Embodied Otherness and Hybridity: David Greig's *The Bacchae* and the Reprise of Ancient Greek Tragedy

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Abstract
David Greig's appropriation of Euripides' *Bacchae* (2007) resorts to the universality of ancient myth both to pose national questions and transcend them through the representation of transnational and transcultural issues. Dionysus, born in Thebes but exiled to Persia, and, on his return, unrecognised by his family and compatriots, is an insider turned outsider, a deracinated, ex-centric figure who threatens the institutionalised repressive society represented by his cousin Pentheus, the prince regent of Thebes. The article will examine Dionysos' literal and symbolic 'embodiment' of the concepts of otherness and hybridity in relation to class, race, and gender, highlighting their relevance to the Scottish historical-cultural context as well as to current world political issues. His demotic voice and native/exotic, transgender identity, combined with his advocacy of a gnoseology based on instinct and experience rather than abstract thought, evoke an ethics of identity and a vision of man that defy fundamentalist ideas. By the same token, the final violence he performs is meant to make us aware of the danger deriving from the non-recognition of the Other both outside and inside us.

Keywords: Scottish theatre, postcolonialism, otherness, hybridity.

1. Introduction

Within and without Scotland, David Greig is nowadays recognised as one of the most important and representative voices in the contemporary theatrical scenario. His plays have been produced, acclaimed and often awarded prestigious prizes, across Europe and the United States, as well as in Canada, Australia, Brazil, Korea, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Not only because of the global

distribution of his wide-ranging output[1] but also, and primarily, owing to his recurring concerns, Greig, despite being included among those British playwrights contributing to the so-called *new writing*[2], or despite working with the cutting-edge, Glasgow-based Suspect Culture Theatre Company and the National Theatre of Scotland, has all the credentials for being regarded as an international writer and world-literature exponent. More specifically, Greig, like the Scottish playwrights David Harrower and Chris Hannan, is at the forefront of that *new wave* in Scottish theatre that emerged in the 1990s, developing especially after the opening of the devolved Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh in 1999. This theatre, though "informed by an artistic vision that is distinctly Scottish", has "largely moved beyond the self-conscious Scottishness of the earlier dramatic tradition" (Zenziger 1996: 125), engaging with the ethical, political and ideological issues of an increasingly global culture and economy, and with questions – such as the relationship between individual identity and place, national roots and transnational routes, sameness and otherness – which continue to emerge in current postcolonial studies[3].

Greig's concern with national belonging in a world whose geographical and political boundaries are constantly called into question under the impact of migration processes is intimately related to his own personal history. Born in Edinburgh, raised in Nigeria, and educated at Bristol University, though working in Scotland since 1990, in an interview, echoing Theodor Adorno's definition of ethics[4], he admitted that part of his moral philosophy is *not to feel at home in his home*, and take advantage of that sense

[1] Greig's copious and eclectic production includes, in addition to *The Bacchae: Europe* (1996), *Caledonia Dreaming* (1997), *Mainstream* (1998), *The Speculator* (1999), *Victoria* (2000), *Outlying Islands* (2002), *San Diego* (2003), *The American Pilot* (2005), *Oedipus the Visionary* (2005), *Pyrenees* (2005), *Damascus* (2007), *Dunsinane* (2010), *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart* (2011), and the adaptation of Aeschylus' *The Suppliant Women* (2016).

[2] A rather elusive phrase originally used to refer to various trends of writing in post-war prose and poetry, and in the Cool-Britannia years (1980s and 1990s), mostly associated with provocative, experimental theatrical forms, such as *in-yer-face* theatre. See Sierz 2011, pp. 27-28.

[3] See, among others, Wilson, Şandru and Lawson Welsh 2010.

[4] According to Adorno's famous aphorism, "Today […] it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" (1978: 39).

of internal exile which he often feels: "[My] experience of being Scottish is one of being intensely and viscerally attached to a place in which I am perceived as a stranger" (Brown 2013: 228) – a condition that, as will be shown, he projects onto the character of Dionysos in *The Bacchae*. Without perceiving any contradiction in it, Greig can at the same time state that "[sometimes national identity] is uncomfortable. […]. But it's nice to have one" (Greig 2007b: 2) and, in his writing, advocate the idea that identity (individual, cultural and national), being always in the process of changing and developing, eschews fixed definitions. By the same token, on the one hand he can partly sympathise with the resurgence of national sentiment in Scotland yet, on the other, endorse a transnational or supranational British identity integrated in Europe, which rests on a shared ground of universal human and humanistic values counteracting the devastating cultural and moral implications of the UK's prospective exit from the European Union following the results of the referendum held in June 2016.

Precisely because of his being aware of the elusiveness of individual, cultural and national identities, Greig's theatre deliberately problematises notions of *essential* Scottishness or other national belongings by privileging dramatic situations in which characters are displaced, marginalised or living on the edge, in *contact zones* where identity is determined by its relatedness to other identities near or around it. As has been observed, "Greig's plays stage a transnational space, a contact zone where characters with different national, ethnic, class or religious backgrounds negotiate their positions, perspectives and identities" (Müller and Wallace 2011: 2). The permeability of the geo-cultural borders he stages intends to allude to the central, albeit often overlooked, role of communication among and across different people – a role that theatre, in his view, is able to accomplish. At the same time, though, it conjures an ideal of transcultural dialogue and even hybridisation that can hardly be realised in contemporary society. Hence, as the analysis of *The Bacchae* will prove, Greig's interest in the figures of the traveller and the exile, paradigmatically embody the dynamic tension between the domestic and the foreign, inward-and outwardness, rootedness and movement, the knowledge of the other and the attraction of home and homeland.

David Greig's adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* premiered at the King's Theatre in Edinburgh, in August 2007, in a co-production

between the National Theatre of Scotland and the Edinburgh International Festival. By resorting to the universality of ancient myth, the play achieves the double purpose of confronting questions concerning specifically Scottish society and of transcending national boundaries through the representation of transcultural ethical and political issues. The Greek hypotext elicits reflections about what it means to be human, the values of tolerance and respect, the acceptance and celebration of difference – all aspects that acquire a particular significance in a post-devolutionary Scotland still aspiring to political independence, as well as in the wider scenario of European and world contexts lacerated by false myths of national integrity, and by the violence of physical and psychological walls erected to repulse the Other.

Euripides presents Dionysus as a demigod born in Thebes who, rejected by his family, chooses exile to Persia, until he returns to his homeland accompanied by a group of wild foreign women worshippers (the Maenads or Bacchae), in order to demand recognition as a new god in Thebes. However, the prince regent of the city, Pentheus, and his subjects, except for the women driven mad by Dionysus (Dionysos[5] in Greig's version), oppose the new cult through repressive methods until the prince falls victim to Dionysus' revengeful stratagem, agrees to spy on the Bacchae's rites and is in the end brutally dismembered by the deranged female band, which even includes his mother Agave. Significantly enough, in the *exodos*, Dionysus travels towards other cities and communities to demand recognition, while his mother and grandfather must leave their home against their will: if the god, being an insider turned outsider, challenges the essentialist polarisation of Self and Other by relativising these conditions, the other exiles suggest the risk of idealising the diasporic status as providing a privileged epistemological experience thanks to *translation* and "dislocation" (Suleri 1992: 5). In other words, Greig's cosmopolitan ideal is rather utopian, and, in many respects, tinged with disenchantment. Homelessness, he suggests, is often experienced as a predicament rather than an opportunity, to adapt Rushdie's words, to "straddle two cultures", while the

[5] When referring to Greig's text, this spelling, instead of "Dionysus", will be used.

risk of falling "between two stools" is always at hand (see Rushdie 1991: 5).

Why and how can Greig's *The Bacchae* be read through the lens of postcolonial theories? The answer involves both general, contextual and specific, textual discourses: I will start from mentioning the latter ones, which will be analysed in sections 4 and 4.1 of the article. Dionysos' body language, in combination with his female acolytes, is the pivot around which the whole semiotics and semantics of the tragedy revolve, and its meanings – conveyed by his half-exotic, highly sexualised, ex-centric demeanour – emerge as particularly relevant to postcolonial issues, namely identity, sameness/otherness, gender, power ideology and difference. Significantly enough, in the 2007 stage performance, Dionysos, played by a stunning Alan Cumming, spoke with a strong working-class Glaswegian accent, totally contrasting with Pentheus' anglicised Scots: he is the deracinated Scot threatening a repressive and conservative Scottish (or British, for that matter) society based on essentialist values of class, race and gender; he is, moreover, a figure of otherness, hybridity and release against the absolute principles and fundamentalist ideas endorsed by his cousin. By the same token, the final violence Dionysos performs is meant to make us aware of the danger deriving from the non-recognition and rejection of the Other.

However, before focusing on these textual aspects, the question whether Scottish history and literature are eligible for inclusion in postcolonial discourse – still a rather contentious territory – is worth considering.

2. Is there a *Postcolonial Scottish Theatre*?[6]

Sociologist Michael Hecter defined Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland as the "Celtic fringes" or "internal colonies" in the UK, thus suggesting interesting, however contestable, links between

[6] The question evokes T. S. Eliot's famous review article published in the *Athenaeum*, on 1 August 1919, provocatively asking "Was There a Scottish Literature?", since, according to the poet, from the seventeenth century onwards, Scottish literature has lacked the continuity of a national language and therefore of an organic tradition.

these countries and the *peripheries* of the British Empire[7]. In fact, contrary to 16th-and 17th-century Ireland, Scotland was never a settler colony of England. Moreover, if the prefix 'post' is intended in the historical sense, as signalling a condition following the independence of the country from foreign political rule, then Scotland, contrary to the present Republic of Ireland, cannot be recognised as holding post-colonial status. On the other hand, in their seminal text *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin dissociate the "Celtic fringes" from postcoloniality, despite admitting that they were the "first victims of English expansion" (p. 33). Critic Michael Gardiner has expressed a similar view, arguing that "Scotland is not in any sense post-colonial, but suffers from economic and cultural inequalities which can in part be articulated as part of a historical process on a national level" (Gardiner 1996: 36). This "historical process" includes, for instance, the Anglicisation and decentralisation of the Scottish political establishment following the 1603 and 1707 Acts of Union, the consequent cultural and linguistic marginalisation of Scots and Gaelic, and the 18th-and 19th-century Highland Clearances – the latter resulting in a phenomenon of mass migration towards England, Ireland, Canada, America or Australia. However, within the same historical process one must necessarily envisage the Scottish contribution to the building of the British Empire, from the Ulster Plantation to the West Indies, Central America, India and Africa.

Clearly, for political and cultural reasons, the whole issue of whether or not Scottish literature is qualified to enter postcolonial discourse is doomed to remain controversial[8], because it is part of a wider argument concerning national cultural formations within the UK and Scotland's reacquisition of an independent nation-state – as proved by the devolutionary projects (rejected in 1979 but successful twenty years later), the 2014 failed Scottish independence referendum and the possibility of a new one to reject the pro-Brexit vote of the majority of English people. In favour of political

[7] See Michael Hechter 1975. For a recent re-elaboration of Hecter's theory see Stroh 2007; on Irish, Scottish and Welsh literatures as regional literatures see Angeletti, 2009.

[8] In addition to those already mentioned, other important contributions to the debate on Scottish literature and postcolonialism include Schoene 1995; Connell 2003; Macdonald 2006; and Lehner 2007.

independence yet despising fundamentalist nationalism, David Greig sees no discrepancy between his endorsement of the YES campaign in the 2014 referendum and his being an 'internationalist': "I would like Scotland to be an independent country. But, to me, that's not in contradiction with a sense that the entire world is my society: it's my world, it's my country" (see Rodríguez 2016: 91).

From the Eighties to the present, Scottish theatre has lent its stage to a contemporary context of cultural and political impetus (see Brown and Ramage 2001). In November 1997, after the success of the devolution referendum, David Greig and David Harrower declared that the stage could become a "site of cultural transformation", because "Scotland has voted to redefine itself as a nation", which involves the need to "exchange ideas and aspirations, confront enduring myths, expose injustices", and "the quality, accessibility, and immediacy of Scottish theatre make it one of the best arenas in which these dialogues can take place" (Harrower and Greig 1997: 15). *The Bacchae* certainly satisfies this need, not least because it confronts the transcultural "enduring myth" of human tolerance and approval of diversity, as well as "exposing the injustices" and the risks of a conservative community that cannot "exchange ideas" and dialogue with the Other.

So, to return to the title question, "Is there a Postcolonial Scottish Theatre?", the Scottish stage has often held the mirror to its contentious cultural and political history, foregrounding questions that the theoretical tools generated by postcolonialism help us to approach and investigate fully. While Scotland's status in history cannot, by any means, be compared to that of the colonies of the British Empire, the comparative critical models adopted in postcolonial and world-literature studies can be useful in identifying analogies between experiences of deterritorialisation, marginalisation, diaspora and inferiorisation beyond geographical, national and cultural borders (see for example Gardiner, Macdonald, and O'Gallagher 2011). Greig's theatre, with its emphasis on inter-/trans-national concerns, shows us the way to recognise these bonds.

3. *Writing back*? Scottish theatre and the Classical Tradition

Greig's *The Bacchae*, like many other twentieth-century and contemporary translations or rewritings of ancient Greek and

Latin tragedy[9], resulted from an act of *writing back* to the classical tradition, to appropriate, that is, an illustrious antecedent in order to rework, refigure and recast it from a new perspective. In line with postcolonial rewriting or writing back, this adaptation, rather than translation[10], of Euripides' tragedy allows a contrapuntal reading of the hypotext that highlights its hermeneutic potential and brings to the surface latent meanings, in this case also relevant to contemporary society. However, unlike postcolonial reprises, the Scottish author's reuse of the Dionysus myth reveals no intention to subvert the ideological and political discourse embedded in the original text. Essentially, Greig shows us that if Euripides' tragedy can still captivate a present-day audience, and even raise issues engaging postcolonial critics and theorists, it is because myth, in A. S. Byatt's words, "derives force from its endless repeatability" (Byatt 2001: 132), from it being, as Kwame Anthony Appiah observed, a "travelling tale" crossing different contexts and addressing different target-audiences (Appiah 2005: 256).

The "endless repeatability" of myth is proved by the explosion of stage performances of classical texts in contemporary Britain:

> Greek tragedy has proved magnetic to writers and directors searching for new ways in which to pose questions to contemporary society and to push back the boundaries of theatre. The mythical, dysfunctional, conflicted world portrayed in the archetypal plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides has become one of the most important cultural and aesthetic prisms through which the real, dysfunctional, conflicted world of the late twentieth-and early twenty-first centuries has refracted its own image. (Hall 2004: 2)

More specifically in Scotland, where theatrical production, since at least WW2, has seen numerous examples of foreign drama in translation (see Findlay 1996, Hardwick 2002, and Corbett 2011), playwrights' engagement with classical theatre has acquired a peculiar

[9] Even limiting it to Scotland, the list of examples would be too long to report. Among the most successful Scottish theatrical transpositions are: Ian Brown's *Antigone, after Sophocles* (1969) and *The Bacchae* (1971); the trilogy, and triple bill, of Tom McGrath's *Electra*, Liz Lochhead's *Medea* and Greig's *Oedipus Tyrannos* (2000); Edwin Morgan's *Phaedra* (2000); and Lochhead's *Thebans* (2003).

[10] For terminological elucidations see Genette 1997; Hardwick 2003; Young 2008; and Sanders 2006.

political meaning, particularly after devolution, as if the authority of that tradition could contribute to the country's reconfiguring of its own identity. Focusing on the deployment of Scots in some of these revisionist dramas, John Corbett has underlined how

> the shift in the nature of the "classical" adaptations of drama into Scots in the years following Scottish devolution is consonant with a repositioning of Scotland, from an internally colonised nation on the periphery of European civilisation, to a reinstated nation, once more in control of its own, but still troubled destiny. […] The millennium was marked by classicising translations that represent the nation-state as wracked by sexual tension, jealousy, ethnic prejudices and ultra-violence. (Corbett 2011: 99)

Corbett's final statement, about Scottish dramatists' remediation of Greek tragedy as a means to confront sexual, ethical and political questions concerning both individual and national identities, is particularly cogent in relation to *The Bacchae*.

After Ian Brown's 1971 *The Bacchae* and his revision of the same, under the title *Bacchai*, for the Welsh company Dalier Sylw at the 1991 Cardiff Festival, Greig devises his own version of Euripides' tragedy, based on the literal translation from the Greek by Ian Ruffell and directed by John Tiffany. "My lines", admitted Greig, "may differ from the original in direct literal meaning, but that is less important to me than that I honour the original effect. Drama is an experience in the gut and heart. That is what I try to restore to old or foreign plays" (Greig 2011: 10). In fact, he rather faithfully reproduces the narrative gist and the formal architecture of the original text (e.g. prologue, six episodes, *stasima*, *paradoi*, *exodos*), but actualises the language by removing many references to Greek mythology and deploying explicitation or addition strategies to underscore certain themes – in the performance even more so than in the published text, as proven by the choice of having black actresses play the part of the Maenads and sing soul, gospel and R&B songs, as well as of turning Dionysos into a camp rock-star, thus giving prominence to the mythemes of otherness and ex-centricity respectively.

4. *The Bacchae*: Staging and Embodying Identity

In Euripides' tragedy, in a crucial scene in which Dionysus and Pentheus confront each other, the former says to his cousin: "Thou

knowest not what end thou seekest, nor/ What deed thou doest, nor what man thou art!"; to which Pentheus replies: "Agâvê's son, and on the father's part/ Echîon's, hight Pentheus!" (Euripides 1906: n.p.). In his version, Greig translates the original message into metatheatrical language: "You have no idea/ Of the part you're playing in this/ Tragedy", says Dionysos, and Pentheus retorts rather arrogantly, "I am Pentheus. My part is/ Prince and yours is prisoner" (Greig 2007a: 32). Despite this variation, both verbal exchanges challenge the audience/readers to face up to the difficulty of defining who we are, or, more generally, what it means to be human. Echoing the ancient Greek maxim *gnothi seauton* ("know thyself"), written above the oracle in Delphi, this is one of those passages of the tragedy which warns us of the danger of simplistically reducing individual identity to a question of origins and social role-playing. In the horrific ending, when Pentheus reveals his identity to his mother – "Mother, Mother […] I'm Pentheus, your son, Mother" (Greig 2007a: 68) – and yet fails to stop her from murdering him, clearly his identification as the child of a royal family and as the ruler of Thebes is of no use to him. Thus, one of the most enduring messages of the play is that who we are cannot coincide with where we come from or with a name only. An important implication is that this truth applies not only to one's Self but also to the knowledge and recognition of the Other. If Pentheus, in other words, does not really know himself, how can he possibly know and, consequently, accept the otherness incarnated by Dionysus?

Throughout *The Bacchae*, both in the original and in Greig's version, Pentheus' authoritative knowledge – intellectual and rational – is opposed to Dionysus', as well as Tiresias', wisdom, a kind of knowing that goes beyond external material facts, family or cultural roots, and is based on values transcending social, gender, political and geographical boundaries. "The god you mock is beyond you […] Beyond the reach even of your/ Intellectual rhetoric", says Tiresias to Pentheus, that is, beyond his sphere of influence as a man in authority, "clever and persuasive [but not] wise" (Greig 2007a: 17). Significantly, Dionysos does not appear as a god but as a handsome orientalised man ("I've crossed Arabia and lingered/ In the Levant", p. 9) in a Maenad's costume, thus totally upsetting Pentheus' need to identify him according to his value system and essentialist categorisations – more than once he wonders

"whoever he may be" or really is (pp. 15-16), and impatiently asks him "Where on earth do you come from?" (p. 24). Although he was actually born in Thebes, partly from the same family as Pentheus'[11], he claims to come from the East, together with his Bacchants. This knowledge is enough for Pentheus to identify him as inferior to the Greeks: "Foreigners, hah,/ That's no surprise, foreigners/ Have no self-control. Greek men, though, Greek men know better" (Greig 2007a: 28), he says, thus construing an image of the oriental Other that confirms the Western stereotypes dismantled by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). Pentheus refers to "Greek men", but not women, to underline their strong *animus*, in Jungian terms, their masculinity, rationality, and poise, and, on the other hand, he implicitly associates Asians with the antonyms of these qualities. He will never be able to understand Dionysos, because his identity consists of being in-between, challenging exclusivist logics and either/or discourses with his disturbing slipperiness: he is half-god, half-man; native and stranger; Self and Other; Western and Eastern; male and female, *animus* and *anima*; man and animal (when he metamorphoses into a bull to escape from imprisonment). He is quintessential otherness, because he exists on the edge where extremes meet and his identity cannot be pinned down to fixed, clear-cut definitions.

When Pentheus tells Dionysos that foreigners lack self-control and only Greeks bear knowledge, he illuminatingly replies: "Or maybe foreigners just know/ the truth – that every man must lose/ His self-control sometimes" (Greig 2007a: 28). Of course, literally these words refer to the Dionysian spirit as opposed to Pentheus' Apollonian philosophy, but, figuratively, they can be read as alluding to the ethical and ontological duty of each human being at some moment of their life to abandon the perspective of the Self and assume that of the Other, or to transgress the boundaries of the ego through dialogue and contact with the unfamiliar, so as to be able to face the fear of the different. Dionysos embodies such possibilities because he is a Greek gone native in the East, after suffering exile and displacement:

[11] According to the myth, Dionysus' mother was Semele – Agave's sister (therefore, Pentheus' aunt) – who was made pregnant by Zeus, but, when she asked to see him, the God incinerated her with a thunderbolt. So, Dionysus was snatched from her body and sewn into Zeus' thigh, where he was incubated.

Thebes, I've been away revealing
Myself in foreign places,
[…]
I've crossed Arabia and lingered
In the Levant. I've been everywhere
And everywhere I've been they've seen
Me for who I am – a new god. (Greig 2007a: 8-9)

Paradoxically, it is not in that "everywhere" that Dionysos felt ostracised but in his own home, nation and culture, which first banished him and, when he returns, are once more unable to recognise and accept him[12]. His peculiar predicament, therefore, complicates the problem of a cultural community that shuts the door on what is foreign, for fear that it might challenge its presumed integrity and produce social insecurity. In fact, Dionysos is both native and a foreigner because essentially he is a transnational figure of mobility, a cosmopolitan traveller moving between cultures but who, at some point, would like to return home and be accepted for who he is, "a new god", whose identity necessarily combines roots and routes, the local and the global, thus preserving, not annihilating, difference. The inability of the Theban community to re-integrate its temporary migrant in his new condition may signify that, for Greig, the cosmopolitan ideal and the concept of transnational spaces are utopian rather than realisable projects, since conservative notions of ethnicity, religion, family and nation often hinder them. Indeed, Agave's and Kadmos' final self-imposed exile from Thebes, "to find a home as refugees –/ Strangers – amongst barbarians" (Greig 2007a: 86), reinforces the sense of disenchantment with those possibilities. As Müller and Wallace observe:

> While the setting and constellation of figures of Greig's work suggest a transnational condition, the development of character and conflict in the plays nevertheless emphasise the pitfalls of such a condition […] *Transnation* is everywhere and nowhere to be found in Greig's work. It is an ideal place where the conflicts in the plays could find their harmonious solution. (2011: 13; my italics)

[12] For a thorough discussion on the concept of displacement see Israel 2000.

Indeed, one might see a link between the figure of Dionysos and Bill Ashcroft's idea of "transnation", defined as "the fluid, migrating *outside* of the state that begins *within* the nation", a space "in which binaries of centre and periphery, national self and other are dissolved" (Ashcroft 2010: 73). By the same token, Dionysos exemplifies Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity as "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'", belonging "to the future as much as to the past", not "an essence but a *positioning*" (Hall 1990: 225-226). Dionysos attempts to export his *newness*, his idea of a fluid, travelling self into his native community, which, however, is not prepared to embrace it.

Moreover, the god's hybrid sexuality is a strong challenge to the Theban establishment. "Man? Woman? – It was a close-run thing./ I chose man. What do you think?" (Greig 2007a: 7), says Dionysos addressing the audience in his first speech, thus asserting, from the very beginning, his distance from Pentheus' masculine, or patriarchal, system of values – the androgynous mind defies one that refutes its *anima*. Clearly, the play suggests a fascinating link between an individual's recognition and respect for ethnic, cultural otherness and the acceptance of the Other inside him/her: again the implied message is that we can know what's other from us only if we deeply know ourselves, confronting and coming to terms with our inner tensions. Pentheus' fierce resistance to Dionysos' hybridity – "Don't touch me/ […] don't infect me", he tells his grandfather, who, unlike him, becomes one of the god's followers – suggests anxiety about the Other, which he can dominate only by imposing his authority and imprisoning him. Hence Dionysos' violent response: "take his mind", he asks the Maenads, "open it […]/ Bring out his feminine side" (Greig 2007a: 56), and, staging a "transvestite mission" (p. 61), whereby he convinces Pentheus to dress up as a woman to see the Bacchants' rituals, the god forces him to recognise that the Dionysian – or indeed anything that he believed *other* from his social and psychic world – is, in fact, around and within him. Interestingly enough, in Pentheus' mental frame women and foreigners are juxtaposed as the inferior Other (irrational, emotional, uncivilised) to be kept under control by Greek men, who "only know better" (p. 28). As head of a community based on rigid hierarchical relationships

and unable to integrate difference, he will pay the penalty for all his subjects and face a horrible denouement.

4.1. Conflicting Identities: Ideology of Power versus Liberty

The Bacchae is a narrative of political and ideological repression. Faced with the unknown embodied by the Bacchants, Pentheus can only respond despotically: "Some I'll sell/ Off as slaves in other cities/ And some I'll keep to work the loom/ In servile domesticity" (Greig 2007a: 32). The authoritarian prince rules a city that, though named Thebes in the play text, could represent any society undermined by its own intolerance and narrow-mindedness. If, on the one hand, the stage performance further highlights the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysos through language differences (Tony Curran's educated accent versus Alan Cumming's working-class Glaswegian), on the other hand, to identify their contrast as one between England and Scotland would be quite outré. In fact, Pentheus is rather meant to personify the myth, or rather mystique, of Scottish masculinity, the *hard man* image, often simplistically associated with Scottish national identity from the eighteenth century onwards.

By subverting this image, Dionysos becomes the mouthpiece of the author's questioning of any idea of essential Scottishness. At the same time, he would seem to suggest that a crucial problem to be faced in contemporary Scotland is the degree of respect for and recognition of gender, class and racial *minority* groups within it, perhaps a more urgent issue than Scottish political independence itself. Greig appropriates and reconfigures Euripides' searing portrait of wildness in the ghastly representation of Pentheus' death by resorting to the extreme physical language of *in-yer-face* theatre: thus he manages to show the dangerousness and imploding effects of an ideology of power that is blind to the needs of the marginalised and subaltern. The words with which Dionysos addresses the Thebans at the end are illuminating in this sense:

> If you had all been wiser here
> And learned to recognise the Scream
> And welcome him willingly – or
> Unwillingly – into your lives
> You would not have had to know pain.

You and me – us – we could have been
A happy family but no – (Greig 2007a: 86; my italics)

Here Dionysos bespeaks an idea of togetherness encompassing Self and Other, which strongly contrasts with Pentheus' obtuse binary thinking, for instance when he says: "I'll not have Bakkhos here in Thebes/ It's very simple. Him or me" (Greig 2007a: 50). This kind of exclusive argumentation entails denying the individual, social and political liberty expressed by the term "Scream", a free translation of Bromius, one of the god's key names, meaning the Roarer and conveying the force of the release from the restraints of selfhood and authoritarianism.

However, Dionysos' fierce revenge for suffering a double rejection at home is by no means portrayed as a wise reaction. By responding to violence with further violence he duplicates the repressiveness of his victimisers; and the outcome of this chain of inhuman acts is perpetual exile everywhere and "Nothing", since "tomorrow's/ Hopes have turned into today's black/ Emptiness" (Greig 2007a: 83), a despairing Agave confesses. As Greig has observed, "The play rails against fundamentalism. It says you must recognise all the gods. […]. The gods simply represent all the parts of being human" (see Burnet 2016). This message of tolerance is embedded in Euripides' tragedy, but Greig emphasises it by having the final Chorus repeat more than once "No – you can't choose the gods that you worship/ No – you just have to worship them all", and by closing the play with a deliberate hyperbole to condemn despotism and all forms of chauvinism: "Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes" (Greig 2007a: 88).

Conclusion

In 2007 Greig staged a play engaging the readers/spectators with political, social and ethical issues that can undoubtedly be connected to Scotland's contentious past, the dramatic changes recorded in its history and the recent resurgence of a national sentiment expressing the desire for complete emancipation from Westminster. However, as I have attempted to show, Greig's concerns here, as everywhere in his output, cross geo-cultural borders to suggest connections among different societies and to fight insularity. Moreover, his handling of individual and national identities, and his celebration of

difference, transcultural empathy and dialogue make an important contribution to postcolonial and world-literature studies. For the Scottish playwright, therefore, the theatrical space can become a *locus* in which Scotland's, the UK's and the whole world's, ideological extremisms or coercive measures are denounced as menaces to the universal values of humanity.

Indeed, in *The Bacchae* Greig deploys metatheatrical strategies in order to draw attention to the crucial role of drama and performance in contemporary society. *In primis*, Dionysos defines himself as a "theatrical god", while Pentheus refers to him just as a "Bakkhic actor from abroad" reciting a part in his own play: "I'm in charge./ I'm writing/ The script" (Greig 2007a: 29), the ruler says. Moreover, the scene in which Pentheus is ready to gaze at the bacchanalia stresses the voyeuristic sensorial experience inherent in all theatrical representations: it is the concrete materiality of drama and the actual *embodiment* on stage of the complexities of human nature that determine the experiential, and therefore uniquely powerful, nature of theatre. Whether this experience occurs *in yer face* or through Brechtian *Verfremdungeffect* techniques, the impact of *watching bodies* perform our feelings, emotions, and ideologies is oftentimes overpowering. It is so even for Dionysos gazing at the bloody and catastrophic ending that he has provoked:

> This scene is hard to watch. This grief.
> It brings no joy to me to see
> A mother weeping for her boy.
> A grandfather destroyed. A house –
> A great city – spoiled for ever.
> Knew the ending when I wrote
> The script, but still – *to see it – here*
> *In front of me, played out for real,*
> *It's cruel*. (Greig 2007a: 83-84; my italics)

Here Greig empowers his protagonist's voice to convey the force and consequence of "presently experienced dramatic actions", to borrow Raymond Williams's words (Williams 1966: 18). *De facto* both in the text and performance of *The Bacchae*, Dionysos' voice and body speak directly to the audience calling attention to questions that involve the global community, thus creating a common ground of transnational and transcultural concerns. Once Greig admitted

that perhaps "theatre is very unlikely to produce political change", but then he poignantly added: "it depends on what 'political change' means. What theatre can do, I think, is build communities" (see Rodríguez 2016: 90).

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