with a series of theatrical performances. The ritual of the City Dionysia took place in the month Elaphebolion, which corresponded to late March or early April, as is obvious in Foxhall's Table 6.1 (99). Yet, the festivals of Dionysus in fifth century BCE Athens do not signal the end of the use of theatre as a genre for the narration of mythological and historical events. The ancient Greek tragedies have become the base on which a number of playwrights create adaptations that have shaped the form of theatre. Taking the content of the ancient Greek tragedy and transferring it to the playwright's contemporary environment is the key to a successful adaptation. As Amy S. Green argues,

> In centuries-old tradition, plays whose central themes resonate with contemporary concerns are adapted to make them more accessible and appealing to contemporary audiences ... It is this essential contradiction between a familiar, well established text and its all-new theatrical idiom that marks contemporary classical revival as the unique product of our specific theatrical, cultural and historical milieu. (2)

Therefore, the concept of the adaptation of an ancient play is based on its intention to comment on its own time. As the great tragedians employed myths and brought them on the Athenian stage in an effort to criticise their own era,[2] the playwrights of the adapted versions of their plays try to do the same.

However, the concept of adaptation is inherent in literary creation, according to Julie Sanders. As she suggests in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, the tragedies whose themes become the sources of contemporary adaptations are themselves works which have been rewritten by their narrators.[3] Myth has been the source of theatrical adaptation for ages and it has served as a storehouse of themes that are bound to carry a very specific message to their audience. As Sanders

proposes, "What mythical appropriations facilitate therefore is a means for contemporary authors to carry out self-conscious investigations into the artistic process" (65). They invite both the creators and the audience to delve into their personal problematisations and, by projecting them onto well-known narratives, to see them from a different angle. Even though the reader or the audience is familiar with the original plot, the adapted text inevitably feels new:

> Mythic paradigms provide the reader or spectator with a series of familiar reference points and a set of expectations which the novelist, artist, director, playwright, composer, or poet can rely upon as an instructive shorthand, while simultaneously exploiting, twisting, and relocating them in newly creative ways, and in newly resonant contexts ... Each moment of reception is individual and distinct, albeit governed by manifold conventions and traditions, by prior knowledges [*sic*] and previous texts: the old story becomes in this respect a very new one, told – and read – for the first time (Sanders 81).

This is the result of the fact that the playwright manipulates the story to convey the *zeitgeist* of his era and comment on the 'new contexts' that the old text can still resolve if appropriated correctly. Each of the plays is in dialogue with and discusses its era's sociopolitical and historical issues. This aims to deeper understanding of the present with the help of past and well-known narratives, which are more easily assimilated by the audience. Toying with the notion of expectation and surprise, the playwright formulates a new environment for age-old pieces of art to function as a commentary on the modern epoch and its troubles.

In this sense, Aristotle is right to underline the instrumental role of action in tragedy:

> ... [T]ragedy is not a representation of men but of a piece of action, of life, of happiness and unhappiness, which come under the head of action, and the end aimed at is the representation not of qualities of character but of some action; and while character makes men what they are, it's their actions and experiences that make them happy or the opposite. (*Poetics* 1450a)

Focusing on the importance of the plot, Aristotle minimises the role of the actor in conveying meaning to the audience. In fact, he proposes the exact same thing that adaptation theory proclaims; the playwright should include the points of "happiness and unhappiness" of the characters and explain, through the plot, how they achieved

either of them. This is undoubtedly the way to criticise the current society and those circumstances in it that form happy or unhappy citizens. Contemporaneity is the source of the precise plot that is formed, considering that "happiness and unhappiness" are the result of different factors in each era. Thus, modern concepts start seeping through to the core of the tragedy and they open the plays to discussion in more than one definitive interpretation. In order to discuss the ancient tragedy and its adaptations in this dissertation, I will incorporate modern theoretical frameworks provided by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* and Sigmund Freud's *Uncanny*.

In the beginning of the 1990s, Butler achieves a breakthrough by claiming that gender is entirely disconnected from one's genitalia and she forms the concept of gender as a social construct. As she says,

> ... [G]ender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive / cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts. (11)

Gender, therefore, is not something one is born with, but rather something that is inscribed on one through one's interaction with the environment in which he/she grows up. "Within those terms, "the body" appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself" (Butler, 12). The external stimuli have a heavy effect on the person's comportment, therefore, and they shape the individual's gender. In fact, gender is the group of "repeated acts" (179) that become what we call identity after a long period of endless repetition.[4] At the same time, Butler argues that gender is also a performance: "Consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an "act" as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "*performative*" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (177). The habituation of gender cannot be complete without individuals facing it as a role they play every day. This innate theatricality of gender, as Butler analyses it, underlines its constructedness.

One cannot succeed in categorising the characteristics that constitute one or the other gender, they are constantly reconstructed to meet temporal and social conditions. In another passage she mentions that

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus o agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted

> in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* ... This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*. (179)

However, those acts do not cease to bear the notion of plasticity. Gender can be bent and stretched as long as it adheres to the norms that society makes in a specific space and time. When gender is 'performed' correctly, the expectation of the members of the said society are fulfilled and individuals are easily assimilated in it. In the event that this expectation remains unfulfilled, there exists "a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (Butler 179), which shows the superficiality of the notion of gender and banishes the "de-formed" individual from society.

At this point, Aristotle's tragedy can be linked to Butler's theory of gender. Originating in the festivals of Dionysus, the tragic genre was developed as a quintessentially active mode as opposed to the static presentation of poetry. In fact, Aristotle in his *Poetics* formulates the complete definition of tragedy, so valuable to future generations;

> Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude—by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament, each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions (1449b).

Aristotle manages to summarise the entire tragic stage in one concise sentence, whose deciphering has become the preoccupation of philosophers throughout the ages. The elements that need to be commented upon in this dissertation are that of *μίμησις* or *mimesis*, which has been translated in English as 'representation' This idea is close to theatricality as it is to *gender performativity*. Gender is a *mimesis* in the sense that it replicates existing behavioural patterns and perpetuates their connection with one gender or another.

Nevertheless, problems arise when the aforementioned *mimesis* fails to be faithful to the pre-existing standards that need to be represented. In this case, the "de-formity" (Butler 179) that is created results in the estrangement of the individual from the social group and its consequent marginalisation. In the case of the tragedy, on the contrary, a successful imitation of events leads to its two main effects on the

audience; *ἔλεος* [pity] and *φόβος* [fear]. Despite the faithful representation of acts, the audience of the tragedy is not appeased, but overwhelmed in the prospect of finding themselves in the same circumstances as the characters of the tragic plot. When gender is represented in an unorthodox way it inspires "... the fear of losing cultural legitimacy and, hence, being cast, not outside or prior to culture, but outside cultural *legitimacy*, still within culture, but culturally "out-lawed"?" (Butler 111). Thus, the otherness of gender not performed correctly or, according to social expectations, is the source of a fear of social expulsion.

The concept of the outsider and the foreigner that is, simultaneously, fearsome is a notion profoundly investigated in Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* (1919). In this essay he delves into the feelings of dread that are created by the encounter with the opposite of "the beautiful, the grandiose and the attractive" (123). In other words, he means to address the type of fear that is generated by one's encounter with the *unheimlich*. The focus on the element of fear is what interests us at the moment. This is not a very clear account of what the *unheimlich* is. The reader is made aware of its capacity to terrify, but the means are still left unknown. Later, he cites an element inherent to the *unheimlich* that helps him clarify it even further:

> ...whatever it is about persons and things, sense impressions, experiences and situations, that evokes in us a sense of the uncanny, and then go on to infer its hidden nature from what all these have in common ... [T]hat species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar (124).

All of a sudden, the idea of memory and familiarity with the world around us is introduced. The *unheimlich* is an entire species of different fears, whose source, nevertheless, remains the same: the departure from the realm of the known and the conventionally admitted as normal or, at the very least, not unheard of. The ways in which one might conceive the uncanny are truthfully endless. The *uncanny* is not limited to vision, but sound, taste, smell, and even mere impression might be its agent.

In his attempt to investigate this concept, Freud provides the reader with a lengthy disambiguation of the German word and a list of its translations. Following an exhaustive and, frankly, exhausting quotation of etymological explanations of the German word, Freud finally reaches the most effective one for his research: "Uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open" (132). The long sought idea for the nature of the *unheimlich* is finally

brought forth, as it had been, ironically, 'hidden' underneath all the other connotations of the term. Freud's exploration manages to uncover the hidden meaning of the term, much in the same way that the hidden is revealed in the *inheimlich* itself. The result is, obviously, terrifying. As Hélène Cixous phrases it: "this lumber room, far from winning us over, this chain of quotations which *Heimlich* or *Unheimlich* threads together, appears to us an overlong, delirious discourse in which the world is seen as a deceptive reduction ..." (530). Yet, despite its fault, the bulky catalogue of examples of the word's usage manages to uncover its own plasticity and imbue into the reader, without any complicated discourse and forced eloquence, the changeability it carries and, thus, the variety of interpretations it might hold. *The Uncanny* is itself *unheimlich*, in the sense that every time it is used it bears a resemblance to its previous meanings and uses. Much like adaptation, it resembles something that was known, like the ancient Greek tragedies, while mildly distorting it to inspire fear. It connotes fluidity and adaptability in its own accord and spans in such a vast variety of meanings that it loses familiarity of its own self.

This fluidity, I will argue, is included in Euripides's *Bacchae*, a play that was produced in the fifth century BCE Athens. In his tragedy, Euripides narrates the story of god Dionysus and his revenge upon the house of Cadmus, the birthplace of his mother and house to the family that disrespected both her and himself. The Bacchae are liberated slaves from all the regions he has visited, who follow and worship him, and this is the threat he devises for the city of Thebes. Once he enters its walls, he declares for himself that "[a]ll the females among the Thebans, all the women, [he] ha[s] sent maddened from their houses" (*Bacchae* 45). However, these are not slave women he has sent into the mountains to follow his bacchanals. These are the women of the house of Cadmus, refined, free women whose lineage would never allow them such outbreak into the city. Dionysus, the god "Lysios,"[5] the one who sets people free with or without their consent, is set to opposition to Pentheus, the Theban king, who insists on binding everyone to their pre-assigned roles, refusing the opportunity for change. Pentheus portrays the "Greek mind [which] was trained to think in polarities; to categorize, distinguish and oppose" (E. Hall xxi), which Euripides tries to contest through his tragedy. The Bacchae are the "hidden [that] has come into the open" (Freud 132), they are the *unheimlich*, rendered as such by their gender which they fail to 'perform'.

Centuries later, the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka chooses to adapt this ancient tragedy in terms of the 1960s Nigeria. His play *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* Soyinka uses the *Bacchae* as a base for the exploration of a revolutionary movement that might free his people from slavery and war, which they experienced everyday during the Nigerian war of Independence and the Biafran war. In his play, Dionysus is there to achieve the physical liberation of the slaves of Thebes from Pentheus' tyrannical rule, which has allowed slavery to thrive and create rituals of human sacrifice for the atonement of the community. The playwright emphasises the importance of freedom by blending the already ethnically mixed chorus of the Bacchae, with a chorus of slaves of his creation. The chorus becomes the *unheimlich* again due to their unfamiliarity to the old chorus. Once the two become one, new rituals are created to replace the old, representing liberty and autonomy for the people. They are 'strange' exactly because they represent what was missing from the *polis* of Thebes; a blend of genders and classes, of races and ages that will lead to the unleashing of the oppressed in plain view. Soyinka, who believes in the power of collaboration to generate change, manipulates the potency of the Bacchae as a marginalised yet tightly knit collectivity, to propose another aspect for the plights of his home country. Gender, therefore, is eclipsed in his play by the profound need to effect change through unison instead of insisting on constructions that aim to divide.

On the other hand, the 1990s American society has had its toll on the creation of Charles L. Mee's adaptation of the *Bacchae*, *The Bacchae 2.1*. The story of the wronged god who returns to his mother's birthplace to seek vengeance remains; yet the characters and the focus of the play vary greatly from the original. It is the creator's intention, however, to have such a huge impact on the play's form, in order to establish his position that "[t]here is no such thing as an original play" ("About the (Re)Making Project"). To Mee, originality itself is an idea that needs questioning when theatrical creation is concerned, since, as he argues, the ancient Greek tragedians used myths and their different variations to construct the pieces of art that were eventually performed in the Dionysiac festival of Athens. In *The Bacchae 2.1*, the plot of the ancient tragedy is generally maintained. Contrary to Soyinka, Mee opts for a more gendered reading of the Euripidean *Bacchae*, and chooses to focus on the fluidity of their gender as opposed to the rigid categorisation proposed by the king of Thebes. Femininity threatens Pentheus' worldview in that it defies social norms, which he worships, and proves that existing outside of them is possible and even

liberating. The world of neatness built by Pentheus is crumbling. The play comments on the way the incessant need of rationalisation was facilitated by the use of the Internet and its plethora of unfiltered information on nearly everything. The era of the internet glorifies information and classification. "On the Internet, conspiracy theories flourished as a means to explain an increasingly complex world," argues Gillon (135), and this is obvious from the title. Resembling a software update, *The Bacchae 2.1* serve as a digitised version of the ancient tragedy that facilitates the commentary that is needed in its era. The Bacchae, who oppose all types of classification, become *unheimlich* by insisting on their uniqueness and their impossibility of categorisation.

These three cases all lead to the same result; that failure to adhere to the socially ordered idea of gender renders the individual fearsome. The Bacchae, a chorus of women who refuse to obey the order of gender performance, are the primary source of the *unheimlich* in the plays. I will argue that gender, as outlined in the social norms, becomes frightening when it abruptly stops following the said rules. When social order is disposed with, then what was deemed as known and safe is transformed into a new and unprecedented situation that must be, once again, categorised in order to inspire the feeling of safety. However, the insubordinate women that Dionysus has issued in the city will attempt to dismantle order and safety from Thebes forever, introducing a new order of disorder. The fear produced by them is only the beginning of a new epoch of acceptance, violently created, yet potent of immense change. The three playwrights have used the myth of Dionysus return to Thebes in an effort to demonstrate that such a change was essential in their own era.

Notes

[1] "Euripides first competed in the drama competition in 445 BCE, was victorious in 441, won again in 428 with the group including *Hippolitus*, and posthumously (in 405?) with *Bacchae* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*" (Hall xiii).

[2] "Drama did not simply 'reflect' social reality in a one-to-one process; members of the social cast of Athens, its acting families, poets, and amateur chorusmen, collaboratively created fictions in their communal spaces that in turn had a dialectical impact, whatever metaphors we use to define it, not only on themselves but throughout their community—the real, social beings who gathered together to watch them in the theatre." (E. Hall, *The Theatrical Cast of Athens* 2)

[3] "Each new generation of story-makers adopted familiar mythic templates and outlines for their storytelling purposes. Even writers, such as Ovid, Aeschylus, and Euripides, who we might consider to be the source of much contemporary literary and cinematic appropriation of myth, were themselves refashioning previous mythical traditions" (Sanders 64).

[4] This is the repetition that forms character and it reminds the reader of the one discussed by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he describes character as a result of *ethos* instead of nature.

> ... [V]irtue of character (ēthos) is a result of habituation (ethos), for which reason it has acquired its name through a small variation on `ethos'. From this it is clear that none of the virtues of character arises in us by nature. For nothing natural can be made to behave differently by habituation ... So virtues arise in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but nature gives us the capacity to acquire them, and completion comes through habituation ... This is why we must give a certain character to our activities, since it is on the differences between them that the resulting states depend. So it is not unimportant how we are habituated from our early days; indeed it makes a huge difference - or rather all the difference. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 23-24)

Unlike him, however, Butler pinpoints the process of assuming one's gender in the work of *ethos* and not to their natural birth characteristics. For her, gender is a habit

that is socially imposed to the person from the moment they are born, and they are "habituated" to it throughout their lives.

[5] "... Dionysus is traditionally "Lysios", and even though there are earlier depictions of men trying in vain to put him in chains the extended exploitation of the tying/freeing motif to characterise Pentheus' fall is Euripides' choice" (Thumiger 206-207).

1. EURIPIDES'S *BACCHAE*

1.1 Introducing the *Bacchae*

The *Bacchae* is not a play like the others, simply because it was not written as a play to be performed in the City Dionysia. On the contrary, it was conceived and created at Macedon, during Euripides's self-exile in the court (Taxidou 13). According to Olga Taxidou:

> It was not commissioned as part of a dramatic festival and it was not written with the support of the whole machinery of Athenian democracy (a somewhat mythic combination that throughout the history of theatre has been read as the organic moment of the co-existence of theatre and democracy - part and parcel of the Classical moment). Indeed, it could be said that the play substitutes this 'organic moment' with the theatrical machine itself: Dionysus provides his own prologue, sets up the play and appears *ex machina* at the end to dish out his justice. It is as if the whole play is *ex machina* and Dionysus master of ceremonies. (13)

As a god, Dionysus could have been the appointed deity for the Euripidean *deus ex machina*, but he does not simply appear at the end. The tragedy seems to be in need for a solution from the very beginning, before the plot starts to thicken, and Dionysus is both the wound and the remedy. In fact, the most striking element of *The Bacchae* is the play's inherent meta-theatricality, not simply because of its occupation with the myth of Dionysus, who is the god of the theatre, but also, as Taxidou proposes "[t]hrough the embodied, sensual and civic experience of the tragic event and through an aesthetic of cruelty, *The Bacchae* theatricalises spectatorship and affect itself" (12). Hence, Thebes is both the place that has given birth to the god and rejects him, and the only home to him is now the stage, "that can welcome this 'cunning' creature" (15).

In this sense, he is the director of the play, come to subvert the hierarchy of Thebes by dictating its fate in the place of its king, Pentheus, who is the representative of order, rationality and classification. The cunningness of the god is once again underlined. He is the one that unveils the hidden, but his own motives and tactics of punishment remain hidden in the recesses of his mind. Yet, he is worshipped as the Liberator and is often called *Λύσιος* [Lysios], " 'the Liberator' " (Dodds 76), the one

that breaks the chains of the civilised society. Who is the one that is let out when the worshipper is committed to the holy *mania*, though? The hidden is once again brought into the light, reminding one of Freud's *unheimlich.* Dionysus, with his strange attire and appearance triggers the *unheimlich* in the tragedy and lures the people of Thebes to follow him, like his Bacchae, into the mountains to perform his ceremonies. The identity subsequently assumed results from the individual's opposition to what it is and what it is not when compared to the Other, represented by the god. To punish Pentheus and his unyielding insistence on binaries, he lets the women out of the house, showing both their bodies, their physical presences in the *polis*, as well as their desire and capabilities. The Chorus, the quintessentially *unheimlich* part of the tragedy, for it is what "was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open" (Freud 132), is formerly slave women, liberated by Dionysus during his journeys. Thus, femininity that was supposed to remain checked in Thebes runs rampant in the streets, 'contaminating' the minds of the men about what they are, compared to them. The herdsman is surprised to see women killing herds with their own bare hands, but did the god and his magic powers render them so strong, or were they always superhumanly puissant, yet never had the chance to show it before?

1.2 Dionysus, the *Xénos*

The play begins with fire. The tomb of Semele is still burning "the still living flame of the fire of Zeus" (*B* 45)[1] and Dionysus, returning from his long absence in Asia, where he recruited his Bacchae, is planning his return to his mother's homeland as an event of destruction of the present status quo. The unravelling of events simply reinforces the god's initial plan; the women do follow him and the Bacchae to the mountains and Pentheus literally shows his repressed self by the end of the play. Dionysus' effect on the Thebans is that he enables them to stop being rationalistic about their condition. What is released under the influence of the Dionysiac worship is the freedom from the constructedness of gender, by the god who is called *Λύσιος*. At the same time, Dionysus is a "foreigner" (*B* 51), a *xénos* [ξένος].[2] Therefore, the one who liberates is also one that comes from another land, who looks similar to and, simultaneously, different from the inhabitants of Thebes.

Sigmund Freud incorporates in *The Uncanny* a rather detailed etymological analysis of the term *unheimlich*, but not without giving the reader a "lexical

continuation, a voyage of reference through foreign languages, [which] constitutes a polylinguistic dictionary article" (Cixous 530). In fact, Freud cites the translations of the term in Latin, Greek, English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Hebrew and in this essay it is interesting that he decided on citing as its Greek translation the word "*xénos*". This word, which means "foreign, alien" (Freud 125) is used to express one that comes from another land; yet, in *The Uncanny* the author uses it to address an aesthetic that is integral to fear. The *unheimlich* is, in Greek, denoted by the idea of the strange and unfamiliar, of one that is not domestic and, therefore, savage and, as a consequence, the type of fear enabled by the new that has not yet been habituated. The *unheimlich* is the repressed other, the one needed as the "constitutive outside, to consolidate the process" (S. Hall 3) of forming an identity, which is only achieved by realising what one is not, when compared to the 'other', the foreigner, the stranger.

Nevertheless, what interests us the most is that in the *Bacchae* the god Dionysus is himself characterised as *xénos* by Pentheus; "And let others comb the city and track down the foreigner who looks like a girl and is bringing this new infection on our women and corrupting their beds" (*B* 53; my emphasis). The king of Thebes is accusing the god of introducing to the city a new kind of disease [νόσον] that destroys the marital serenity and the order of things within the *polis*. There are two words that need to be commented upon in this quote which, as I will argue, are not different from each other in their use through the play: "θηλύμορφον" and"ξένον"[3]. The first word could be translated as "effeminate", but this does not entirely do. The word derives from the words *θήλυ* [woman] and *μορφῶ* [to depict, to represent] and finally signifies one that not only acts like a woman but also looks like and *represents* women in his appearance. Dionysus inspires fear and brings chaos to the city and Pentheus' most accurate description of him is that he appears to be female, but is not, and maybe this fact, combined with his liberating nature, is the chaotic and dangerous quality that Pentheus is so terrified of; what if the women he has been oppressing escape their houses? For the word *θηλύμορφος* [*thilimorphos*] alone conveys the *uncanny* fear, since it is a male adjective that carries the word *woman*. The mixture of the two in a single person defines the liminal and denotes a person of unidentifiable characteristics, which inspires fear because that person cannot be addressed as an either/or being, but only as something in between.

As a result, the *xénos* is the Liberator and Dionysus shows Thebes that the unfamiliar could set everyone free from the limits of social norms. This is how *xénos*

acquires a new dimension. Dionysus' characterisation is not simply in accordance to his coming from the Orient and the places of the barbarians. He is himself the incarnation of the *unheimlich* exactly because he shows both signs of recognition and utter unfamiliarity with anything else in the scope of knowledge of both the cast and the audience of the tragedy. His appearance that pertains both of the male and the female strikes as something of the human nature that is known to all, but nearly no one admits to themselves; that gender is but an "act" (Butler 177) and that there is no sure way to determine it. The unfamiliarity of his form is part of his identity as a god; when Pentheus captures Dionysus and interrogates him about the god's initiation mysteries, the dialogue shifts to the form of the god as well:

> PENTHEUS The god, just what was he like? Tell me for you say you saw him.
>
> DIONYSUS He appeared in the form he chose. I did not arrange this.
>
> PENTHEUS Here again you have sidetracked me with fine but empty words.
>
> DIONYSUS An ignorant man will think another's wise words folly (57).

Dionysus insists that the form the god takes is not to be determined by a mortal, like the king believes him to be, but rather that the god has no certain appearance and changes according to his whim. The "shape-shifting stranger," as Olga Taxidou calls him is there to show that his appearance is regulated by himself alone and that, however frightening this might be to the onlooker, it is 'wise' to someone that cannot think straight (14). Escaping a definite form, the god promotes the constructedness of the self as an element detrimental for the state of Thebes. Dionysus demonstrates that disregard of the social norms leads to the realisation that only by embracing the hidden can one know him/herself entirely. As Poole argues, "If you resist Dionysus then he, she, it, they will take their revenge" (63-64), and "he, she, it" is far more terrifying for 'his, her, its' slipperiness.

At this point, one must delve into the mythological origins of Dionysus. Hesiod describes the family tree of the god in his *Theogony* :

> [...]To Ares, who
> Can pierce the skin inside a shield, Kytherea bore the two
> Ferocious gods, Terror and Fear, who drive the ordered ranks
> To chaos in the chilling battle-with Ares, he who sacks
> Cities; and she bore Harmony, whom Kadmos took as spouse.
> [...]Semele, Kadmos' daughter, bore the radiant boy she' d bred

When she had mixed with Zeus: glad Dionysos, god of wine,
Immortal son of mortal woman - both now are divine. (52)

Dionysus is a very interesting case of a god. Harmony, his maternal grandmother is the offspring of the union between Ares, the god of war, and Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty. Her name means "a pleasing arrangement of parts" ("Harmony" Merriam-Webster) and the god that devises the punishment of Pentheus proves to be the product of polar opposites that create harmony, balance, which is branded in his identity.[4] There is a balance in the god's in-betweenness, there is a wisdom that he wants to impart to the Theban king and his people and it begins with admitting that the strange and the unfamiliar exists in a repressed form in everyone.

As a result, one can argue that Dionysus really incorporates Freud's *xénos*. He is the *unheimlich*, since he manages to unleash the hidden in the city and the people in it and, thus, create an atmosphere of awe and fearful reverence that cannot be escaped. The fearful reverence is, however, only the trigger that points to the strange. The Bacchae enter the city themselves being foreigners [*xénes*], 'polluting' with their strangeness the other women of Thebes and, most importantly, Pentheus. It is also of immense importance to highlight the element of free will that is inherent and in-betweenness to the figure of Dionysus. Therefore, Dionysus is there to be the liminal god that exists to unleash the hidden and let known to all that the fate of the humans might be in the hands of the Fates. Dionysus initiates the followers to the mysteries of the blurred boundaries, showing that humans are to obey their in-betweenness, because this is what the 'self' means in the end (Vernant 389-390).

1.3 Pentheus Mourned

On the other hand, there is the king. As the sovereign power of the state, Pentheus is there to make sure that the city does not fall apart; yet in the end both the city and himself are literally torn. The end of the *Bacchae* finds Thebes without a royal family, and therefore without an heir to the throne, which indicates political upheaval, especially after the recent events that have befallen it. In spite of his power over the entire city of Thebes, Pentheus is seen as a blind king, one that cannot see clearly and makes the wrong decisions for himself and, by extension, for the rest of the *polis*. Dionysus himself declares from the start that Pentheus "fights against the

deity" (*B* 45) by not admitting his sacred nature and by reinforcing the rumours that his mother was a liar and that he is not a son of Zeus, but rather another mortal's:

> For my mother's sisters - the last who should have done so - denied that I, Dionysus, was the son of Zeus, but said that Semele had been seduced by some mortal and used Zeus as a cover for her sexual transgression. This they claim, was Cadmus' clever idea, and they gloatingly spread the story that her lies about her marriage were the reason that Zeus killed her (26-31).

It is this "θεομαχία" that leads Pentheus to be mourned by the end of the tragedy. It is apparent that the hubris that has been committed to his mother's name and to his own is more than enough to enrage any god, especially the gods of the ancient Greek mythology whose temper was notoriously short. However, the fault is not Pentheus'; Cadmus and his daughters have sustained the idea of Semele's lie and he simply remained faithful to what has been his teachings for what could be his entire life. As a result, one can derive from this that the true hubris that Pentheus commits is his stubbornness and unbendable character that keep him from welcoming the *xénos* in any form it might take in his city. Due to his unyielding rationality, Pentheus fulfils Teiresias' prophesy to the old king: "Be careful that Pentheus does not bring sorrow on your house, Cadmus" (54). As *penthos* is the Greek word for mourning and sorrow, the Theban king is eventually the source of grief for the house of Cadmus, as his name foretold.

Of course, this is how tragedies unfold and Pentheus' fatal flaw, his failure to accept the new god in his *polis*, is the turning point for the plot of the play. The need for his reason to prevail and his mockery of the two elders, Cadmus and Teiresias, for following the Bacchae in the celebrations for Dionysus coincides with what Nietzsche calls *aesthetic Socratism* "whose supreme law runs roughly like this: 'In order to be beautiful, everything must be reasonable' " (*Birth of Tragedy* 62). It is not any kind of reason that has to be followed, though. Pentheus insists that his rationality prevails and he incorporates the discourse that is deemed acceptable and credible by the people. This is what Foucault calls "régime of truth". In fact,

> Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and

> procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (*Power/Knowledge* 131)

To the king, who creates and regulates rationality in his own terms, there is no bigger threat than the realisation of the people whom he commands that there is an opposition to his rule of rationality. The alternate rationality that Dionysus tries to impose on Thebes liberates them from the chains of gender norms and establish a new type of 'regime' that dispenses with every regime.

Thus, the main problem that Pentheus poses in the tragedy is the overthrow of his "régime of truth" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 131). This is probably the consequence of the poet's own education by the sophists, who were "masters of thinking, masters of talking" (Romilly 1). According to Edith Hall, Euripides infused in his characters the atmosphere that the sophists created:

> One certainty is that Euripides, intellectually, was a child of his time. [...] And Euripidean characters certainly adopt the new philosophical *methods*: they subtly argue from probability and relativism, and formulate their points as antilogy, proof, and refutation. (xiv)

While Pentheus struggles to put the world into words to understand it, Dionysus shows him a type of humanity that cannot be put into words. The reality of Dionysus cannot be rationally analysed because it includes the irrational as an integral part of humanity. If Pentheus lets himself be dragged into the non-discursive state that Dionysus proposes, he will lose his power over his people. As Butler suggests, "to be *constituted* by discourse is to be *determined* by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency" (182). However, the king's denial to embrace the irrational, non-discursive, as part of the city and life itself is certainly the beginning of his plight. For, really, he refuses to recognise that life can be unpredictable and therefore uncontrollable. The denial of fear, that is the disposal of tragedy itself, shows that reason based on what can only be explained limits the possibilities of the human and leaves the unexplainable to be feared.

Following this argument, one can easily suggest that the feeling created in Pentheus, which he tries so hard to contest is the fear of the *unheimlich*. When faced with an image that defies logic he tries to rationalise it and attach meaning to events that seem to have none. This is common among the Greek thinkers of the time:

> The Greek mind was trained to think in polarities; to categorize, distinguish, and oppose. If the divine personality of Dionysus can be reduced to any one

> principle, it is the demonstration that conventional logic is an inadequate tool with which to apprehend the universe as a whole (E. Hall, xxi).

The polarised mental state of the king is what leads him to instantaneously register Dionysus and his cult as threatening to him and his *polis*. Under the condition that anything can be either reasonable and positive or irrational and negative, Dionysus is certainly identified with the second and is met with fear by Pentheus and his straightforward thinking.

Simultaneously, Dionysus is the *unheimlich* that attacks Thebes and brings up what the city tries so hard to suppress; memory, trauma and guilt. Pentheus suppresses the urges of the *polis* for a celebration of their desire for a mad night without consequences. His ultimate *sparagmos* is the effect of continual and systematic suppression of, not only his own instincts that resurface and frighten him with their primordial impression, but also the instincts of his entire *polis*. Women were not entirely disregarded, as Edith Hall argues:

> [They] could not vote or participate in the assembly; nor could they speak for themselves in the courts of law or normally conduct financial transactions except through the agency of their male 'guardian' (*kyrios*) - father, husband, or nearest male relative. But women did, of course, negotiate with the existing power structures (we hear hints in the orators of the need for men to seek their womenfolk's approval), and were prominent in the central arena of public life constituted by official religion. (xxxi)

Pentheus' denouncement, therefore, is not focused simply against the god of wine and joy, but also against those that have not direct public voice whatsoever and are, because of him, denied one of the few aspects of the public life they could still exercise. The prohibition of the Dionysiac worship is a signal that the women of the *polis* and the god that looks like them, are not welcome in the city and, subsequently, are not to be physically present in it.

This is why the utter punishment for him is his embracing of the Bacchic dress. Convinced by Dionysus that the only way to defeat the Bacchae is to spy on them unseen, he decides to follow the god's advice and blend in with the feral women by wearing their clothes of worship. However, the moment he holds the *thyrsus*, his vision changes and he can see what was invisible before:

> I think I see two suns and a double Thebes, our seven-gated city. And I think that you lead the way before me as a bull and that horns have grown on your

> head. Were you perhaps a beast all the time? You have certainly been changed into a bull (*B* 70).

In this moment of epiphany the king finally sees the irrational and the unexpected more clearly than ever before. It is proof that his suppression of all that kept his world intact by the glue that is rationality is now falling apart and Dionysus has full power over him. Dionysus' response to Pentheus' discovery of the world of liberated emotions, "[n]ow you see what you should see" (*B* 70), is in full accordance with the theory of the *unheimlich*. Especially if one takes into account one of Freud's interpretations of the term: "something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret" (133). Hence, the king himself is made to see, to have his eyes unhindered by social conventions that require sanity and clear-cut argumentations, to be submerged to the Dionysiac orgies where the senses are a priority.

Nevertheless, Pentheus is afraid, and the reason behind his fear is one: he sees in the people whose urges he suppresses his own deeply hidden instincts that struggle to come out seeing their like unleashed in others. Taking into consideration Royle's argument about the *uncanny*, that it "undoes any certainty about what is real and what is not" (134), we can safely argue that his struggle with Dionysus is, in fact, a fight against the unknown that he personifies in order to keep the hidden as it is, to maintain certainty of his present perception of the world and his reality. Truly, once the king is bereft of his rationality and holds the *thyrsus*, his name is sealed and he assumes his name's foreshadowing. As Foucault writes "Madness is the déjà-là of death" (*Madness and Civilisation* 16). Once the too rational Pentheus admits the reason of sensual existence proposed by Dionysus, he loses his rationality and his fate is sealed.

1.4 Uncanny, Wild Women

The unknown and the hidden in the city, however, always remains the female counterpart of the male inhabitants that physically show themselves in the public life of the city. Contrary to them, women's physical existence in the polis was meticulously hidden and the rules of propriety wanted the most respectable of them to even hide their first names from the rest of the *polis* as a sign that they were no common women, according to Pomeroy, "at least while they were living" (115). In

fact, their entire identity needed to be concealed within the house for them to be considered having *sophrosyne* [prudence]. According to Anne Carson,

> So too, ancient discussions of the virtue of sophrosyne demonstrate clearly that, where it is applied to women, this word has a different definition than for men. Female sophrosyne is coextensive with female obedience to male direction and rarely means more than chastity. [...] In general the women of classical literature are a species given to disorderly and uncontrolled outflow of sound - to shrieking, wailing, sobbing, shrill lament, loud laughter, screams of pain or pleasure and eruptions of raw emotions in general. (126)

This is largely the context behind the extraordinary amount of shock that Pentheus experiences when he finds all the women of the city not simply out of their houses, but also following the loud and violently cheerful group of Bacchus' worshipers. If we follow Carson's argument, we might well agree that, to his mind, the entirety of the Theban women are out of their minds and Dionysus does not merely set their bodies free to roam the city and the mountain of Cithaeron, but he drives them crazy. Therefore, in the beginning of the tragedy, he proclaims,

> So that is why I have driven those same women from their homes in a mad frenzy, and they live on the mountain in a state of violent delusion. I have forced them to wear the trappings of my rites. And all the females among the Thebans, all the women, I have sent maddened from their houses (45),

Here he means that he has caused them to lose their *sophrosyne* by showing themselves and making their voices heard throughout the *polis*, unobstructed and unfiltered by any male. In this excerpt of the tragedy, the god simply shares his plan with the audience, a plan that is meant to punish the entire *oikos* of king Cadmus, the god's own maternal grandfather. Dionysus keeps no part of his plan secret; he shamelessly confesses that he has "stung [all the Theban women] with frenzy" (26) and that has made them leave their houses and take to the mountains where they shall meet with his Bacchae and live a life of mountainous madness. The house that is left behind is more than a physical entity, though. The women leave wedlock and domesticity behind, hence they stop *performing* their gender.

Apart from their escape, the fact that the god's punishment entails their escape from the hearth to the mountains is an attempt to be set free from the policing of their bodies. The forest, with all the hidden life, the wild foliage of the trees and the religious mysteries that took place in it, straightforwardly functions as a metaphor for

the female genitals. Besides, these places both share the quality of the *unheimlich*, in the sense that they are "the entrance to man's [*sic*] old 'home', the place where everyone once lived" (Freud 151). On the one side, the womb as the first home that humankind inhabits before birth is largely explored by Freudian thought. In his essay *The Uncanny*, he explicitly connects the female genitalia with the place that creates the type of fear that he calls *unheimlich*. He suggests that, as their first abode, women's genitalia are often described by neurotics as being themselves *uncanny* or "*unhomely*"(151). Having departed from them a long time ago, their sight from the outside strikes them as strange and frightening because they are changed beyond recognition:

> [I]f someone dreams of a certain place or a certain landscape and, while dreaming, thinks to himself [*sic*], 'I know this place, I've been here before', this place can be interpreted as representing his mother's genitals or her womb. Here too, then, the uncanny [the 'unhomely'] is what was once familiar ['homely', 'homey']. The negative prefix *un-* is the indicator of repression. (Freud 151)

On the other hand, the forest was the first real home for our ancestors long before they managed to create houses and build organised cities, like the ones that Pentheus and his people inhabited at the time when the play was performed. The habitat of the first people resembled the womb in its "solitude, silence and darkness [that are] connected with infantile anxiety, something that most of us never wholly overcome" (Freud 159). Thus, a great part of the reason behind Pentheus' terror of the women that run wild in the mountain is that they are about to completely let their femininity run rampant through their interaction with their forest and its hidden secrets. There is no doubt for the link of the female sex and nature -as opposed to males and civilization- but most importantly of the women's supposed tendency for criminality and violence:

> And it is also written that nature lives and breathes by crime. Hungers at her pores for bloodshed. Aches in her nerves for sin. Yearns for cruelty. That she kindles death out of life, and she feeds with fresh blood the innumerable and insatiable mouths suckled at her milkless breast.[...]
>
> And we learn to be afraid.
>
> ("Woman! The very name's a crime," it is written.)
>
> *of our nature* ... (Griffin 24)

Consequently, Pentheus feels no surprise, but rather affirmation of an already existing fear of the unleashed female, of the liberated nature.

Moreover, as far as propriety is concerned, it is also a subject that Freud connects with the *unheimlich*. In his long citation of examples of the word's use, one finds the quotation " 'secret places (which *propriety* requires to be hidden)' " (130; my emphasis). The relation of this quotation with the women is apparent. They cannot be seen because of the socially constructed idea of what is appropriate, which makes their appearance in public a frightening sight, exactly because it denotes the decadence of the city laws and undermines the male citizens' power over the bodies of the females. It seems as the beginning of the end for life as they knew it and this is fearsome as it introduces the unknown in a place where they feel safe due to their control over it. As Butler says, the "ritualistic repetition" (186) is broken and gender becomes an unfamiliar territory. It ceases to be a binary opposition of clearly defined roles and it claims new identity for those who subvert the existing rules, which is what produces fear and uncertainty of what those who used to be familiar - mothers, daughters, aunts and grandmothers - have become under the liberation provided by Dionysus.

In their free state, the women who are in *ekstasis*, which, according to Edith Hall means " 'standing outside of one's self' " (xix), do things deemed to be humanly impossible:

> And one of them took her thyrsus and struck it against a rock , from which the dewy wetness of water leapt forth ... Another plunged her fennel rod into the earth's surface, and for her the god spurt up a spring of wine ... scraped at the ground with their fingertips and took jets of milk in their hands ... [T]hey turned against the young cows which were grazing upon the grass. They held no iron weapons in their hands ... [A]nd kept wounding them and making them turn and run away. Women did these things to men. A god certainly helped them (64-65).

Moving from the wondrous to the abhorrent, the women embody the most terrifying end for a man; to be killed by a woman without the use of weapons, by the sheer power of her own two hands. This kind of hunting image is, as Thumiger suggests, that of the "shrewd, fraudulent hunter" (200) and death, therefore, given this way is great dishonour to a man, like king Pentheus.

Additionally, the punishment is not entirely fulfilled without the literal dismemberment of the house of Cadmus. Agave, in the climax of Dionysiac mania, rips the left arm out of her son's body, despite his pleas, and she continues to pull his limbs away one by one with the help of the other women. Following the uprooting of a tree, a picture of castration, the *sparagmos* of Pentheus' body seems inevitable. However, according to Slater, this is the direct consequence of a community that excludes and demotes women:

> A society which derogates women produces envious mothers who produce narcissistic males who are prone to derogate women. The anxiety that success aroused in Greek males had its origins in the nursery. For was not *hubris* fundamentally masculine pride and phallic self-satisfaction, even exhibitionism? And was not the divine *phthonos* at bottom the mother's resentful envy? (26)

The mother, who has watched her son grow into the replica of a father that oppressed and used her for simple propagation reasons, takes her revenge while under a trance that renders her undefeatable. As Slater says, this was not an unknown theme for the tragedy of the era. Often in "... tragedies young women and virginal goddesses are helpful and benign, while the mature ones tend to be jealous, vindictive, and destructive" (13). Agave, consequently, makes the body of the king and her son a sight that is unbearable, a sight of the *uncanny*. Severed limbs are a carrier of the aesthetic that produces fear, according to Freud,[5] to graphically demonstrate the fate of those who oppose freedom of expression and try to suppress the urges of the others and, of course, their own.

1.5 Concluding remarks

At this point, we might need to go back to Judith Butler's argument about gender and its constructedness:

> If one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because the pregendered 'person' transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender

> intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. (6)

This fluidity of what gender means and the impossibility to completely disregard social conventions when talking about it shows the irrationality behind a concrete definition of what 'woman' or 'man' is, for that matter. Inevitably, those that support this strict definition will find themselves at a loss; there is no way to meticulously divide and categorise gender, exactly because it is constituted of a plethora of different identities that are equally eligible for the term 'woman' or 'man'. Like Pentheus, therefore, one will be frightened by how unreasonable rationality seems to be when applied to gender, since they have repressed what they cannot admit to themselves, and fear will rise. The *uncanny* is procured and the Bacchae come menacing to show that what is repressed will always rise and take revenge for its entrapment.

Therefore, Euripides's *Bacchae* incorporates the fear of the *unheimlich* in the shape of *gender performativity*. Dionysus initiates the fear in the unyielding king, who denies the existence of irrationality in his *polis*. The existence of Dionysus, who confronts the neat duality of gender that Pentheus so fervently supports, threatens the régime of truth in the city of Thebes. As a consequence, the Chorus because of its escape into the forest and its liberation from the environment of the house where its members should still remain constraint according to Pentheus' value system. The end of gender performativity denotes the end of the world as is known and it creates the fear of "what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud 124), but is not anymore.

Notes

[1] From this point onwards, the parenthetical citations for this play will appear as such.

[2] The original word that is used in Greek by Euripides for 'foreigner' is "ξένος". See Ευριπίδης. Βάκχαι. Πρόλογος και Μετάφραση Θανάσης Γεωργιάδης. Σύγχρονοι Ορίζοντες, 2001.

[3] "οἳ δ'ἀνὰ πόλιν στείχοντες ἐξιχνεύσατε

τὸν *θηλύμορφον ξένον,* ὃς ἐσφέρει νόσον

καινὴν γυναιξὶ και λέχη λυμαίνεται." (*Βάκχες* 118; my emphasis)

Translated in English as:

"And let others comb the city and track down the *foreigner who looks like a girl* and is bringing this new infection on our women and corrupting their beds" (*Bacchae* 53; my emphasis*).*

[4] Dionysus' father, Zeus, harbours him in his leg and gives birth to him a second time, when his mother, Semele, dies of his fiery presence:

While his mother carried him once in her womb,
the lightning of Zeus took its winged flight
and in the forced labour of childbirth
she bore him prematurely,
leaving her life
with the blast of the lightning bolt.
At once Zeus, son of Cronos,
received him in his thigh, the secret recesses of birth,
and covering him up there,
closed it together with golden pins
to keep him hidden from Hera. (*B* 89-98)

In this account of his miraculous birth, it is made obvious that he is born by a man instead of a woman, once again overturning the gender induced stereotypes, but, as Slater argues; "Zeus, however, is in no way feminized by these incidents- there even seems to be some underlying feeling that his manhood is incomplete until feminine abilities are also acquired." (36). On the contrary, the male child resulting from this unconventional birth is attributed utter maleness, since the female characteristics that are assigned to the faulty parts of humanity are bypassed by a male birth (36) and,

thus, Dionysus is fully a man that chooses to look as a woman, since, as a god he is obliged by none to have a specific appearance.

[5] "Severed limbs, a severed head, a hand detached from the arm (as in a fairy tale by Hauff), feet that dance by themselves (as in the novel by A. Schaeffer mentioned above) - all of these have something highly uncanny about them, especially when they are credited, as in the last instance, with independent activity" (Freud 150).

2. SOYINKA'S *THE BACCHAE OF EURIPIDES: A COMMUNION RITE*

2.1 Contextualising the Re-writing

Euripides's play has not stopped being a major source of inspiration for authors and playwrights who adapted the play's plot to fit to their own era's social reality. This is how the characters of Dionysus, Pentheus and Agave travel all the way from ancient Greece to Nigeria in the 1970's in Wole Soyinka's reworking of the Euripides's tragedy, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*[1]. The play is heavily based on the original and even maintains the language of the Euripidean play. Soyinka admits to have used the original tragedy's plot as well as its phrasing from the very beginning: "... I have not hesitated to borrow phrases and even lines from [the original text]" (xii). It is true that the plot of the adaptation is faithful to the original, treading on the same paths of return, vengeance and regicide, although, it has been infused with social issues contemporary to the playwright. However, he chooses to transfer the social problems of his own era in this play, removed from the context of modern day life to the environment of the ancient Greek tragedy. Soyinka's work is the product of the 1970's theatrical scene and the play belongs to his Plays of Exile, as Gibbs argues (112). The playwright's connection to ancient Greek culture and language was, as he himself admits, covered by a "twenty-year rust" ("Introduction" xii). However, he remains a connoisseur of the Greek culture both because of his education and his upbringing by a father who was a schoolteacher. This fact, as he admits in his interview for *The Nobel Prize* in 2005, gave him the "advantage of both western educational instruction in the school, as well as what you might call the process of imbibing the traditional processes of education instruction in me".

On the other hand, Soyinka was greatly influenced by the Nigerian War and the politically unsettled years of the 1960's and 1970's Nigeria. As Chinua Achebe describes in *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra,* the war was one that faced a great deal of publicity and there was a great wave of anti-war demonstrations on the part of the people and celebrities around the world.[2] Raising awareness regarding the Biafra issue, therefore, was dealt with in a spirit of collaboration from the beginning. Soyinka himself was imprisoned in his attempt to end the conflict of

Biafra. During his effort for an anti-war treatment of the Nigerian Independence, he was captured and incarcerated for his supposed participation in weapon interchange.[3] This personal investment of the playwright in the anti-war struggle, and the pains he went through to create a spirit of unified effort to end the fighting, could be the reason why Soyinka has transformed the Euripidean tragedy into *A Communion Rite*. The subtitle of the play is also its major difference from the original: it brings the community, instead of the individual, into focus.

What also deeply hurt Soyinka was that his country's independence was the threshold to a Civil War. People who had struggled together under the same oppressor failed to co-operate for their own freedom. Since the "late 1950s the British were rapidly accepting the inevitability of independence" and they started fleeing the country as fast and quietly as possible (Achebe 71). After the inability to form a stable democracy, a schism on who should maintain control over the country was formed, leading to the 15 January 1966 coup d'état by the military (90). The dichotomy had already started. On 27 May, Biafra was declared an independent country and the conflict with Nigeria was imminent (91).

> The Western Region, primarily the Catholic *Yoruba* tribe, tended to be the nation's traders whilst the Christian *Ibo* tribe - dominant in the Eastern Region - held most of Nigeria's civil service and public life positions. Independence allowed *the differences in Nigeria's peoples to come out into the open* and it was this, above all else, which laid the foundation for the civil war which broke out seven years later. (Draper 9; my emphasis)

The conflict was a great trauma for the Nigerians, who saw their Independence from the British colonisers turn into a Civil War with atrocious effects. The transformation of the stage into a miniature war zone is the generator of the *unheimlich* in Soyinka's work. It is especially represented by the Slave chorus, introduced by the playwright, to underline the uncanniness of the outsider and the possibility of their liberation from Pentheus' oppressive rituals taking place with the aid of the god in charge of freedom, Dionysus.

Therefore, the Euripidean play about the god who liberated the Asian slaves and proceeded to free the oppressed people in his birthplace acquires a new dimension in the hands of Soyinka. The adaptation works as a call for "balance and proportion" (*BECR* 13), for a communal unity. The Bacchae stress the significance of unison against the oppressive status quo, which Pentheus represents here as well, and

Dionysus leads the way towards a new "Rite". The grandson of Harmony comes to the rescue once more.

2.2 ''The gentle, jealous joy"

> "It is time to state my patrimony - even here in Thebes.
> I am the gentle, jealous joy. Vengeful and kind." (*BECR* 1)

In Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides; A Communion Rite* one can see the shift of the character of the god from the *θηλύμορφος ξένος* of Euripides to "a being of rugged strength, of a rugged beauty, not of effeminate prettiness" (1). Even from the first pages, the analogy created between him and the unheimlich is nearly overturned. As I will try to demonstrate, the god of Soyinka is not a blend of genders, but a mixture of cultures, Greek and Nigerian. His affiliation to the Yoruba god "Ogun, god of metals, creativity, the road, wine and war" (Soyinka, "Introduction" v) is an extension of the whole concept of adaptation: to make a point out of the marriage between two seemingly incompatible cultures, ancient Greek and Nigerian, by their successful connection. At the same time this unorthodox melange is an aspect of the unheimlich. Soyinka writes that

> ... primarily Dionysiac cults found suddenly fertile soil in Greece after centuries of near-complete domination by state-controlled Mysteries because of peasant movements in the wake of urban expansion ... Myth is part wish-fulfillment through hero projections. This means, naturally, that it is an outline for action, especially for groups within society who have experienced loss and deprivation. ("Introduction" vi-vii)

It is the advantage of the adaptation to renovate an old concept and produce an outcome that is frightening because it "goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud 124), but is not so anymore.

Dionysus in this play exists in order to bring together and make the "Communion Rite" possible, which, in return, will liberate the people of Thebes from the political oppression exercised by the king, Pentheus. The problem of Nigeria's unison and the formation of a regime that lacks oppression becomes a theme permeating the tragedy. The god returns to Thebes not only to avenge his mother's death anymore, but also to redeem the city from the chains by which Pentheus has been strangling it. He is there to fight exclusion and oppression, as he declares when

he enters the stage: "I am the gentle, jealous joy. Vengeful and kind. An essence that will not exclude, nor be excluded. If you are Man or Woman, I am Dionysos. Accept" (1). By announcing that he obeys to no gender rules he does not discard gender as unimportant. On the contrary, he manages to set himself beyond these concerns for the sake of communal liberation regardless of social constructs. Dionysus assumes control over the entire city, and is there to set things straight, not regarding the murder of his mother alone, but as it seems, all that is oppressive in the present government.

The play begins with the stage bearing "the bodies of crucified slaves," a procession and Semele's tomb "smoking slightly ... to one side ... [g]reen vines cling to its charred ruins" (1). Pentheus' authority and oppression is physical in Soyinka's text through the institution of slavery, which seems to be the doom of Thebes. This scenery of death and scorched earth is there to remind one of the African customs related to vengeance and regeneration just as much as Dionysus is related to both. According to Thompson, the family of a murder victim avenged their dead by setting the land of the murderer ablaze, so that the earth was "a fiery surface" (43).[4] Therefore, African tribes did not actively kill the person responsible for the loved one's loss, but rather they destroyed the land which would provide their nourishment. Nevertheless, Thompson argues that this act of revenge made the earth remain hot, in contrast to the much appreciated in African cultures skill to maintain the 'coolness' of the liquid element in times of crisis. This is not mere calmness, but, rather, a general capacity to attain a "mastery of self" (41) through calm strength,[5] similar to that of the self-composed Dionysus.

This eternal self-composition is what differentiates Dionysus in Soyinka's play from that of Euripides. Soyinka does not suggest a need for orgiastic outbreak in Thebes, for he does not dwell on the Bacchae and their 'immoral' behaviour. On the contrary, he underlines the fact that they are former slaves, who owe their freedom to Dionysus, and foreshadow the fate of slavery in Thebes. Dionysus is there to unearth the hidden again. Yet this time what is repressed is the concept of freedom from the sovereign power much more evidently than in Euripides, because it addresses the reification of the human body. This, however, does not seem as a violent *coup d'état*, but as the restoration of "a sense of balance and proportion" (13), as argued by Soyinka. In this play, Dionysus does not partake of both genders, but he offers freedom to both of them. This is achieved by the decapitation of the state that promotes slavery, both literal, as the play is a tribute to Nigerian independence, and

metaphorical, if Tiresias' demand to "tell the difference between ritual and reality" (9) is taken into consideration. There is an amount of difficulty in realising what is ritualistically needed, abiding to socially constructed norms that are to be replaced by the 'reality' of Dionysus.

This sense of the ritual is of major importance in the play, primarily because of the sense of community that it necessarily attributes to the plot. Soyinka admits to have chosen the *Bacchae* because it "is not a play of accommodation but of group challenge and conflict" ("Introduction" viii), one that arises from the friction between classes, and can only be tamed by Dionysus' ritual. In this sense, "[r]itual is ... a way of controlling emotion, while at the same time a way of expressing some degree of controlled emotion" (Bishop 73). The god is there to destroy the existing rituals of the Theban society, those of exclusion and chains represented by Pentheus, and establish his own, those of liberation from the manacles of slavery. These chains, therefore, are a metaphor for the ritual that binds the Thebans in the old state of Pentheus' oppression. In controlling the rituals, Pentheus controls the people's emotions.

Moreover, one should not forget the type of ritual discussed in Butler's *Gender Trouble*. She presents the idea of gender as one that is constantly re-established by the attendance to a series of rituals, which eventually form the idea of *performativity*. More specifically, according to her, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a *ritual*, which achieves its effects through its naturalization through the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (xv; my emphasis). Gender, therefore, as performed by the inhabitants of Thebes, was the ritual that imprisoned them in a life of slavery and restraint. Thus, Dionysus' intervention is essential to the disturbance of the ritual, which represses the individual and limits them to a specific series of actions. The god, though, will found a new one based on freedom and causes Pentheus' terror of Dionysus. The latter pinpoints the cause of the king's denial of the god, and it is fear: "But you do fear me. You fear my presence here might set you free" (*BECR* 65). Dionysus threatens his régime of truth by showing Thebes that disobedience to him would only mean the emancipation of the people and the creation of a new order of unison. This newly found freedom threatens the role of Pentheus in the play and Dionysus is there to subvert the policy of oppression that he represents, and uncover the hidden in every inhabitant of Thebes, even its austere king. There lies, therefore, the fear in the play.

2.3 "A man of chains"

> You Pentheus, because you are a man of chains. Have you uttered one phrase today that was not hyphenated by chains? You breath chains, talk chains, eat chains, dream chains, think chains. (*BECR* 65)

Pentheus is the voice of oppression in Soyinka as in Euripides. He is not simply the sovereign, who creates the law and expects everyone to follow his command, but he is also the man who produces chains, in the sense that he condones and exercises slavery. Most importantly, he is the center around which everything else is formed. As Dussel argues, "Power, domination, and the center are identical, above the colonies with other cultures, above slaves of other skin colours. The center is; the periphery is not. ... Being is; beings are what are seen and controlled" (6). Consequently, Pentheus is the Being, the one who controls and defines others, those in the shadows of the "periphery." The slaves and the Bacchae are defined by Pentheus, for they are what he is not and vice versa. His rite is one of oppression because it is based on the presupposition that the others are to stay within the frames of his definition as the head of the state, unable to escape the labels he creates for each of them.

The inescapability of the present rituals of Thebes is most exquisitely described by the participants, when they try to describe the ongoing festival in the *polis*, where flogging and human sacrifice are supposedly the means to its cleansing from the sins of the past year. During the rites, though, the prophet Tiresias is getting accidentally attacked by the people participating, a fault that the Third Flogger attributes to the "incantations" of the rite: "It's all that incantation. It soaks in your brain and you can't feel yourself anymore" (9). The king and head of the state regulates the régime of truth in Thebes, and therefore he cannot get carried away by his emotions. He needs to keep his temper to maintain the "rites." The one that Pentheus has kept alive so long, thus, is numbing, since it makes one unfeeling of themselves, they only feel the truth of the incantation, exactly like the mechanical way in which gender is performed. As Butler states, the performance of gender is but a series of endless repetitions: "As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane

and ritualized form of their legitimation" (178). Gender as 'social action' constitutes, in this case, a ritual, a repetition of events and behaviours that aid the society to form a solid idea of what is what. In the case of *The Bacchae of Euripides*, the repetition that everyone in Thebes obligatorily follows is the one dictated by Pentheus, which is oppressive to all because he is "a man of chains" (65).

The entire problem of the *polis* springs from its ruler's obsession with what he describes as "order and sanity":

> I shall have order! Let the city know at once that Pentheus is here to bring back order and sanity ... The city in uproar. Well, let everyone know I've returned to re-impose order. Order! And tell it to the women especially, those Promiscuous bearers of this new disease. (27)

The problem in the king's declaration is that the 'order' he is describing is the one that he has forced on all the people of his *polis*. While the original play was plagued by the notion of the lost mind, Soyinka's adaptation mostly focuses on the concept of the physicality of Pentheus control through the support of slavery. Once again, the subject of the ritual, transferred to the notion of the order, is the issue behind the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus. While the former insists on unyieldingly conserving the traditional values of the state, the latter breaks the chains created by Pentheus and trades them for a newly found liberation and ritual. Subsequently, what is discussed in Soyinka's play is not the complete disavowal of the rituals of a society, because they create social bonds. On the contrary, a new set of rites must be formed, based, this time, on the needs of the people, instead of the will of the ruler.

In order for Dionysus' rites to be established, therefore, the god does not aggressively oppose the volition of the sovereign. He opts for the unearthing of the hidden in Pentheus, which manages by nourishing his sense of rationality, pushing him to a delirium of *hubris* and an undignified end. "Reality / is your only safety. Continue to reject "illusion," he instructs (69) while he prepares Pentheus to get dressed as a Maenad and join them in the mountains. The scene that follows in Soyinka's play presents a drunken, an *entheos* Pentheus, getting dressed by the god, who has acquired complete control over the king. Thus, instead of the armour that the king has chosen to greet the Bacchae, Dionysus meticulously dresses him in pieces of Bacchic clothing. When Pentheus realises that his 'armour' is much lighter and softer than usual, Dionysus responds that: "It is the wine. It does create that effect" (72). Intoxicated or not, the king is ready to trust him completely, a sign that the god's plan

has worked. Dressed in the Bacchic attire, he is prepared for his last battle. The military leader becomes the cross-dressing transgressor who disrupts the order of the city and he no longer "located at the point of intersection of the discipline of the body and the control of the population" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 125). He has lost control over his and his people's bodies in the *polis*.

In surrendering the control upon which he so firmly clung just moments ago, Pentheus is getting the punishment designed by Dionysus. He will have his eyes cleared from the filter of rationality that kept him from understanding the truth about his rituals and their oppressiveness. It will not be long till he dances next to Dionysus in what he thinks is a war march, which he learnt from a Phrygian "drill-master" (78): it is in fact the dance that completes his transformation into a Bacchante. In fact, he confesses to have danced inside the palace when he was getting dressed: "Funny. Inside, I went this way with my head/ Then, that way - back, forward - back. It was/ Almost a kind of trance. I dreamed I stabbed/ A bull. A minotaur. Was that you?" (76). Suddenly, Pentheus can come into communion with the god by dancing to the rhythm and having hallucinations about killing a bull or a minotaur that he immediately assumes was Dionysus. What had been " 'locked away, inscrutable' " (Freud 133) for so long under Pentheus' rule is coming back to haunt him, before he loses his head.

In this scene in particular one can see that "something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret" that Freud was using to describe the *unheimlich* (133). Pentheus, who has been the centre that defines the periphery throughout the play, is now becoming a stranger himself, unrecognisable to the audience and hardly recognisable to himself. The *unheimlich* has started to become physically manifested in the face of the king and it will be completed with his decapitation by his mother.

2.4 "We are strangers"

> We are strangers but we know the meaning of madness. (*BECR* 37)

The agent of the *unheimlich* in the play is the Chorus, which, in this tragedy, is divided in two: the Chorus of the Bacchae, the liberated slaves, Dionysus' followers, and the Chorus of Slaves, the men and women of Thebes under Pentheus' rule. The former corresponds to the chorus chosen by Euripides in the original play, but the

latter is an invention that Soyinka added to the tragedy. The two choruses consist of different individuals who have, though, the common denominator of being the "constitutive outside" (S. Hall 3). They are what Pentheus is not, the people that suffer his oppression and are, thus, hidden in the shadows of exclusion. At the same time, they also consist the only way for the king to know who he is, through his opposition to them. The Bacchae, coming from the outside and being already free, appear to perplex the situation even further. Their only hope is their liberation by Dionysus, an act that stands for the hidden that "has come into the open" (Freud 132), the *unheimlich* in the tragedy. Being already a company of mixed groups, the two choruses confront Pentheus' obsession with racial and class purity, bringing them in direct opposition.

This is the point where rituals and their significance as the construction of slavery find their meaning. By being self-characterised as "strangers." The slaves show their proximity to the god rather than their ruler, who uses that word to describe Dionysus, and, therefore, their willingness to follow him and his established tenets. The Slave Leader states that they live like foreigners [*xénoi*] in their homeland because of their oppression by their king. This statement puts them in the position of the *unheimlich*, because they are the unfamiliar in the *polis*, and their liberation is what mortally frightens Pentheus. The breach of the ritual, of their common behaviour in the city is what he is mostly afraid of, with the consequences that it may have for his reign over them. Before Pentheus' entrance into the stage, the Slave Leader proclaims: "It is the hour we have long awaited. / What is hidden must some day come to light" (16). Those "hidden" beings are none other than the slaves of Thebes, and they threaten the established order of the *polis* with their emergence into freedom, which threatens the legitimacy of the state.

Similarly, the movement from the centre to the periphery, from the known to the unknown, from the *polis* to the forest acquires the sense of escape into a place of freedom, which was not unknown to the people of Nigeria at the time. According to Achebe, "When the Nigerians found out where the open markets were and started bombing them, the women moved their commercial activities into dense forests" (246). Like the Bacchae who sought refuge under the foliage of the trees for their mysteries, the Nigerian women avoided the bombings by moving their markets to the most secure place for them, the forest. The play returns to its modern associations by reminding the audience of the atrocities that took place during the war for the

Independence of an entire people. The ritual that is to be changed, therefore, means more than ceasing a specific reign and replacing it with a different, equally violent one. In the case of Soyinka's double chorus, the ritual is an independence that reaches a deeper sense of existence in the *polis*, one that does not entail escape plans and coverage, but acceptance within its limits.

Nevertheless, the real fear starts being palpable on stage after the two choruses become one. Exactly before Pentheus' murder, the two groups start to blend in a way that makes it impossible to distinguish one from the other. "[The Slaves] form, for this last part, a solid fanatic front with the followers of Dionysus" (79), becoming the "foreigner[s] who [look] like girl[s]" and they assume the effeminacy suggested by the god himself in the original play (*B* 352). Baker-White writes: "The gradual (then sudden) merging of these two choruses is the central dramatic action of Soyinka's adaptation. When the bacchante chorus joins the slave chorus in rhythmic incantation, the political potential of ritual is manifest most fully on stage"(384). Hence, the mixed Chorus that is formed is the proof of the new ritual that comes to life aiming for the destruction of the old regime. The already mixed entities unite to destroy Pentheus' idea of purity. "The Slaves and the Bacchantes should be as mixed as possible," Soyinka directs in his Introduction (xix). The two choruses, thus, create a new community of blended origins that will demolish Pentheus society of chains. The "ritualistic repetition" (Butler 186) of acts is broken and the play rapidly moves forward to the eventual formation of the new ritual.

In the last scene of *The Bacchae of Euripides,* the severed head of the murdered king is brought into Thebes "cradled in [his] mother's arms" (75), as Dionysus had foreseen. Proud for the extraordinary game she has in her arms, she is as loath to believe that she has murdered her son, as in Euripides's tragedy. However, what is different in Soyinka's adaptation is that the moment of recognition is surprisingly different: "*She moves closer until she is standing almost directly under it, looking up. She stiffens suddenly, her body shudders and she whirls round screaming*" (95). After her initial shock, Agave's reaction to the gruesome punishment that Dionysus chose for them is to unblinkingly accept the god's wrath. "In Euripides's version, the return of her sanity only makes things worse, but in Soyinka's she sees better because of her former insanity" (Bishop 75). Cadmus' exclamation "Why us?" is met with her "Why not?" (97). Her stoic manner conveys her readiness to accept the new rite that has set the others free. The rulers are not exempt from the new order that

punishes whomever needs punishing and liberates all regardless of class, race or gender. The bloodbath of a stage that is before the audience suddenly is transformed into a place of celebration, after Cadmus and Tiresias' dialogue:

> KADMOS Again blood Tiresias, nothing but blood.
>
> TIRESIAS *(feels his way nearer the fount. A spray hits him and he holds out a hand, catches some of the fluid and sniffs. Tastes it).*
>
> No. It's wine.
>
> *Slowly, dreamlike, they all move towards the fountain, cup their hands and drink.* (97)

The similarities between the appearance of wine and blood are obvious. However, Freud in *Totem and Taboo* cites the different kinds of relationships to which they lead. Blood relations create family members to whom one cannot deny connection and obey the system of hierarchy they create. Nevertheless, bonds created by wine after a sacrifice, where blood has been replaced by wine, form bonds of comradeship: "The ethical force of the public sacrificial meal rested upon very ancient ideas of the significance of eating and drinking together. Eating and drinking with a man was a symbol and a confirmation of fellowship and mutual social obligations" (156). Thus, the old rituals have found a way to introduce the new. The blood of the former oppressor of Thebes becomes the chalice for their unification, the means for "Justice! Restitution!" (82). Their liberation has been completed and Pentheus has, finally, served his purpose as a king by unifying his people. The mixed Chorus has achieved its goal to establish "a sense of balance and proportion" (13) and show that gender is but a ritual that needs to be modified in order to include everyone instead of excluding the outsiders, who evoke fear because of their alterity. Consequently, the *unheimlich*, when unleashed in Soyinka's play, is capable of creating a wholeness that exceeds the boundaries of gender and unifies what was once thought to be utterly incompatible.

2.5 Concluding remarks

Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* is an attempt to create a play that would communicate the horror of war and civil conflict as the playwright had experienced it during the 1960's and 1970's Nigeria. The independence from British occupation was followed by a series of administrations that destroyed the country's functioning system and led to a Civil War with thousands

of victims. As Chinua Achebe admits: "We should have known that freedom should be won, not given on a plate. Like the head of John the Baptist, this gift to Nigeria proved most unlucky" (76). Thus, Soyinka creates a play in which the Independence is actually won, fought for instead of granted and he puts in the heart of this struggle the need for unity of the people that were initially shunned from society and forced to slavery. Complete inclusion of the 'others' and the formation of a community that can withstand blows because of that is the focus of this play.

At the same time, the focus on the rite provides the reader with a view on the issue that could have otherwise been entirely overlooked. It is not simply the ruler of Thebes, Soyinka shows, who needs to change his "rituals," but also his people. The Slaves, the second Chorus in the play, managed to dethrone Pentheus and literally dismember his power over them exactly when they embraced the chorus of the Bacchae. Re-creating gender conception by the public, therefore, seems detrimental for this play. Full unity can only be achieved when boundaries are broken, frightening and *unheimlich* as this may seem, and disparate parts come together. The realisation that "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a *ritual*" (Butler xv; my emphasis) works as a means to consolidate a community struggling for its independence. "The responsibility for the ritual is thus transferred from the elite to the masses, who adopt Bacchus as their god and reject the "state religion" that demands their sacrifice" (Bishop 71). Change, therefore, is feasible when it is communally fought for, Soyinka suggests through this play. Dionysus, not effeminate anymore, like in Euripides, unearths the hidden in the oppressed Thebes, himself remaining a stranger, but this time enabling others to unity.

Notes

[1] The in-text citation for this play will appear in the initialism *'BECR'*.

[2] "Antiwar sentiment worldwide was reaching a peak. Bombarded constantly with war imagery through their television sets and newspapers, particularly pictures of babies and women perishing and starving, several individuals and international human rights agencies started mounting demonstrations in world capitals -London, Washington, Lisbon- against the war" (Achebe 185-186).

[3] " [He] had travelled to secessionist Biafra in an attempt to appeal to a cease-fire to the hostilities. He planned to set up an anti-war delegation made up of intellectuals, artists and writers from both sides of the conflict -and from around the world- to achieve his aim. When he returned to Nigeria the authorities arrested him and accused him of assisting Biafra in the purchase of weapons of war" (Achebe 147).

[4] "The moment that a murder has been committed the land is said to become "hot" and is believed to not be properly assuaged until warriors from the immediate patrilineage of the victim attack the premises of the murderer's ancestral home, driving off all occupants (who take refuge with their mother's parents), burning or destroying the house, crops, and animals, and quite symbolically, cutting down all the shade trees so that the land about the house becomes, in actuality, a "fiery surface" " (Thompson 43).

[5] "In other words, mastery of self enables a person to transcend time and elude preoccupation. He can concentrate or she can concentrate upon truly important matters of social balance and aesthetic substance, creative matters, full of motion and brilliance. Quite logically, such gifted men and women are, in some West and Central African cultures, compared in their coolness to the strong, moving, pure waters of the river" (Thompson 41).

3. MEE'S *THE BACCHAE 2.1*

3.1 The *Bacchae* Software

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the idea of an adaptation is revisited by the American playwright Charles L. Mee. Soyinka's play is a rewriting of the *Bacchae* that adheres to the original plot and the language that it manipulated to a large degree, using the exact English translation in many instances. On the contrary, the playwright of *The Bacchae 2.1* is utilising the original ancient Greek text in a more interventionist way. The liberties the playwright takes with the text derive from his insistence on the idea that "there is no such thing as an original play" (Mee, "About the (Re)Making Project"). The roles are simply recast and reused to convey new meanings, according to the era in which they are produced and the historical contexts that surround them. Mee creates plays that are in accordance to the era in which they are eventually performed, regardless of the original author's work, showing that even the ancient Greek tragedies where not original plays, since they were based on even more ancient mythological sources.

Subsequently, the characters that are formed in the new version of the *Bacchae* are not the same ones as in the original. Their existence, Mee argues, is the product of a different culture that both builds them and is built by them:

> I think of these appropriated texts as historical documents - as evidence of who and how we are and what we do. And I think of the characters who speak these texts as characters like the rest of us: people through whom the culture speaks, often without the speakers knowing it. (Mee, "About the (Re)Making Project")

The reciprocal formation between humans and culture is the centre around which the playwright's work revolves. There is little doubt that Mee's Dionysus and his Bacchae are entirely detached from those of Euripides exactly because, according to Mee, they are the by-products of epochs, societies and histories that are necessarily detached from each other. So was the case with Soyinka's text, who, however, employed much of the religiousness of ancient Greece mixed with Nigerian to form the idea of the

ritual. His years as a historian have left him with the world-view of a close observer; he does not comment on those observations, he simply includes them in his plays for the audience to find, to comment upon and to make sense out of them.[1]

This is the mindset behind his decision to use a Greek play as the base for his adaptation. He creates a new play out of something old, a thing that looks eerily similar to its ancient predecessor. This similarity to "what was once familiar" (Freud 151) and has become changed through the adaptation process renders the play *unheimlich*, as is the case for all adaptations. As Mee admits, the choice of the Greek plays is not random. On the contrary it is based on the idea that the core of the tragedy will be quintessentially problematic:

> That is to say, the Greeks take no easy problems,
> no little misunderstanding that is going to be resolved
> before the final commercial break at the top of the hour,
> no tragedy that will be resolved with good will,
> acceptance of a childhood hurt,
> and a little bit of healing (*Notes* 94-95).[2]

Indeed, Pentheus is facing no easily resolved problem. Dionysus reminds Thebes of crimes past, and Mee changes them to incorporate U.S.A. problems and historical traumas in the plot, turning the text into a monument of the culture and historical moment that has formed him and he has shaped in return.

The reciprocity of this relationship is in the heart of the problematisation of the play. The Euripidean play is transferred in the age of the 1990's America and the protagonists are updated, as the title of the play suggests. The numbers *2.1* demonstrate, in the language of programmers, the departure from a previous version and the creation of a new one that is both 'incompatible' with the old one, but also keeps referring to it.[3] The use of the software programming companies, however, of the Dewey Decimal Classification[4] is in itself an upgrade. Using an old and tried medium to accommodate modern needs, like Internet and software use, is what adaptation struggles to do. The age of the popularisation of the Internet has as a result the use of the idea of software update seeping in the realm of the arts. Thus, Mee uses it in the title in order to connote that the culture of the specific time is indispensible to any kind of artistic creation that belongs to it. The mixing of cultures which produces a completely different outcome is unavoidable. Most importantly, though, the playwright shows that the need for safe answers can never be fulfilled in a world

driven by irrationality. The play is an 'upgrade' of this conception of the world as able to be neatly categorised and dissected, which Mee sees as impossible to find in a world governed by gender fluidity and cultural blending.

3.2 The transvestite Dionysus

The god, in Mee's play, reassumes the gender fluidity he enjoyed in Euripides, after the loss of interest in gender he developed in Soyinka. In fact, the playwright clarifies from the very beginning that the appearance of Dionysus should be one that partakes of both genders, even calling him

> ...a transvestite in a white pleated linen skirt,
> combat boots,
> an orange silk blouse or tunic,
> a cut-off woman's nylon stocking on his head, knotted at the top,
> a gold cigarette holder
> five days' growth of beard... (Mee, *The Bacchae 2.1* 1).[5]

His appearance is one that visually shows his lack of specific gender. He has both a beard and he is wearing a skirt, a combination that stops him from looking anything like the definite being that Pentheus praises later. Dionysus is, once again, the "foreigner who looks like a girl" (*B* 53) who does not shy away from openly showing the hidden and he incorporates the idea of gender as a social construct.

The part of the unfamiliar in the play is represented by him as well as the Chorus. Yet, this is a method that Mee generally employs in his work, bringing to the forefront the people who would have been otherwise left behind, out of the stage and away from the public eye. Dionysus, therefore, is a typical character for Mee's plays. As his daughter, Erin Mee, argues when writing about her father's work: "He makes room for the marginalized, the rejected and the outsider" (86-87). In this sense, *The Bacchae 2.1* is the home for the stranger of all strangers. The god this time refrains from making clear the reason behind his return to his mother's birthplace, and he simply dances on stage while the strange band of the Bacchae appear one by one. Revenge is not, therefore, a central part of the plot any more, like Soyinka and unlike Euripides. The Dionysiac presence in this play includes the effort for inclusiveness, without the fear of losing individuality.

Moreover, in Mee's play, the character of the god is an instance of the fragmentation incorporated in it by the playwright. Giving life to a being that is itself an unorganised, blended figure that belongs nowhere and yet is relevant to every aspect of life in the *polis*, he proves the 'Pentheuses' of the world wrong. It is expected, then, that he would come to Thebes to establish a new outlook on life, and that he would exclaim: "When my happiness is given me/ life will be/ a nameless thing" (*TB2.1* 29). His suggestion for a happy life is an existence where names are irrelevant because one can be what one is. The messiness of existence and the beauty in mixtures is, according to Dionysus, the delight of humanity. No one, nothing, is ever pure, with the possibility to be fully categorised and put into boxes according to its ingredients. The reality of uncategorisability in human life is the lesson that Dionysus tries to teach Pentheus, who deliberately pushes himself and others to an order that is nearly inhumane. Euripides shows this obsessive behaviour by focusing on the hindrance of the women to worship the god, while Soyinka infuses the play with the idea of corporeal slavery.

At the same time, the god seems to be the mouthpiece of Judith Butler in the play. Apart from his gender fluid appearance, he is witnessed to talk about the fluidity of gender in the countries of the south: "Because these people - whom some might think are backwards people - know that gender and genitals are two entirely different things. And there are places in the world that I have seen where there are 8 different genders or more" (*TB2.1* 24). Spoken by a god that lacks definite gender himself, these words show his interest in gender as far as social function is concerned. He moves in the play, demonstrating that Pentheus' idea, shared in the society, of a life that revolves around one's gender is entirely conceited. Escaping classification, Dionysus does not simply prove the head of the State wrong. He also achieves the greater victory of showing that if a god, a being that stands higher than even the king, can assume a role completely gender free, then so can humans. In fact, he underlines Judith Butler's idea that:

> Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right. Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all (178).

Dionysus, therefore, pertains to that neglect of the 'acts' that eventually form gender and ignores the social norms that created it in the first place. He does not, however, actively oppose himself to the idea of gendered existence. His role in the play is, once again, to arouse suspicion rather than openly fight against oppression; he leaves this part to the Chorus.

However, his teaching is not a lull into a dream-like state of in-betweenness. On the contrary, what is inhuman and a threatening illusion is the idea that Pentheus poses: there is no tangible way to categorise the individuals of a society, all categorisation is doomed to fail because it is constructed. This is illustrated in the last scene of the play when, finding Pentheus brutally murdered by his mother, king Cadmus reassures himself saying: "Surely, this is a dream- only a dream" (67). The god's goal is disillusionment through the teaching that categories are falsely constructed when it comes to humans and he responds:

> These human beings:
> what unfathomable creatures.
> In the end,
> when they feel themselves suffocating,
>
> covered over finally in a gully filled with rubble,
> swallowed up by the earth,
> the thought rushes up unbidden:
>
> it's only a dream -
>
> this is the last
> hope
> we have within us. (67)

As a result, the god is the agent of disillusionment in this work. Like Euripides and Soyinka, Mee utilises the role of Dionysus as the 'Liberator.' Nevertheless, the prison from which the Thebans are now to be freed is that of their own perception. Pentheus as well as the audience are provided with the knowledge, despite all their efforts, their lives will never be mastered and put in order because this is a constructed idea itself. Mee, writing in the end of the twentieth century, understands that the fight between 'nature' and 'culture' is once again visible in the American society. The playwright

demonstrates that "by the end of the twentieth century, ‘‘culture’’ was steadily losing ground" (McClay 443) using the figure of Dionysus as the messenger of destruction of the orderly lives they thought they were living. Now, come Dionysus, the constructs of neatness are destroyed and so are the limits imposed by Pentheus.

3.3 Pentheus the Orderly

Besides Dionysus, the Theban king assumes a new identity. He is turned into a "white establishment male" who should be in direct opposition to "the chorus of women of color" (*TB2.1* 6). His neat and ordered appearance reflects the need he expresses for order, for discrete and recognisable boundaries and for a truth that is universal and coincides with his worldview. However, it is of great interest to mention the playwright's stage directions for the way Pentheus should be enacted:

> Much of what Pentheus says in the following scene could be spoken with deep anger and, later, *fear*. But I think it would be best to think of him as a man who considers himself intellectually superior and charming. His rage and fears are repressed ... Only occasionally, in a word or a phrase, is the dark side revealed - and then quickly covered by a smile or some other form of recovery (6; my emphasis).

Hence, the king is filled with repressed anger and terror for what he cannot understand or whatever escapes rational signification. Yet, this only creates an existence that lacks meaning even more profoundly, and the fear of change and precariousness resurfaces, groping around for some answers and a sense of order that is anything but helpful in clarifying the human condition. It is, therefore, no wonder that Dionysus made him so overwhelmingly uncomfortable, being the one that cannot be defined. His fear of Dionysus is based on the fact that all his theories about truth and beauty that stem from order and categorisation are destroyed once the god of chaos and disorder enters, showing everyone that there can be beauty and truth there.

Moreover, the god's mere existence is a stretch to Pentheus' conception of 'pleasure,' as he describes it to the two elders; "The pleasure of a well-ordered society that guarantees us peace in our homes and in our streets" (8). He derives gratification from a life that leaves no question marks and is completely figured out. In fact, this is

the only type of life depicted in art that he can enjoy. In a long list of the things that give him pleasure, Pentheus cites:

> ...elegance, precision, exactitude, discipline,... mathematics, ... the law, ... the game of whist, the deep and uniformly green quadrangles of Exeter and Andover, the Dow Theory, the traditional brown brogan for men... But more than this: the lucidity of Haydn, the satisfaction of a syllogism, the human suffering of Beethoven transmuted to the instruments of a symphony, the act of forethought in a game of chess or contract bridge, the invention of the wheel, the glass lens, the electric light, the cybernetics. (8)

Pentheus' list of indulgences is full of examples of precision and categorisation. They all point, in one way or another, towards the same view of nature as a messy, disorderly space that needs 'tidying up' by perfectionist humanity. Accuracy and categorisation are, thus, the primary criteria for the satisfaction of such as Pentheus. He needs to have a clarity that is derived from perfect order and he will get punished for the impossible expectations he sets for human beings. It is, though, a list of all things constructed, as well.

At the same time, Pentheus circulates rumours about what the women in the mountains do and what could happen to those that try to get close to them:

> And what do you suppose that the women are doing in the mountains?
> Do you know they tell stories of the husbands they have left behind, and
> what they
> would do to them if these men came out among them,
> how they would like to have the dead bodies of their fathers
> to hang them by the wrists with wires
> choke them, choke them
> till they come again and again. (*TB2.1* 11)

The king is ready to burden the women with acts of vengeance that they have not committed and with motives that are not stated directly by them. In this sense, he represents the part of the population that in the decade of the 1990's, when the play was written, tried to victimise the women that managed to stand out. According to Alison Yarrow, 1992 was called the Year of the Woman, featuring women that assumed theretofore man-dominated roles. Nevertheless, their victimisation and their promotion as the instigators of their own destruction is continued by the "emerging 24-hour news cycle - providing real-time, unremitting coverage of live and current

events - swiftly infiltrated households and shaped the American consciousness during and after the Persian Gulf War" (Yarrow). As a result, the constant bombardment of the public with information did not make the image of the female gender clearer. On the contrary, it muddled the waters even further perpetuating the notion that women who were heard of, were automatically at fault for every misfortune that befell them, "they were sluts, whores, trash, prudes, "erotomaniancs," sycophants, idiots, frauds, emasculators, nutcrackers and succubi" (Yarrow). Their innocence was irrelevant, their mere implication in an exceptional event was enough for them to become unforgivably extraordinary.

The insistence of the Bacchae to remain beyond classification is the source of the king's paralysing fear. As he confesses, "Do you think there haven't been times I've wanted to dress in lace panties to be taken by a gang of strong men?" (*TB2.1* 13). He is not a stranger to female desire: he recognises its existence. Nevertheless, he perceives it as a thing dirty and violent, thus perpetuating the male fantasy about being a woman. He insists on projecting his own perception of femininity on the Bacchae, believing that women crave male violence, not suffer it. The difference lies in its repression: "I prefer a world of light!" (*TB2.1* 13). There is an element of the *unheimlich* in Pentheus, then, a point of his own personality that is "frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar" (Freud 125). Being afraid of himself, the king cannot help but also be afraid of others, those who remind him who he hides inside posing the greatest threat. This fear of the self is inherent in the 1990s American society: "Underneath the prosperity of the 1990s ran a current of fear: the nation preoccupied itself with worries about terrorism, both foreign and domestic. On the Internet, conspiracy theories flourished as a means to explain an increasingly complex world" (Gillon 135). Hence, the need for rationalisation and plausible answers are a consequence of the technocratic regime that reigns in the era of the Internet. Unfortunately, it demands what the Bacchae oppose: discreteness, purity, neat categories and unwavering opinions. Pentheus, as their representative in the tragedy, finds himself literally torn by his decision to remain unyielding to his fear. The resistance towards disorder results only in his undoing into chaos. This is Mee's way of opposing the preoccupation of his era with answers that might be outrageous, yet they clothe everyday life with the comfort of control, superficial as it may be. Euripides, Soyinka and Mee create Pentheuses that incarnate the régime of truth in their *polis.* Mee, however, insists on Pentheus' obsessing with order, like Euripides

struggles with female freedom and male madness and Soyinka fights for bodily freedom.

3.4 Performing Chorus

As in the previous plays, the disorderly aspect of life is, of course, portrayed by the Chorus of the Bacchae. The followers of Dionysus are, in Mee's play, turned from the liberated slaves of Euripides and Soyinka, into artists. The playwright states that they should occupy themselves with unconventional forms of art. In fact they should be

> ...dancers, singers, operatic singers, players of musical instruments, Butoh performers, animal trainers, herders of peacocks or herons or possessed of other extraordinary and highly developed arts that they perform with such power and beauty as to break your heart with that alone. (*TB2.1* 1-2)

In other words they are performers of strange arts, the likes of which the audience is not accustomed to and might take a little more time to process their beauty and harmony on the stage. What is obvious in this rendering is that the chorus is a live pun. Influenced as he is by Max Ernst,[6] Mee utilises the same technique of the visual pun[7] to get his message across. The women are performers of both strange art and strange gender, one that belongs outside of the strict and neat categorisation of Pentheus' *polis* and throws it out of balance, sharing the lack of purity of Soyinka's choruses.

As a consequence, the peculiar forms of art that they engage with are the means of establishing their independence from oppressive cultural norms that regulate the expression of feelings and personal aesthetics. Their art, already a blend of different art forms, underlines their inability to be put into already existing categories, simply because they have invented their own. The conscious choice of their 'performance' shows the relation between action and gender. As Butler states,

> Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed ... There is no gender

> identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expression" that are said to be its results (33).

Thus, the Bacchae are not defined by their performances, but rather they define them, consciously adopting a form of art that expresses their *doing* their gender. Therefore, they are agents of their gender, partaking in, or more accurately abstaining from, a circle of action that could reverse this identification. They refuse to be defined by them and insist on expressing themselves, despite the consequent marginalisation.

Nevertheless, the literal and metaphorical 'performers' we watch on stage are the inhabitants of an equally strange land. After king Pentheus is dressed and sent away to spy on the Bacchae by Dionysus, he enters "the land of Cockaigne" (43), the place where the Bacchae live. However, this land which is in itself a delirium of unrecognisability is inhabited by the women who:

> ... lie about.
> These are the Bacchae still, but now transformed.
> This is not a world of women;
> it is a world of particular women.
> It does not represent women;
> it presents several unique women
> who do not stand for anyone else.
> It is not a utopia,
> an idyllic, cooperative, communal female world.
> It is a *strange world* (43; my emphasis).

This "strange world" is the land of the *unheimlich*. By entering the peculiar, the unique and the unfamiliar, the women make a point; they are frightening because they are unprecedented, but that does not negate their existence. As the inhabitants of the land of strangeness, they have the right, the obligation even, to be as distant from the world of Pentheus' strict categories as possible. What their strange artistic occupation showed in the beginning, is now visually represented in "the land of Cockaigne" (43); they exist to perform their 'strangeness' despite social opposition. In what Erin Mee describes as typical of her father's writing, they are the " 'Brechtian' reversals - familiar things made strange" (85). Women, the most common and predictable beings in Pentheus' world, have become the residents of the land of indecency, impropriety and unlimited freedom of expression. They are rendered the *unheimlich* of the tragedy.

Mee's focus, though, is on a very specific aspect of their existence. He makes it perfectly clear that these Bacchic beings "do not stand for anyone else" (43). In fact, the strange world they live in is the aftermath of their uniqueness. Exceptional as they are, with no previous referent to make them more familiar to Pentheus and the audience, they acquire a sense of the *unheimlich*. However, as Freud states, "All that one can say is that what is novel may well prove frightening and uncanny; some things that are novel are indeed frightening, but by no means all" (125). So what makes the women of the Chorus a part of the *unheimlich* is that they affect the audience by being the performers of a gender that is "unknown and unfamiliar" (125). There is no sense of rules in their 'performance' and neither is there the responsibility to stay faithful to one identity throughout the play in order to make a point through symbolism. They are, each one of them, themselves, no other meanings attached to them, a point that is itself a symbolism. If they are there to only symbolise themselves, they automatically become agents of individuality and difference. According to Erin Mee:

> At this moment, there is room for *outrageous, unusual* people to have their say and perform their acts. People who have had no place in the conventional theatre, people who have been excluded from the mainstream, are put onstage, given a platform from which to speak ... *He makes room for the marginalized, the rejected and the outsider* (86-87; my emphasis).

Consequently, by transforming the stage from a space of elitist symbolism to a locus of inclusion for those who do not belong in the mainstream, conventional society, Mee partakes of the liberating nature of Dionysus.

The Bacchae are, indeed, novel and frightening because challenge Pentheus' repression. They are the live proof that life can exist and be as beautiful and frightening as Pentheus' is sterilised and unachievable, because it denies the unpredictability of humanity. As the playwright admits, his work is not "... too neat, too finished, too presentable ... That feels good to [him]. It feels like [his] life. It feels like the world" ("What I Like"). The Chorus, trying to frighten Pentheus into admitting who he is, talk about their 'performance'. The Cook says:

> this comes from a deeper place
> this comes from my chromosomes, my cells
> my synaptic gaps
> from a place inaccessible to language

> to reason or explanation
> a place so deep,
> so inexplicable
> so irresistable [*sic*]
> it takes us and deploys us however it will (*TB2.1* 50).

The strangeness of gender and her unwillingness to conform to what Pentheus' oppressive regime has established about it summarise the presence of the *unheimlich* in the play. She describes her desire as something that comes from a "deep" place, and has "no reason or explanation" and, for this reason, is completely opposite to Pentheus' "world of light" (*TB2.1* 13). Thus, the Bacchae embody the *unheimlich* by embracing the darkness and the messiness of their lives and, then, demonstrating the falseness of the clarity of categorisation. The female body and desire that "was once well known and had long been familiar" returns radically changed to show the constructedness of the idea of gender, which invokes fear to the leader of Thebes. Fluidity threatens the idea of classification, like darkness threatens the light. As the Euripidean Dionysus explains, "The night has solemnity ... You can find immorality by daylight, too" (57). In the darkness, where strange things lurk, nothing can be clearly defined, like Pentheus needs things to be. The nocturnal Bacchae frighten him because they can find the "solemnity" in darkness, they need no explanation for their condition.

In this sense, the worshippers of Dionysus are once again 'strangers.' In fact, this is the playwright's intention, too, according to the stage directions in the beginning of the play: "These women should be foreign; they bring something profoundly different, alien into the world of the piece - deep passions from origins unknown to the world of the play" (*TB2.1* 2). They are *xénes* (Freud 125), strangers, like Dionysus is in Euripides's *Bacchae*, whose existence uncovers what is hidden in the city of Thebes; the need for freedom of expression, for an existence not weighed down by the restrains of society. They create the "new vocabulary" that Butler suggests is important to talk about the restrictions of gender:

> Indeed, gender would be a kind of cultural/corporeal action that requires a new vocabulary that institutes and proliferates present participles of various kinds, resignifiable and expansive categories that resist both the binary and the substantializing grammatical restrictions of gender. (143)

These performers change the vocabulary used for them. They become something new, that creates a fear of the unknown, for they upset the familiar social norms. The gender they practice renders them peculiar, ergo *unheimlich*. But they also become the agents of change and individuality.

3.5 Concluding remarks

The Bacchae 2.1 is a play that deeply adheres to the idea Charles Mee has tried to create for tragedy and its contemporary adaptation. His characters are not metaphors for types of life; they are life itself. They are "people through whom the culture speaks, often without the speakers knowing it" ("About the (Re)Making Project"). Therefore, Dionysus, Pentheus and the Bacchae are not simply characters that stand for something in the society they are portrayed in, but rather the actual agents of this culture whose products and producers they simultaneously are. In his play, Mee uncovers the imperfection of everyday life, and through this the validity of an experience that does not share the finesse and lustre of the life that the status quo promotes. The humans and their world is the centre of attention for him, as he states:

> then theatre is the art form, par excellence,
> in which we discover what it is to be human
> and what it is possible for humans to be. (*Notes* 89)

Endless possibility and freedom of expression is key for the creation of Euripides's *Bacchae.* The use of the Internet and the easiness with which it provides often dubious answers to all the difficult, messy parts of our lives, is of great importance for the play since it gives the title to the play, that is now the updated version of the Euripidean *Bacchae*.

Thus, the women, who were liberated from the insides of the house and let loose to be seen and heard of in the *polis* in the original tragedy, are now the destructors of the old order of things that repressed the inhabitants of Thebes by making them believe that categorisation is their only choice. The women are, in Mee's play, not only heard and seen, but they also carry their desire on stage to be obligatorily devoured by the audience, who are made to look at them. Whereas Euripides's tragedy is focused on the release of the women in the *polis* and, therefore, their acknowledgement in it, Mee forms a play of "obscene discomfort" (Bacalzo).

This results in a play that is deeply disturbing, for it feels terribly close to real life, where nothing makes sense, yet one fights for control throughout his/her life. Mee proposes a world where control is deemed unachievable and social constructs, like gender and its performance, are disrupted.

This world does not provide the audience with the comfort of the establishment of a new order by the end of it, like Soyinka's play does. It ends with the scene of Agave's realisation of her crime, but the god's further punishment of the house of Cadmus is stalled. Instead, the punishment of the mortals is that they never learn. They insist that anything bad that happens to them is nothing but a dream and they only need to face it as such. As a result, responsibility and the horrible events of the past are discarded as a nightmare that cannot harm them, because it does not make sense. As Freud proposes, even though the work of a psychoanalyst is far from the analysis of aesthetics, he feels the need to engage in the discussion of the type of aesthetics that arouse "feelings of repulsion and distress," that are frequently manifested in the psyche, yet seldom talked about (123). Dionysus is there to remind the audience that incomprehensibility is an indispensible part of their lives and that a new order cannot be created when everyone lives in the fantasy of a neat and orderly universe. The only way to wake up from this conceited fantasy is to embrace uniqueness and treat the fearful fluidity as a mere consequence of being alive.

Notes

[1] "Historians pick up documents from the time they live in, they quote sources, they quote documents, they insert into their texts unedited pieces of evidence of the real world, and I'm still thinking in that mode. So I thought, rather than process something as a writer - which is to say run it through my sensibilities so that it comes out differently - how would it be if I just took it unedited - raw- from the world" (E. Mee 87-88).

[2] This text has been published in fragmented form within Erin Mee's interview of her father. The fragmentation of its form complies with the playwright's attempt to show the dispersed nature of the sources of his inspiration and it works as a thread that ties the interview, where he discusses his artistic position, with an actual sample of his artistic work.

[3] "Given a version number MAJOR.MINOR.PATCH, increment the:

MAJOR version then you make incompatible API changes,

MINOR version when you add functionality in a backwards-compatible manner, and

PATCH version when you make backwards-compatible bug fixes.

Additional labels for pre-release and build metadata are available as extensions to the MAJOR.MINOR.PATCH format" (Preston-Werner).

[4] " Based on W.T. Harris' classification for the St. Louis Public Library, the Dewey system was first formulated by the American librarian Melvil Dewey in 1873 for application in the Amherst College Library. It was first published in 1876, and the 20th edition of the system had been published by the late 20th century." (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica)

[5] From this point onwards Mee's *The Bacchae 2.1* will be referred to as *TB2.1*.

[6] "The Bacchae 2.1 [*sic*] was composed in the way that Max Ernst made his Fatagaga pieces at the end of World War I" (*TB2.1* 68).

[7] "A verbal pun is formed when a single sound can have more than one meaning; a visual pun is formed when a single shape can be seen as a literal representation of more than one thing" (Stokes 200).

CONCLUSION

As I have tried to demonstrate, gender as a fluid spectrum instead of an unchanging essence of the individual's identity produces fear to the status quo. The original text of the *Bacchae*, as well as the two twentieth century adaptations by Wole Soyinka and Charles L. Mee that were investigated support the previous statement. In the case of Euripides's tragedy, fear grasps Pentheus after the release of the Theban women from the domestic sphere. Their itinerary from the limited and controlled space of the hearth, which translates into the conventional idea of womanhood, to the open space of the forest where they join the liberated Bacchae shows the passage from 'captivity' to freedom. The latter shutters Pentheus' conception of gender and the social norms connected to it, exactly because this new conception includes both the familiar, that is the women of his *polis,* and the unfamiliar in the form of their novel role in it. On the other hand, the Pentheus that Soyinka decides to depict in his adaptation is threatened by the idea of the release of his slaves. The king's exercise of slavery brings together the two choruses of the play, creating a new form of the 'unfamiliar'. The new 'Communion Rite' established by the two choruses is the *unheimlich*, since it entails the prioritisation of the communal interest rather than the personal gain, shaping a Thebes that is both the same city and a novel aspect of it, which allows the Thebans to be liberated, like the playwright wishes for his compatriots to be. Lastly, Mee focuses on his Chorus of performers to showcase his insistence on the lack of categorisation in life. His Bacchae are actual performers and also performers of gender, showing the order-obsessed Pentheus that classification is unmanageable when applied to the human condition.

Through the investigation of these texts, it is obvious that the breach of the social norms that regulate gender and its *performance*, as Butler describes it, is, eventually the source of terror of the new and unprecedented. Lack of conformity to the social norms, therefore, is fearsome because it introduces the unknown in a sphere were the feeling of safety is maintained by their strict regulation. Seeing gender as changeable and fluid threatens the stability of the state, which has based its entire existence on gender polarisation of and has, subsequently, formulated roles that correspond to genders instead of individuals. However, when this duality is proven

wrong, the world turns into a terrifying place for the fanatics of order, represented by Pentheus in all three plays. Suddenly, everything they knew as stable and certain is destroyed and their worldview is invalidated. For, then, a new world arises in which gender is proven to be a mere construct and all those parametres that were drawn by the sharp opposition between the two genders suddenly vanish. Thus, the status quo is rendered powerless to control the individual on all levels.

Therefore, the fear of extinction by something 'unknown and unfamiliar' (Freud 125) is omnipresent and it stems from the realisation that gender is not what was known to be until that moment. The peculiarity of the *other*, those that inhabit the periphery, is not meant to spill into the centre, for fear that they might mar the constructed purity of identity. What is being contested in all three of these tragedies is the nature of identity and the fact that it constantly is constructed and reconstructed as the individual inhabits a world ruled by social conventions. The loss of these norms that determine individual behaviour releases havoc in the *polis*, as the three texts prove, and creates an ambiance of uncertainty because of the rapid change. The feeling of the *unheimlich* is evoked by the sudden realisation that gender has stopped being performed in the same way as in the past. There is a considerable amount of unresolved fear because Pentheus denies to acknowledge a different approach to gender from the one he forms and blindly follows. The Bacchae might not seem dreadful to someone who automatically accepts their existence as equally valid to the already accepted identities in the *polis*, and who does not to insist on oppressive limitations. The "mad frenzy" (*B* 45) to which the women are led by the god of liberation is the inevitable aftermath of their being the hidden in their *polis* and their liberation promises a radical social reformation. However, what makes them and the Bacchae even more terrible is their gender, is the fact that they stop inhabiting the house; instead they enter the public sphere, making themselves visible, open to comments and able to effect change on its current structure. Thebes will never be the same after that. The *other* serves as a catalyst for social change towards inclusion, and gender, terrifying at the beginning, unites people instead of dividing them, forming a new order based on broad-spectrum acceptance. .

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

«Αποτελεί το να είσαι γυναίκα ένα "φυσικό γεγονός" ή μια πολιτιστική επιτέλεση», αναρωτιέται η Τζούντιθ Μπάτλερ στο βιβλίο της *Gender Trouble.* Η θεωρητικός συνδυάζει δύο έννοιες σε αυτή της τη δήλωση: τη θηλυκότητα ως βιολογικό γεγονός με την αντίληψή της ως επιτέλεση της συμμόρφωσης σε κοινωνικά κατασκευασμένες συμβάσεις. Για εκείνη, η υπακοή σε αυτούς τους κανόνες καταλήγει στην επανάληψη πράξεων που κατασκευάζουν, με τη σειρά τους, την ιδέα του φύλου, καθώς έχουν οριστεί ως πάγιες. Επομένως, όντας μια «πράξη», οι κοινωνικοί κανόνες εμποτίζονται με την έννοια της θεατρικότητας. Η «πράξη», σε αντίθεση με την απαγγελία αποτελεί το στοιχείο που ο Αριστοτέλης θεωρεί αναπόσπαστο για την τραγωδία, εκείνο που τη διαφοροποιεί από τα υπόλοιπα λογοτεχνικά είδη. Ωστόσο, παραμένει η ερώτηση του τί ακολουθεί τη ρήξη αυτής της «τελετουργικής επανάληψης» των ρόλων των φύλων, τα οποία αναπόφευκτα μετατρέπονται σε κάτι μη οικείο και παράξενο. Σύμφωνα με τον Sigmund Freud, όμως, αυτά είναι οι κύριες πηγές του τύπου του φόβου στον οποίο αναφέρεται ως *ανοίκειο*, το συναίσθημα της αμφιβολίας που σχηματίζεται στη θέα ενός πρώην οικείου αντικειμένου, προσώπου, ή κατάστασης που είναι ταυτόχρονα παρόμοιο με και διαφορετικό από αυτό που ήταν κάποτε.

Εξερευνώντας την αρχαία τραγωδία του Ευριπίδη *Βάκχες* και δύο σύγχρονες διασκευές της, το *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* του Wole Soyinka και το *The Bacchae 2.1* του Charles L. Mee, αυτή η διατριβή θα τολμήσει να απαντήσει στην ερώτηση του πώς το φύλο μπορεί να γίνει η πηγή του *ανοικείου*. Ο Πενθέας, ο Θηβαίος βασιλιάς που παράγει και εφαρμόζει το νόμο στην πόλη, καταπιέζει το λαό του υποδουλώνοντάς τον, τόσο μεταφορικά όσο και κυριολεκτικά, όπως στην περίπτωση του Soyinka. Ο Διόνυσος, ο θεός του κρασιού, εισέρχεται στο χώρο του τραγικού για να το μεταμορφώσει από ένα μέρος ορίων σε ένα χώρο απελευθέρωσης. Εισάγοντας τις λάτρεις του -βάρβαρες Ασιάτισσες ονόματι Βάκχες- απελευθερώνει στο κέντρο της πόλεως αυτό που ήταν «κρυμμένο» στα ενδόμυχά της, αναγκάζοντας έτσι τους κατοίκους της, και συγκεκριμένα το βασιλιά της, να γίνουν μάρτυρες του βίαιου αντίκτυπου της καταπίεσής του. Οι Βάκχες, που ενσαρκώνουν το *ανοίκειο* στα τρία έργα με την αντίστασή τους στη συμβατική επιτέλεση του

φύλου, υπάρχουν για να καταδεικνύουν τις φρικτές συνέπειες της καταπίεσης. Έχοντας παραμείνει κρυμμένες, σύμφωνα με τις διαταγές του βασιλιά, καλωσορίζουν τον ελαφρώς ψυχικά ασταθή Πενθέα και βοηθούν τη μητέρα του να τον σκίσει σε κομμάτια. Θα προσπαθήσω να αποδείξω ότι οι *ανοίκειες* γυναίκες, καταπιεσμένες και για πολύ καιρό περιθωριοποιημένες, απαιτούν την καταστροφή του παλιού καθεστώτος και την ανάδειξη μίας νέας τάξεως γενικής αρμονικής αποδοχής.

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