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ΗΛΕΚΤΡΥΩΝΗ

Divine reverence in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Bacchae*.

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Abstract

Historically humans have demonstrated a persistent attraction to the "unknown", that which they cannot understand or attribute to natural causes. This view led to the "birth" of supernatural entities to which are attributed not only natural phenomena but everything one lacks or enjoys in comparison with others. Concequently, in the Ancient Greek consciousness, the lightning was not due to the collision of the clouds, but to Jupiter. The plague that wiped out a multitude of Achaeans in Phrygia resides in the wrath of Apollo. In the context of explaining a phenomenon, a boon or an unfortunate event, therefore, man invents the concept of "god" (etym. probably from v. *θέω* or

τίθημι, according to Babiniotis). The existence of deities is evident in cult traditions that predate, by far, even ancient Greek. Sometimes beneficial, in a sense such, as the gods of Olympus and sometimes "dark" and eerie like Lamia. The veneration of the divine—often oscillating between profound reverence and an existential sense of horror—emerges as a direct corollary of the human fascination with the indeterminate. This ontological tension is rooted in the perceived disparity between mortal limitations and the absolute nature of the gods, who are viewed as possessing an inexhaustible abundance of both material goods and moral virtues. Consequently, the gods are not merely objects of admiration but serve as transcendent benchmarks of an excellence that, while aesthetically and ethically alluring, remains inherently inaccessible and potentially threatening to the human condition. Since we are referring to the term "morality" it is necessary, before delving into our subject, to clarify the correlation of the concept with the religious system in question.

In the multitude of views expressed on the relationship between religion and ethics, I single out as the most lucid account that of Lloyd-Jones, according to whom the understanding of the morals of a culture must be sought within the religious framework from which they derive. Anyone who questions the religiosity of the ancient Greek polytheistic system because its mechanisms do not resemble those of other monotheistic religions, such as Christianity, is far from approaching what is at stake.[1] The existence of divine intervention could not be absent from the works of Ancient Greek Literature, especially Drama. The aim of this paper is to examine the ways and patterns through which respect for the divine is manifested in three specific tragedies: *Hippolytus*, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Bacchae* of Euripides, as well as the similarities and differences among the plays in terms of how this respect is highlighted.

Key Words: Euripides, Hippolytus, Iphigenia, Aulis, Bacchae, drama, tragedy, divine, reverence.

[1] [1] LLoyd-Jones (2001) 456.

Hippolytus

Hippolytus is a tragedy by Euripides which was taught in 428 BC and earned the poet the first place. Just three years before, the Peloponnesian War had broken out while the plague reaped the crowds. It is a tragedy that strongly reflects the socio-political concerns of the citizen-spectator of the time, combined with the political and philosophical pursuits of the poet. Within the context of exploring the ways in which reverence for the divine is manifested in *Hippolytus*, it is worth clarifying that a religious system such as that of the ancient Greeks in no way allows complete devotion to a single god. Detachment from all and the avoidance of developing a special mystical relationship with a single god is automatically the greatest sign of respect towards them.

Right from the outset of the play, the young Hippolytus is shown praying to Artemis, hoping to end his life exactly as he began it - with this unadulterated and intimate spiritual connection with the goddess. A wish which is fulfilled through a circular figure: even at the moment of his death he enjoys this mutual respect, maintaining the privilege of direct and unmediated contact that includes conversation as well as smell[2] (*ὦ θεῖον ὀσμῆς πνεῦμα· καὶ γὰρ ἐν κακοῖς ὢν ἠισθόμην σου κἀνεκουφίσθην δέμας. ἔστ' ἐν τόποισι τοισίδ' Ἄρτεμις θεά*).[3] Hippolytus is a pious and pure young man who abhors marriage and love. Purity is a central motif in *Hippolytus*. However, the term *ἁγνός* is differentiated in the play depending on the broader conceptual context within which it fits. As Segal aptly points out: "with this interest in overlapping word meanings that he shares with the Sophists, Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Socrates, Euripides exploits various notions of purity to explore more deeply the moral dilemmas he raises and the complexity of our moral judgments in general". In verse 102 (*πρόσωθεν αὐτὴν ἁγνὸς ὢν ἀσπάζομαι*) Hippolytus alludes to a transcendent kind of purity which he has just elaborated metaphorically and symbolically when he speaks of an *ἀκήρατον*

[2] Gould (2018) 385.
[3] Eur. Hipp. 1391 – 1394.

λειμῶνα from which he offers his crown to the goddess. The idea of such a kind of purity is certainly something familiar to us from Christianity; but it is unintelligible to an audience for whom purity as a concept carries a cultic and religious significance.[4]

This choice would be, if anything, respectable today, but not in ancient Greece.[5] It is a drama that approximates the fine line between piety and irreverence of a polytheistic religious system. Although there are references to Hippolytus' rejection of sexuality early in the Prologue, Euripides does not precisely state the reasons for this rejection. It is the "subtle economy of art" that Freud speaks of. As the poet identifies the motives which impel the pious young man to the renunce love "he forces us to fill them in; he engages our intellectual activity, deflects it from critical reflection, and keeps us firmly identified with the hero. A clumsy man in his place would give conscious expression to all that he wishes to reveal to us, and would thus be confronted with our cool and unbridled intelligence, which would preclude any deepening of illusion"[6].

In *Hippolytus*, reverence is clearly shown through three prayers. Just as clearly as the hero's demise becomes increasingly evident. The "unanswered" prayer of the servant in front of the statue of Aphrodite, asking the goddess to pretend not to listen, reinforces the aforementioned view (*ἡμεῖς δε, τοὺς νέους γὰρ οὐ μιμητέον φρονοῦντας οὕτως, ὡς πρέπει δούλοις λέγειν. Προσευξόμεσθα τοῖσι σοῖς ἀγάλμασιν, Δέσποινα Κύπρι*).[7] The servant prays to Aphrodite on behalf of Hippolytus and concludes his prayer with the following verses: ("the immortal wise are considered wiser than mortals"). This may remind us that a key pursuit of the tragedy is wisdom, not the existence or powers of the gods.[8] In verses 522 - 523, the nurse invokes Cypris when she resorts to seeking the ingredients for the creation of the love potion ("*μόνον σύ μοι, δέσποινα ποντία Κύπρι, Συνεργὸς εἴης*")[9]. The prayers in Euripides' *Hippolytus* are a vital part of the tragedy since they have often even led to the questioning of the paternity of these verses. Features of the structure of Theseus' prayer are also found in Euripides' *Rhesus*. But what we will focus on are the words with which the Chorus concludes ("*φεῦ φεῦ, τῶν*

[4] Segal (1970) 279.

[5] purity as part of the ritual is linked to the entrance of the believer into the sacred place of worship, in order to avoid contamination of the place by any kind of physical pollution. The dimension of purity which Hippolytus introduces is unknown to the Athenian public until Hellenistic times.See.Barrett (1964) 172.

[6] Freud (1916) 315.

[7] Eur. Hipp. 114 – 117.

[8] Mikalson (1989) 81 – 98.

[9] Eur. Hipp. 522 – 523.

ἐμῶν τυράννων δόμους. ὦ δαῖμον, εἴ πως ἔστι, μὴ σφήλεις δόμους, αἰτουμένης δὲ κλῦθί μου· πρὸς γάρ τινος οἰωνὸν ὥστε μάντις εἰσορῶ κακόν)[10]. The appeal to the demon refers to a vague, unspecified deity - something the ancient Greeks were not accustomed to - and therefore prayers and supplications could not reach it and be answered.

Already from the Prologue and Aphrodite's monologue, Hippolytus' disrespect for her is emphasized since the hero honours Artemis more by offering her a wreath as a sign of respect. He transgresses the boundaries when he throws off the old servant and Cypris herself, resulting in conflict with her. The poet's choice to narrate the circumstances and the development of the myth in the Prologue through the mouth of a god who, appearing *ἀπό μηχανῆς*[11] , either arbitrarily determines the course of the case as in *Hippolytus* or predicts the future. Does this, however, come into conflict with the prevailing view of the fifth century and the accusations of atheism? Probably not, considering that the poet's last tragedy, *Bacchae*, is a deeply religious work featuring Dionysus himself as the protagonist, where divine power acts as the constitutive principle governing the balance of the world. The Chorus describes Aphrodite's plan of punishment, pointing out the situation in which Phaedra, wife of Hippolytus' father, Theseus, and foster mother of Hippolytus, has found herself. As the Chorus characteristically states in the first *antistrophe*, Phaedra remains shut up in her chamber, seeking death by starvation because of the amorous frustration of Hippolytus' failure to respond to her love ("*κρυπτῶι πάθει θανάτου θέλουσαν κέλσαι ποτὶ τέρμα δύστανον"*)[12]. Euripides' ingenuity is made even more evident by a staging device when he presents Phaedra on stage bedridden and fully collapsed. Aphrodite therefore uses as an instrument of revenge against Hippolytus the sinful love she has instilled for him in Phaedra. The need for reverence is even better seen through Phaedra's note to Theseus.[13] Any argument of Hippolytus, however sincere, would in no way outweigh the words of the deceased. Theseus "must" respect his wife's words and believe the accusations of

[10]Eur. Hipp. 870 – 873

[11] according to Nietzsche, Euripides' introduction of the *ἀπό μηχανῆς* θεοῦ into tragedy destroys tragedy, since it downgrades the Chorus, the predominantly Dionysian element of the genre, thus negating the tragic nature of the human impasse, the essence of tragedy.

[12] Eur. Hipp. 139 – 140.

[13] in Euripides' surviving fragmentary tragedy, *Ιππόλυτος Καλυπτόμενος*, Phaedra herself confesses her love to Hippolytus. Much concern has been raised by the line *"τί δ', ἢν λυθείς με διαβάλῃς, παθεῖν σε δεῖ"*, which has led many scholars to speak of the extraction of an oath from Hippolytus by Phaedra herself. For an oath to *Ιππόλυτος Καλυπτόμενος* see. Hutchinson (2004) 22.

rape, otherwise his act would constitute irreverence toward the gods.[14] Even if by his attitude he achieves what he was seemingly avoiding. After Phaedra's suicide, Theseus, in his meeting with Hippolytus, hurls abusive insults at the latter, even questioning his piety ('So you are a man of superiority, who keeps company with the gods?'). The culmination of the discussion of divine reverence in *Hippolytus* is the oath. When he is informed of the Phaedra's forbidden love, the young man takes a vow of silence, never to reveal anything to anyone, explicitly stating that he will not reveal the truth to Theseus, even citing his godliness.

It is not unlikely, however, that it was his own piety that led him to waver between revealing the unholy secret and keeping his oath. Hippolytus, despite his oath not to reveal Phaedra's love, he claims that it was not his mind, but his tongue that swore the oath. A statement which in itself constitutes disrespect. In a fit of rage Hippolytus nullifies the importance of womanhood, wishing for the perpetuation of the human race without their participation. Hippolytus is not the only one to swear an oath, the Chorus does so likewise. In verses 713 - 714 the women of the Chorus are shown swearing to Artemis that they will not reveal the secret of Phaedra ("*ὄμνυμι σεμνὴν Ἄρτεμιν, Διὸς κόρην, μηδὲν κακῶν σῶν ἐς φάος δείξειν ποτέ"*)[15]. The Coryphaeus of the Chorus, as the representative of Aphrodite, is able to exploit her deft manipulation of language through her suggestion to Phaedra that she prepare the magic potion. As Fletcher observes, the suggestion of a magical antidote is nothing more than the revelation of events to Hippolytus. However, in her acumen she first manages to elicit an oath from him. The fulfillment of this oath, which both Hippolytus and the audience are unable to see, functions in a manner similar to the way that Aegeus' blind oath to Medea functions in *Medea*, performing the same function in the succession of verbal acts.[16] [17] The oath of the Chorus will play a crucial role in the outcome of the drama and the death of Hippolytus, since it is the need to respect the divine that prevents the Coryphaeus from

[14] Of particular interest are the verses 1082 - 1084 by Hippolytus and the reference to the term "νόθος " ("*ὦ δυστάλαινα μῆτερ, ὦ πικραὶ γοναί· μηδείς ποτ' εἴη τῶν ἐμῶν φίλων νόθος"*). The description attributed to the hero is "παῖς Ἀμαζόνος", not "son of Theseus". Rankin identifies in him an imprint of the ideological background of 5th century society. The social stigmatisation of the bastards impinges directly on the psyche of Hippolytus, who in a moment of intense emotion refers to his birth - the only one he makes to it in the whole play.
[15] Eur. Hipp.713 – 714.
[16] Fletcher (2003) 37.
[17] Hippolytus' vow of silence reflects, according to Zeitlin (1996) 260, the "condition of physical restraint imposed by the denial of love".

revealing the truth to Theseus, resulting in the death of his son. During the confrontation between father and son, when the latter, bound by an oath, is unable to reveal the truth, he takes a second oath. An oath of innocence that fulfils all the criteria of an oath in the sense understood by the ancient Greeks: he invokes the divine, exalts his innocence and finally curses himself in case of perjury. In a desperate attempt to convince Theseus, Hippolytus defends his innocence ("*νῦν δ' ὅρκιόν σοι Ζῆνα καὶ πέδον χθονὸς ὄμνυμι τῶν σῶν μήποθ' ἅψασθαι γάμων μηδ' ἂν θελῆσαι μηδ' ἂν ἔννοιαν λαβεῖν"*)[18], claiming that if he lies, he should die without a country ("*ἄπολις ἄοικος, φυγὰς ἀλητεύων χθόνα"*)[19].

However, all his efforts are in vain until he himself realizes that there is no way to convince his father; his punishment and death seem to be inevitable. But as John Gould points out, ancient Greek religion was by no means a system of punishment under the control of the Olympian gods. So if ancient Greek religion is as research delivers it to us, not only divine intervention, but also human behavior plays an important role. Hippolytus's choice to devote himself entirely to a single goddess constitutes a hubris. Rather more apt is the reaction of the women of the Chorus, once they are kept abreast of the current developments. They seek the problem, not in Olympus, but in the waters, the mountains and the rocks, focusing on Pan, the Corybantes, Hecate and Dictynna.[20] In the context of examining the ways in which reverence for the divine emerges, then, it would be foolhardy at first sight to claim that Euripides pursues a balanced piety, for the simple reason that the fates of the heroes are determined by higher powers, coming also in contrast to their royal lineage. But how in this equation of gods - human respect do the gods determine the fate of mortals arbitrarily, when the springboard for this chain punishment is Hippolytus' bias? Or how can there be any mention of "victims of the gods" when Phaedra, frustrated by mad love, resorts to an act that can only be described as impious, forsaking the greatest gift the gods offer? Through this cycle of disrespect-punishment, human values, moral virtues, the divine will and the imposition of punishment are reinterpreted in a web that composes and ultimately shapes the drama itself.

[18] Eur. Hipp. 1025 – 1027.
[19] Eur. Hipp. 1029.
[20] Gould (2018) 387.

Iphigenia in Aulis

Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis* was taught in 405 BC, a year after the tragic poet's death, and is part of a trilogy along with the plays *Bacchae* and *Alcmaeon through Corinth*. It focuses on the Achaean leader's decision to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to Artemis, after being urged by the seer Calchus to turn the windlessness into wind and set sail for Troy. Artemis occupies an important place in the play, and respect toward her functions in a way as a constitutive principle governing the drama. Tradition wants Artemis, in addition to being a goddess of the hunt, to pass through all the stages of the earthly world. From the protector of animals to the childhood of man as "Artemis iphigenia", especially during childbirth. Of particular interest is verse 676 of the Supplices: «*Ἄρτεμιν δ' εκάταν γυναικών λόχους εφορεύειν*». Iphigenia is therefore one of Artemis' religious substitutes. The close connection between Artemis and Iphigenia is also evident from the etymological analysis of her name: ἶφι - γένεια , ἶφι + γίγνομαι (she who was born strong or the goddess who encourages women during childbirth). Versions linking the goddess to the main protagonist of the myth vary if we look back to the rich and long tradition concerning Iphigenia.[21]

Any attempt to approach the ritual of sacrifice as the imposition of a punitive attitude on the part of the goddess toward Agamemnon for killing her sacred stag or for breaking his promise, as well as any attempt to relate it harmoniously to the apnea that afflicts the Greek fleet assembled in Aulis, it exhibits inherent weaknesses. So too is inherent, in the goddess' demand, the danger that the Trojan expedition, an action aimed at all Greeks, will not be carried out for an offence committed by Agamemnon. If we consider that the ships of the Achaeans were gathered in Aulis for the purpose of another

[21] for further information on the presence of Iphigenia in the myth I would suggest:
Kovacs, G. A. 2010. "*Iphigenia at Aulis*": *Myth, Performance, and Reception*. Canada: University of Toronto.; Gliksohn, J.M. 2015. *Iphigenia. companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes*, 597-602.; Sourvinou-Inwood, C. 2015. *Iphigenia*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics. ; Marshall, C. C. 1994. *America: A Modern Day Tauris? A Study of Two Adaptations of the Iphigenia Myth*.
focus on German Studies; Kyriakou, P. 2006; *A Commentary on Euripides' Iphigenia in Tauris*. Berlin.;
Markantonatos, A. 2012. "L*eadership in Action: Wise Policy and Firm Resolve in Euripides' Iphigenia at Aulis" Crisis on Stage: Tragedy and Comedy in Late Fifth-Century Athens*, edited by Andreas Markantonatos and Bernhard Zimmermann, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, , pp. 189-218.

punishment, it becomes readily apparent that respect for the goddess may override the action of another divine will.[22]

The fact, however, that Euripides not only accepted all these elements of the myth but presented in his own perspective the attribution of respect to the divine will, makes us believe that the poet saw behind the surface of the myth.[23] In Artemis' dilemma he did not distinguish the possibility of the campaign not materializing but the creation of the necessary conditions for its favorable outcome. In the Aeschylean version several factors pressure Agamemnon to accept Iphigenia's sacrifice: Zeus' command that the Greeks avenge Paris' violation of hospitality on the part of the Greeks, the announcement of Artemis' oracle by Calchus, which demands the sacrifice, the willingness of the troops, and of course Agamemnon's own desire to conquer Troy. In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, however, Artemis delivers to Calchus, not an order, but a choice. Verses 89 - 93 suggest that it lies in the choice of the Greeks to sacrifice Iphigenia. If they sacrifice her, they will sail to Troy. If not, then they will simply turn back. In this particular play, the divine command takes the form of choice. In this way Euripides raises moral concerns in his audience. Foley notes that without the oracle the vision of a Panhellenic Idea would have been impossible to realize: "the heartless oracle suddenly creates a structure that allows for a transition from a situation characterized by political corruption and foolish strife to an atmosphere more oriented toward public concerns".[24] The need to respect the goddess here lies in Agamemnon's dual role, that of commander-in-chief of the Greeks and that of a father. The paternal instinct had to be overcome by a transcendent power that would force a conflict between Agamemnon's ambition[25] and the desire to save his daughter. If Artemis' dilemma was not against

[22] Ευστρατιάδης (1985) 13.

[23] In his article "Zeus the Father and Heracles the Son in Tragedy", Mikalson, referring to the relationship between divine will and human expectation, concludes: "In order to find the solution, Euripides goes beyond myth and even cult, penetrating the field of recent and current philosophical concerns". See. Mikalson (1986) 98.

[24] Foley(1985) 93.

[25] The view that the main influential factor that shapes the final attitude of the Greek commander-in-chief is not the will of the goddess, but the suggestions of the troops, has many supporters within the academic community. In this view, however, Siegel identifies a remarkable inherent weakness: the army does not know why Iphigenia is in Aulis (425 - 432), nor of Calchus' oracle, which only Menelaus and Odysseus know, and of which they are informed when two-thirds of the play has now passed (about line 1338). By that time Agamemnon has already left the scene and the army's opinion does not influence him. See Siegel (1981) 258.

these two forces, Agamemnon would probably not have accepted Iphigenia's sacrifice.[2627]

But let us not forget that a tragedy is not just a myth that wants to please the audience, but a work with a political background, directly influenced by the social reality of its author. Athens is in perhaps the worst position in its history and the future looks bleak. The existence of the Euripidean version of the myth helps us to better understand the concept of necessity and, by extension, the necessity of maintaining a pious attitude toward the gods. The Athenians' resistance to the Spartans was an act of necessity, as was the Greeks' resistance to the Persians. A way had to be found to give the notion of the necessity of reverence for to the divine will the character of a full justification of sacrifice, which could only be possible if Iphigenia accepted and justified the necessity of her sacrifice. This justification, however, would have to be linked to the poet's ideological beliefs, thus acquiring a symbolic dimension. Despite the poet's great disappointment, the democratic ideal was deeply rooted in his consciousness. From the very first verses of the play, the seer Calchus conveys to Agamemnon the command of Artemis through his oracle (*Κάλχας δ' ὁ μάντις ἀπορίᾳ κεχρημένοις ἀνεῖλεν Ἰφιγένειαν ἣν ἔσπειρ' ἐγὼ Ἀρτέμιδι θῦσαι τῇ τόδ' οἰκούς ῃ πέδον*)[28]. First, then, the "servant" of the goddess himself seems to be "forced" to obey her advice, acting as her messenger. Of particular interest is the dialogue between the two brothers, Menelaus and Agamemnon, who, being victims of the will of the goddesses, are called upon to respect their dictates despite the strong desire of the former to campaign to save his wife and the latter not to sacrifice his daughter. It would not be extreme to claim that reverence in this case works in a contradictory way: Agamemnon's respect for Artemis automatically means the loss of his own child but the salvation of his brother's wife (*ὅστις ἀπολέσας κακὸν λέχος ἀναλαβεῖν θέλεις*)[29]. The brothers' quarrel culminates in an abhorrent formulation, since they would not hesitate to kill the representative of the goddess (*οὔκ, ἢν θάνῃ γε πρόσθε·*

[26] The importance of a hero making a decision is a figure that we find in other tragedies, with the most characteristic examples being Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Euripides' *Medea*. More than a few academics have advocated two necessary criteria for treating a decision as appropriate for tragedy. On the one hand, the hero must be free to make the decision, independent of the suggestions of the divine will - or mythological tradition, as Sorum adds - and on the other hand, the hero must take full responsibility for the final outcome - happy or otherwise. See Sorum (1992) 528.

[27] refining Snell's theories, Rosenmeyer emphasizes the importance of necessity in tragedy compared to epic poetry, noting that in epic there is more room for free will. See Rosenmeyer (1978) 1-24.

[28] Eur.Iph.Aul. 89 – 91.

[29] Eur.Iph.Aul. 389 – 390.

τοῦτο δ' εὐμαρές)[30]. This conversion, which is often shown by Euripidean heroes - most notably by Iphigenia herself, who is led to the altar of her own free will[31] - and the criticism they do not hesitate to make of divine decisions and actions (such as Achilles or Clytemnestra) are due to the fact that the tragic poet was ideologically aligned with the Sophists, without, however, depriving the gods of their greatness.

A striking example of this conversion is Achilles[32] who, although he initially promises Clytemnestra to save Iphigenia, transcending the divine when he arrogantly declares "*θεὸς ἐγὼ πέφηνά σοι μέγιστος, οὐκ ὤν· ἀλλ' ὅμως γενήσομαι*"[33] he ultimately participates in the preparation of the sacrifice for the good of the Achaeans. It is not only Achilles' attitude that indicates a viciousness but that of all the generals of the Greeks, since each one obeys the divine commands according to his personal interests and aspirations, expressing corresponding arguments on each occasion. Contrary to this depravity is the final attitude of Iphigenia[34] when she accepts her sacrifice for the sake of her country and its moral values: "*εἰ βεβούληται δὲ σῶμα τοὐμὸν Ἄρτεμις λαβεῖν, ἐμποδὼν γενήσομαι 'γὼ θνητὸς οὖσα τῇ θεῷ*"[35] The heroine's piety is thus highlighted on the one hand, but a kind of indirect criticism of the divine is projected: "*μη μ' ἀπολέσῃς ἄωρον· ἡδὺ γὰρ τὸ φῶς βλέπειν·*".[36]

Bacchae

[30] Eur.Iph.Aul. 519 – 520.

[31] The differentiation of Iphigenia on a moral level from the other heroes of the play is emphasized by Lush, who sees in the central heroine a model of moral attitude. Once her own father has decided on her sacrifice, she has no choice. Accepting the situation she realigns her identity. On the one hand she could 'wear' the characterization of disobedient and cowardly, on the other hand she is given the opportunity, through her new socio-political alignment, to act as a benefactor of Greece ("*εις em' Ellas η μεγίστη πασα νυν αποβλέπει*", 1378), on which the political stability and freedom of her homeland depends (1387 - 1391). See Lush (2015) 234.

[32] Walsh identifies a key difference between Homer's Achilles and Euripides' Achilles: although Euripides "borrows" the image of the excitable and inconsistent hero, placing it in a completely different context, he changes the way we perceive the man as a hero. For more on Achilles in *Iphigenia in Aulis* see Walsh (1974) 241-248.

[33] Eur.Iph.Aul. 973 – 974.

[34] For McDonald, Iphigenia's decision encompasses not an intellectual universal, but an emotional one. Her decision is not made to serve a lofty idea, but out of love for her own. This is precisely what gives her a new dimension of heroism. See. McDonald (1990) 84.

[35] Eur.Iph.Aulis 1395 – 1396.

[36] Eur.Iph.Aulis 1218 – 1219.

The play was written in 407 BC when Euripides was staying at the court of king Archelaus, but was taught by his son in 405, a year after the poet's death. It was part of a trilogy along with *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Alcmaeon through Corinth*. It is the only drama of antiquity in which Dionysus is presented in human form, thus symbolising the drama of the god who is also the drama of mortals. It is a play that has puzzled as few others, mainly because of the difficulties that arise in terms of interpretation.[37] This can probably be ascribed the poet's mature age. The "swan song" of the broad poetic output of the "most tragic of tragedians" as he was referred to by Aristotle. Of particular interest is Euripides' approach to the religious element and the ways in which the need to respect the divine is highlighted through this - purely - religious drama. This quest is made all the more adventurous by the view of some scholars that *Bacchae* is the expression of an intellectual conversion of Euripides to traditional religion, thus renouncing the sceptical spirit of his hitherto sceptical course.[38] As in *Hippolytus*, so in *Bacchae*, the predominance of the transcendental and superlative element over human reason is strongly observed. When the exological element is mentioned, there could be no more striking example than Bacchus himself. Apart from its ritual role, the Chorus contributes substantially to the economy of the drama by being the god's fellow traveller in his struggle to establish the new cult. It is not only the inclusion of liturgical parts of the tragedy under the veil of the new religion that gives the play a religious character. It is also the *σκευή* of the play ("*θύρσους ἀνάπτειν καὶ νεβρῶν δορὰς ἔχειν στεφανοῦν τε κρᾶτα κισσίνοις βλαστήμασιν"*)[39] that connects the orchestra of the theatre with the new religion and the life of the citizen-spectator.[40]

By denying the worship of Dionysus, Pentheus automatically denies the god himself. As in the case of Hippolytus, man is a victim of his own abusive behaviour, which stems from his detachment from and contempt for the divine. It is natural, therefore, that he

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[37] the question of the interpretation of the *Bacchae* is a vast issue which we will not deal with at this stage in order not to deviate from our purpose. By way of illustration, I will cite the opinion of Willink who refers to lines 35 - 43 as the most difficult to interpret in the work because of metricality, meaning and syntax See. Willink (1966) 27-50. For more on the interpretation of the *Bacchae*, see Levy (1972) 487-489; Gregory (1985) 23-31; Campbell (1956) 56-67;; Gregory (1985) 23-31; Campbell (1956) 56-67. Regarding the imposition of Bacchic worship I would like to dwell on the view of Verdenius, who in the phrase "*ἀλλ' ἐξ ἁπάντων βούλεται τιμὰς ἔχειν κοινάς, διαριθμῶν δ' οὐδέν' αὔξεσθαι θέλει*". Tiresias in the First Episode does not locate in the term *ἁπάντων* a quantitative connotation like Dodds ("Dionysiac worship was essentially collective"), but a qualitative one ("the god wants to be worshipped by anybody, whatever his status"). See Verdenius (1962) 342.

[38] Decharme (1906) 63 – 64.

[39] Eur.Bacch. 176 – 177.

[40] Unlike Verrall, Phoutrides does not identify any cynical or mocking attitude of Euripides in the *Bacchae*. Here, "he has made his Choruses representatives of the Athenian populace that he might interpret rather than condemn the simple, passionate and impulsive world". See Phoutrides (1916) 122.

should be led lawfully to his own extinction. Right from the Prologue, Dionysus emphatically stretches out his divine origin and imposes his worship on mortals, starting from his birthplace Thebes ("*Ἥκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίαν χθόνα Διόνυσος*").[41] The choice of the city cannot be considered merely accidental, since it is through it that the twofold plan of enforcing respect for the new religion and revenge against his ancestral house and Agave, which questioned his divine origin from Semele ("*ὃν τίκτει ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρωι πυρί"*)[42], gains substance. Of particular note is Dionysus' choice to impose the new religion through the *Maenads*, women who, in a state of mania as their name suggests, adopt the god's words without question. With this finding Euripides gives a character of universality and collectivity to the proclamation of the new religion, while eliminating any form of discrimination between believers.[43] The need to respect the divine is accentuated by the self-proclamation of the god as a general of the Maenads, in case the inhabitants of Thebes oppose and resort to violence, but also by the choice of two persons of great prestige: the seer Tiresias and the mythical king of Thebes - grandfather of Dionysus and Pentheus - Cadmus. Their placement in the First Episode by Euripides favours the dramatic economy of the play, leading to the formation of an apologetic motif before the conflict between the two main characters of the play, Dionysus and Pentheus. The conversion of the two elders intensifies the need to conform to Bacchic worship and emphasizes the necessity for humans to obey divine commands. Reverence that is reinforced by the prestige of Cadmus representing the political element and the widely accepted and respected figure of the seer representing the priestly world.[44]

So despite their admonitions to Pentheus and the unsubstantiated accusations hurled by the latter, there follow insults that intensify the tragic irony between the human imposition of punishment ("*εἰ δ' αὐτὸν εἴσω τῆσδε λήψομαι χθονός, παύσω κτυποῦντα θύρσον ἀνασείοντά τε κόμας, τράχηλον σώματος χωρὶς τεμών"*)[45] and the divine one of

[41] Euri.Bacch. 1 – 2.

[42] Euri.Bacch. 2 – 3

[43] a necessary clarification I would like to make is that by the terms "collectivity" and "universality" I am not only referring to the intra-dramatic heroes, but also to the audience: "With his foreknowledge and his power to decide who knows what, the god acquires a narrative authority that elevates him to a level close to that of the poet. [...] In this respect, Dionysus operates as a kind of metanarrational device that forces the audience to shift from the narrative to the authorial level". MacLeod. (2006) 581.

[44] Νικολαΐδου – Αραμπατζή (2006) 356.

[45] Eur. Bacch. 239 – 241.

which Pentheus will be the recipient. This is a masterful use of figures of speech and narrative techniques by Euripides, with the common thread being the intensity of the hero's tragic character. It is not Pentheus who will sentence the effeminate stranger to stoning ("*κἄνπερ λάβητε, δέσμιον πορεύσατε δεῦρ' αὐτόν, ὡς ἂν λευσίμου δίκης τυχὼν θάνηι, πικρὰν βάκχευσιν ἐν Θήβαις ἰδών"*)[46] but the Maenads themselves, before dismembering him. In the Second Episode, when Pentheus captures Dionysus, he ignores all the warning signs as well as the admonitions of the healer who tries to bring him to his senses. The unquenchable flame of both Semele's sanctuary and the god's vine in her temple, the meek and serene attitude of the captured god as well as the inexplicable release of the Maenads are signs which, combined with the constant contradictions, ironies and reversals of fortune, render man powerless and insulting to a higher power, pushing him to the one and only punishment that disrespect for the divine brings: his self-destruction. In this effort to find ways to highlight respect for the divine in *Bacchae*, the concept of the miracle[47] occupies an important place. Euripides, through the eloquence and vividness of his description of miracles, defines the boundaries between piety and irreverence, between the magnificence of the gods and human pettiness. The demolition of the palace by the voice of Dionysus, the capture of a bull instead of Dionysus by Pentheus (*πρὸς φάτναις δὲ ταῦρον εὑρών, οὗ καθεῖρξ' ἡμᾶς ἄγων, τῶιδε περὶ βρόχους ἔβαλλε γόνασι καὶ χηλαῖς ποδῶν*)[48], the god's contempt for Pentheus, having escaped and walking free (*ἥσυχος δ' ἐκβὰς ἐγὼ δωμάτων ἥκω πρὸς ὑμᾶς, Πενθέως οὐ φροντίσας*)[49], the image of the Maenads suckling wild animals while snakes touch their faces, validate Pentheus' hubristic attitude and the divine origin of the "stranger", bringing about the total reversal of roles. The persecuted of the insulter and impious Pentheus has now become his pursuer. It suffices to recall the words of the shepherd *(βουκόλος)* when describing the dismemberment of oxen by the Maenads at Citheron and their supernatural power to understand where the messenger's obvious admiration (*τὸν δαίμον' οὖν τόνδ', ὅστις ἔστ', ὦ δέσποτα, δέχου πόλει τῆιδ*)[50] comes from. Regarding the divinity of Dionysus, however, we must understand the initial

[46] Eur. Bacch. 355 – 357.

[47] The question of the "depiction" of the wonders of the palace on stage has occupied many researchers. See. E. R. Dodds. 1960. Oxford.; S. Goldhill. 1986. *reading Greek tragedy*. cambridge.; D. Wiles. 1988 "*Reading greek performance*" G & R 34? H. Oranjie. 1984." *Euripides Bacchae: the play and its audience*." *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 78. "the palace miracles, while real for the audience as dramatic events, are also symbolic in the sense of being representations of the god's nature." Fisher (1992) 188.

[48] Eur. Bacch. 618 – 619.

[49] Eur. Bacch. 636 – 637.

[50] Eur. Bacch. 769 – 770.

reaction of Pentheus who did not accept the god from the beginning. It would have been unreasonable for the ruler of the city to accept the words of a passerby so readily, especially when they carry such weight. Even after the god's *ἐπιφάνεια* it could not be clear that the prisoner was indeed Dionysus.[51]

Before the punishment was inflicted on Pentheus, god intervened and clouded the young king's judgment, resulting in *ἄτην* and subsequently *ὕβριν*. Through a series of contrasts and escalation of the moral scheme, we arrive at the ultimate humiliation of the hero and the complete reversal of fortune. Bacchus convinces Pentheus to disguise himself as a maenad! The disguise which is an integral part of the Dionysian cult becomes the vehicle of punishment and the ultimate humiliation of the hero who is transformed into exactly what he despises. The concept of *parenδisía* (cross – dressing), beyond the functional part, also involves the ideology of Bacchic sacrificial worship. The hero, as the bearer of the worship of the god in his new garment, becomes the object of the sacrifice after his masculinity has disappeared. He who until recently was the epitome of manliness and was to lead the army in the war against the stranger, agrees to go up the mountain to meet his end.[52] Respect for the divine is therefore highlighted significantly through - and by - the complete reversal with which Dionysus imposes himself on Pentheus. The effeminate meek and subsequently imprisoned Dionysus is transformed into an imposing, cruel and punishing presence that determines the fate of mortals. In contrast, Pentheus undergoes a reverse transformation, losing his virility and prestige. Through the ritual of parenδisía , a supernatural transformation takes place, trespassing the hero's personality, now adopting qualities and characteristics that had previously been derided: femininity instead of masculinity, emotion instead of reason, illusion and deception instead of intellectual clarity.[53] Dionysus represents nature itself, being the closest of the Olympian gods to man, since his form constantly changes, approximating the boundaries between beast and god. Without his presence, human existence is ineffective and incomplete. The denial of the god inherent in nature, earth, entertainment, life itself implies a denial of the existence of the mystery. The ultimate annihilation of Pentheus is realized through the instrument of the Maenads and Agave because both the god himself and the women oscillate on the margins of political life,

[51] Syropoulos (2003) 47.
[52] Συρόπουλος (2000) 12.
[53] Συρόπουλος (2000) 15.

vacillating between pure and serene vision and the violent release of the instinctive emotional energies that the city restrains in the name of law and order.[54]

Conclusions - Similarities and Differences

Religion occupied a central place in the life of the ancient Greeks. Through these three plays, we understand through the eyes of Euripides how respect toward the gods governs - sometimes defines - the lives and fate of mortals. In *Iphigenia*, it is the need to respect the goddess, in the form of a dilemma, that compels Agamemnon to obey the divine commands. Human ambition and greed for territorial expansion becomes the lever for the near killing of his daughter. An obedience reverently accepted by the victim herself, motivated by love for her loved ones and the realization of a Panhellenic vision. So while her fate may be the result of the imposition of a divine will, as in *Hippolytus* and in *Bacchae*, the purpose differs. In Iphigenia's soul lies the pre-eternal voice of the Greek woman, whom the gods have blessed with her very lineage. What, then, is her sacrifice for the common good in the face of posterity and eternal memory? She will not perish because she "sinned" at the expense of some god like Hippolytus and Pentheus. Instead, she accepts her fate and it is precisely this that at the last moment, unlike the other two heroes, prevents her from dying.

Gods intervene to remind that in addition to material nature people also have a spiritual one. It was Agamemnon's *ὕβρις* that angered Artemis. Just as it was the irreverence of Pentheus that angered Dionysus, and as it was the impiety of Hippolytus that angered Aphrodite, showing that all the gods independently demand the respect of mortals. As for the two victims in *Hippolytus* and in *Bacchae*, the punishment inflicted by Dionysus is just as harsh as the punishment inflicted by Aphrodite. In both cases, Euripides focuses the *ἔλεος* of the spectators on the victims of the gods.[55] Unlike Iphigenia, Pentheus and Hippolytus are debauched, and by disregarding a religion and persisting in their fallacy, they subject those around them to a chain of punishment. Whether it is a wish or a love wish or Bacchic worship, the gods' demands for deference remain steadfast.

[54] Segal (1978) 185 – 202.
[55] Dodds (2004) 87.

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