

ARION

WINTER 2015

A JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND THE CLASSICS



Dionysus as Global Rorschach

MARIANNE MCDONALD

A GOOD READ.* In this interesting study, Erika Fischer-Lichte claims that Dionysus “has been resurrected as the god of globalization,” primarily “because he is the god of theatre” (229). She claims that her book is “intended for a broad readership,” surely important in a globalized world propelled by a certain capitalistic drive that, coupled with isolated fanaticism, threatens to abolish or limit education to “profitable” subjects, most of which do not include studying the classics—and certainly not those written in ancient dead languages.

She addresses the issues of globalization from three main standpoints, as summarized in her Epilogue:

1. Traditional communities dissolve and the question arises how to build new ones . . .
2. The dissolution of traditional communities inevitably leads to the destabilization of collective as well as individual identity.
3. Today culture can no longer be perceived as a fixed or isolated entity.

(225)

Fischer-Lichte asks how, since we have become globalized, do we deal with this new reality? What does it mean to lose one’s own identity, and will societal confrontation “turn out to be a productive encounter or a destructive clash of cultures or a combination of both” (225)? I like her conclusion that “Dionysus is present” because he represents theatre,

*Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Dionysus Resurrected: Performances of Euripides’ The Bacchae in a Globalizing World*. Malden, MA and Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2014. 238 pages.

which has been in existence since man first learned to play a role to amuse others and which destabilizes identities in the formation of new communities.

Fischer-Lichte holds that there is no such thing as “universal truths and values” in Greek tragedy,¹ adding that “the concept of universalism must therefore not only be questioned but also abandoned altogether” (xii). But then she goes on to show how ancient Greek plays throughout the ages have been directed to illustrate their themes as they affect contemporary people. So I quarrel at times with some of the sweeping statements that her own text refutes, but I will certainly admit that different peoples express universals in particular ways.

Death and the use (or abuse) of power are universal truths, and these are certainly addressed in ancient Greek tragedy. Cacoyannis, among others, has claimed that Euripides’ *Trojan Women* is the greatest anti-war play of all time. Suzuki used that play to show comparable abuse, as a parallel to the atrocity of Hiroshima, which also left women and children homeless, and men to suffer the effects of radiation for generations. Right now, homeless Syrians are trying to get a visa to the US to perform Euripides’ *Trojan Women*; the play seems to appeal to many cultures as a criticism of war that victimizes women and children. (By the way, American officials are refusing the visas because the cast of performers have had their homes destroyed, and are technically refugees.)

There have always been variations in cultures, and the Greeks were among the first to react negatively (see Edith Hall’s *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*).² Anyone not Greek was a barbarian, who spoke unintelligible words that sounded like “Ba Ba,” not the cultivated language of the “civilized Greek.” Medea and Dionysus were primary examples of the barbarian, and Euripides’ two plays on them frame the beginning and the end of the Peloponnesian War (431 BC and 405 BC, with the war ending in 404 BC). Both *Medea* and *Bacchae* question who is the true barbarian; both involve murders of the innocent (terror-

ism in antiquity), and both end in devastating punishments for the perceived wrongdoers. As R. Winnington-Ingram claimed, "Euripides recognized but hated Dionysus."³

I applaud the comment in the book's preface: "All translations are by their very nature 'adaptations' and should be seen as a first step in the process of appropriation culminating in a stage production" (xiii). Having translated all of Greek tragedy, with about half performed, I have always faced the dire truth that the Greek author was a better poet. Another problem was, how in the world would I get this performance to reach a modern audience? While I tried to choose accessible language that would be as faithful to the original ideas as possible, the words were modern words.

Fischer-Lichte shows how in its themes the *Bacchae* parallels events in many different periods and countries, and *how* she relates it to modern themes is very interesting. It is very trendy nowadays to relate drama to modern capitalism and technology, both important in our new globalization.⁴ Fischer-Lichte's introduction elucidates three main—and quite different—aspects for her investigation: parallels for Dionysus as a god of joy and beneficial community release; a second phase as a destroyer of personal identity; and finally, a murderous clash that benefits no one.

There follows a history of these productions and their eras, with their murders, assassinations, mass violence (e.g., Vietnam), the rise of murderous groups (Bader-Meinhof in Germany)—many such movements seeking change, yet only provoking and suffering violence. I found too much time was given to the dated theories of ritual and sacrifice "explaining" Greek tragedy, including the Jane Harrison group and the Cambridge school in England, and to citing Walter Burkert, Victor Turner, Arnold van Gennep and others. A good friend of mine, former theatre critic Jonathan Saville, pointed out that Jane Harrison's writings and Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough* were brilliant mythical works in themselves. However, "does the theory tell the truth about all those death-and-resurrection myths and about Greek

tragedy? NOTHING tells the truth about myths and tragedies, they are their own truths.”⁵

Fischer-Lichte claims “staging a play always means performing a ritual,” which includes “*sparagmos* [of the text] and *omophagia* [which the audience consumes]” (21). Why sacrificial ritual? I rather prefer Zeami’s theory of Japanese Noh drama, the *hana* (“flower”) that the actors performing create with the audience.⁶ But then the Japanese were close to flower arrangements and Zen. And Aristotle in his *Poetics* claimed *catharsis* can result from the pity and fear that a performance raises in an audience, the Greek equivalent to that *hana*.

Fischer-Lichte also mentions that the first Greek tragedy staged in China was Luo Jinlin’s in 1986, which I saw with her in Delphi (as I did most of these plays, at what was then Delphi’s annual Greek Tragedy festival). That was an amusing production in that the chorus had to have shoes of varying height to make the actors all the same height, signifying their equality under communism: Greek tragedy used to make a political statement.

The discussions of individual productions, given the quality of each, are well worth reading. Fischer-Lichte has immense acquaintance with performance and is not simply an armchair intellectual with little discrimination about live theatre. However, though I understand why her categories were convenient, I just question their rigidity: the performances included in the “Festivals of Liberation: Celebrating Community” section of the book have seeds of both the disintegration of identity and hostility.

Chapter One discusses Richard Schechner’s *Dionysus in 69*. His performance featured fewer than half the original lines of the play, but mingled a type of spontaneous improvisation along the lines of Grotowski’s “in search of self.” The audience is invited to sit most anywhere in the theatre, and to participate. At first, participation led to the Performance Group’s actors and actresses feeling physically violated and it was gradually toned down. Participation also worked in the

other direction. In Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Group was arrested and imprisoned for a night for “corrupting the morals of the good people of the State of Michigan” (45). Ann Arbor was not as ready as New York for experimental theatre.

Pentheus in Euripides’ *Bacchae* makes the mistake of assuming the Bacchantes are engaged in sexual orgies, and that is the major attraction of his allowing himself to be dressed up to spy on them. Tiresias explicitly advises Pentheus:

And don’t imagine sexual orgies:
Dionysus doesn’t force women into either sex or chastity.
They are what they are:
if chaste, they will remain chaste.
even while celebrating Bacchic rites.

(*Ba.* 315–18)⁷

Many versions, including Schechner’s, see Dionysus mainly as the source of orgiastic revelry, underestimating his power as god of the theatre, with a dual nature (both civilized and barbaric), the god of imagination besides the savage animal. Dionysus says (of Pentheus):

He will get to know Dionysus and what a god he is:
to all mankind most fierce, but equally, most gentle.

(*Ba.* 860–61)⁸

Over the course of the thirteen-month performance period, the actor playing Pentheus evolved from emphasizing a role of authority into conveying an abused innocent youth. “The reflection of fascism as an imminent threat was reduced to the acting out of gynophobic fantasies comparable to that of the *vagina dentata*” (44–45).

Critics from Walter Kerr to Stefan Brecht have complained about the role of the spectator, criticisms that range from “surrender” to “co-managerial status.” According to them, the audiences were the ultimate victim. I suspect the audiences were not used to dealing with ambiguity, and in various performances that I’ve attended (including this one), I must say I prefer my usual role as spectator. (However, no spectator is

totally removed from the action in the original ancient Greek theatre, or the traditional settings for Noh in Japan, or Kabuki in which actors intersect the audience, as Mnouchkine does in her performances of the *Oresteia* at the Cartoucherie, an old munition factory converted into a theatre).

Fischer-Lichte shows how Schechner's theatre transformed the audience into a community, and liberated audiences—as LSD did some during the sixties in America, similar to the way that Dionysus liberated with wine. For her, this Dionysus dismembered the theatre in its old traditional form.

Chapter Two deals with Wole Soyinka's *Bacchae*, performed at the National Theatre in London in 1973. Soyinka himself subtitled his play *A Communion Rite*. Fischer-Lichte doesn't add this subtitle in her bibliography, but she does talk about it as a communion ritual, following on extensive commentary from Soyinka. She also lists other African versions of Greek tragedy, but several significant ones are missing, such as Athol Fugard's *The Island* (in their prison on Robben Island, the inmates fight for their rights by performing *Antigone*) and Guy Butler's *Demea*, a version of *Medea*, here a Yoruba princess taking vengeance on her Jason, a white Boer Trekker, whom she totally destroys, using her magic as an African priestess.⁹

This chapter is a breath of fresh air, corroborating the case for ritual aligning itself with Greek tragedy—because of the input of the Yoruba religion, not because of anything to do with the Cambridge School. That was as racist and ill-informed about Soyinka's work as the 1973 production at the National. The bad reviews—panning that production, not Soyinka's play—resulted in only two performances before closing.

These performances were under the auspices of Peter Hall who can put the kiss of death on any Greek tragedy. I know that many walked out on his production of the *Oedipus* plays (which Hall fancied a trilogy, though he broke the plays up into a dyad, typically omitting *Antigone*; of course, Sophocles wrote all three plays at various intervals in his life). Hall used masks in a way that one was hypnotized not only by the

movement of the tongue, but also the unintelligibility of the language (hard to identify it as English), highlighting mere talking heads. For a living mask tradition one should see Asian drama, such as Noh, or Kathakali, where the body conveys what the face doesn't. Ritual depends on use of the body.

I experienced the power of ritual while in Brazil for Carnival in a church located in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro. It seemed that I was the only foreigner there, attending a Candomblé ceremony that incorporated the Yoruba gods and ritual that Soyinka used to fuel his drama. As Dylan Thomas put it, "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower"—the attendees were possessed of spirits (namely, Ogun and Obatala), and smoke hung heavy in the air of the converted church. Dancing and channeling followed, which consumed everybody and was terrifying at the same time. People spun in ecstasy, they spoke in tongues, and eyeballs rolled. They were channeling gods.

Obatala like Dionysus can die and be resurrected, and a yearly battle is enacted. Ogun fights against injustice, and in a sense Soyinka merged the two because his play protests the injustice he knew in Nigeria (having spent two years in prison) and what he saw around the world.

Soyinka fiercely calls Schechner's *Dionysus in 69* a "blasphemy of the culturally deprived." He continues: "I see nothing significantly anti-bourgeois in a bare arse clambering over the audience and flipping ugly tits between me and the main body of action on the stage" (54). Peter Hall wouldn't entrust the direction of his own play to Soyinka, but called in Roland Joffe, who ignored all of Soyinka's informed requests. Again, the white colonialists knew better than to trust the colonized. Harold H. Hobson panned the production as "sweating thighs, wobbling bottoms, and the propaganda of barbarism," just what Soyinka thought of Schechner's *Dionysus in 69*.

Fortunately, there were successful productions in both Jamaica and Nigeria, two places that prize the use of the body rather than reducing it to bouncing flesh. Soyinka's was a

Communion Rite, involving a community ritual that kills a victim and is transformed in the process. This also fits the Greek original: at the end of Soyinka's play, blood seems to spurt out of Pentheus' severed head, but it is wine to add to ecstasy and liberation. Here we find the transformative community feast that Fischer-Lichte sees as one function of Euripides' *Bacchae*. Soyinka encapsulates this well when he describes what both actors and audience feel: "It is this experience that the modern tragic dramatist recreates through the medium of physical contemporary action, reflecting emotions of the first active battle of the will through the abyss of dissolution" (51).

One can also understand Fischer-Lichte's attraction to the ritual as fueling Greek drama, since the next version of the *Bacchae* (her third chapter) is also filled with ritual. It takes a lot from Schechner's drama in having orgiastic behavior, including the birth ritual multiple times (the whole performance is about six hours). This is the *Bacantes* by the Teat(r)o Oficina in São Paulo. Their name has the bracketed "r" to create "te ato," which means "I'm connecting you to someone," the obvious function of theatre being to engage or connect with the emotions and attention of the audience. During the military coup of 1964 in Brazil, there was great oppression and censorship of the arts, but when it was finally over, the Teat(r)o reopened, after having been closed by the regime.

In the staging of *Bacantes*, there is an entire area which functions both as Semele's womb and a place to roast meat. Many gods appear, and it seems that Dionysus at one point becomes Apollo. Each performance contains an orgiastic ritual that merges everyone through an enactment of cannibalism that featured in the history of the Brazil, when the indigenous people of the country killed and ate a Portuguese bishop (Sardinha). In Catholicism, it is said that the communicants eat the body of Christ (a wafer), and the priest drinks his blood (the wine).

Many a people probably have, at one point or another, had cannibalism somewhere in their history. The Greeks

tried unsuccessfully to rewrite this, but evidence certainly points in that direction in Crete, particularly in some new archeological finds and publications. Americans have the shameful history of the Donner pass, though that cannibalism was because of starvation, not ritual or sacrifice.

In the *Bacantes*, nudity abounds and loose garments flash genitalia. Rhythmic dance is contagious. An orgiastic feast takes place at one point, and Pentheus appears as the dictator to stop it. One could say that Euripides' text was the first casualty. It is truly dismembered, although sometimes lines of his appear, as do lines from elsewhere, such as the Frog chorus from Aristophanes, "Breke Breke Coax Coax" (sic, 86), to mock Pentheus.

There is also political satire (as in Soyinka) with references to the wealthy capitalist, Silvio Santos, who had been fighting for years to take over this theatre and convert the property into a shopping mall. When Tiresias asks, "Want to build a shopping mall?" he links Pentheus to Santos. The bacchants address the young king as "Pentheus Pentagonus," and a flag with a dollar bill pattern hangs from his palace. The manipulative wealth from America is seen as a threat. When Pentheus stops the festivities, one is reminded of the coup of the military dictators who stopped the theatre from performing for so long.

The celebratory feast is transformed into cannibalism, and the audience finds its pleasant emotions turned to disgust—but then to participation (ah, the ease of dramatic seduction). Fear turns to pity, but finally acceptance, as emotions shift, giving us the ultimate lesson of reality: *panta rei*, "Everything flows" or changes, as Heraclitus noticed. Or as Fischer-Lichte concludes, "The performance allowed them to experience themselves as ever-changing—as truly Brazilian" (88).

Here at the conclusion of Part I, one sees how adaptable Greek tragedy is throughout the world, and Fischer-Lichte is seducing us into accepting Dionysus as the god of globalization as well as of theatre. Part II deals with renegotiating cultural identities. Chapter Four takes Johann Joachim Winckelmann's "noble simplicity and quiet greatness" (*edle Einfalt und stille*

Grösse) that described Greek Culture, an ideal for both eighteenth and nineteenth century Germans, as well as for the Nazis, and stands it on its head with the four-hour production of the *Bacchae* (1974) by the Schaubühne of Berlin and its Antiquity Project. This production was directed by Klaus Michael Grüber who follows the Dionysus Nietzsche described in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1882), which introduced the two drives inspired in man by Apollo and Dionysus. Nietzsche clearly favored Dionysus.

The Schaubühne presented political theatre, and Peter Stein was one of its founders. After one performance of Peter Weiss' *Vietnam-Discourse*, Stein collected donations for the Viet Cong. This theatre would not let superpowers stop them.

The 1974 production of the *Bacchae* featured an introductory evening by Stein in *Exercises for Actors*, designed by Karl-Ernst Herrmann. This was to acquaint the audience with what they would meet in Dionysus. Both the production and the introductory evening had little to do with the Greeks, but the snippets and dismemberment (*sparagmos*) of the language (with additions from, say, Wittgenstein) allowed the audiences to leave with their individual reactions to this new theatre of the body. There was much nudity, as in Schechner and the Teat(r)o Oficina's *Bacantes*. Other gods also make their appearances, like Prometheus boasting about giving man language and the arts. In this case, the arts destroyed language, though not original theatre.

With brutal Germanic realism (e.g., a gruesome head for Pentheus) a sacrifice is conducted, with Pentheus as the climax. Sobs and screams from the mother when she sees what she has done, and it all seems meaningless. The body parts are not even reassembled, and there is no type of reconciliation. The audience is not invited to take part in the ritual, which is not a celebration and achieves no resolution. The audience is just a witness to this slaughter as they are to the continuing slaughters throughout the world, some possibly genocides.

This is a drama which incorporates modern history, "a meditation on the fundamental strangeness and inaccessibility

of the distant past—be it archaic or classical Greek culture” (111). I would add also the strangeness and inaccessibility of the immediate past, since interpretations of events these days can be diametrically opposed. Fischer-Lichte rightly concludes, “This was a political statement. It denied any possibility of owning ancient Greek culture” and “marked a turning point in the cultural history of Germany” (114).

The next play (Chapter Five), Theodoros Terzopoulos’ *Bacchae*, was performed in 1986 at the Delphi festival. Negative notices by some Greek reviewers are repeated every year by those who feel their holy Greek tragedy is being violated. These are often conservatives who associate their identity with “classical purity,” the same way that the Nazis in Germany preferred Winckelmann’s definition. These Greeks did not want their sacred works contaminated by barbarians (anyone not Greek), reacting against foreign elements—like the Japanese—in Terzopoulos’ work. (Terzopoulos worked with Tadashi Suzuki both in Japan and Greece.)

In fact, the *Bacchae* begins with Akis Sakellariou executing the *Bugaku* traditional court dance with the warrior variation: *bu-no-mai*. Budo describes the martial arts, and this is a martial dance. Both Suzuki and Terzopoulos were preceded by Grotowski in the body as a basis for theatre, but Suzuki put a Japanese spin on it, and Terzopoulos definitely added Greek flavor from traditional theatre and rituals with which he was familiar.

Needless to say, Terzopoulos had great success in other countries. He based his work on the body, which must function as a whole to create both joy and horror in the audience. Having himself grown up in the northwest of Greece, in Makrygialos Pierias, Terzopoulos was acquainted with ecstatic rites, such as the *anastenaria*, a fire-walking ritual—on live coals when the body had worked itself up to being immune to the fire.

Terzopoulos said that he remembered the Germans in his village during World War II, when soldiers got drunk and raped and killed three Greek women. It is this sort of pain that he translates into his movements.

The patients seeking treatment at the hospital of Asclepius walked for eight hours until their pain vanished or was minimized for the operations they were to undergo: they gained ecstatic energy. Japanese Kabuki and Noh actors also have this commitment to using their total body for expression. The body has its own memory and access to the soul. As Terzopoulos said of the *Bacchae*, “many times theatre is a cause, a pretext, for proceeding to the internal knowledge, the knowledge of the cell, of our blood, and it is painful.”¹⁰

The actors and actresses in Terzopoulos’ production were able to move about the stage in contorted positions, portraying agony through their bodies. The bodies conveyed the action, and while some words were used, the bodies had the final say.¹¹ His *Bacchae* was an investigation of death and ecstasy, but shown through adolescence as a time of revelation and a rite of passage: Dionysus and Pentheus are vulnerable adolescents who indulge in a deadly dance of love mixed with hate. They are young animals confronting and challenging each other.

The actors (three) and actresses (two) are semi-nude, emphasizing both their primitive nature and their vulnerability. They seem possessed by demons, or a god—indeed Dionysus, who is kind to those who worship him, but most fierce to those who deny him.

Sophia Mikhopoulou was brilliant as both Tiresias and Agave. She is ecstatic in the spoils of the hunt, a young lion. After she recognizes the truth that she holds the head of her son, and not a lion she has killed, she descends into horrified silence and then agonizing screams as she dances the nightmare from the realization of what she has done, distilling both the ecstasy and the agony that Dionysus releases.

Fischer-Lichte concludes this chapter rightly: “By performing the tragedy that deals with the devastation of Thebes as a consequence of the refusal of its ruler to accept the Stranger, the new god from Asia, in the polis, a new concept of Greekness was outlined that welcomed the inclusion of ‘Strangers,’ i.e., elements from other cultures, because all

cultures spring from a common source, the human body” (133). To which I might add that these people also all face death and its trauma, including the repercussions of murder. Many claim killing another man can be justified, and many object, but Terzopoulos presents this problem in its total brutality. During the Greek civil war, one was forced to choose sides, and there were many atrocities—even, of brother killing brother. Terzopoulos shows that man is an animal. His style may have international elements, but its essence derives from Greek passion, and from the suffering of centuries of occupation and defeat.

The next drama is Krzysztof Warlikowski’s *The Bacchae* in Warsaw, 2001. It is an interesting variation that blows apart the text and the myth, and again offers no resolution or redemption. But it does lead to creative thinking. Fischer-Lichte goes into the history of the Polish theatre, and its politically expressive iterations, protesting in various ways the Communist occupation that ended in 1989. Then suddenly the theatre faced other challenges. It never was especially interested in the Greeks, except for some sporadic productions. I remember Andrzej Wajda bringing his *Antigone* to Delphi, his chorus dressed in miner’s costumes. *Antigone*, like all Wajda’s work, is a theatrical fight for justice, with examples from the Poland he knew well.

At the beginning of Warlikowski’s *Bacchae*, Dionysus is born as a headless creature. He emerges from darkness wearing a white sweater, trousers and sneakers. Then appear three sisters—the Fates? Marys at Jesus’ tomb? More likely, as in *The Bacchae* (229–30), Autonoe, Ino and Agave—with Semele, Dionysus’ mother, now deceased. The final womb from which he emerges is Zeus’ thigh, Zeus having killed Semele by appearing in his true form—fire, or his lightning bolt—tricked by Hera into granting Semele’s wish.

In the play there is a statue in a shrine, and these sisters seem to worship the statue. Christ? Tiresias and Cadmus appear, and are prepared to worship in their own way, as hippies, with malas, prayer beads. Pentheus appears in a bright

red jacket with a hood and looms over Dionysus as he lies on the ground. Pentheus throws sand in his face, then sits down at a table and eats a slice of bread. A homoerotic play between them begins, with overtones of sado-masochism.

A mirror scene of this now begins. This time, Dionysus wears the red jacket while Pentheus is dressed in white. Dionysus slaps him and eats a piece of bread. Pentheus slaps himself, and lies down before Dionysus, rubbing his head on his foot. Dionysus drags Pentheus through the sand at the back of the stage. The three women laugh raucously, shouting words of the chorus. Noise and red lights fill the space.

Agave gives birth to the bloody head of her son, as she birthed his body at the beginning of the play. Cadmus brings her to see what she has done and screams and wails. They empty buckets beside them filled with raw meat and bloody pieces—Pentheus' body, which is never reassembled. Agave and Cadmus sit at the "communion" table or altar in silence: bread and blood are served for the communion.

The text has once again been dismembered, and bodies and actions reign. No orgies, but suggestions. If this is a Catholic text, then the church houses monsters. (Certainly, the child abuse by priests in Ireland and elsewhere around the world has destroyed faith in its ministers.)¹²

Fischer-Lichte does well to cite the mixed reviews and different interpretations, but the upshot is that there is no single interpretation: "The intellectual discourse is deepened by ambiguity of the production . . . Discussing the performance potentially led not only to a new understanding of the play, but also to a new common self-understanding of all those involved" (153). Obviously though, a negative interpretation of Dionysus is not new (see note 3). Yet I find it richer to see the duality in Dionysus' own nature and an ambiguity in theatre, which varies in each and every performance, even of the same play.

Part I consisted of celebrations, whereas Part II showed that cultural identities and national dramas were questions. Part III debates whether cultures benefit each other by these

mixtures or cause a destructive clash. We now journey to the East, Japan first, then India, and finally China. What happens when very different philosophies and theatrical traditions merge?

I really appreciate Fischer-Lichte's brief histories of the theatre in the countries of the directors and/or playwrights she's investigating. She shows what theatre confronted them and how they gradually imported western drama into their works. Nowhere is this done better than with Suzuki and the state of Japanese theatre when he started; and she also documents the performances of the *Bacchae* and *Dionysus* over the years.¹³

Fischer-Lichte shows how the *Bacchae* at first is a protest against the dictator who oppresses the people, and just when they think they are safe, the dictator returns and kills them all. Gradually, the treatment of the *Bacchae* comes to reflect the madness of cults and fanatic groups proliferating in the world, like the Jim Jones-led suicide in Guyana in 1978, or the AUM Shinrikyô in 1995, with sarin gas released in the Tokyo subway, killing thirteen and sending five thousand to the hospital. America had its own experience of mass murder in 9/11.

In later versions, cults arise and Dionysus becomes a group. The god never appears. His priests carry out the murder; Agave doesn't kill Pentheus, as she had earlier. In several of Suzuki's plays, people roll around the stage in wheelchairs. They are part of the "Farewell to History" cult, and wear dark glasses like intellectuals in Japan. Perhaps that implies that, as George Santayana put it, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." If they haven't learned this, they are blind and crippled (perhaps explaining the wheelchairs). The audience hears "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow," an allusion to Macbeth's speech on life as "a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing." In retrospect, Suzuki's plays gave way to the absurd, with Beckett's *Lucky* in charge. One trilogy was *Dionysus*, *Macbeth* and *Ivanov*. East and West truly met—or clashed.

Fischer-Lichte concludes that there has been a long journey from the oppression of a political ruler, to other versions which represent “history as a never-ending struggle for power between different destructive and deadly groups,” which then are saved in a “utopian vision of the ‘restoration to wholeness’” to be realized in the performance. “Even if history will never bring about such a restoration to wholeness, theatre can do so” by highlighting “the human body as the common ground of culture and theatre” (182).

I experienced most forms of Japanese classical drama while I lived in Japan for a while. I studied Japanese at a university there, and learned from the family with whom I lived. I had a chance to see Suzuki and his work in various venues over the years. Whereas I was entranced by Suzuki at the beginning, I found the way he developed defeated his real genius.

First, he lost the great actors at the beginning. He could not replace Kanze Hisao with Tom Hewitt (who is in my opinion an execrable actor, and bombed in *Dracula*, a musical by Des McAnuff at La Jolla Playhouse, 1984), nor Shiraishi Kayoko with Ellen Lauren, whose acting I find ludicrous, whereas Shiraishi always sent chills up my spine in her three roles—Hecuba/Cassandra/Hiroshima victim—in Suzuki’s *Trojan Women*, which was a masterpiece. (I was part of the audiences that saw and hated the work of these Americans.) Shiraishi left Suzuki to work with Ninagawa and also took a major part in the Butoh opera *Julie Taymor* produced in Japan, Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* (1993).

I think that Suzuki was no judge of American actors, and the mixture of languages and races simply did not work. Fischer-Lichte is generous, and I admire her for it. Her scholarship is usually impeccable, but I don’t agree with some of her value judgments. I have been in many audiences that loved Suzuki’s *Trojan Women*, but detested the affectations of his *Bacchae/Dionysus*. Suzuki also became quite dictatorial—and rather like the dictator in his first production of the *Bacchae*, he murdered his good actors and they left the company.

In this case, Suzuki seems like Dionysus the dictator, who destroyed his own theatre.

The next production is from India. First, Fischer-Lichte tells us how the production was decided upon: the Greek embassy in New Delhi asked Guru Sadanam V. Balakrishnan, of the International Centre for Kathakali in New Delhi, for the *Bacchae* to be integrated with Kathakali in the 1998 Delphi festival. Other cultures have tried to merge styles, but this one was a conscious attempt to incorporate two ancient art forms into something more traditional than some of the modern performances that have outraged Greek critics, whom nothing different could satisfy, since “it is something written into our DNA.”¹⁴ The rest of the world is *barbaros* in its misplaced attempts to tell them how to produce their own drama.

In this case, the Indians ceded to the requests of the Greeks, which were often made without regard to the rich Indian tradition. For instance, the Greeks insisted the chorus be at the heart of the production, and so that had to be added to their work, although such a group of singers and dancers didn’t exist in Kathakali.

Fischer-Lichte outlines the elements that were based on ancient Indian religious classics, such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, the Hindu holy book. Kathakali usually was performed before a temple, starting at dusk and ending at dawn. The form itself originated in Kerala in the seventeenth century, and developed further over the years. It traces its art to the *Natyasastra*, an ancient Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts, the mythical author of which is the sage Bharata. Kathakali consists of silent actor-dancers, with the text sung by two vocalists, to the accompaniment of percussionists. This is very similar to ancient Noh in Japan, developed in the 13th century out of court dances, to which drama was added. They were masked in part, and used the flute together with drums. Performances last all day, and there are various characters from gods to warriors, women, and demons.

Both Kathakali and Noh have stylized movement, and work in the belief that the actor must be possessed by the character.

In Kathakali, various states of being and feelings are the *bhavas*, and they are greeted by responses called *rasa*. There are eight *bhavas* covering love, comedy, sadness, anger, heroism, fear, disgust and wonder. (Abhinavagupta added peace and atonement.) Facial expressions and *mudras*, hand gestures, convey these emotions. The gestures can express a whole gamut of inner reactions. The *padam*, a dialogue or soliloquy, involves the dancer/actors with hand gestures, vocalists and percussion; these are performed at least twice during the traditional performance of Kathakali.

The performance in Greece was scheduled for an hour and forty-five minutes to suit the westerners. Dionysus was like Shiva, a god who transformed into a bull, a snake and a lion. The elaborate makeup and colors indicated much about the character. Dionysus features the gold of a god, and Pentheus, a typical tyrant, part good and part bad, an anti-hero, with a green face and red mustache, red eyebrows hovering over his eyes.

When Agave entered with Pentheus' bloody head, she entered carrying his mask, and there was blood on her face. Bloodshed is not shown on stage in Kathakali, which is comparable to Greek tragedy where violence was hidden. The text was curtailed. The Greek press showed that as usual Greece won, and India lost (rather like a sports game that was fixed in advance).

There were other versions of Greek tragedy in India merging the two traditions; *Alcestis* was the most successful. Fischer-Lichte shows that Greek tragedy worked best with Kathakali given that both came from mythological traditions and featured gods, while Shakespeare, for example, with its complicated text, was dismembered beyond recognition.

Fischer-Lichte concludes in her generous assessment that this performance of the *Bacchae* at Delphi was "an encounter between their own cultural heritage and the Indian tradition of Kathakali . . . that enabled them to see their own

tradition in a new light and appreciate the other . . . [and in this way] must be deemed an exemplary intercultural performance” (204). Both traditions are enormously rich. In 1992, Ariane Mnouchkine, and her Théâtre du Soleil, made this ultimately clear in her successful performances around the world of the *Oresteia*, *Les Atrides*, (which included *Iphigenia at Aulis*, so one could understand Agamemnon better). Her drama perfectly exemplified world drama (including Kathakali), and how topical Greek tragedy could be.

The final play discussed is Peter Steadman and Chen Shizheng’s *The Bacchae* in Beijing (and also Delphi). Fischer-Lichte shows how the Chinese allowed themselves to be corrupted by the then largest grant that the NEH had given to promote an exchange of the arts between the two countries. This illustrated that money tends to corrupt, and that a lot of money corrupts absolutely.

Fischer-Lichte describes how Peter Steadman (of a relatively unknown theatre, the New York Greek Drama Company) lorded it over the Chinese Beijing opera and smeared his mediocrity and ignorance all over the joint production. He did not even realize that the Beijing opera did not use masks. The Messenger, played by a talented actor, Kong Xinyuan, tore off his mask and delivered his speech, thus earning the first heated applause in the performance. Steadman bullied the director Chen Shi-Zheng to perform it his way—with togas for costume, masks from *commedia dell’arte*, and text in Greek (so no one could understand it). One critic, Catherine Diamond, said that the actresses occasionally tittering “with their hands over their mouths, a cliché-gesture, supposedly connoting femininity, was a travesty.” The title of her review says it all: “The Floating World of Nouveau Chinoiserie: Asian Orientalist Productions of Greek Tragedy.”¹⁵ She could have added that the tittering and mouth-covering was out of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Mikado*: “Three little maids from school are we.”

Needless to say, this *Bacchae* was panned by most critics wherever it was performed. The failure was a pity because there was the potential for real collaboration. The connois-

seurs of Beijing opera were appalled, but the young people who were not aware of the beauties of either tradition, were more pleased with it, since they accepted it as spoken drama, which the opera was not.

Tang protested: "In the exchange between China and the West, we have such an inferior position that we are scarcely autonomous anymore."¹⁶ That is obviously changing. Would that we could have an equal collaboration where both bring their best from their own traditions, rather than elicit the worst due to misunderstanding.

Fischer-Lichte has written an excellent book, informative about world traditions and critical of unwarranted claims (such as the knowability of the ancient Greek staging techniques, 209). She makes a case for how the new global conditions shape performances now, and how we often profit by this enrichment.

NOTES

1. In response to Marianne McDonald, *Ancient Sun, Modern Light: Greek Drama on the Modern Stage* (New York 1992).

2. Oxford 1989.

3. *Euripides and Dionysus* (Amsterdam 1969), 179.

4. See Daisuke Miyao's *The Aesthetics of Shadow: Lighting and Japanese Cinema* which seems promising in itself, but then the first chapter is "Lighting and Capitalist-Industrial Modernity: Shochiku and Hollywood." This is a very different from *In Praise of Shadows* by Jun'ichirô Tanizaki, which Miyao cites, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (Stony Creek, CT 1977).

5. In private correspondence with me after reading this review.

6. *On the Art of No Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*, J. Thomas Rimer and Masakazu Yamazaki, trans. (Princeton 1984), see *Fûshikaden*: "Teachings on Style and the Flower," 5-110.

7. My translation of the *Bacchae*, first performed in San Diego at Sixth at Penn Theatre in 2006.

8. See note 7.

9. See Kevin Wetmore, Jr., *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky* (North Carolina and London 2002) 130-41. He also includes comments about Soyinka's play. He published my *Medea, Queen of Colchester*, a transvestite queen, abandoned by the white Afrikaner she married; she also exacts a

gruesome punishment. See *Black Medea: Adaptations in Modern Plays*, Kevin J. Wetmore, ed. (Amherst, New York 2013), 293–337.

10. Terzopoulos' Talk in my *Ancient Sun* (note 1), 164.

11. See my "Theodoros Terzopoulos: Theatre of the Body," *TheatreForum* 9 (Summer/Fall 1996), 19–25, and the book on his work for which I also wrote the preface, *Theodoros Terzopoulos and the Attis Theatre* (Athens 2002), 15–30.

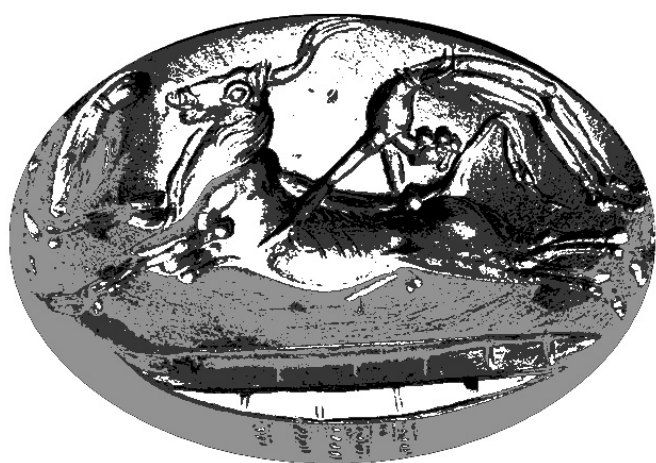
12. See John Michael McDonagh's new film, *Calvary* (2014), starring Brendan Gleason. John Michael is Martin's brother.

13. In addition to my chapter on Suzuki in *Ancient Sun, Modern Light* (note 1), see also various articles of mine: "Tadashi Suzuki's Chthonic Theater," *Proceedings of the Second International Meeting of Ancient Greek Drama* (Athens 1989), 36–60; "The Madness that Makes Sane: Mania in Tadashi Suzuki's *Dionysus*," *TheatreForum* 4.1 (1994), 11–18; "Fusing Greek and Asian Drama, Suzuki Tadashi's Theatre: A Japanese Export that Enriches," *Didaskalia* 1.4 (October 1994) Sallie Goetsch and Peter Toohey, eds.; "Silence and Samurai: Suzuki Tadashi and Greek Tragedy," *TheatreForum* (Summer/Fall 2001), 83–89 (also delivered at a panel on Japanese theatre at the a meeting of the American Philological Association in 2001 with Mae Smethurst who spoke on the work of Ninagawa); and "The Rise and Fall of Dionysus: Suzuki Tadashi and Greek Tragedy," *Arion*, 3rd series, 17.3 (Winter 2010), 55–69; and others.

14. Platon Mavromoustakos, *Theatre and the World: Essays on Performance and Politics of Cultures* (Delhi 1990), 311.

15. *Theatre Quarterly*, 15, part 2 (NTQ 58), 142–64,

16. Tang Xiao-bai, "The *Bacchae*—the Encounter of Illusions," *Chinese Theatre* 6, 42–44.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Four poems by LAWRENCE DUGAN

JONATHAN ROSAND remembers his father, David Rosand

PETER GREEN translates Book 24 of the *Iliad*

“Penelope,” a poem by DAVID GOMES CÁSSERES

The future of Classics: COLIN WELLS explores Havelock’s
alphabetic thesis and its implications

TOM KEELINE Latinizes three poems
from A. E. Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad*

George Seferis and Yiannis Ritsos on Helen of Troy,
by JAMES NIKOPOULOS

Two poems by GEORGE KALOGERIS

“Frogspawn: A Play For Radio”:
J. MICHAEL WALTON updates Aristophanes’ *Frogs*

The life and work of a Uranian connoisseur:
THOMAS K. HUBBARD on Edward Perry Warren

Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *Dionysus Resurrected*:
Performances of Euripides’ The Bacchae in a Globalizing World,
reviewed by MARIANNE McDONALD

JUSTINE MCCONNELL reviews Jeff James’ play *Stink Foot*