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The monster within: between the onset and resolution of the oedipal crisis

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Acknowledgements

Doctoral research is often presented as a long, lonely, miserable journey. The fact that, for me, it was an enriching, enjoyable and transformative experience can only be attributed to my supervisors. I am deeply indebted to Amber and Stephen for being unfalteringly supportive and for believing in me and my project even when I had doubts. Their genuine care for students extends beyond what can be expected of a supervisor, and it is difficult to overstate the importance of the safe space they create for students.

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Abstract of thesis

This thesis, *The monster within: between the onset and resolution of the oedipal crisis*, is located at the intersection between psychoanalysis, philosophy and myth, and builds on all three to look at the formation of the psyche.

Drawing on Freudian and Lacanian theories, I interrogate the emergence of psychic structures that constitute subjectivity and argue that an un-theorised psychic structure operates at the level of the pre-oedipal and is not assimilated by phallic law. I suggest this element is a fully-formed transcendental ego that is overwritten but not annihilated in the oedipal phase, and continues to exist beneath the constituted ego. I term this a *non-Symbolic subject*, to show it possesses a transcendental ego and *is* a subject, but it has not been habituated into phallic norms. I argue the existence of the non-Symbolic subject stems from the primacy given to the father as possessor of the phallus, and the secondary function the mother occupies in psychic development.

To support my argument, I use an ancient Greek tragedy, *The Bacchae*, due to its compartmentalisation of sexual difference and almost dogmatically defined gender roles. Following Irigaray, I return to Greek tragedy to interrogate the male imaginary and identify the elements that structure the psyche. My aim is to argue that the conceptualisation of the subject with which Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis operates is historical, not universal; by positing a pre-phallic subjectivity, I seek to show that subjectivity need not be restricted to the replication of the image of the Father. Using the non-Symbolic subject as a critical tool, I attempt to expand the psychoanalytical theoretical language and help theory move beyond the oedipal, towards a space where subjectification around the Father becomes a historical occurrence, not a condition for existence as a subject to be possible.

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	6
Overarching aims	6
Main theorists.....	11
The gap in psychoanalytic theory	12
The main claim of this thesis	15
The new theoretical model: non-oedipal subjectivity and the divine feminine	20
Chapter structure	26
<i>Chapter 1 - Methodological considerations: psychoanalysis, philosophy and myth</i>	28
Psychoanalysis	28
Philosophy	29
Myth.....	29
Allowing the psyche to speak—Freud, Lacan and the unconscious.....	30
The problem with mind dualism	30
Moving on to understanding psychoanalysis as a language.....	32
From field of study to discourse of the self: the hold of Lacanian psychoanalysis	35
The birth of the subject—Kant, Foucault, Freud and Lacan on subjectification.....	39
Using discourse to become a subject: man’s claim to knowledge	40
Both subject and object: the difficulty with (self)representation	43
To love and be loved by oneself: modern subjects as products of narcissism.....	49
Summary of Chapter 1	59
<i>Chapter 2 - Violence shall set you free: Eleutherios as the non-Symbolic subject</i>	60
Why posit the existence of such a subject?	64
The problem of violence and its links to sacrifice.....	65
Nietzsche and the aesthetics of the Dionysiac	78
Summary of Chapter 2	82
<i>Chapter 3 - God, man and country: limits of feminine agency in the male imaginary</i> ...	83
The psyche and structure: against monadic (mis)representation.....	83
The monstrous mother: Dionysus and Agave.....	90
Klein’s theory of subjectification	92
Accounts of subjectification: Klein and Lacan.....	96
The mother and the non-Symbolic subject	102
The mother and the Symbolised subject.....	107
Kinship and tragedy	112
Summary of Chapter 3	118

<i>Chapter 4 - Little women: femininity in The Bacchae</i>	119
The mother-child dyad: Agave and Pentheus.....	119
Objectification: the Theban women as the structural base of patriarchy	124
The female chorus: the negotiation between the feminine and the masculine	129
The absent mother	136
Kinship ties and their opacity in The Bacchae	142
Summary of Chapter 4	147
<i>Chapter 5 - Death, violence and self-harm: the place of the mother</i>	148
Dionysus as symptom	150
The generative mother	152
The repression of the mother	163
Repression and the death drive.....	167
Summary of Chapter 5	172
<i>Conclusion</i>	174
Summary of the argument.....	174
The drivers of the argument	176
The achievements of this thesis	180
The limitations of this thesis	183
Future steps	186
<i>Bibliography</i>	190

Introduction

The quest to uncover subjectivity, what it is that makes one a subject, has troubled thinkers throughout history, from ancient to modern times. If science has helped us come closer to understanding *what* the subject is, we are still to elucidate *who*, *how*, or, indeed, *why* he is. I do not claim to be able to answer any of these questions through this thesis; however, I hope to reframe the way we envisage the process of subjectification today to help think through the problematic mechanism by which an individual becomes a subject and exists in society.

Overarching aims

My thesis, titled *The monster within: between the onset and resolution of the oedipal crisis*, is located at the intersection of psychoanalysis, philosophy and myth, and draws on all three to look at the formation of the psyche. For the purpose of this thesis I employ the term 'myth' in the same sense as Amber Jacobs does in her book, *On Matricide*. Jacobs, following Levi-Strauss, defines myth as "a complex set of codes with a high degree of internal organisation that, under structural analysis, reveal the "unconscious truths" that "make...man aware of his roots in society." This view, that myth is a receptacle for universal unconscious structures, makes the analysis of myth the key to revealing unconscious structuring laws, and, as a result, an indispensable tool in interrogating the psyche. For this reason, I use myth, as Levi-Strauss puts it, as "a musical score", in which meaning is not given by the sequencing of events, but by their totality and variance. As Jacobs argues, employing this understanding of myth allows one to use "differential myth analysis...to challenge psychoanalysis's unilateral approach to myth", thus enabling the identification of universal unconscious structures.¹

Through this work, I aim to theorise what I see as an identifiable psychic structure that has not been theorised previously in psychoanalytic theory, and which, through its very existence, destabilises the psyche from within. I envision that such an intervention might not only develop the psychoanalytic theoretical body, but, by providing a new interpretation of psychoanalysis, it could also serve as a useful tool to interrogate literature and unearth meanings that had been hitherto hidden. Furthermore, my thesis

¹ Amber Jacobs, *On Matricide* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007), 17.

might shed new light on the psyche by looking at its structures from an interdisciplinary perspective that is part philosophical and part psychoanalytical.²

In this inquiry I am governed by my interest to undertake research into the theories of traditional (Freudian and Lacanian) psychoanalysis, more specifically, the idea of the oedipal complex as the necessary and sole foundation of selfhood, and the mythical instances where this dynamic is challenged. My main argument is that, in the course of the formation of the psyche, as theorised by Freud and, later on, Lacan, there is a residual element that fails to conform to the rules imposed by the patriarchal Symbolic, and therefore does not successfully transition to the post-oedipal organisation.³ As a result, this residual element acts beneath the constituted ego, as a continuous subversion of the phallic law, even after the subject has been habituated into norms and the patriarchal Symbolic.⁴

The purpose of looking at the development of the psyche in such a way is to demonstrate the existence of this aforementioned residual structure, and the way in which it destabilises the psyche, leading to the creation of a 'monstrous subject'.⁵ I argue that the appearance of the 'monstrous subject' at the core of the psyche reflects a failure of psychoanalysis to capture adequately the way the subject's ego is formed: in theorising the development of the ego as primarily dependent on the figure of the father, theorists such as Freud and Lacan have fundamentally omitted the importance of the mother, and have created a theoretical model that excludes her. My aim is to use the theories of Luce Irigaray to challenge this model, and demonstrate it is no longer apt to capture the complexities of the modern subject.

² Here I use the term 'psyche' in a Freudian sense, and understand it as the sum of conscious, preconscious and unconscious elements made up by the id, ego and superego. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1960), vol. XXIII.

³ In following Freud, I look especially at *On Narcissism, The Unconscious, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, Totem and Taboo – The Oedipus Complex and Society, The Claims of Psycho-analysis to Scientific Interest* — Freud, *The Standard Edition*, (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1960), vol. VII, XIII, XIV, XVI and XIX, 2001. I also look at Jacques Lacan (Lacan, *Écrits*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis (Seminar II)*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991) and Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. Book VII*, (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1992).)

⁴ I use the term 'phallic law' in the same sense as Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* and in *New Maladies of the Soul*. To Kristeva, the phallic law or phallic prohibition is that which regulates the taboos against murder and incest and ensures the continuation of the social organisation around the Father. As the phallus is what dictates social norms and rules, he who possesses the phallus also manipulates the dominating ideology. See Kristeva, *Powers of horror*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) and Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, (New York, NY; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁵ Following Barbara Creed I understand monstrosity as that which demarcates the boundary between human and non-human – or, if we take the Irigarayan view and argue the subject position can only ever be male, monstrosity becomes the demarcation between human and *female*. In her analysis of female monsters in horror film, Creed works with a notion of monsters that lies precisely in that s/he/it threatens the safety of the phallic law and of the institutions of patriarchal capitalism. Understood this way, the monster is that which has either transgressed, or is causing others to transgress the limits of subjectivity, the boundaries of the phallic law, and the patriarchal institutions. Employing this definition touches on Kristeva's work on abjection, and works with the idea that female violence, particularly when coupled with female sexuality, appears in literature as driven by forces beyond the woman's control—vampires, demons, or external monstrous others. For a discussion of monstrosity in popular film and abjection, see Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, (London: Routledge 1993) and Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1982.

I start from the Irigarayan idea that Western culture is founded upon the murder of the mother.⁶ While bold, this is a claim Irigaray supports by means of sophisticated analyses of psychoanalytic and philosophic discourses. By associating women with materiality, with the baseness of the body and the substance that must be controlled by the higher faculties of the (male) thinking subject, Irigaray shows that the subjectivity of the mother, and of all women through her, is obliterated. The natural conclusion of Descartes' cogito is that matter is designed to be studied, understood, classified and dominated by reason; extrapolated to the male/female dichotomy, the mind/body divide becomes the blueprint for the organisation and functioning of Western civilisation.⁷

As the foundation of Western culture is the sacrifice of the mother, her murder becomes apparent at all strata—including, as Irigaray shows, at linguistic level. Sexual difference, especially the polarisation of masculinity and femininity and their presentation as complementary yet different, is apparent in language. Irigaray engages extensively with the theories of Lacan, and argues against him, demonstrating the phallus is historically constructed. While Lacan presents the phallus as a master signifier of the Symbolic order, Irigaray sees it as an extension of Freud's one-sex view of the world, reinforced in the Western imaginary through the discourse of psychoanalysis. The phallus and its connection with male anatomy becomes irrefutable evidence that the signifier can be traced back to the male imaginary, and it is both historical and in flux.

The problem that arises with the exclusion of the mother from the formation of the psyche is profound: I suggest that, in theorizing the oedipal stage, Freud and Lacan opened the possibility of mapping recurrent patterns in social organizations that, precisely because of their recurrence, act as quasi-transcendental elements and appear unchanged throughout large periods of history.⁸ I hope to show that the oedipal stage does not reflect a mechanism of the psyche that must exist for human development to be possible, but rather a mechanism of society that must be imposed on the psyche for the preservation of society as we know it to be possible. I will aim to demonstrate that such a move is unilateral, as it rests on the Father as the sole structuring element of the psychic life of the subject; in this scenario, the mother is

⁶ For a detailed discussion of matricide as foundational for Western civilisation, see Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 2007 and Alison Stone, *Feminism, psychoanalysis, and maternal subjectivity*, (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁷ Throughout this thesis, I will use the term 'male' to signify subject-positions, and 'masculine' to denote extensions of maleness; as I wish to avoid suggesting that similar subject-positions can be occupied by mimicry—that is, that alternative subjectivities can exist in the Symbolic if they seem *masculine*, I use 'female' and 'feminine' to signal biological and socially-imposed difference in modes of existence.

⁸ Foucault shows that the life and thought of humans is shaped by elements that precede them: life, language and labour. These, he argues, are *quasi-transcendental*, as they must exist for subjects' development to have continuity—and it is in this sense that I use 'quasi-transcendental' in this thesis. Following the same idea, I argue that Freud's theorisation of the oedipal complex has a similar quality: it identifies patterns that must appear or be imposed on the development of the psyche for it to evolve in an ideologically-determined way. Michel Foucault, *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*, (London: Routledge, 1989, c1970).

entirely erased from the picture of the psyche, and consequently silenced.⁹ In the current socio-historical context, the effect of this erasure can only be neurosis, which leads to an irreparable clash between the two structuring elements, and to the creation of a 'monstrous subject'.

Feminist theory has a long history of identifying psychic excess at the core of the subject and areas of the psyche that are foreclosed by the dominant order and limit the expression of the mother/feminine psyche. My thesis follows a similar path, and aligns itself with the feminist tradition, as I aim to theorise the existence of an additional psychic element with 'monstrous' characteristics, which could reread conflicting drives, intra-subjective aggression and oscillation from a new perspective. Yet my thesis fundamentally differs from previous theories concerning the foreclosure of the mother through the structure it proposes for this psychic excess: drawing on the theories of Freud and Lacan, I interrogate the creation of psychic structures that lead to the formation of the ego, and, like feminists themselves, I argue that there is a residual element that is not assimilated by the phallic law. Unlike feminist theorists, however, I maintain this residue is a *structured* subject.

The thought that subjectivity cannot be reduced to the male imaginary is not new, and feminism has elaborated at length on the nature of the excess that cannot be assimilated into the phallic, its impact on the psyche and the traces it leaves in the male imaginary.¹⁰ Indeed, feminist theorists have long identified the need to go beyond the oedipal and uncover forms of subjectivity that are not predicated on structuring elements that exclude the mother from the psychic space. Yet the transition to (an) alternative model(s) of subjectification is difficult in the existing theoretical framework, which considers any attempts to bypass the phallus necessarily fated to end in psychosis. The current language of psychoanalysis, particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis, condemns the non-phallic to a space of un-representation, where only madness is possible. Moving towards such a place is tantamount to entering a space of non-Being. If subjects are to exist, they must do so around the phallus or cease being

⁹ Throughout this thesis, when I refer to the Father in his structuring capacity, I spell it with a capital letter to differentiate from the mundane 'father' – for example, Cadmus as Agave's father. At the same time, I refer to the everyday mother and to the structuring mother using the more generic 'mother' written in lowercase. I made this choice as I felt that capitalising the word 'Mother' when referring to her role in structuring the psychic life of the infant would imply she fulfils the same function as the Father – which I do not believe to be the case, for a variety of reasons I will explore.

¹⁰ See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, 1993; Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1982; Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990); Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and feminism*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); Karen Horney, *Feminine psychology*, (New York; London: Norton); Joan Copjec, "Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety," *October* 58 (1991): 25-43; Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: a feminist introduction*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1990); Susan Lurie, "The Construction of the 'Castrated woman'", *Psychoanalysis and Cinema in Discourse*, (Vol.4; 1981); Herta Nagl-Docekal, *Feminist philosophy*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004); Jane Todd, "The Veiled Woman in Freud's 'Das Unheimliche'", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, (Vol.12, Issue 3, 1986; 519-28); Marcia Westcott, *The Feminist Legacy of Karen Horney*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) and so on.

subjects. To circumvent the totalising and universalising account of subjectification proposed by phallogocentric theories, many feminist theorists have demonstrated the existence of residual femininity at the heart of the psyche symbolised into phallic norms, and have shown this excess continuously influences and destabilizes the male imaginary. Feminist theory has broadly posited femininity as subordinated to the male, as something that exists in respect of male identity and can only position itself with regard to existence from the viewpoint established by the male imaginary. This approach has allowed for the multifaceted aspects of being woman to emerge and be debated: for example (to name just a few), Butler has explored the problematic links between gender, power and minority categories, while Irigaray has exposed the difficulty with articulating feminine difference; de Beauvoir has thought feminism in existentialist terms, while Kristeva has redefined the identity position of women in the Symbolic order. These theories broadly work within the constraints imposed by the male imaginary, and as such do not posit feminine traces (traces of excess) within the male imaginary as subjects-proper. In this thesis, I aim to *do* the Irigarayan project and reconfigure subjectivity away from the imposed dualism of male/female binaries. I propose that the feminine excess at the heart of the psyche is, in fact, a pre-oedipal, non-Symbolised subject, that has the same capacities as a 'traditional' subject, but is not confined by the structures dictated and shaped by the male imaginary. I suggest that this residual element is a fully-formed transcendental ego, a self-aware entity capable of deep introspection, that is overwritten but not annihilated in the course of the oedipal phase and continues to exist beneath the constituted ego.¹¹ I term this subject a *non-Symbolic subject*, to show that it¹² does possess a transcendental ego and *is* a subject, but also that it has not been habituated into the norms that pertain to the phallic law, meaning that it is non-Symbolic, and therefore has different responses

¹¹ I take the transcendental ego to refer to the self-aware subject, following Kant and Foucault. Kant defines the thinking subject as one that can unify representations under concepts through the faculty of understanding. As Stone explains, to be a Kantian subject means "not just to undergo experience but to *author* its meaning" and thus acknowledge yourself as a unitary agent that can simultaneously have knowledge and understanding. Stone, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity*, 53. To Foucault, the ego exists initially in a period of reflexivity, in the sense that it is aware of its surroundings, of others and of its materiality. However, it is only with self-awareness, which marks the beginning of the process of subjectification, that the ego can make the transition from reflexivity to reflectivity. In this context, reflectivity denotes a state of being that pertains to subjects who can interrogate the conditions of their own existence, their finitude, and the limits of their knowledge. It is with the idea of the transcendental ego in mind that Kant argues human finitude is the basis of knowledge, and it is the same notion I employ when discussing the moment when the infant becomes a subject. See Foucault, *The order of things*, 1989; Michel Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008); Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Béatrice Han, *Foucault's critical project*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), and Béatrice Han, "Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude", *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

¹² Due to the way I position myself in relation to the process of subjectification, I will refer to subjects that have resolved the oedipal stage (whether successfully or not) as 'he'. When speaking of the non-Symbolic subject generally, I will refer to this subject as 'it', to show that it has not yet been inscribed in the Symbolic and does not belong to gendered binaries. Given the grammatical nature of their names, I will refer to male characters in the play (such as Dionysus) as 'he', and to female characters (such as Agave and Kybele) as 'she', although, as I will show, the positions they occupy are not this straightforward.

to the taboos meant to protect the male imaginary.¹³ I propose that the existence of the non-Symbolic subject is the result of the primacy given to the father as possessor of the penis/phallus and the secondary function the mother occupies in the development of the psyche. Throughout this thesis, I undertake an analysis of the way the non-Symbolic subject appears and develops in the absence of a normative phallic superego, and how its defining characteristics manifest under these circumstances.¹⁴

Main theorists

This research is conducted at the intersection between philosophy, psychoanalysis and myth. To undertake such an exploration, I refer to several psychoanalysts who theorised subjecthood, namely Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray and Melanie Klein, whose theories I use to argue that the psyche is organised around the Father and the mother as structuring elements.¹⁵

To flesh out the characteristics of the non-Symbolic subject, I turn to René Girard's work on sacrificial violence, while to understand monstrosity and its place in the psychic organisation of the non-Symbolic subject, I work with an ancient Greek tragedy, *The Bacchae*.¹⁶ In working with a Greek tragedy, I do not analyse the text from a classicist's perspective, but look for the way myth is absorbed into modern thought, and how its patterns of organisation, such as the opposition of apparently distinct elements, are passed on as law. I seek to trace the limits of binary pairs of opposites, such as male/female, human/non-human and humane/monstrous, and apply the Irigarayan methodology to this end. Using both a phenomenological framework and Hegelian dialectic, Irigaray demonstrated not only that the two apparently opposing sides of the binary are linked, but also that they depend on each other to exist.

¹³ In speaking of the 'male imaginary', I use Luce Irigaray's definition in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Irigaray uses the male imaginary to explain how women have not had access to their own subjectivity, and have instead been described through the prism of the male understanding. Thus, the male defines, and, as a result, has monopoly over all the universal elements of the Symbolic world, making the Symbolic itself dependent on the phallus and the male's subjective understanding of male and female individualities. Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1985 and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1985.

¹⁴ In defining the subject as non-Symbolic, I refer to the same notion of the Symbolic that Lacan employs. Lacan, *Seminar II*, 1991. One of the most important traits of the non-Symbolic subject, in this context, will be its propensity for extreme acts of violence. In the absence of a phallic superego that channels the subject's libidinal energy into outlets that are non-threatening to the male imaginary and the Symbolic organisation (See Freud, *The Standard Edition*, vol. IX/XIV, 1960), the non-Symbolic subject will necessarily be capable of manifesting its primary drives, and will be able to display pure, unprovoked violence. I analyse the makeup of the non-Symbolic subject and its propensity for violence in Chapter 2, using René Girard's theories on sacrificial violence. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979).

¹⁵ By this, I refer particularly to Lacan, *Écrits*, 2006 and Melanie Klein, *The Writings of Melanie Klein, Volume 1-4*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1975). In speaking of the mother and the Father as structuring elements, I use André Green's understanding of structuring elements, and how the structuring around the Father differs from that around the mother. André Green, *On Private Madness*, (Madison, CT.: International University Press, 1972).

¹⁶ I conduct this research mindful of research in subjectification, such as the work of Foucault, Lacan, Butler, and Kristeva. In positing the existence of such a subject, however, I do not seek to 'rectify' a blind spot in feminist theory; I work in a contemporary framework and, starting from the idea that different forms of subjectivity are historical and depend on the subject's lifeworld, argue that *now* is the time to reconfigure subjectivity and move beyond the oedipal.

Irigaray's method is to seek the feminine voice, that which has been silenced, murdered and overwritten by the male imaginary, and uncover it. The Irigarayan project, in short, is to expose the feminine other and challenge the polarisation of masculinity and femininity, and in so doing reconfigure subjectivity and move away from the imposed dualism of male-dominated discourses.

Irigaray is not the only theorist whose work I use to interrogate the problematic pairing of opposites. Judith Butler also pays close attention to duality and its role in delineating kin relations; I will discuss Butler's reading of the role of kin relations in Greek tragedy and in *The Bacchae*, and will look at the place subjectivity occupies in the nexus of kinship. I will engage with subjectification primarily from a psychoanalytic perspective and will use the lens of psychoanalysis to understand how the concept of the self manifests and is understood today. As I will discuss later, I argue for the historical character of subjectification, and employ psychoanalysis as a meta-language that can capture historical shifts in the elements that constitute the lifeworld of the subject.

In redefining subjectivity, one of the most difficult questions theorists face is that of origin: what is the origin of subjectivity and how can we start to isolate the moment a (human) entity becomes a subject? And more difficult still: in theorising subjectification and attempting to pinpoint the birth of the "I", are we going back to a moment in psychic life, or to a moment in history?

It is at this problematic juncture that I propose to situate my thesis.

The gap in psychoanalytic theory

Recent and traditional Freudian psychoanalytic theories accept that the child enters the world in a state of awareness, although they disagree on its extent. Modern theories of subjectification, such as those of Foucault, suggest infantile awareness is reflexive, not reflective. In his analysis of Kant's transition from the *Critique* to the *Anthropology*, Foucault envisages the subject as a 'double', constantly trapped in a circularity between his transcendental and empirical ego.¹⁷ By this token, infantile awareness pertains to the Unthought, the stage prior to the development of the transcendental ego, and is thus unable to explore the Symbolic value of objects, despite (potentially) realising their inscription in a temporal, spatial and causal network.¹⁸ It is in this context

¹⁷ Foucault, *The order of things*, 1989; Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, 2008.

¹⁸ Drawing on the work of Martin Heidegger, Foucault defines the Unthought as "the implicit, the inactual, the sedimented, the non-effected—in every case, the inexhaustible double that presents itself to reflection as the blurred

that the child becomes self-aware: with the onset of the oedipal crisis, the child is faced with prohibition, suffering, and the realization of his self-limitation; this, according to Kristeva, propels the infant outside the realm of the abject and into sublimation.¹⁹ The child is no longer able to secure the full attention of the mother, and is denied the initial omnipotence enjoyed in the mother-child dyad. Moreover, the infant must share the attention of the mother with the father, whom he grows to hate. Although Freud does not address the incipience of self-awareness, recent theories, such as those formulated by Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler regarding the constitution of the self correlate the incipience of reflectivity with the realisation of one's dependence on intersubjectivity: the self becomes self-aware when faced with the intervention of the father as normative element—and the first encounter the infant has with this type of normativity is the oedipal prohibition.²⁰ This prohibition makes the child experience suffering, which, in turn, forces him to become aware of himself as powerless and dependent on the mother. As a result, Freud argues, the child begins to desire the destruction of the father for the return to the initial omnipotence to be possible; yet the way the oedipal crisis is resolved is not through the destruction of the father and the possession of the mother, but through the internalization of the father as normative principle (Father) and the (almost complete) renunciation of the mother. According to a Lacanian reading of Freud, the internalization of the Father enables the formation of the (phallic) superego, in itself a normative principle that serves as supreme moral rule, and keeps the realm of the abject and psychosis at bay.²¹ Through the resolution of the oedipal crisis the child is forced to renounce the relation he has with the world before the internalisation of the Father, and replace it with one of limited agency, in which he can only constitute himself intersubjectively. This picture shows a (reflective) ego that originates as a 'growth' on the pleasure relation the child has with the world in his omnipotent state, and a superego that appears superimposed on the ego, in a further parasitical relation. The superego is the constant reminder of the subject's dependence on intersubjectivity and his impossibility to transgress the norms that constitute his lifeworld.

Consequently, the balanced, normal self Freud envisages is the self that has overcome the oedipal crisis and can now position himself in relation to the world by making reference to the internalized father-figure.²² Yet I believe there is a very important stage of development present in this picture that is not sufficiently emphasized in the analysis

projection of what man is in his truth, but that also plays the role of a preliminary ground upon which man must collect himself and recall himself in order to attain his truth." Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 356.

¹⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of horror*, 1982.

²⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, (London: Verso, 1997); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

²¹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 2006. The Lacanian picture does not allow much space to discuss the presence of the mother and its structuring quality.

²² The Freudian picture is heavily criticized for its phallogentrism by writers such as Irigaray and Horney, among others.

of self-formation, namely the period between the onset of the oedipal crisis and its resolution: this period of a self-aware ego that nonetheless exists in isolation of phallic structures only occurs between the incipience of self-awareness and until the appearance of the superego, and, I would argue, represents the self unmediated by social normativity.²³ It is this particular stage that prefigures the radical value of Freud's oedipal theory. The genesis of self-awareness and the subsequent development of the normative self gain quasi-transcendental value: the type of normative rule that the child internalizes as the father-figure must necessarily be transmissible. The father-figure, as Irigaray argues, becomes not the actual father, but a transferable, unwritten rule that acts as the axis around which the development of the self revolves.²⁴ In the course of the oedipal complex and its resolution, therefore, the self discloses and re-closes itself: it discloses itself by revealing the existence of the mechanisms that generate self-awareness, and it re-closes itself by the resolution of the oedipal crisis, which forces the ego into an organisation that 'castrates' the subject's drives by filtering them through the civilising lens of normativity, and tailors them to neutralise any danger to the male imaginary. Thus, the subject becomes a *Symbolic* subject.

I argue that the non-Symbolic subject is not annihilated, but rather concealed by normativity and misrepresentation to the point of becoming unknowable. The existence of the non-Symbolic subject itself points to an underlying problem regarding the structuring elements of the psyche: the rejection and disavowal of the mother, and the act of stripping her of the power to structure the infant's psyche give rise to conflict between the subject created *by the mother*, and that (*re*)created *by the Father*. Using Klein's theory of subjectification, I aim to show that the type of subjectivity the infant possesses rests always already on its relation with the mother and the psychic structures developed under her influence. Thus, the non-Symbolic subject, I maintain, exists *qua subject* before the oedipal crisis. The internal conflict of the adult subject, the Hegelian struggle between social submission and omnipotence occurs against the backdrop of this intra-subjective tension, which stems from the unresolved clash between the two structuring elements of the psyche.²⁵

²³ If we understand the existence of the infant before it becomes self-aware as a negative type of Being (i.e.: animal reflexivity, or non-Being), we can describe the state of Being as a transcendental ego as a positive type of Being. (see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1962).) It is on this state of Being that the superego is imposed, and from this state of Being that a Symbolic subject, congruent with normative laws, is moulded. The implication of this claim is that the process of subjectification is not a direct result of the *resolution* of the oedipal stage, but occurs before it. The resolution of the oedipal crisis serves to habituate the subject into the phallic law and does not play a part in subjectification. Of course, in making such a claim I do not refer to the oedipal crisis, or even to the paternal prohibition, as fixed moments in time, but as an evolving process, a tentative discovery by the child of what is permitted and what needs to remain taboo.

²⁴ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1985.

²⁵ When I speak of the subject's conflict between social submission and omnipotence I draw on Jessica Benjamin's work on subjectification, and her understanding of the role of the Other in this process. See Jessica Benjamin, *The bonds of love: psychoanalysis, feminism and the problem of domination*, (London: Virago, 1990).

The gap in current psychoanalytic theory, therefore, rests in its failure to identify the need for the existence of a fully-formed, self-aware subject, whose expression is hindered by normativity and the phallic law, and theorise it to intervene in the psychoanalytic theoretical body.

The main claim of this thesis

In the (Lacanian) phallogocentric theorisation of subjectivity, we begin to talk of a self-sustained subject (i.e.: a non-psychotic one) after the resolution of the oedipal stage. Other thinkers, such as Kristeva, have theorised a psychic residue that exists outside the confines of Lacanian subjectivity, but have stopped short of calling it a subject.

In this thesis, I look at this psychic residue and make a stronger claim: that self-sustained subjectivity exists outside oedipal structures, and that the oedipal paradigm is not the only one we can employ when theorising subjectification. In other words, I propose to *do* the Irigarayan project, and create a space for redefining the subject in terms that go beyond the oedipal model, that propose an alternative to it, and that do so without jettisoning the mother outside the social space.

In terms of methodology, I use a mimetic approach, which is close to the method Irigaray advances for uncovering the female other. To Irigaray, it is only through acts of (sometimes exaggerated) mimesis that the binary oppositions that are perpetuated by the male imaginary can be challenged and ultimately dismantled. It is only by taking entrenched perceptions to their extreme that the perception itself can prove untenable.

To undertake such extreme mimesis, I look at an ancient Greek tragedy, Euripides' *The Bacchae*, which I treat as the skeletal framework of Western culture, due to its extreme compartmentalisation of sexual difference, and the near-dogmatic approach to defining gender roles. I would go as far as to claim that the play *is* the Irigarayan project: the mimesis of societal patterns, particularly those concerning the place of women and the legitimacy of rulers, and the exaggeration of traditionally celebrated aspects of the subject, such as the independence from the mother, reveal the gaping hole left by the erasure of women, of female subjectivity, and of the role women play in shaping subjectivity.²⁶ In the play, we see a series of mimetic acts that appear to fulfil deep-rooted desires of the male imaginary, but end up distorting the Symbolic and jeopardising the male imaginary. In the play, the desire of the male subject to bear

²⁶ For discussions of matricide in Western civilisation, see Christina Wieland, *The undead mother*, (London: Karnac, 2002); Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 2007 and Stone, *Feminism, psychoanalysis, and maternal subjectivity*, 2012.

children and attain independence (and protection) from the mother's threatening body becomes both an erasure of the mother and parthenogenesis (Zeus giving 'birth' to Dionysus). The trope of the irrational woman, ruled by baseness, who needs to be contained by men is also present: women in the play begin by acting their parts faithfully, and even the maddened Theban women are seen performing traditionally feminine activities, such as dancing. However, they soon take their baseness to the extreme, becoming frighteningly violent (the Theban women tear cattle apart with their bare hands) and savage (they suckle wolf cubs and revert to a pre-linguistic state), eventually becoming not only ungovernable by the civilising male subject, but anathema to his survival.

Following Freud and Irigaray, I return to ancient tragedy and attempt to reread it in a contemporary context to find examples of the way the non-Symbolic functions. Freud's predilection for substantiating his theories through literary works, particularly myth and tragedy, prefigures an important insight into the significance of literature in self-constitution, and I turn to the image of monstrosity in Greek tragedy to interrogate the existence of a pre-normative ego. As Creed shows, the monster represents that which subtracts itself from the unifying activity of the lifeworld. The image of the non- or poorly-Symbolised subject shows the boundaries of identity becoming superfluous to the point of self-annihilation, making the monster, or the idea of an ego-without-superego, simultaneously appalling and fascinating. It is the monster, or the non-Symbolic subject, who can never subscribe to the same empirical determinants as other subjects, and, consequently, the one who needs to be exorcised for others to be able to re-claim intersubjectivity. The non-Symbolic subject becomes the embodiment of lack, which causes misrepresentation in self-constitution and the inherent need for return *ad-originem*.

I analyse Euripides' *The Bacchae* and the triangular oedipal structure present in this tragedy (Zeus/mother goddess/Dionysus),²⁷ and use the figure of Dionysus as it emerges from this structure as the skeletal framework on which the characteristics of the non-Symbolic subject can be fleshed out. The reason for such a return is complex: firstly, returning to Greek tragedy allows us to interrogate the Symbolic and the male imaginary, as, according to Irigaray, it is through transferable structures displayed in myths and returning tragic tropes that the fabric of the Imaginary can be woven. This

²⁷ This triangular structure is interesting, as it appears to follow both Freudian/Lacanian and Kleinian psychoanalytic theory: on the one hand, it presents the existence of an infant (Dionysus) in its relation to his father (Zeus), and the way the infant Dionysus relates to the Father as a normative element. On the other hand, it also depicts the relation Dionysus has with the absent mother, represented in this context by the mother of all gods (I refer throughout this thesis primarily to Kybele, as a non-European mother of all gods, although the figure may differ depending on translation), and the way the infant attempts to recapture the presence of the mother by returning to a pre-Symbolic organisation. The triangular structure is mirrored in the relation Dionysus has with Pentheus (the representative of the phallic law), Semele (his dead mother), and Agave (the embodiment of the devouring mother).

does not mean that every mythical theme has structuring power, but that the Symbolic order is based on conglomerates of symbols that the male imaginary incorporates and treats as law. This implies that the skeletal structure of the (Western) psyche exists at its purest in myths, which, in being, as Freud argued, equivalent to dreams display the vicissitudes of the subject and interrogate the human condition.

Secondly, returning to Greek tragedy will allow for the identification of more pivotal elements that structure the psyche. Irigaray writes that “our imaginary still functions in accordance with the schema established through Greek mythologies and tragedies,” suggesting that the return to Greek tragedy constitutes a return to the basic elements of the psyche, and is the most suitable place for an enquiry of the kind I intend to undertake.²⁸ Irigaray understands Ancient Greece to be the cradle of Western civilisation: as Stone explains, “the culture of ancient Greece has exerted a founding, decisive influence on...the West” and helped articulate “male phantasies about the hierarchical split between the mother and father” and embed these into the social (Symbolic) order.²⁹

Finally, Greek tragedy is remote from current morality. As Foucault argues, Greek thought pertains to another *épistème*, which hinges on similar quasi-transcendental elements as our lifeworld, but is different in its organisation.³⁰ For this reason, interrogating psychic structures through tragedy and myth should help avoid disguising taboos through language, while retaining the historicity of subjectivity. As I explore the figure of an element that functions as discordance in the midst of the Symbolic, I turn to Dionysus, the character capable of unprovoked, unmotivated violence.³¹ While modern texts do present violence similar to that in *The Bacchae*, it is vitiated by attempts to make it acceptable by providing a reason for its existence.³² Such a move impedes the text’s ability to represent the unfathomable, and moves unthinkable psychic structures within the limits of representations, effectively castrating them. As a result, the type of non-Symbolic subject that can exist in modern texts will come close to the Dionysian structure, but remain a weaker version of the latter. To exist within the limits of

²⁸ Irigaray, Luce, and Margaret Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 36.

²⁹ Stone, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity*, 48.

³⁰ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 1989.

³¹ Dionysus arrives in Thebes to exact vengeance on the city for having found his mother’s tomb destroyed by lightning. It is also suggested that Dionysus seeks to prove that he is a god, punish the House of Cadmus for having slandered his mother, and recover his mother’s good name. Nonetheless, the ‘vengeance’ of Dionysus lacks a direct object: he plunges Thebes into chaos, drives its female inhabitants to madness, upturns the social order, and causes the beheading of Thebes’ leader, Pentheus, at the hands of Pentheus’ own mother, Agave. He invokes the rites of the mother goddess to set the tone for his orgiastic revelries, but as the play unfolds it seems he uses them as a pretext for uprooting Thebes and un-structuring its citizens. After having caused a surplus of libidinal energy, which culminates in murder and, arguably, cannibalism, Dionysus leaves.

³² Horror discourse, in particular, appears keen to motivate violence. Violent acts become ‘acceptable’ because they are perpetrated by non-human monsters (as in the texts analysed by Creed, including *Dracula*, *The Exorcist*, *Carrie*, *Alien* or *Psycho*); because their perpetrators are numb or completely desensitized to human norms and morality (such as in Marquis De Sade’s texts, or, more recently, in Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho*); or even because the perpetrators of violent acts resort to violence to reform society (such as in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*).

representation, monsters moulded on the image of Dionysus will fall short of the monstrous potential exhibited by Dionysus himself. Dionysus fits the description of the non-Symbolic subject, in the sense that he exists concomitantly in the Symbolic and the Real, is structured by both a mother (Kybele) and a father (Zeus), is androgynous, and exposes the male imaginary by causing its collapse from within. Yet I do not suggest that returning to myth to examine subjectivity can reveal ahistorical characteristics of subjectivity itself; on the contrary, I follow modern writers and use myth precisely due to its fluidity and its ability to help name the elements that constitute the lifeworld of subjects at particular points in time.

Western civilisations return time and again to Greek myth, with an interest that appears to endure throughout the ages. From Daniel Mendelsohn's *An Odyssey*, A. S. Byatt's *Arachne*, Derek Walcott's *The Odyssey* and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, to Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* and Nietzsche's *A Genealogy of Morals*, to name only very few, Greek myth continues to shape and define Western thought. Yet rather than merely noting the manifold ways in which myth resurfaces in literary and academic writings, it is important to consider how contemporary retellings use myth to think through and reflect on pressing social issues. For example, in his new book, *Mythos*, Stephen Fry charts the history of Greek gods, from Kronos and Ouranos, to the age of humans and the gods' interactions with them. Fry's gods are vengeful and vain, but refreshingly vulnerable, while his goddesses are intelligent, complex and fiercely independent—closer, indeed, to today's understanding of femininity.³³ Fry's rereading makes the gods relatable, and thus suitable for modern audiences, but also alters the 'traditional' understanding of femininity and its relation to patriarchy. In Fry's retelling, Metis is not a helpless victim of male power, but a wise goddess, who tricks Zeus into allowing her to reside inside him, retaining influence over him long after his erotic interests have waned. Metis becomes not the rape victim whose abuse forms the basis of patriarchy, but the civilising influence that channels Zeus' base passions into more intellectual avenues, helping him become the unchallenged ruler of the gods.³⁴

Similarly, Marcus Stevens' and Oran Eldor's recent musical, *Mythic*, reinvents Greek myth for modern audiences to tell the story of teenage Persephone, her struggle to cope with her overbearing mother, and her forbidden romance with Hades.³⁵ Persephone breathes new life in a depressing Underworld, where she eventually chooses to stay part-time by deliberately eating six pomegranate seeds. Persephone is strong willed and independent, a far cry from Bernini's Proserpina; she deftly

³³ Fry, *Mythos*, (Penguin Books Ltd., 2017).

³⁴ Metis' civilising influence is not dissimilar to that of other powerful female figures, such as Rhea, Demeter, Kybele or the Queen Bee, to which I will return in later chapters.

³⁵ Marcus Stevens and Oran Eldor, *Mythic*, (London: Charing Cross Theatre, 2018).

manipulates a Pantheon of petulant, self-absorbed gods, and empowers unassertive deities like Demeter and Aphrodite to challenge the status-quo and take over Olympus.

Rather than being a constant that echoes unchanged throughout time, the way myth is borrowed and moulded in literature shows it evolves with society, acting as a thread that links past and present, shaping subjectivity by absorbing and reflecting historically-specific aspects of the time to which the subjectivity in question belongs. The way we read myth today can reveal important insights into the status of representation and the place of the subject in society; it is in this use of myth that I am particularly interested, and I explore throughout this thesis. Rereading myth through a contemporary lens helps demonstrate the historical character of subjectivity and provides us with the tools to articulate that which evolves, the historicity of subjectivity itself. Freud used Oedipus to illustrate a specific facet of the process of subjectification, necessary for subjectivity to develop suitably for 19th and 20th century societies. Yet as feminists have relentlessly shown, the cultural picture has shifted, and Oedipus cannot singlehandedly elucidate the subtleties of subjects today.

Rereading myth from a modern perspective provides new tools to express subjects' difference, as it becomes manifest at specific points in time. If psychoanalysis is, as I will argue in this thesis, a meta-language that captures the historicity of subjecthood, then a rereading of myth through a modern lens can enrich the vocabulary of psychoanalysis to revive it for contemporary use. In this context, I use *The Bacchae* as a tool to go beyond Oedipus, to help expand the language of psychoanalysis and ultimately express subjectivity more faithfully. Although I use ancient tragedy and Greek myth, my thesis is not about history, but the *present*; it employs a modern reading of the *Bacchae* to analyse the way patriarchy structures subjectivity and uses psychoanalysis to articulate the threads that constitute the male imaginary *now*. Using a modern interpretation of an ancient text to discuss subjectivity structurally is a gesture towards myth's ability to explain and occasionally create social boundaries and serves to reinforce the historical nature of subjectivity.

My textual choice to expand the vocabulary of subjectivity is not accidental, as *The Bacchae* is highly relevant in the current socio-political context. The play depicts a society that struggles between religion and secularism, order and chaos, tradition and change, tyrants and the role of chance (or gods) in an unpredictable world. Read through the non-Symbolic subject, it becomes a story of female agency, and a tool through which the phallogocentric oedipal paradigm is not supplanted but complemented by an alternative model of subjectification. Through my use of myth and ancient

tragedy, I orchestrate a timely intervention in the body of psychoanalytic theory to demonstrate that a model beyond the oedipal paradigm is necessary and attainable.

Throughout this thesis, I situate all commentaries and interpretations in a contemporary framework. While I do not provide a historical account of the evolution of the notion of subjectivity, my reading of *The Bacchae* is rooted in history, much like subjectivity itself. My argument that we need to articulate a model that allows for new expressions of subjectivity is, itself, driven by the limitations of theories of subjectification that claim to be ahistorical, and inadvertently trap subjectivity in an overly prescriptive framework. Subjectivity is structured by patriarchy and dependent on the historical determinants of patriarchy itself; yet recent events, from contemporary rereadings of myth to the #MeToo movement, suggest patriarchal structures and the oedipal paradigm have become inadequate. While going beyond Oedipus may not be enough to undo patriarchy, it seems to be a step one must take in that direction.

The new theoretical model: non-oedipal subjectivity and the divine feminine

Throughout this thesis, I will argue not only that subjectivity is possible outside of the oedipal, but that *The Bacchae* offers us the space for thinking how alternative subjectivities can become manifest. Through the concept of the non-Symbolic subject and the return to the importance of the feminine in subjectification, I will seek to demonstrate the play opens a previously un-theorised space where subjectivity is possible. According to Irigaray, the exclusion of the feminine from cultural life, and especially from the process of subjectification, has hidden the fact that subjectivity itself is fluid and dependent on quasi-transcendental elements. Subjectivity, Irigaray argues, has evolved and changed over time, but male dominance has not; as a result, it will be impossible to move away from the logic of male dominance and allow subjectivity's fluidity to become manifest until we learn to allow the female other to surface. To do so, Irigaray proposes to use mimesis to allow the silenced female other to challenge male authority and, implicitly, the strict male/female binary: by tracing the way the female body has been excluded and unpacking the logic of this exclusion, we can reveal the exclusion itself as unfounded and allow the female a voice. By allowing the opposing term of the binary to speak, we force a shift in the perception that created the opposition and reveal the terms to be equal.

In this thesis, I use the play to search for the Other, and force it to reveal itself through mimesis as the *female* other, hitherto censured.³⁶ Through the concept of the non-Symbolic subject, I seek to show that subjectivity is not only possible outside the oedipal paradigm, but that it can revolve around the female other as structuring element.³⁷

Yet my interest is not to (re)define the feminine. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray argues that redefining femininity would hinder the act of women redefining themselves. Instead, what she suggests is to allow a new definition of womanhood to emerge out of collective acts of mimetic engagement with old notions, defined by and through the prism of the male imaginary. It is for this reason that I treat the play as a mimetic act, one that allows for a redefinition of the place of femininity at the core of the process of subjectification. I argue that femininity can only redefine itself if we move away from understanding subjectification as necessarily tied to the oedipal structure—a form of subjectification, that is, which replicates maleness, only producing male subjects. The claim of my proposed theoretical model is that the subject can become a subject before undergoing the oedipal phase—a non-Symbolic subject, but a subject nonetheless. I am not, however, suggesting that the process of subjectification is phased (i.e.: first revolving around the mother, then around the Father). Rather, I am saying that sustainable subjecthood can exist outside this oedipal conceptualisation, and that it does not necessarily end in psychosis.

³⁶When I speak of 'the Other' I do so in a phenomenological sense, and use Sartre's take on the topic. Awareness of 'the Other' can be broadly defined as awareness of the existence of other conscious beings, other *subjects*. While the awareness can be linked to positive emotions, such as in some moments of recognition, it is more often associated with shame, with being somehow found out by another, as demonstrated in Sartre's account of shame. Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology*, (London: Routledge, 1989, c1958). It is important, for the purpose of this thesis, to retain the focus on otherness as being something that has the potential to disrupt the subject, especially when discussing 'the feminine other'. There is significant tension between the second-hand status traditionally assigned to women and the experience of interacting with an Other, especially when the Other is female. Note that I spell 'the Other' in capitals, but refer to 'the feminine other' in lowercase. This is deliberate: Sartre capitalised 'the Other', as did Lacan when speaking of 'the big Other' *qua* Symbolic order, which I take to mean that those individuals who are *subjects* within the Symbolic are 'Other'. Yet, as I will discuss later, I follow Irigaray and argue that the subject position the Symbolic allows for can only ever be male, which is why speaking of 'the female Other' would falsely imply the type of otherness femininity manifests occupies a subject-position.

³⁷I am aware that modern Lacanian theory is turning towards the late Lacan's work and his conception of a fluid oedipal stage. In Seminar XVII, Lacan signals a change in the status of the Oedipus complex, and suggests that the Name of the Father is only one mode of binding the subject to the Symbolic order, but that there can exist a plurality of other such modes. Indeed, it is based on this Seminar that Geneviève Morel proposes the existence of a 'law of the mother', and argues that "the *sinthome*... is capable of separating the child from the mother, possibly even without the father, and sometimes more effectively than him." To Morel, 'the law of the mother' consists of a series of equivocations transmitted to the child through the mother's language "at the youngest possible age". Composed "of words bound up with pleasure and suffering, in short, with maternal jouissance", the 'law of the mother' "remain[s] imprinted in the [child's] unconscious, forming the basis of fantasies and symptoms." Morel, *The Law of the Mother*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2019), 2-3. Morel discusses the manifold ways patients cope with the 'law of the mother', reconcile it with their everyday lives, and translate it into a *sinthome* that is compatible with the Symbolic. Morel's work tests Lacan's thought in clinical practice and, in charting the different ways her patients work through neurosis and psychosis, proposes seemingly viable alternatives to the Name of the Father. It appears to me, however, that the alternatives Morel discusses do not represent different forms of subjectivity that exist outside of Symbolic constraints, but rather forms of subjectivity that cannot (for whatever reason) internalise the Father and must find surrogate images in order to exist in the Symbolic 'normally'. The distinction is important, as I am interested not in the ways in which subjects can cope with the enduring but damaging influence of the mother, but with instances where they are able to bypass the oedipal and become independent subjects with the help of a different structuring element – such as the mother. For this reason, I will not pursue the late Lacan's work in this thesis, although, at structural level, it would be interesting to consider what a relaxation in oedipal constraints may reveal about the male imaginary and its position relative to the mother today.

As Stephen Frosh writes, Lacan understands the psychotic state of mind as “the refusal to enter into the symbolic order in which one becomes a cultural and linguistic subject.”³⁸ In the absence of the internalised father-figure and the superego that comes with it, the subject can only become a psychotic one—for outside the Symbolic lies only psychosis. And yet, *The Bacchae* paints a different picture through mimesis of the trope of the maladjusted subject: Dionysus is initially presented as the subject without a father, the one with several mothers, who displays a kind of subjectivity that is threatening to the ‘normal’ one and does not appear to have internalised a father-figure. As we see through repeated episodes of needless violence, Dionysus seems to be *amoral*, suggesting he bypassed the internalisation of the Father. Nonetheless, we also see Dionysus is capable of functioning in the Symbolic and move between registers without fearing the dissolution of the self. Towards the end of the play, Dionysus actually appears to remain one of the few characters still capable of distinguishing between the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. In contrast, Pentheus, who functions throughout the play as a distilled version of the male imaginary and the quintessential male subject, incorporating to exaggeration the traits of the Apollonian ruler, and Agave, who represents rebellion that becomes caricature submission, remain those unable to delineate the boundaries of the Imaginary.³⁹

Female identity is one of the key aspects of the play, and an idea on which I focus in this thesis. Femininity, especially insofar as female agency is concerned, starts in the play with the divine feminine, which becomes manifest in various guises: through the figure of the absent mother-goddess,⁴⁰ the uncommonly-subjectified Dionysus, and the decidedly divine yet altogether unusual pregnancy of Zeus.

The divine feminine is a topic on which Irigaray elaborates, and which she sees as key in disrupting the role of religion in the definition of male identity. Irigaray follows Feuerbach in reading divinity as instrumental in organising both identity and culture, and interprets religion as bound with both culture and power. To allow for a re-evaluation of the centrality of Cartesian dualism, which distributes power along gender lines, Irigaray suggests replacing the traditional transcendental God with a divinity that is both sensible and transcendental.⁴¹ In *The Bacchae*, we see the creation of such a divinity, who claims her non-dualism by, paradoxically, mimicking the dualist aspects of

³⁸ Stephen Frosh, *For and against psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 117.

³⁹ Pentheus and Agave are key characters, and I will argue they represent tropes, whose characteristics are exaggerated to the point of collapse. I return to both of them throughout this thesis.

⁴⁰ To illustrate the characteristics of the mother-goddess, I turn to the figure of Kybele, the Anatolian mother of all gods, as her exoticism highlights her difference more readily. The mother-goddess changes with translation, but her primary function remains unchanged.

⁴¹ When speaking of identity and the creation of the ego-ideal in relation to God, I refer to the Christian God; however, I would argue the traits of the Christian God that are at the basis of this type of identification (punishing aspects underlined by omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience) can also be found in Greek male (and, occasionally, female) gods and goddesses.

the 'classic' transcendental God: Kybele is human (she has an affair, suffers for her lover and acts out of passion), but is also transcendental, and mirrors aspects of male gods in both monotheistic and polytheistic cults. Kybele is a violent, punishing, demanding and jealous goddess, who nonetheless is mostly absent. Unlike the male (Christian) God, however, Kybele does not impose a hierarchical structure on the subject's psyche, and does not become a feminine ego-ideal. To a great extent, Kybele is deeply engaged in the Irigarayan project, and a key player in mimicking the workings of the male imaginary to their collapse. As divinity plays a crucial role in defining the relation of the subject with his lifeworld, I will return to the problem of female divinity in a later chapter.

The main argument of my thesis is that we can speak of subjectivity without having to inscribe it in the oedipal model. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray argues that theories of the subject have become intrinsically linked to being male. Not being male, in a way, equates to being a lesser subject (or, as Freud has argued, to having to work extra-hard to overcome your lack of a penis). In this thesis, I will show that it is possible to theorise subjectivity not necessarily outside of the masculine, but in such a way so as to allow for the expression of feminine subjectivity in addition to the expression of masculinity. I would like to emphasise, however, that I resist simply theorising femininity outside the masculine, as such a move would risk re-inscribing the single-sidedness of subjectivity in a female-centric as opposed to a male-centric system, thus merely displacing the problem and coming nowhere near a new theoretical model.

Irigaray questions the split between the knowing subject, the Kantian transcendental subject, and the object of knowledge, that which is put to the subject to be scrutinised and 'taken in' through understanding. In exerting his capacity for understanding, the thinking subject is synthesising the data he receives from his field of experience and holding it into a unified concept. Irigaray's claim in relation to this (generally accepted) position of the thinking subject in philosophy is, however, that in exerting this critical difference, the subject is removing himself from the field of experience. Irigaray shows an interesting and complex shift in the relationship between the male subject and the surrounding world: on the one hand, all thinking subjects are male, and by virtue of being male, they possess a type of rationality that allows for a great degree of anthropocentrism, that is, a world view in which all objects are to be studied and understood by the rational (male) subject. And yet, the way such distance from the field of experience is imposed is through Cartesian dualism and through the positioning of the male I in a hierarchical relation with God and women, with desired pure rationality on the one hand, and inconvenient materiality on the other. In effect, the male subject becomes caught in a relationship of inferiority towards his ego ideal, one he

consistently seeks to surpass by distancing himself more and more from the field of experience; and yet, in so doing, he comes no closer to embodying the ego ideal, but cuts himself off "from his empirical relationship with the matrix...he claims to survey".⁴²

The Bacchae presents an alternative model, in which the thinking subject can still exist, but not by virtue of the same mechanisms that led to the creation of the 'traditional' male subject. The claim here is that the play can produce a model that will help us go beyond the traditional Kantian (and oedipal) paradigm(s) and move towards an alternative model of psychic functioning that allows female subjectivity to manifest itself, in addition to, or alongside male subjectivity. The claim is not that subjects have a choice, that they can follow either Oedipus or Dionysus in their road to subjecthood; rather, the thought is that theorising subjectification from the perspective of the oedipal model only allows a glimpse into the richness of subjectivity and reduces the argument to male subjectivity alone. Tragedy, and Greek tragic myths, show us the male lens may be too focused to allow for a sophisticated understanding of subjects, of what it is that constitutes their subjectivity, and the space in which this subjectivity is allowed to exist. *The Bacchae*, like many ancient tragedies, depicts a space in which this single-sided view of subjectivity proves inadequate. Tragedy is not the space for self-expansion, of broadening of horizons through introspection and self-knowledge, but the space for suffering, death and endless sorrow; yet we can use tragedies to think through the types of spaces that can hold such suffering at bay and expand the subjects' fields of experience enough to allow for the understanding and theorisation of other subjectivities.

Irigaray sees such a model as crucial if feminine subjectivity is ever to express itself; she proposes some non-prescriptive methods through which feminine subjectivity can escape the male paradigm, amongst which is the idea of a female divinity, on which I briefly touched in this introduction. My claim is that *The Bacchae* provides us with the model Irigaray seeks: a skeletal framework of subjectivity not founded on the phallic paradigm, expressed through the figure of Dionysus. However, I do not wish simply to claim that the model that goes beyond the oedipal configuration accidentally arises in *The Bacchae*; rather than suggesting the model Irigaray discusses is a fluke, I propose this structure already exists in current subjects' psychic configuration.

Throughout this thesis, I will claim:

- that the infant becomes a subject before the oedipal stage, and its subjectivity is not dependent on internalising the Father;

⁴² Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 134.

- that we can speak before the oedipal stage of a fully-formed subject that is not psychotic; and
- that proof for this subject's existence is the possibility of existing in the Symbolic in ways that defy the Symbolic order and that, most importantly, can destabilise it. Following Irigaray, I wish to show that the fact that a secondary order can destabilise a primary one shows the secondary order can exist independently. In other words, by virtue of being deemed impossible, psychotic, abject, other by the male imaginary, the female imaginary becomes not-that: not impossible, not psychotic, not abject.

I will argue that the whole play can be read as an act of mimesis of the male imaginary, which serves to show the possibility for existence of an alternative, *female* way of structuring the subject. My argument is that this is possible by virtue of the subject not being conditioned to be male, but rather containing a plurality of subjectivities. While the oedipal (male) paradigm is one route the developmental process can take, there are others, to be explored and theorised. I follow the play's structure and interpret it as a mimetic act of the male imaginary, highlighting its inconsistencies to show where it differs from the object it mimics and where it starts to become a structure of its own.

I employ the psychoanalytic discourse as a methodological tool that aids the mimetic process, as, in Irigaray's view, psychoanalysis is an extension of the paradigm of the transcendental subject, who wishes to filter reality through understanding. This way, I explore *The Bacchae* and imitate the process of becoming the play espouses to the point that the imitated object unravels and the imitator's difference is exposed.

The theoretical model I envision serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, through the theorisation of the non-Symbolic subject, it provides a new lens to examine and expand the body of psychoanalytic theory by creating a new term to inform the discussion around subjectification. I hope that, through theorising an additional psychic structure, I may be able to explain the reasons behind the tension that arises from the clash between the mother and the Father as structuring elements, and interrogate their impact on the psyche. To further this intervention into psychoanalysis, I analyse the notion of monstrosity and set it in both phallic and maternal contexts to map their common elements, and the discrepancies between the two theoretical frameworks. Such an analysis can encourage further inquiry into the creation of intra-subjective monstrosity and the mechanisms that drive it. As I will show in later chapters, I use psychoanalysis as a linguistic framework, and through this thesis I hope to contribute a new term to an already established linguistic body.

On the other hand, the idea of the non-Symbolic subject can serve as a tool to re-read literary texts and unearth new meanings. In exploring the rift between the mother and Father through the prism of the non-Symbolic subject, we can argue that the clash between the two becomes manifest as intra-subjective tension, directed at the threads that hold the two structural spheres separate but linked.

If I am correct, such a structure could exist in *every* contemporary subject failed by the oedipal paradigm and would become manifest as a drive towards un-structuring the (phallic) Symbolic, whose constraints are too extreme to contain the psyche indefinitely.⁴³ In literary and artistic texts, the non-Symbolic subject would appear as a threat to the boundaries of subjectivity and selfhood.

Ultimately, I propose a theoretical-conceptual approach to examine the contemporary critical framework, and provide an alternative to the question of self-constitution and the role of the phallus in this process.

Chapter structure

Chapter 1

I will begin by tracing the evolution of the status of representation and the way the subject positions himself in history, and will argue subjects established themselves as objects of their own knowledge. In getting to know themselves, subjects deploy a complicated and ever-morphing critical tool—language—through which they carve out a totalising account of what it means to become a human subject; yet they universalise historical occurrences and allow only one subject-position to be representable.

Chapter 2

I will move from the problem of the historicity of subjectivity to the moment when subjecthood becomes confused and violent, and the remedies available to restore peace. Using Girard's understanding of sacrifice, I will flesh out the characteristics of the non-Symbolic subject, an un-theorised form of subjectivity that precedes the oedipal. I will argue that, in *The Bacchae*, the role of the non-Symbolic subject is occupied by Dionysus, and that the construct can help us explore the process of subjectification and the left-behind subject.

⁴³ With this idea, I am veering close to Laplanche's notion of a process of 'unbinding' that which has been 'bound' by the ego with the help of Symbolic constraints. Nonetheless, my idea differs from Laplanche's in that it argues for the existence of an actual subject, a (hidden) transcendental ego, as opposed to a drive that facilitates the process of unbinding. Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

Chapter 3

The problem of subjectification and of the structuring of the subject is difficult, and I will explore the place of the mother in the psychic life of the infant. Although the mother is theorised out of the Symbolic, I will argue that it is possible to theorise a new form of subjectification when operating with a particular understanding of structure, one that draws on both Kleinian and Lacanian thought.

Chapter 4

Mothers and women occupy complicated positions in *The Bacchae*; in this chapter, I will argue that the complex nature of the relationships between women, men and divinity makes binaries in the play untenable. I will show that the mother plays a crucial part in the play, revealed through her absence, and that she has structuring capacity.

Chapter 5

In my final chapter, I will interrogate the conditions that made possible the exclusion of the mother from the space of representation, and suggest her figure has been repressed by the male imaginary. I will argue that the non-Symbolic subject enables the repressed figure of the mother to be identified and attacked, thus opening the space from which a more flexible understanding of subjectification can emerge.

Chapter 1

Methodological considerations: psychoanalysis, philosophy and myth

In this chapter I will look at the structures that constitute the subject's psychic makeup, and specifically at the moments in the subject's psychic life that make it possible for the individual to become a transcendental subject. My main interest is to undertake the Irigarayan project, and I engage with the three discourses she identified as instrumental in the creation and perpetuation of the male-dominated Symbolic: psychoanalysis, philosophy and myth.⁴⁴

Psychoanalysis

I start to explore the processes that culminate in the emergence of subjectivity by looking at psychoanalysis, whose main theoretical contribution is the universalisation of the forces that produce social subjects. As a discipline, psychoanalysis can capture changes in the psychic makeup of subjects due to its ability to function as a meta-language and trace behavioural patterns that are then elevated to the status of quasi-transcendental elements. The way these are imposed on the psyche in specific socio-historical contexts dictates the range of subjectivities that are possible at a given time in history. It is the identification of these patterns, I would argue, that was psychoanalysis' significant contribution to deciphering the psyche, and their naming that contributed to the (false) universalisation of the discourse of subjectification. I propose to bring Freudian and Lacanian theories together into a narrative of psychic development, and subject these to an Irigarayan lens to expose their historicity and complicity to propping up the male imaginary.

⁴⁴ When I speak of psychoanalysis, I mostly refer to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and these strands' take on subjectivity; by philosophy, I mean specifically the Kantian approach to subjectification and the way it has been interpreted phenomenologically, primarily by Foucault and Heidegger; finally, I make use of some Greek myths that concern mothers, mother goddesses and the civilising influence of (godlike) females and situate these in the wider context of *The Baccahe*.

Philosophy

In addition to looking at psychoanalysis, I will also introduce philosophical discourse into the picture of the psyche—in particular, Kantian philosophy and the later strands of structuralism and phenomenology that help unpick some of Kant's radical, yet fundamentally gendered claims. Eminently a discourse of male dominance, philosophy is similar to psychoanalysis, in the sense that it maps recurrent patterns of thought to distil transcendental elements, which can then function as meta-rules for the organisation of the subject's Being-in-the-World.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, in identifying set patterns, philosophy appears more attuned to the fragility of cultural fashions; for this reason, any recurrences can be regarded as *quasi*-transcendental at best and the organisation of the psyche as a social construction, not a given that remains unchanged through time. In other words, philosophy is well suited to de-universalise psychoanalysis' universal claims.

If psychoanalysis is instrumental in *naming* the elements of the psyche and provides the meta-language to manipulate these elements into a 'cohesive' picture of it, philosophy proves equally instrumental in *tempering* psychoanalysis' radical claims by helping integrate it in a social system that is susceptible to change. Philosophy provides the framework to account for changes in ideology, and the impact these may have on psychic organisations, the process of subjectification, and the underlying structure of the subject himself. Throughout this work, I will refer to the work of Foucault and the way his understanding of the quasi-transcendental elements of a subject's life (life, language and labour) shape the reading of subjectification from a psychoanalytic viewpoint.

Myth

Finally, I will also engage with myth through ancient Greek tragedy. Myth will add a third, more palpable dimension to this work, and provide a narrative of the working of the psyche that will highlight the theoretical framework. This is not to say that myth or literary works that employ myth are used as case studies, but that through myth one can more readily understand the structure of what Foucault terms 'life', and what Dreyfus and Rabinow term the "social aspect of the subject."⁴⁶ Like philosophy and psychoanalysis, myth can identify patterns; however, unlike the first two, it identifies repetitions or breaks in *language* (Foucault's quasi-transcendental element that refers

⁴⁵ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1962.

⁴⁶ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 17.

to the reservoir of shared meanings among subjects), and signals the shortcomings, tensions, and silences in the current ideological system. Most importantly, by helping interrogate ideology, myth can identify its breaking point, raising one's consciousness about changes in thought systems, and, implicitly, in psychic organisations.

I will attempt to show how these discourses paint a cohesive picture of the subject (which they also disrupt irremediably), and how their overlaps reveal the existence of an un-theorised space where we can locate a differently structured form of subjectivity—one dissimilar to the Lacanian Symbolic subjectivity, but functional and self-sustained.

Allowing the psyche to speak—Freud, Lacan and the unconscious

The problem with mind dualism

Freud's clinical studies led him to assert that the gaps and inconsistencies in conscious data and subjects' inability to account for a significant proportion of their actions were reason enough to consider consciousness unable to encompass the entirety of mental life. Freud brought forward the existence of an unconscious dimension of mental processes.⁴⁷ Yet in elaborating a theory of the unconscious, Freud also created a new model of the mind: structurally, he divided mental activity between three systems: the unconscious, the preconscious and the conscious (Ucs, Pcs, and Cs). Broadly speaking, the unconscious stores most primary processes, and in being a reservoir for repressed wishes, it acts as the link between infancy and adult life, thus exerting permanent influence over one's conscious mental life and behaviour.⁴⁸ To expand his theory of the unconscious, Freud drew on the thoughts of Aristotle, Locke and Kant. He remained faithful to his predecessors' distinction between thought and sense and introduced a striking dichotomy between the conscious and the unconscious as parts of the mind responsible for sensation and thought, which in turn gave rise to problematic discussions of dualism.

The unconscious/conscious binary mirrors the intellectual/material binary that Irigaray argues constitutes the foundation of the male imaginary. The language of

⁴⁷ Freud's reasons for positing the existence of something that transcended consciousness, however, were not reduced to the existence of occurrences that are temporarily forgotten; Freud saw the unconscious as a medical innovation capable to account for the shortcomings of neurological explanations, which failed to provide causal explanations for conscious mental processes.

⁴⁸ As Freud stresses in his second topography, secondary processes can also be unconscious. However, these are "redirections of the primary processes." Alasdair MacIntyre, *The unconscious: a conceptual analysis*, (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1958), 30. Not all that is unconscious is a reservoir of repressed memories: Freud agrees there is content in the unconscious that was never repressed; however, as far as unconscious wishes are concerned, these are primary processes that have been repressed as dictated by secondary processes.

psychoanalysis generates structures rooted in phallogentrism, and can only be navigated from within the psychoanalytic discourse/male imaginary. In making the unconscious conscious and bringing unarticulated drives into the space of language and logic, Freud *transferred* the unconscious into the male imaginary, thus (perhaps unwittingly) eliminating the possibility for femininity to become manifest in the social sphere. The discourse of psychoanalysis employed philosophy to this end, and made use of texts that were instrumental in laying the foundations of dualism, thus reinforcing the structuring role of the male imaginary. Kant, Descartes and Aristotle, along with other philosophical figures, were key in institutionalising the primacy of the phallus, in the sense that their philosophy advocated for dualism, and for the triangular relation of the male ego with his ego ideal (God) and inferior point of reference (woman) that Irigaray critiques.

The unconscious becomes particularly problematic when inscribed in the conscious/unconscious dichotomy and understood as an entity of its own. Philosophers such as Jonathan Lear and İlham Dilman support viewing the mind as a whole, in which the conscious and the unconscious coexist in a permanent, dynamic relation. This view is not without its merits: in the preface to Freud's paper on the unconscious, it is noted that the German words for 'conscious' and 'unconscious' have passive connotations, suggesting that the unconscious should not be regarded as an independent entity, but part of the mental system.⁴⁹

A monadic understanding of the mind pushes one towards regarding the unconscious as a *language* of psychic organisation that places *hidden* thoughts at its centre. Freud himself considered the unconscious to be a reservoir for thing-presentations, while the conscious system was one for word-presentation. In perception, both thing-presentations and word-presentations are registered *simultaneously*, each by its corresponding system, and hypercathected. It is when the process of hypercathexis is hindered, Freud argues, that thing-presentations are stored in the unconscious and repression ensues. However, Freud also argues that there is a certain amount of sense-data present at the level of thing-presentations and word-presentations alike, suggesting there is common ground between word- and thing-presentations, and that it is on the basis of this common ground that thought-processes pass into the conscious system. The play between the idea of common ground and the *sliding* of thing- and

⁴⁹ "The German words 'bewusst' and 'unbewusst' have the grammatical form of passive participles, and their usual sense is something like 'consciously known' and 'not consciously known'. The English 'conscious', though it can be used in the same way, is also used, and perhaps more commonly, in an active sense: 'he was conscious of the sound' and 'he lay there unconscious'. The German terms do not often have this active meaning, and it is important to bear in mind that 'conscious' is in general to be understood in a passive sense in what follows. The German word 'Bewusstsein', on the other hand (which is here translated 'consciousness'), does have an active sense." – Freud, *The Standard Edition*, 1960:XIV:164.

word- presentations over each other and over the common ground in the creation of *meaning* is very Lacanian in nature, which could suggest that the Lacanian interpretation of the unconscious as hinging on linguistics may prove more conflict-free.

Moving on to understanding psychoanalysis as a language

Psychoanalysis has become in the past century a fragmented discipline—countless branches have emerged, each drifting further away from the original Freudian position. Lacanian psychoanalysis, as much as Lacan might have rejected the categorization, appears to follow the same lines, as it re-reads Freudian concepts to the point of altering them completely. Nonetheless, Lacan considered his work to be a return to Freud and the first accurate reading of psychoanalysis. Yet his linguistic reinterpretation of the Freudian unconscious and his psychoanalytic reading of linguistics seem attempts to refashion an entity driven by instinctual drives into one shaped by language. Lacan argues the mechanisms through which ideation is possible are (almost) identical to symbol-formation in language, thus enabling symptoms to surface in the Cs by means of language, and be pinpointed linguistically. Lacan's linguistic take on Freud explains how subjectification is precipitated in the not-yet-subject, bypassing the problems traditional psychoanalysis encounters, the coming to life of the subject. Freud was unable to identify an actual moment when the infant becomes a subject and considered subjectification to occur with the resolution of the oedipal crisis, when the infant is habituated into norms through the assimilation of the paternal figure. The Lacanian reading follows a similar path, but treats the subject as a conglomerate of linguistic entities. While the coherence of the Freudian picture is difficult to maintain due to the unsatisfactory explanations that surround the different processes that occur in boys and girls in the oedipal stage, Lacan's translation of subjectification in linguistic terms seemingly avoids the gender-bias inherent in the Freudian account and supports a stronger universal claim.

In the early Freudian model of the unconscious, sensorial impingements must go through a series of stages to be consciously registered, namely to be perceived by sense organs, filtered through a series of mnemonic systems, which act in a cross-referencing fashion, and translated into psychic terms. If the sensorial impingement/psychic impulse is not repressed by the censor, it passes into the Pcs and the Cs respectively; however, if repressed, the impulse is denied passage into the Pcs and Cs, and can either briefly surface with the relaxation of the censor (in dreams), or sublimate, as apparently unconnected compulsions, fixations and obsessions. The seeming incompatibility between the physicality of the Freudian system and the way in

which energetic inputs are translated into linguistically-inscribable entities, such as dreams, jokes or parapraxes, makes Lacan's approach to unconscious processes, particularly his appropriation of linguistics, appear a legitimate attempt to correct a slippage in Freud's thinking.

Freud's account of thought-formation, however, is where the similarity between him and Lacan is evident: to Freud, thing-presentations and word-presentations are registered simultaneously in perception and hypercathexed. It is when the process of hypercathexis is hindered that thing-presentations are stored in the unconscious and repression ensues. Freud argues that thing-presentations and word-presentations share a common amount of sensorial data, which suggests that it is based on this correspondence that psychic energy can breach the censor and enter consciousness. This model is similar to the signifier/signified correspondence, particularly in terms of separating the two categories into word- and thing- presentations; Freud apparently argues for regarding the unconscious as structured like a language, dispelling the difficulty posed by the topographic model of the mind. If we accept this hypothesis, then the Lacanian move to use Saussurean linguistics to decipher the workings of the unconscious is legitimate, although in his transition an interesting inversion occurs: in the Lacanian reading, it is word-presentations, not thing-presentations, that are stored in the unconscious.

Lacan's description of the unconscious and of the passage of thoughts from one system to another is identical to Freud's, with two major differences: firstly, Freud oscillated between linguistic and physical systems without explaining the mechanisms by which the transition is made, while Lacan remains in a linguistic system that allows for the *materiality of the letter*, a concept which proves essential to his project; and secondly, different types of presentations are now stored in the unconscious. Lacan focuses almost exclusively on dreams and regards them as capable of providing access to the unconscious and the apparatus through which primary and secondary repressions ensue. The insistence on dreams is an indication of the primacy of language: to Freud, dreams create connections in the same way language does, by using dream elements like words; dreams, to Lacan, do not mimic reality, but articulate it. They do not show a picture of the repressed content, but encode it, using linguistic methods to connect its elements; the language-like quality of dreams is achieved by means of subtle intensities *within* the dream, such as recurring patterns, dream sequences or over-emphasized elements—through condensation and displacement. Nonetheless, dreams do not *tell the story* of an unconscious wish; dreams, formed around oedipal and pre-oedipal fixations, represent an individualized way of building on and around the oedipal crisis, creating an intricate nexus of wishes. Through dreams, a

narrative of a conglomerate of wishes emerges, the result of successive processes of displacement, condensation and overlapping of impulses that make them non-threatening to the conscious mind. As Lacan explains, the interpretation of the manifest content of the dream does not reveal a clear wish structure, but a nexus of terms that contain different manifestations of a primal wish or its ramifications. Being regulated by the rules of logic to a lesser extent than waking life, the dream displays flexibility in the directionality of letters, or signifiers, and the work of the analyst is to decipher the dreams of the analysand *to the letter*. As a result, the unconscious is not ordered linguistically in the sense that it follows grammatical rules; the unconscious does not function like propositional content, but is driven by the internal logic that leads to the creation of a context of signification for a particular (repressed) wish. This is an important clarification Lacan makes, necessary for his project of putting the unconscious into a linguistic framework.⁵⁰

I would like to make two points regarding Lacan's interpretation of Freudian theories:

- Firstly, that through the translation of theories into linguistic terms, Lacan achieves an almost complete shift in focus in what concerns the unconscious. If earlier theories allowed for some degree of flexibility in thought formation and invited a monadic interpretation of the unconscious, Lacan takes this monadic view to the extreme. The linguistic reading of the unconscious denies the possibility of non-phallic intrusions in the unconscious. The materiality of thought is translated into a male system (language), and filtered through its prism to the point that binary descriptions become almost impossible. In the linguistic translation proposed by Lacan, an opposition such as conscious/unconscious, taken to equal rational/sensorial or even masculine/feminine becomes nonsensical. The materiality of the subject, of the unconscious and of thought itself is translated into male terms, nullifying the binary and expelling materiality, and with it, the female voice, from the system in which subjectivity is possible. The feminine is allowed back into the Lacanian

⁵⁰ To Lacan, the dream displays the same mechanics as language, and its primary processes, condensation and displacement, are reinterpreted as metaphor and metonymy. This, as Fink shows, is something analysts have failed to grasp, and have instead attempted to reconstruct a narrative in dreams, as opposed to deciphering the signification of dream-play, of the latching of signifiers onto signifieds. Fink, *Lacan to the letter*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). This is not to say that there is no narrative structure in the *play* that takes place in the dream; on the contrary, the narrative structure must be there for the dream to be comprehensible. However, this does not mean that it is the dream that has the narrative structure generally ascribed to propositional content, but that the dream-play *must* be ascribed this structure in waking life to be able to make sense of it. I use 'narrative', therefore, in the same sense as Lyotard, as a series of patterns of thought necessarily arranged in a logical, time-sensitive order that communities/groups of subjects use to create a reservoir of shared meanings. Lyotard is concerned with the temporal sequence of narratives and meta-narratives, and argues that it is only in its presence that 'shared meanings' can become 'knowledge'; when the temporal sequence is removed, what one has is but an *occurrence*, a temporal singularity that Lyotard translates as the Sublime. Lyotard's reading is close to Foucault's, in the sense that these conglomerates of shared meanings can be seen as quasi-transcendental elements, arranged on a temporal scale retrospectively. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 18-37.

system through *jouissance* and discussions of the Real, that is, through elements that find an ill fit in the Symbolic. This point is particularly relevant when employing psychoanalysis to unearth the female voice: having made itself alien to female subjectivity and the materiality of its body, psychoanalysis will not be able to give females a voice, which will then necessarily become visible as silences, omissions and pauses that invite closer scrutiny.

- Secondly, that the confines of subjectivity are arbitrary and culturally-constructed. The Lacanian exercise shows that culture, and the primacy of the phallus, have been translated into the language of the unconscious and instilled in subjects: subjectivity is, as Irigaray demonstrated, not ahistorical, but *ahistoricised*. Lacan also makes the process of subjectification dependent on literalization: becoming a subject is only possible once all traces of femininity have been eliminated, and the male imaginary allows the subject to enter the Symbolic only once female subjectivity has been contained. The idea that psychoanalysis captures the working of the male imaginary and replicates the dominant discourse is important: it means the psychoanalytic discourse, for example, the one elaborated by Freud then Lacan, becomes the 'voice' of the male imaginary and only speaks for male subjects. As my argument will be that we can speak of subjects that can exist outside the confines of the space delineated by Lacan, it is essential to differentiate between the subject in Lacanian theory (always male), and other types of subjects. In this chapter, I am looking at the process of subjectification in Lacanian theory to illustrate the context in which I plan to argue for the existence of a space where different subjectivities can emerge. Outlining the space of psychoanalysis as fundamentally male is the first step in identifying the circumstances that must change for alternative subjectivities to exist.

From field of study to discourse of the self: the hold of Lacanian psychoanalysis

One of the first steps Lacan takes towards shifting the focus of the unconscious from archaic drive to linguistic construction is to *literalize* the subject; yet to resist transferring the problem from one register to another, Lacan also *materializes* the letter. As Fink writes, Lacan's main thesis in *The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious* "is that the Unconscious is *not* merely the seat of the instincts or drives...[but] of...the whole structure of language."⁵¹ The Lacanian unconscious captures the complexity of the Freudian unconscious without the risk of being conflated

⁵¹ Fink, *Lacan to the letter*, 76.

with the id and reduced to a (neo-romanticist) notion of irrational depths of the psyche; it becomes the discourse of the Other, modelled on the desire or lack instilled in the subject by the presence of the Other. Yet the Lacanian unconscious also inscribes the Other into a discourse that is created and manipulated by a male subject. The unconscious is a necessary formation that permits repression and inscription into a certain social order. To argue such a point successfully, Lacan first shows how the subject is dependent on language by *literalizing* him.

The literalization of the subject, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe explain, is achieved by introducing the concept of the *letter*, which “designates the structure of language insofar as the subject is implicated therein.”⁵² The Lacanian ‘language’ refers to a system that precedes the subject, existing always-already before the subject’s entry in the Symbolic, and whose origin cannot be traced in relation to subjects themselves. The letter appears to be equated by Lacan to the signifier itself, a supposition strengthened by Saussure’s similar connection between the sound-impression of words on the psyche and materiality.⁵³ Nonetheless, an in-depth analysis of the letter, particularly with a view to the idea of *phonemes*, or, as Lacan puts it, “the synchronic system of differential couplings that are necessary to discern vocables in a given language (*langue*),”⁵⁴ reveals the letter as what permits semantic differentiation, and which, by its directionality and temporal movability, gives the signifier its materiality. The letter becomes paradoxical: located between signifier and that which constitutes it, the letter is material insofar as the signifier itself is material, yet also immaterial, insofar as it constitutes the microstructure of the signifier, without referring to the ink on paper, or the “kilos of language” in books.⁵⁵ Being both, the letter becomes a stepping stone in the correspondence between the material and the immaterial. The subject is shaped by the letter, as he exists in a pre-determined linguistic structure and depends on the material support provided by language. The implication of the materiality of language on the subject with a view to these prerogatives of the signifier is that the subject finds himself always-already in a linguistic system and his integration in this system is the very condition of possibility of transindividuality.

Having reified language, Lacan also attempts a redefinition of the unconscious: he derives an ‘algorithm’ of linguistics from the Saussurean equation of the interchangeable relation between the concept and the sound-image that is fundamentally different from Saussure’s initial postulate and, as Fink notes, not confirmed by any linguist. If, to Saussure, there is a reciprocal relation between signifier

⁵² Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The title of the letter*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 27.

⁵³ Fink, *Lacan to the letter*, 76.

⁵⁴ Lacan, *Écrits*, 501.

⁵⁵ Lacan, *Écrits*, 282.

and signified, between the sound-image and the concept, which constitutes a fixed sign, to Lacan this reciprocity does not exist. Rather, the signifier and the signified are independent, and do not call each other to mind. This modification makes the sign both more fixed and more flexible: fixed, in the sense that reciprocity cannot exist between its two components, the signifier perpetually dominating the signified (i.e., being above the bar in the hierarchical relation), and flexible, in the sense that the totality of the sign, its holistic character, is abandoned in favour of a movable meaning. Furthermore, Fink points out, Lacan subverts the Saussurean sign with the abolition of the original purpose of the bar: if, to Saussure, the bar denominated the signifier and signified as “a two-sided psychological entity,” to Lacan, it becomes a bar-rier that *resists* signification.⁵⁶ This suggests that signification can never be self-evident and that resistance itself (the bar) is instrumental in the creation of meaning. The signifier becomes, as Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe note, “the order of spacing, according to which the law is inscribed and marked as difference.”⁵⁷

The linguistic structure of consciousness is defined by the signifier/signified relation, with its meaning created by the gliding of one chain over the other. In the unconscious, signifiers are repressed and prevented from reaching consciousness; the gliding of the chains of signifiers and signifieds is halted, fixating meaning and attaching it to particular elements, which results in compulsions and obsessional behaviours that are perceived as symptoms of underlying pathologies. Lacan conceives of the chain of signifiers as quasi-transcendental elements that regulate everyday life, the chain of signifieds becoming that by virtue of which the chain of signifiers becomes comprehensible. Lacan sees the signifier as that which enables the creation of the subject, in the sense that the subject finds himself in a world pre-determined by the chain of signifiers, and given meaning by their interplay with a chain of signifieds; yet it is not the subject who creates or transmits signifiers, but signifiers that enable the formation of the subject. The subject postulates meaning in relation to existent signifiers, which is to say that the subject is shaped by discourse and cannot exist other than in relation to the Other, to a chain of signifiers that endow him with meaning. “The subject”, Elizabeth Grosz writes, “is the effect of discourse, no longer its cause.”⁵⁸

Lacan uses this modified version of the Saussurean algorithm to also explain repression. Initially identified as taking place through displacement and condensation, or, in Lacanian language, through metaphor and metonymy, repression is now defined

⁵⁶ Ferdinand de Saussure in Fink, *Lacan to the letter*, 80.

⁵⁷ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The title of the letter*, 46.

⁵⁸ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: a feminist introduction*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1990), 98. Throughout this thesis, I return frequently to Grosz's reading of Lacan, as I find it captures adeptly the subtleties of the Lacanian account and its implications for the possibility of positing a female subject position in language.

as either vertical or horizontal oscillations in relation to the barrier. Thus, metonymy (or displacement) consists of the shifting of the signifier to a different signified, which could elude the censor and present a sufficiently altered signification so that the initial meaning is not grasped. Metonymy is also the main representation of desire, as the barrier between signifier and signified and the shifting of signifiers also point to the underlying lack in the subject that prompted the repression of the (primal) impulse in the first place; this lack, both Grosz and Fink argue, is what further generates the endless slippage of signifiers, the desire for something else. Metaphor, on the other hand, represents the substitution of one term for another, while still maintaining the metonymic chain; metaphor freezes signifiers, but confines them within the unconscious, while their connection to the metonymic chain allows them to resurface as symptoms, condensed and displaced. The Lacanian equations are important due to their hierarchical structure: as I will show in chapters 3 and 4, the construction of the subject in layers has deep implications for the possibility of femininity to enter the Symbolic and become manifest in subjectification.

Lacan translates primal impulse into lack/desire, effecting a secondary translation—that of *instinct into language*. Lacan postulates human desire as *enabled* by language; the mechanics behind the constitution of a sign allow for the linguistic organization of desire and the resurfacing of primal instinctual drives into day-to-day behaviour. Desire, the driving force behind repression and thus, the unconscious, and what enables metonymy (and, implicitly, the precipitation of the ego), is the basis on which the transition between instinct and language can occur. From this viewpoint, Lacan remains close to the Freudian unconscious, insofar as he, too, postulated the existence of common ground between thought- and word-presentations; to Lacan, this common ground is represented by desire, which can be configured in linguistic terms, linking the instinctual and the symptomatic; like the subject himself, desire is connected to the letter and shaped by its directionality.

If we start with Freud's description of the unconscious (a reservoir for repressed drives), then it follows that the unconscious itself can only come into being once repression (or entry into the Symbolic order) has been achieved. In other words, the unconscious becomes a (symptomatic) manifestation of repression. Yet, in depicting the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, Lacan suggests that for the infant to repress an oedipal wish, the infant must have both overcome primary narcissism and have come to an awareness of the existence of (at least) a triangular oedipal structure, and must already implicitly be part of a linguistic order. Lacan thus uncovers a further layer of this equation, that awareness of the Other is a condition of possibility for the existence of the unconscious; moreover, the unconscious as entity can only appear as

a(n) (infantile) response to the existence of the Other, and linguistic organization must be presupposed in the infant at this stage, before subjectification. The subject emerges in language, which is a quasi-transcendental empirical determinant of human existence: the subject is always a social subject and subject to communication.⁵⁹ This means that transindividuality, recognition, and ultimately subjectification take place not in relation to an Other as a point of origin, but as a pinnacle of linguistic organization; the subject, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe write, is “installed by the Other in the midst of language as ‘signifying convention’.”⁶⁰ To Lacan, the process of becoming a subject, therefore, rests on literalization as a condition of possibility.

Lacan attempts neither to subvert Freudian psychoanalysis, nor to present it as a language; to Lacan, language is not meant to represent reality, but rather *signify* by means of its capacity to constitute subjects as conditioned by their empirical determinants. The Lacanian reinterpretation of the psychic apparatus provides a description of the means by which the subject *qua* subject enters the world, and of the mechanics that facilitate subjectification. Lacan’s reinterpretation of Freud sets in place an immensely complex system of reference that helps navigate the many recurrent patterns of psychic organisation. Lacan paves the way towards using psychoanalysis as a system of thought that helps organise retrospectively that which occurs before concepts can be entertained. This understanding of psychoanalysis will be helpful when interrogating the gendered historicity of subjectivity and exploring bursts of femininity that germinate in the wholly-male Symbolic. By using Lacanian psychoanalysis to search for traces of femininity in *The Bacchae*, it will be possible to unpack the system that made it impossible for the subject position to be occupied by anyone else other than the male subject, and propose alternatives to this (oedipal) model of subjectification.

The birth of the subject—Kant, Foucault, Freud and Lacan on subjectification

In establishing the subject *qua* (male) subject, one of the most important moves made by philosophy (through Kant) and by psychoanalysis (through Lacan) was to redefine the place of the subject in discourse. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault shows he is aware of the importance of discourse in subjects’ relation to their own identities, and he charts the way subjects refer to knowledge and the implicit changes in the subjects’

⁵⁹ Foucault, *The order of things*, 353.

⁶⁰ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The title of the letter*, 30.

position caused by the shifting definition of knowledge. Foucault suggests that, in the current ideological system, human knowledge revolves primarily around three elements (life, labour and language), which act as quasi-transcendental elements, in the sense that they exist unchanged in the life (and, implicitly, psychic makeup) of every subject until a turn in ideology occurs. In a sense, Foucault is close to Irigaray in arguing for the historicity of quasi-transcendental determinants (which include the Symbolic) and demonstrates that the role of language and Man's relation to it are historical.⁶¹

Using discourse to become a subject: man's claim to knowledge

In tracing the evolution of knowledge, Foucault is interrogating the mechanisms by which the subject becomes a subject. The ability to analyse and comprehend the process of subjectification is what Kant sees as the possibility of universal knowledge, and the great innovation he introduces through the *Critique* with what is known as 'the Copernican turn'. The Copernican turn redefined the status of representation and turned human finitude—the mark of human inferiority in attaining universal knowledge—into the condition of possibility for knowledge. For the first time in the history of human inquiry, Foucault argues, Kant questioned not representations, but what makes representations possible, and moved away from systems that inquire why things happen in a certain way, towards a truly transcendental question of what it is that enables things to happen at all. The move Kant makes is from the post hoc to the a priori.

Following Kant's Copernican turn, Foucault analyses finitude and the way Kant established it as foundational for universal knowledge. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault assesses Kant's distinction between the empirical and the transcendental, and shows how the two cannot exist independently, but coexist in a state of permanent oscillation. Foucault uses the idea of finitude to show the way Modern Thought, due to the decline of discourse and the change in the status of representation, was forced to acknowledge the duality of man and attempted to make it foundational for the claim to absolute knowledge to be meaningful. Yet the elements of man's duality are never separate, giving rise to anthropological finitude and making it impossible to maintain the empirico-transcendental doublet while, at the same time, holding empirical finitude to be foundational for the possibility of knowledge. Foucault's work is particularly rich

⁶¹ Foucault does not refer to subjects as subjects, but uses the more general term *Man*. I believe the terminology is not accidental and is chosen to capture the cultural baggage of the term. It is important to note the use of a gendered word, particularly with a view to Irigaray's argument that history and philosophy orchestrate culture from a male point of view. In contrast, psychoanalytic discourse refers to 'subjects' and argues for their ahistorical nature. I would argue Foucault's 'Man' is equivalent to 'subject', especially when the term is unpacked through the Irigarayan lens.

when read in conjunction with Irigaray, as it allows for deep probing in the systems that create a close yet ultimately impossible bond between man and God on one side, and exclude femininity yet make it essential for man's self-definition on the other.

In *The Order of Things* Foucault undertakes a methodical analysis of the social, political, institutional and discursive spheres, which, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, stems from a reduction of his anthropological method so that it addresses solely the rules that govern discourse.⁶² In analysing the mechanics of discourse, Foucault turns his attention towards the "sciences of man", seeking to understand the means by which man understands and refers to himself. He does so by scrutinising the methods that encompass the kernel of thought, that is, life, language and labour, or, as Dreyfus and Rabinow put it, "the social, the embodied individual and shared meanings."⁶³ This inquiry into the production of meaning within discourse is, in fact, a search for the conditions of possibility for knowledge: Foucault writes the aim of his project is "to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible", which he undertakes by introducing the notion of *épistème*, the ideological setting that prompts and supports the development of a field of study in one way or another.⁶⁴

To carry out his project, Foucault identifies the systems of thought and different types of *épistème* that underlie the history of thought, and distinguishes between the Classical Age, Renaissance and Modernity. What is crucial in all three is the status of representation: by focusing on the way the Classical notion of representation has shifted in the Modern age, Foucault can highlight the development of the "sciences of man" towards regarding man as a double, "a special kind of total subject and total object of his own knowledge."⁶⁵

In the Classical Age, the status of representation was such that representation could be broken down into its constituting parts, which would be assigned an almost narrative structure through which the constitution of an object could be achieved in one form or another. Its parts could be ordered in a "system of grids, which analysed the sequence of representations...arresting its movement...and redistributing it in a permanent table..."⁶⁶ Discourse was the "last 'bastion' to fall": by destabilizing the system of language, the Classical system of representation based on ordering and classification collapsed. "[W]hen words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of man", the shift in *épistème* was complete; this

⁶² Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 16.

⁶³ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 18.

⁶⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 331.

bought about a new outlook on language, one that would assign it a broader, but more unstable role, in which it becomes objectified, formalized and entrenched.⁶⁷ With the decline of discourse, the *épistème* was directed towards anthropocentrism, and language was exorcised from the field of thought until the 19th century, when its disjointed status came to the fore.⁶⁸ Language, Foucault explains, could no longer function as a closed system, meant to explicate representations; from sign, language had become a signifier devoid of signification.⁶⁹ Language thus loses its status of unity that can capture unequivocally the signifier-signified relation, becoming a being in itself.⁷⁰ This shift is important, as it facilitates the emergence of the language that enabled the Lacanian unconscious to exist. The emergence of language-as-Being marks the birth of the subject of psychoanalysis—the subject that situates himself in a triangular relation with God and woman in a (male) Symbolic.

With the decline of discourse that marked the shift from a classical to a modern *épistème*, the status of representation changed. Foucault turns to Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, and argues it captures the status of Classical representation, the impossibility of representing the act of representation. *Las Meninas* displays the limits of Classical representation by showing the subject who acts as the organiser of knowledge can never be shown in the act of representing; the picture is dominated by lack—the lack of its principal subject.⁷¹ This manifestation of lack testifies to the impoverished status of the subject: man, in the Classical age, has no place on the grid that he organises, as if he did not exist. While man has been the object of inquiry in the Classical age, he was only studied through the prism of his relation to the sciences of man. Yet once the correlation between linguistic signs and nature is questioned, “the positive relation of nature to human nature begin[s] to take shape,” and, along with it, a change in the mode of representation occurs.⁷² Language, the act of naming, becomes insufficient for knowledge, as simply inscribing things into a system does not capture the transcendental dimension of man, his need to identify the conditions of possibility of the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “[T]he living beings...regrouped around the central enigma of life”—Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 332.

⁶⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 333.

⁷⁰ This could prefigure the idea of language as Dasein; if so, the decline of language from closed system to signifier-signified duality can be said to mirror the same epistemic shift in the constitution of man: the transition from organiser of knowledge to unstable double. In a Lacanian framework, however, this shift is essential to enable the ‘birth’ of the unconscious, that is, the destabilisation of language that permitted a degree of laxity in the sliding of signifiers and signifieds. This is to say that it is the specific structure of *épistème* that directly shapes the individual and dictates which elements of everyday life become quasi-transcendental.

⁷¹ An emblematic figure in this sense, Foucault argues, was Descartes, whose primary method implied the extreme reduction of representation down to its atomistic parts, followed by its reconstruction. This way, the representation could be understood, and its mechanisms of constitution could be replicated and made clear. The most important trait of this method, as well as this approach to representation, was the fact that it was infallible: provided the representation was adequately broken down into signs, the understanding obtained would be perfectly certain. Yet what is amiss, by comparison to the Modern age, in this picture of representation is the status of man: despite being able to manipulate representation and its components, and to understand the complexity of representation, man had no agency when it came to the creation of representation.

⁷² Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 336-337.

existence of things: if man is solely an organiser of knowledge and plays no part in its production, universal knowledge is closed to him. Without transcendental activity, man cannot be both object and subject of knowledge, meaning he exists outside the space of representation. By assigning him a place, the Classical *épistème* makes room for the Modern man. Now, the idea of the cogito enters the picture, and an appropriate *épistème* replaces the classical one, allowing for the articulation of the “interrogation as to the mode of being implied by the cogito.”⁷³

Both subject and object: the difficulty with (self)representation

When the natural sciences of man become objects of knowledge, Foucault explains, an “archaeological mutation” occurs, and man suffers a transformation from actor external to the stage on which knowledge is produced, to an ambiguous creature that is at once “an object of knowledge and...a subject that knows”.⁷⁴ Man is now *created*, and occupies the place that *Las Meninas* seemed to have reserved for him: that of the King, hitherto only reflected in the mirror, enjoying a centrality that was not quite central. However, now the paradoxical duo that is man, “enslaved sovereign, observed spectator”, replaces the lack that had been central to the space of thought.⁷⁵ The epistemic shift that substantiates the need for this new position can be described as a transition from the need to understand the empirical conditions that shaped life, to the conditions of possibility of those epistemic givens: “...life...should itself define, in the depths of its being, the conditions of possibility of the living being;... labour...[should] provide the conditions of possibility of exchange, profit and production;...languages [should explain] the possibility of discourse and of grammar.”⁷⁶ The picture of representation as the origin of life, labour and language ceased to be meaningful, and called for a turning towards transcendental inquiry. Yet this new approach reveals man’s paradoxical nature and his ambiguous relation with the empirical determinants of his life: in discovering himself as both object and subject of knowledge, man is in fact charting his own finitude.⁷⁷ On the one hand, man is subject to the empirical

⁷³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 340. This gives rise to a conundrum regarding the existence of the subject: if the subject, in an anthropocentric sense, did not exist in the Classical Age, then the process of subjectification did not exist either. This does not mean that people did not *think*, but that in the absence of a framework that situates the subject *qua* subject in the midst of a series of empirical and transcendental determinants, to speak of psychic structures, patterns in mental organisation or subjectification is not meaningful. From this perspective, the shift in *épistème* not only changed the way man positioned himself in relation to knowledge, but marked the birth of the subject *with a psyche*.

⁷⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 340.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* It is this dual status of man that prefigures his existence as a double: by losing his state as organiser of knowledge, man is forced to regard himself as subject to the same empirical laws as all objects, and attribute the status of an object to himself.

⁷⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 340-341.

⁷⁷ “In one sense, man is governed by labour, life, and language: his concrete existence finds its determinations in them; it is possible to have access to him only through his words, his organism, the objects he makes – as though it is they who possess the truth in the first place (and they alone perhaps); and he, as soon as he thinks, merely unveils himself

determinants of his life (life, labour and language) and finds his existence shaped by them, as it is in these three spheres that his daily activity takes place. In this sense, man's existence is shaped and dictated by the empirical conditions of his existence.

However, on the other hand, Foucault shows the subject to exist in a paradoxical relation with his empirical determinants: the moment the subject moves towards transcendental reflection and considers the conditions that shape his life in a positivist manner, he gives way to his dual nature as oscillation between the empirical and the transcendental egos. The reason for this is that reflection on one's condition necessarily implies reference to temporality and to the way the subject relates to himself in a temporal framework, and forces the subject back to a point of origin that marks the genesis of dependence on empirical determinants. However, such a point cannot be identified: man is already born in a relation of dependence to the empirical determinants of life, labour and language, and cannot extricate himself from this relation. From this perspective, a point of origin can only be identified in relation to the genesis of self-awareness, that is, the moment in which the subject ceases to be merely reflexive and becomes reflective—the moment of subjectification.⁷⁸

The Unthought, that which preceded self-awareness, constitutes the pre-history of consciousness: it cannot be dated, and can only be apprehended retrospectively, from without, rather than perceived as it happens, from within. Consequently, since the genesis of the birth transcendental ego arises from the pre-existent (and necessary) foundation laid by the empirical determinants of life, it follows that these empirical conditions have primacy over transcendental reflection. The positivity of these empirical determinants highlights the finitude of man; and yet, despite their primacy, it cannot be argued that life, labour and language have priority over the existence of man, as they, too, are dependent on it.

Finitude becomes foundational and can illuminate the universal structures of experience. This move, Foucault argues, changes the history of Western thought: finitude, to Kant, becomes what Dreyfus and Rabinow call "the basis of all factual, ... positive, knowledge."⁷⁹ Kant's analysis of the conditions under which representation is possible becomes an analytic which looks at the way things are

to his own eyes in the form of a being who is already, in a necessarily subjacent density, in an irreducible anteriority, a living being, an instrument of production, a vehicle for words which exist before him."—Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 341.

⁷⁸ The genesis of reflectivity can only be dated from a third-person perspective, as dating it from a first-person perspective would require awareness of what existed prior to the existence of awareness—which is impossible. This inaccessible past of human reflexivity that is devoid of reflectivity is what Foucault terms an 'irreducible anteriority'. Perhaps an argument could be made that psychoanalysis sees this as infantile omnipotence, and that the struggle Jessica Benjamin, following Hegel, observes between omnipotence and subjectivity prefigures a wider, conceptual struggle between the transcendental and the empirical subjects. If so, anthropological finitude is replicated in current thought, making us unable to understand intersubjectivity if we regard subjects as closed systems.

⁷⁹ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 28.

presented in experience. Kant ascribed the empirical limitations on knowledge, such as contingency and obscurity, to its content, and argued for the pure form of knowledge. Translated into psychoanalytic terms, the possibility of pure knowledge equates to the possibility of inquiring into man's own origin, into the originary itself, or as much of it as may be comprehended within the constraints of empirical determinants. In this sense, psychic structures (named by psychoanalysis as a system of reference and orchestrated by language) become themselves quasi-transcendental elements that exist by virtue of (and also enable the existence of) the empirical determinants of life, language and labour. Psychic structures are marked by the same finitude of the subject, and their recurrence throughout generations is strictly dependent on a) the status of representation, and b) the empirical determinants of life, language and labour.

The new status of man as actor and orchestrator of knowledge is characterized by paradoxes, which is how man becomes 'enslaved sovereign' and 'observed spectator', prefiguring a dichotomy that must exist for the production of knowledge to be possible, and gives rise to an internal conflict that must be perpetuated for the quasi-transcendental elements of human life to continue to exist.⁸⁰ By virtue of his limitations, man can claim absolute knowledge, as these limitations are no longer imposed on him, but by-products of a discourse *created by him*: it is because he is finite that he can understand and chart his own finitude against positive forms of knowledge.

Man is, thus, posited as an invention of modernity; Foucault analyses three dyads that ratify Man's status as empirico-transcendental doublet, the empirical/transcendental, the Cogito and the Unthought and the Return and Retreat of the Origin, which, ultimately, prompt man to both affirm and deny his finitude in a constant oscillation⁸¹ between the extremes of each binary, and give rise to anthropological finitude.⁸² By describing the three pairs of doubles, Foucault is trying to show how empirical finitude returns time and again within transcendental finitude, and how the clean-cut distinction attempted by the Copernican turn can never be regained.

In the *Anthropology*, a paradoxical pair emerges: that of the fundamental and the originary. As Han explains, the idea of the originary undermines the Copernican turn by making the distinction between the transcendental and the a priori difficult, generating the interplay of epistemic and empirical finitude in the Analytic of Finitude. "The

⁸⁰ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 340.

⁸¹ The need for permanent redefinition, however, weakens the claim of finitude to being fundamental; moreover, Dreyfus and Rabinow explain, the existence of the double(s) also weakens the explanatory claim of archaeology as a method.

⁸² "The blurring of the empirico-transcendental divide within man's "doubles" repeatedly defeats the foundational core of the Kantian strategy by generating a new inability to sustain the a priori perspective necessary for securing a universal epistemic ground. Because of man's dual nature (both transcendental and empirical), the transcendental subject, the former a-priori and self-transparent condition of possibility of knowledge, now appears as "already" determined by the empirical background of Life, Language and Labour."—Han, "Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude", 129.

thematic of the originary is introduced through a reflection on the relationship between Geist and Gemüt”, the element that “generates the possibility of (noumenal) spontaneity” and “the purely empirical object of psychology”.⁸³ The Geist, Han continues, generates a problem, as it is through its existence that an “originary passivity” can become manifest at the level of the transcendental; thus transcendental finitude “is suddenly folded back upon man’s empirical limitations:”⁸⁴ by constituting itself as a condition of the possibility of knowledge, yet not as something that can be known, it undermines the Copernican turn, and thus invalidates the possibility of “overcoming the limitations of anthropological finitude by shifting to the epistemic primacy of its a priori counterpart...[since] the latter reveals itself as contaminated from the start by empirical determinations.”⁸⁵ It is by means of this movement that the idea of the return of origin is introduced: by understanding himself as shaped by the empirical determinants of the world, man must see himself as existing in an empirical space that he does not fully understand. Not only has he no choice with regard to the empirical conditions that shape his existence, but once immersed in these conditions, he is forced to find that the conditions themselves precede him, having existed before him in an un-datable anteriority: “as soon as the ‘I think’ has shown itself to be embedded in a density throughout which it is quasi-present...it is no longer possible to make it lead on to the affirmation ‘I am’. For can I say...I am this language I speak?”⁸⁶ To capture this ‘irreducible anteriority’, Foucault borrows Husserl’s theory of the Unthought.⁸⁷ Modern man needs to think the Unthought, an act which would reconcile him with his essence, which underlies his constitution; however, such a move is impossible without becoming trapped in the circularity of anthropological finitude, as understanding the originary and secondary passivity that shape the ego is dependent on empirical determinants.

Yet despite failing to regain the Unthought, the need to return to the origin still exists, but man finds himself in the midst of empirical determinants, which are bound to a temporal framework that can only be temporalized in relation to man.⁸⁸ Foucault writes that despite not being able to identify the point of origin of things at an empirical level, man can constitute himself as the point of origin. However, this temporal duality proves unstable: in this double, man is shown to become the point of origin of an untraceable anteriority, which becomes inscribable into a temporality only with a view to the

⁸³ Han, “Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude”, 132.

⁸⁴ Han, “Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude”, 133.

⁸⁵ Han, “Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude”, 134.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 353.

⁸⁷ The Unthought is “the implicit, the inactual, the sedimented, the non-effected—in every case, the inexhaustible double that presents itself to reflection as the blurred projection of what man is in his truth, but that also plays the role of a preliminary ground upon which man must collect himself and recall himself in order to attain his truth.”—Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 356.

⁸⁸ In this sense, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that it is Heidegger who shows that “the origin...of temporality can...be understood by understanding the structure of the authentic Dasein.”—Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 39.

constitution of man as the point of origin. The fundamentality of finitude lies in that man's status of being already there is necessary for the apprehension of a temporality of empirical determinants. Yet this is unstable because the origin identified with respect to man as a starting point will always retreat further back in time for man as he existed at the identified point of origin; consequently, despite man being essential in establishing an origin, this origin can only hold true for a specific time and context. The retreat of the origin culminates with what Heidegger terms 'the essential mystery', a moment in time that remains fundamentally unknowable.⁸⁹

The problem of origin, Dreyfus and Rabinow explain, is that "the source of man's being is unobtainable, and this truth itself can only be learned by seeking and failing to find any source."⁹⁰ Although it is to do with the subject's inscription into a temporal framework, the source can be found neither in the past nor in the present, suggesting it must, paradoxically, lie in the future, as an unavoidable, yet ungraspable possibility that reveals itself through "recession into the future."⁹¹ This argument is crucial for my thesis: the need to uncover the originary, to return to the moment of subjectification and risk transgressing into the 'just-before' of this moment, is fundamental to subjects, and becomes manifest as the death drive. Yet the paradoxical argument is that 'living out' the death drive by *regressing* to the stage prior to subjectification is impossible—the subject *qua* subject cannot experience that which came before he became a subject. The experience of the originary therefore only becomes possible by looking towards a moment in the future, when one's subjectivity can be altered, taken to the brink of collapse and experienced as if one emerged as a subject again. It is possible to imagine an event in time (or, indeed, crave and thus position oneself towards the possibility of such an occurrence) in which the subject *almost ceases to be*. This may be achieved through doubling, through seeking out instances of uncanniness and through phantasies of multiplication and parthenogenesis that threaten the subject by pushing him to the edge of the limits of his subjectivity, but nonetheless allow him to come as close as possible to experiencing his own not-Being, or before-Being and grasp the originary—it is in this sense that the experience of the originary retreats into the future.⁹² I will explore the idea of gearing one's existence towards the future with

⁸⁹ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 40.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 362.

⁹² Some artworks, for example, can allow the subject to transgress the limits of the Symbolic and momentarily experience a state close to the dissolution of the self—such is the case, I would argue, with Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau / 2° le gaz d'éclairage*: by recreating a primal scene which draws the subject in, the installation enables the viewer to initiate an aesthetic experience from the Symbolic, only to be immediately abjected from it. Like a child spying on his parents, the viewer walks tentatively through the room until he reaches the imposing Spanish doors, which, like the doors of the parental bedroom, remain forever closed. The viewer cannot open them, but must hover in the threshold and peep through the holes to discover the splayed, naked body of a woman. The sight is surreal yet clinical: the woman is not a being, but a body—her genitals are thoroughly lit, as if on an examination table, and she is shaved and unresisting. In a reversal of the mother-child power relationship, the viewer can subject the woman to his gaze, taking her in with no fear of retribution—for she is headless, and cannot reciprocate the sexual

the purpose of experiencing one's point of origin when looking at *The Bacchae*, but it is important to emphasise that the experience of the death of the subject (or of the just-emergence of the subject) is only possible through the creation of new forms of subjectivity. My argument is that the forms of subjectivity explored through *The Bacchae* point to the existence of a plurality of paradigms, rather than the singular, oedipal one, that allow us to understand the psyche (or, in Foucauldian terms, the language that makes up modernity).

Foucault's argument concerns the finitude of man and the difficulty associated with universalising historical and cultural processes. He shows that, while psychoanalytic theory may uncover quasi-transcendental patterns, it remains ill-suited to the task of making universal claims about subjects. Even when understanding psychoanalysis as a system of reference, and the psyche itself as a series of patterns that organise themselves in accordance to the laws of linguistics, the picture is not simple. For a question always arises as to the origin of these patterns of psychic organisation, and the reason they are precisely that—*patterns*; what is it that makes them repetitive? The problem is that these theories hinge on the idea of knowledge and the way it is produced and disseminated; moreover, they appear valid only if one considers knowledge fixed. If knowledge is regarded as a moveable entity, whose prerogatives fluctuate with ideology, the patterns of psychic organisation risk becoming obsolete—or, as I aim to show, being exposed as historical.

There is value in analysing the way psychoanalysis gives voice to the male imaginary in an *épistème* where man is both object and subject of knowledge and comparing it to an *épistème* where such a voice was silent. In this thesis, my main methodological tool will be to take the discourse of the male imaginary out of context and reread it from a modern perspective, to show that modern language, the language-as-Dasein⁹³ that Foucault argued was crucial for fashioning the modern man—indeed, the language of subjectivity, is not a closed system, but a permeable, fluid one. The *épistème* only allowed for the expression of the male imaginary, which, in turn, permeated language, *became male language*, and turned into a quasi-transcendental element—aided, through psychoanalysis, by models of organisation centred on the oedipal paradigm. Yet reading texts like *The Bacchae* through a contemporary framework shows that the

gaze. And yet, as soon as the viewer assumes this (Symbolic, male, active) position, he comes to realise his own vulnerable, passive voyeuristic state. He is at once gazing-subject and object-to-be-gazed-at, active and passive, omnipotent and powerless, subject and non-subject—a duality that is so unstable that it can jettison him out of the Symbolic. The artwork-as-primal-scene in this context enables the subject to reexperience his powerlessness relative to the mother and imagine the possibility of regression to a state prior to subjectification. In recreating the primal scene, the artwork allows the subject to position himself towards the experience his own (near) not-Being and come as close as possible to capturing the originary. Duchamp, *Étant donnés*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1946-66.

⁹³ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to refer to the mode of Being that characterises the human condition. The term does not have biological, but ontological nuances, and seeks to capture the type of entity that human beings are.

translation of Oedipus into a paradigmatic model of subjectification is only one form of translation that language-as-Dasein allows; other translations are possible and can reveal a plurality of forms of subjectivity existent in the language of modernity.

What I hope to show is that the transition from Classical thought to modern thought effected, as Foucault shows, primarily through language, opened the way for a multiplicity of subjectivities to exist. In this context, the insistence on the oedipal paradigm as the only model for subjectification is reductive (and unsatisfactory), and I will use *The Bacchae* to explore other possible models. By entertaining this line of thought and using psychoanalysis as a system of reference, I hope to be able to go beyond the oedipal and uncover a form of feminine subjectivity left behind following the shift in épistème.

Using the Foucauldian critique of Kantian philosophy, I will pursue the possibility of a feminine subjectivity, by which I understand a type of subjectivity that can exist alongside male subjectivity and is created through an alternative to the oedipal model. I do not wish to suggest that subjectivity, or subjectification itself, follows one of two models, that it can be 'male' or 'female', or that the process should be inscribed in a binary construction. On the contrary, my argument is that modern subjectivity, as a by-product of language-as-Dasein, is fluid, and the oedipal paradigm is insufficiently flexible to allow for a plurality of subjectivities to become manifest. I refer to 'feminine subjectivity' as an alternative to 'male subjectivity' only in terms of modes of organisation, and use 'male' and 'female' to define their roles as subject positions in language. Using these tools, I will argue for alternative modes of subjectification that can exist despite the male-centric language of psychoanalysis.

To love and be loved by oneself: modern subjects as products of narcissism

Since man became both object and subject of knowledge, the process of subjectification has ceaselessly concerned psychoanalysts, philosophers and anthropologists alike, particularly due to the process's inability of being ascribed an originary. It seems impossible, therefore, to answer all questions the ontological nature of the subject poses, especially those that concern the time that preceded the subject's *notion of time*, that is, the period of infant reflexivity; yet in theorizing subjectification as a stage of identification with a specular image based on narcissistic cathexes, Lacan appears to provide a smoother transition between the (unknowable) infantile psyche and the mature ego, constantly plagued by repressed drives and reminiscences.

Freud's understanding of the subject through the lens of psychoanalysis is a prime example of language-as-Dasein working to establish man as both subject and object of knowledge, and of accounting for the process of subjectification through a universalizing theory. Fascinatingly, Freud not only crafted a theory of the self that claimed universal value, but also identified narcissism, the love of the (male) self, as foundational in the genesis of the subject. Lacan took Freud's account of narcissism and incorporated it in his theorization of subjectification, the mirror stage, maintaining the centrality of narcissism, but bridging the mature and infantile egos towards a more coherent picture of the birth of the subject.

Freud, as Grosz explains, held two different views on ego development for the better part of his life, never prioritising one over the other: the realist and narcissistic views. According to the realist view, the psyche is driven by its neuronal/neuro-psychological agencies, with an ego meant to regulate the demands of the id and mediate between id and reality. This model envisages the ego as the *true* form of the self, as something that must be strengthened in analysis by making it sensitive to cultural prerogatives, but gives no account of its genesis.

The narcissistic view argues the ego does not exist from the beginning of the subject's life, but is precipitated into being. In this sense, Rosine Perelberg writes, "new psychical action has to take place to bring about narcissism", which, as Laplanche suggests, could be considered the image of the self provided by the Other for the self to identify with and love.⁹⁴ The narcissistic ego takes itself as the object of its affection, splitting the subject into active and passive parts, into subject and object, and investing the object with libidinal energy as if it were external. In this scenario, narcissism is the "amorous captivation of the subject by this image," the linchpin without which the ego could not come into being.⁹⁵ Primary narcissism is different from auto-erotism, and is dominated by fantasy, modes of identification and introjection, and thus "amenable to the desire of the other."⁹⁶

To illustrate the links between subjecthood and narcissism, Freud identifies four main characteristics of narcissism: libidinal withdrawal, idealization, the loss of self in the relation with an ideal twin and the dilemma created by the existence of the object. While all are essential in subjectification, the relation with an ideal twin seems to be paramount, particularly with a view to Lacan's theorization of the mirror stage.⁹⁷ In the relation with an ideal image of the self, any sense of difference is abolished, and the

⁹⁴ Rosine Perelberg, *Freud: A Modern Reader*, (London: Whurr, 2005), 76.

⁹⁵ Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 256.

⁹⁶ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 31.

⁹⁷ Perelberg, *Freud*, 73.

subject loses himself in the object, as if there were nothing beyond the relation with the specular image; the concretization of the self, however, requires awareness of the existence of the Other as a condition of possibility for the occurrence of the stage itself. For the ego to emerge, the not-yet-subject must abandon pure narcissism and take the first (tentative) steps towards object love by acknowledging dependence on the Other for subjectification. This is achieved by means of splitting, of renouncing the omnipotent ego in favour of an intersubjective one.

Lacan oscillates between regarding the mirror stage as an internal biological process, or a (socially-regulated) linguistic one. He does not argue that by identification with a specular image, the ego is lost to itself; rather, he suggests that there exists a *naturally social* side to the ego that allows the infant to 'fill' the lack generated by his biological prematurity by identification with a gestalt image. Lacan's argument is Heideggerean/Foucauldian, in the sense that he regards the baby as existing always-already in a pre-given network of quasi-transcendental determinants. Despite not formulating it in Foucauldian terms, Lacan places the baby in a socio-linguistic system that precedes him, a system whose point of origin eludes the baby, acting instead as web of (*necessarily social*) empirical determinants that shape the existence of the subject. Furthermore, the social and linguistic orders in which the subject finds himself function as the instinctual; if, for animals, survival is dependent upon instinct, for humans, it is dependent on being part of the socio-linguistic orders and attuned to their demands. The identification with the twin image is that which generates the narcissistic response of identification, and, consequently, part of the human makeup that dictates subjectification; by highlighting the importance of fascination with the specular image, Lacan singles out narcissism as a human predisposition, and a key element in an ontological account of subjectification.

In effect, Lacan inquires into the conditions of possibility for the birth of the subject; this, in Kantian/ Foucauldian terms, equates to splitting the subject into two—the empirical and transcendental subjects. The empirical subject, the subject given in experience, is the subject as he hears, sees, perceives, feels, etc. himself. The transcendental subject is the underlying condition for the existence of the empirical subject: it is the subject that makes self-consciousness possible through the three faculties (judgement, understanding and imagination) and the condition of possibility for subjectification. Yet the Lacanian account does not pay sufficient attention to the quasi-transcendental elements that shape the subject's lifeworld, and to the role of history in creating

subjects.⁹⁸ He identifies the mechanisms that must exist for subjectivity to develop in the normal (male) way, but does not consider the reciprocal, interdependent relation between subjectivity and society. As I argue throughout this thesis, it is precisely the historical nature of subjectivity that allows us to go beyond the oedipal *now*.

For both Freud and Lacan, narcissism entails the internalization of the image of the self, the identification with the self-as-object. For the mirror stage to take place, the infant must go through a series of stages, the first of which is the disruption of the mother-child monad. As Perelberg argues, the early infantile mother-child relation, which has been described as a dyad, is better portrayed by Grunberger as monadic and characterized by pure narcissism, in which the baby's omnipotence encompasses the mother. For the mirror stage to be initiated, a separation between mother and baby must occur to end the baby's omnipotence. This separation threatens the baby with imminent disintegration and acts as the catalyst towards the baby's realization of a lack (of the (m)other, of instant gratification and of the yielding of the environment to the baby's needs, characteristic of omnipotence), making way for the mirror stage, which provides compensation for the lack-of-being the baby experiences: by identifying with his specular image, the baby is embracing the promise of future self-mastery. The emergence of the ego, Grosz writes, "coincides with the emergence of...the first psycho-sexual drives", and marks the incipience of awareness of space, distance and differentiation between the self and the other; moreover, it helps the baby in identifying himself as a cohesive, independent unity, separate from the mother.⁹⁹ The identification of the baby with its mirror image creates the illusion of corporeal unity, and helps it establish itself as an object of the (m)other's desire. Additionally, since Arnold Rothstein shows that the stages of psychosexual development can be associated with loss, it may be that the onset of the mirror stage is caused by the loss of object.¹⁰⁰ It can be inferred that the mirror stage encompasses early psychosexual stages, culminating with the threat of castration that generates the resolution of the oedipal stage and the acceptance of the regulating influence of the Name-of-the-Father.

⁹⁸In "Science and Truth", Lacan discusses the importance of history in the definition of the subject and the issues that stem from the Cartesian splitting of the subject. He understands psychoanalysis as always bound with history, and rejects the idea that it can reveal universal truths. From this perspective, it would be wrong to suggest that Lacan is not attuned to the part history plays in shaping the subjects of psychoanalysis. Lacan, "Science and Truth", Newsletter of the Freudian Field, Spring/Fall 1989. However, what I am suggesting is that he does not consider sufficiently the way psychoanalysis, in adopting a male subject-position, perpetuates a certain *type of history*, becoming divorced from the historicity of the quasi-transcendental elements that constitute the lifeworld of subjects. To an extent, universal truths shape history from without, as they exist independently of history. Psychoanalysis is different, as it does not seek to make universal claims about the scientific nature of subjects. Yet, in allowing for the existence of only one subject-position (male), psychoanalysis imposes fixity in the process of subjectification from within: it becomes a *universalising metalanguage* that only allows one form of subjectivity to *speak*, thus instilling rigidity at the core of the subject similar to that inherent in axiomatic propositions.

⁹⁹ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ The oral stage with the loss of object, the anal stage with the loss of love, and the phallic stage with castration. Rothstein, *Making Freud More Freudian*, (London: Karnac Books, 2010), 24.

In the first months after birth, the baby is an uncoordinated mass; although responsive to external stimuli, it is not yet an agency in its own right. In Foucauldian terms, the newborn is in a state of reflexivity, capable of registering sensorial and perceptual impingements, but lacks reflectivity, and cannot see itself as separate from the surrounding world and dependent on intersubjectivity for self-constitution; the newborn is more 'it' than 'he' at this stage. However, despite existing in a fragmented state and lacking the sense of bodily cohesion, the infant does not experience this lack as *lack*. The inability to represent boundaries, and to perceive oneself as socially-determined pertains to the Real, and is what Lacan terms 'the lack-of-a-lack'. In the Real, the child experiences no separation; both animate and inanimate objects are regarded as extensions of the self in a form of 'primal unity', and the universe is yielding to the baby's desire.¹⁰¹ Lack is non-existent, as even when unable to find satisfaction, the baby hallucinates the desired object.

When absence is felt by the baby, this blissful state ends, and the mirror stage is precipitated: once the child realises it *lacks something*, it can also create a plethora of new associations. With lack comes the awareness of the self, of the self-that-*lacks*-something; the baby experiences absence, and with it, the idea of temporal succession and causality.¹⁰² Through the experience of lack, the baby understands it is separate from his main provider, the (m)other, and that *he* exists as an independent entity, who nonetheless relies on the (m)other for care and nourishment; the mother-child dyad is broken, and the child moves from primary narcissism to object love. The awareness of lack enables the emergence of reflectivity (subjectification-proper) and encourages the structuring of the world around binaries that govern adult life. However, the recognition of lack has another implication: the child comes to realise that the (m)other is not his to control; the absence of the (m)other signals the rupture with the Real and leaves behind a gap that the child seeks to fill for the remainder of his life by creating specular images with which he attempts to identify. Awareness of lack, therefore, also propels the child into the orders of the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

¹⁰¹ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 34.

¹⁰² At this point Lacanian terminology proves fruitful: the stark contrast between the Real and the Symbolic is useful in marking the transition from the absence of the transcendental ego to its existence, which, implicitly, brings with it the necessity of temporal succession and logical sequencing. The Real represents the period when concepts such as time, causality and succession do not yet exist, and neither does the subjective transcendental apperception of the subject-qua-subject (the 'I think'). By contrast, the Symbolic is the network of social elements that make up the lifeworld of the subject; yet the existence of the Symbolic is only possible *because* of the appearance of the transcendental subject. The Real-Imaginary-Symbolic, however, are not solely developmental stages. In this context, they refer to the transition from reflexivity to reflectivity (in Foucauldian terms), or from the empirical ego to the finite duality that marks human existence (the empiric and transcendental egos together, in Kantian terms). This process is what Lacan and Kristeva (in a sense) investigate; it is also this transitional space that makes the subject of this thesis. Oscillation between register is possible post-subjectification, and the threat of expulsion from the Symbolic into the Real remains present throughout the subject's life.

The first encounter of the baby with lack takes place at a minimum of six months, and lasts for approximately one year, being dissolved, Grosz writes, "if ever, with the Oedipus complex."¹⁰³ The identification with the gestalt image is reflective, an act of (re-)cognition: the child is subjecting his specular image to a complex mental process, as he takes it in with great pleasure, registers it as an external stimulus, and apperceives the complex factors that make up the image itself. At this point, the difference between animals and humans is most evident: while an animal would lose interest in its image, the human is *fascinated* by it, signalling his linguistic organization and appurtenance to the Imaginary and the Symbolic. This fascination, Grosz argues, is what reifies the infant's lack, as it fails to prompt immediate identification, instead allowing it to take place over time. At the beginning, the child is more likely to recognize the image of the other in the mirror, as he already has an awareness of the other's physical body. When it comes to his own body, the child recognizes himself tentatively as the one reflected and needs encouragement to do so, as recognition in the mirror is only the first step in acknowledging himself as both subject and object.

As soon as the child understands the image in the mirror to be an image of *himself*, he becomes enamoured with it, and fixates on it (fixations which resurface in adult libidinal/erotic relations). The specular double provides the child with the means to *manipulate himself*, to position himself in relation to the world and gradually allow himself to become part of the Symbolic. In identifying with the specular double, the child assumes agency over himself (as object), in the sense that he is permitted to exert on the specular image the (self-)mastery he lacks. Emphasis, Grosz argues, is placed at this point on the visual side of identification: looking/gazing becomes a form of control that allows the subject to dominate the object without being dominated in return. There is a degree of (scoptophilic) search for pleasure, as the child attempts to distance himself from the object, yet holistically *take it in*, subjecting *itself* to the primacy of visual perception.¹⁰⁴ However, the identification also generates regression: enthralled by the unity of the mirror image, and aware of his own fragmented state, the child attempts to return to the omnipotence enjoyed prior to the mirror stage, while simultaneously anticipating the unity the mirror image promises, in a Hegelian struggle between omnipotence and submissiveness, translated into Lacanian terms.

To Lacan, the ambivalence towards the mirror image gives rise to subjectivity-proper: by being and not-being the mirror image, the child manages to maintain an autonomous self, while becoming socialized into norms and ideology; however, while

¹⁰³ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 35.

¹⁰⁴ Yet the congenitally blind have egos, too; see Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 1990 and Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge, 2005).

this *splitting* of the 'I' points to its permanence, it also gives rise to what Lacan terms intra-subjective aggressivity, the oscillation between the ego's *affairement jubilatoire* and *connaissance paranoïaque*.¹⁰⁵ The mirror stage becomes a phase of narcissistic infatuation with the self, but one that generates aggression: the image created to account for the lack-of-being is attacked, because the image the child identifies with is both twin and foreign, outside of his control, and thus intangible. The subject, Grosz writes, "recognizes itself at the moment it loses itself in/as the other," which is the reason the specular image acts as both the axis around which self-identity is created, and what destabilizes it.¹⁰⁶ The mirror stage becomes an alienating experience, as it forces the rupture of the child from the mother, paralleling the incoherent image of the child with the plenary one of the mother; it instils tension in the baby, maintained in the mature ego as oscillation between activity and passivity, omnipotence and submission. From a phenomenological perspective, the mirror stage is the stepping stone in creating the body-subject, the *lived* body, governed by its own subjectivity. Following the body-schema, it could be argued that the body gains an agency of its own, requiring the subject to permanently reclaim (through narcissistic cathexes) the image of the body, in a quasi-neurotic struggle for self-assertion.¹⁰⁷

In identification, the subject internalizes the specular image; nonetheless, as Lacan points out, the image he internalizes *is different* from the self—it is, in fact, (an)other. This implies that in identifying with the specular image, the subject splits himself into active and passive parts. The self that *does the identifying* is active, it *incorporates*, through a cannibalising act, the other, it takes it in and makes it like the self. To put it in a plastic description, it appears there is a 'real I' and a 'specular I' that need to be brought together for the ego to emerge. It would, however, be an oversimplification to say that the 'specular I' is an object external to the 'real I' that simply exists to be taken in by the 'real I', as an inanimate object. Had this been the case, the baby would have been capable of incorporating this object without breaking the state of pure narcissism; in fact, since the primary narcissism of the baby already encompasses all external objects as extensions of the self, had it been entirely passive the 'specular I' would have already been part of the baby's self with no need for the mirror stage to occur. The 'specular I' is only passive to the extent that it allows incorporation. Further than that, it is active: it represents the image of the (m)other, which the child must internalize and regard as an image of himself; it also represents an attempt to relate to an external self *as if* it were an object, and yet wish to internalize it for its *subjecthood*, for being a

¹⁰⁵ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 40.

¹⁰⁶ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 41.

¹⁰⁷ See Merleau-Ponty's argument for bodily-consciousness, and his reinterpretation of the Cogito. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 2005.

holistic version of the 'real I', an ego-ideal. As Grosz has shown, the baby comes to have an ambivalent relation towards his specular image, based on idealization and the realization of the specular I's otherness.

Nonetheless, despite the (ambivalent) relation between the baby and his specular image, the image's passive quality remains: even if briefly, the image must be regarded as an object, to allow the baby to exert dominance over it and internalize it. The (specular) self, always the Other, becomes external to the (real) self: it is *othered* by the baby, reifying its Otherness. Yet this relation to the specular self has a further implication, that the self must have awareness of the Other to be able to identify with that which is external to his own self; in other words, His Majesty the Baby must have been forced into recognizing his own intersubjectivity to transcend his omnipotence and identify with something external by something other than the mirror stage itself. This idea raises a question about the mirror stage and subjectification: if the baby must have awareness of the existence of the Other to identify with what is Other, then awareness of the Other occurs before the mirror stage, once the mother-child monad is replaced by the mother-child dyad.

This problem can be solved if we return to the centrality Freud awards narcissism: to Freud, primary narcissism is essential in precipitating the ego's development. Through primary narcissism, the child can have his libidinal energy turned onto himself from *without*, both as object and subject, and more-or-less *will* himself into being.¹⁰⁸ In the narcissistic ego-view, the child can manipulate the libidinal energy that was initially turned onto himself and direct it towards other objects, establishing a phenomenological relation with the exterior. This 'turning on itself' of the libido enables the emergence of the ego by allowing the subject to step outside himself and take himself as an object; arguably, since such a turning of libidinal energy requires outside influence, it may be what ends primary narcissism and encourages the mother-child dyad. Once the mother-child dyad established, the child can begin to learn the dual structure of identification and enter the mirror stage.

Yet the return to Freud does not provide an entirely viable solution, as it does not explain why a turning on itself of libidinal energy occurs, or why narcissism is so important in psychic organization. Lacan's answer is his departure from the zoological study of Caillois: unlike other animals, humans single themselves out by taking themselves as their own libidinal objects. The answer, in other words, is that it is the human equivalent of instinct to position oneself as an independent, albeit

¹⁰⁸ "The development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism...brought about by means of the displacement of libido on to an ego ideal imposed *from without*..." Freud, *The Standard Edition*, 1960:XIV: 99, my italics.

interdependent entity among other similar (not identical) beings. The human equivalent could be translated as the need for recognition: as the need to recognize and be recognized by others is what generates internal struggles for submission and dominance, social struggles, gender differences, and even libidinal preferences, it seems that the human 'drive' towards subjectification is fuelled by such a need. As Benjamin points out, however, the need for recognition is not a product of habituation: while culture influences the way we construct our ego-ideals, the *need* to construct them is present from birth. Although its motor and neuronal capacities are limited, the child can still behave in relative awareness of its surroundings, discern the voice of its mother and manifest preference for the mother over other members of the family; this, to Benjamin, is a manifestation of the baby's recognition of the mother. In turn, the mother recognizes the baby as baby, as well as its autonomy, granted to it by the physical act of separation from the mother's body.

Yet this has a deeper implication for subjectification: if the baby is born needing recognition for it/himself, it follows that the baby also can discern the mother. This suggests that the omnipotent state of the mother-child dyad becomes impossible: if the child can *recognize* the mother, then it cannot also regard her as an extension of the self. As Benjamin points out, it is more plausible to understand the initial omnipotence of the mother-child monad, as well as their dyadic relation, as *episodic* lapses into complete fusion, in which the child's needs are so completely met by the mother that he feels as *if* she were part of him.¹⁰⁹ As the child matures, the need to be recognized grows, and fusion with the mother becomes rarer; the child gradually concentrates its libidinal energy on the relation with the (specular) twin and learns to internalize the image, thus creating his ego ideal.¹¹⁰

This view challenges the traditional Freudian view of the subject as a closed system of libidinal flow, which becomes open with the (inexplicable) emergence of a new psychic agency. Rather than seeing the baby's subjectification as a sudden occurrence, it connects the Freudian idea of an emergence of the ego with Lacan's view of an innate social drive, providing a cohesive picture of subjectification. From this perspective, considering the driving force behind the baby's fascination with the specular image to be the need for recognition, the subsequent identification with the gestalt twin—the result of the baby's ability to cathect narcissistically onto objects—would remain in line with Lacan's theorization of the mirror stage.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, it poses a problem to the

¹⁰⁹ This solution is similar to the one proposed by Lear for the paradox of unconscious mind(s). See Lear, *Freud*, 2005.

¹¹⁰ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 1990.

¹¹¹ Furthermore, acknowledging the existence of an embedded social character in humans is also congruent with Lacan's literalization of the subject, and its necessary inscription into a social order by means of the *letter*. – See Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 2004 and Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The title of the letter*, 1992.

Freudian understanding of primary narcissism: if the newborn needs recognition, it must have a modicum of understanding of the existence of the Other. Although the extent of this awareness is limited and not conceptual, the baby must nonetheless be able to *understand*, to an extent, that the Other *is*.

In theorising the mirror stage, Lacan not only fills the gap between the infantile and mature egos by describing the mechanisms by which the self comes into being, but highlights the paramount importance of narcissism in self-constitution. In describing it as the ability to take oneself as the object of one's libidinal cathexes, Freud had already shown narcissism is critical in subjectification, as it is by means of narcissism that the subject can understand his own subjecthood and ties to culture; Lacan elevates narcissism to the status of axis around which subjectification revolves. Yet Lacan's account also points to an underlying tension in the Freudian theorization of the concept: in arguing that the birth of the subject takes place with the turning of libidinal cathexes onto oneself, it follows that a splitting of the 'I' is presupposed in this turning of libidinal cathexes, which also *presupposes an existence of the subject*. For the subject to take himself as an object of libidinal investment, he must be able to differentiate between an active (libidinally-investing) part of himself, and a passive (libidinally-invested) one. Moreover, regardless of whether the baby willingly turns libidinal cathexes onto himself, or an outside force faces the baby with his image from without, a question remains, which points to an underlying self-referential problem: how can one turn libidinal energy towards himself to bring about self-constitution, if one *is not*?

In addressing the process of subjectification, Lacan shows the mechanisms by which the coming-into-being of the subject distorts the picture-perfect view of the ego psychoanalysis had held. Lacan exposes the genesis of the subject as tortured, as the subject must gradually renounce his comforting lapses into unity with the mother and face his disjointed self. From then on, Lacan shows the self permanently striving to maintain an acceptable degree of self-coherence by identifying with the (m)other and subjecting himself to the desire of the Other, whilst also repressing resurfaced infantile drives. The Lacanian view of the subject suggests a feasible psychic organization that can address the gap between the infantile and the mature. While still incapable of pinpointing subjects' Origin, the Lacanian explanation avoids becoming self-referential, and paves the way for further inquiry into the psychic makeup of the social subject and the degree to which he is tied to others. This understanding of the coming-to-be of the self is rooted in history (and destabilised by it) and espouses the primacy given to the male imaginary, which is why I will employ it going forward to contrast it with instances when alternative forms of non-oedipal subjectivity can become manifest.

Summary of Chapter 1

In this chapter I have traced the evolution of the status of representation and the way the subject positions himself in history. In transitioning from the Classical to the Modern period, the subject has morphed into both object and subject of knowledge—an essential move in establishing himself as capable of attaining pure knowledge, but one that signals a deeper shift, from a monadic understanding of the subject, to a dyadic, or split conception. After the change in *épistème*, the subject becomes subject to his own probing, and establishes himself as object of his own knowledge. In getting to know himself, the subject deploys a complicated and fluid critical tool—language-as-Dasein—through which he carves out a static, totalising account of what it means to become a human subject. The way this modern language is used to explain the genesis of the subject is fascinatingly rich, but its claim to universality is not unproblematic: despite intricate attempts to show the unique human subjectivity as enduring through time and space, this account of what it is to be a subject is revealed to be fundamentally historical, and to fall short of the plurality of which a fluid language is capable. In this chapter, I have sought to show that the concept of a unique subject-position is historically determined, and not universally true. With the splitting of the ‘I’, the subject has opened the possibility for the existence of varied forms of subjectification, but has left these un- or under-explored. I will approach the subject henceforth as always-already encapsulating a plurality of different subjectivities and the potential for multiple modes of subjectification. From the following chapter onwards, I will discuss subjectivity in the context of *The Bacchae* and will interrogate subjectification through the prism of one of the play’s key characters, Dionysus.

Chapter 2

Violence shall set you free: Eleutherios¹¹² as the non-Symbolic subject

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the linearity attached to the formation of psychic structures is historically determined and a product of the shift in *épistème* that occurred with the transition to modernity. I used the theories of Freud, Lacan and Foucault to present a holistic picture of the psyche and argued that its coherence is historical and symptomatic of the male imaginary's project to create a discourse that universalises and unifies the formation of the psyche. Despite theoretical inconsistencies, these works can function as a meta-narrative of the psyche and bring together the various guises of male discourse. This is not to say that the narrative structure is inherent in psychic structures, but that current understanding of the formation of the psyche necessarily takes narrative form and speaks to the phantasies and fears of the male imaginary.

As shown previously, this understanding of the psyche presents the child entering the world as a blank slate, in a state of dependence on the mother and with little more than just spatial awareness. However, a change suddenly occurs: when entering the process of subjectification, the child transitions from reflexivity to reflectivity. The process of subjectification is the most important the child undergoes and opens the possibility for it to become a subject. Once a subject, it becomes impossible for the child to remember, date, or make sense of what preceded subjectification—this period is marked not by presence, but by lack: of psychic structures, differentiation, logic, discourse, linearity, narrative structures and time.

The lack of temporality is an especially interesting aspect of what precedes subjectification: it is only when temporality becomes possible that the empirical determinants that shape the existence of the subject can become manifest. The period that precedes subjectification/reflectivity can be described in Lacanian terms as

¹¹² Eleutherios is another name for Dionysus, meaning 'the liberator'.

pertaining to the Real: the child exists in monadic, and, later, dyadic union with the mother, in a space that is characterized by omnipotence and lack of Being.¹¹³ Crucially, the non-subject cannot assign these 'negative' connotations of the attributes of the Real to this state of Being (or non-Being) until after the process of subjectification has been completed, as before it the non-subject would have no means to conceptualise either negativity or positivity, as it would not be able to employ language or concepts. Furthermore, as I will suggest later in this chapter, these negative connotations are dependent on the type of morality that governs a certain ideological climate; in the modern era, in a Nietzschean framework, we speak of Christian morality, an ethical system based on guilt, as opposed to Classical ethics, which revolve around displays of power.¹¹⁴

However, once the subjectification process has been completed, the subject's world opens to a series of possibilities: discourse, language, linear temporality and repression are enabled to exist. In other words, knowledge becomes possible by the transcendental ego, and with it, so does the necessity to chart one's finitude and interrogate the conditions of one's existence. The process of subjectification precipitates the birth of psychic structures, as the id, a left-over of the child's period of reflexivity, becomes subordinated to the ego, the more sophisticated psychic structure that is the essence of reflectivity. At this point, an interesting development occurs: in the course of the transition between reflexivity and reflectivity, the child had been caught in a state of (non)-Being that required him to internalize the image of the mother for any type of self-reference to become possible. This means that the non-subject is necessarily one that internalizes the image of the mother, and uses it for self-definition post-reflectivity. Following subjectification and the birth of the ego, the now-subject undergoes another transformative process—the internalization of the Father, as part of the resolution of the oedipal crisis. The internalization of the Father enables the subject's entry in the Symbolic order, and, in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the appearance of a third and final psychic structure, the superego, which can be defined as a super-stratum of abstract concepts and ideals that regulate the relation

¹¹³ I would like to highlight two important aspects: firstly, I do not suggest that the Real is separate from the Symbolic, in an early-Lacanian fashion. It is more plausible to understand the Real as a *passivity* (in a Merleau-Pontian sense) that encapsulates the Symbolic, allowing for occasional lapses into the Real. Yet, while the late-Lacan's view of the Real is preferable, I also argue that the non-subjectified infant cannot *lapse* into the Real, but exists in it, as access to the Symbolic is not yet possible, not having been eased into the phallic law through the oedipal stage. Following subjectification, return to the Real becomes a possibility, and, more importantly, a constant attraction and threat. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 2005.

Secondly, I find Benjamin's explanation of the monadic/dyadic union with the mother not as a continued state, but as periodical return to a specific type of Being most convincing. I am therefore not arguing that prior to subjectification the child *is one* with the mother, following to 'break free' suddenly once he has become reflective. Rather, as the child approaches subjectification, the returns to this union become rarer and rarer. As an adult, omnipotence is craved and resisted at the same time, as giving into its possibility would mean returning to a state of non-Being. Benjamin, *The bonds of love*, 1990. I use the term 'Being' and 'non-Being' in the same sense as Heidegger, to denote an ontological status of the subject. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1962.

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

with the Symbolic. Following this process, the subject can be said to have internalised both the images of the mother and that of the Father. The figure of the mother is one that perpetually haunts the subject, becoming the Lacanian *petit objet a*, a double form of loss that never leaves the subject. The figure of the mother, however, is not defined as a structuring element, which is problematic for the existence of the subject in the Symbolic. I will return to this idea in Chapter 3 when discussing the sterile separation from the mother and Butler's use of kinship, but it is important to emphasise that we can understand the process of subjectification as being interwoven with the rules that govern kin relations, as subjectification itself is based, like kinship, on the continued influence and 'taking in' of others.¹¹⁵

If the charting of this developmental progress is correct, then it follows that, prior to the internalization of the Father, the subject exists in a unique state of Being *with* the internalized figure of the mother, which differs from the state of non-Being with the internalized figure of the mother prior to subjectification. This state of Being appears nowhere else in the subject's life but can be described as similar to the subject's adult state, yet, crucially, without the 'civilising' influence of the Name of the Father. Consequently, the subject in this state will have the potential to exhibit intra-subjective aggression, but without the ability to repress it and allow the violence to resurface in different guises, non-threatening to the male imaginary.

Imagining a subject that has somehow failed to internalise the Father is impossible, as psychoanalysis shows the resolution of the oedipal crisis takes place even if there is no father-figure to guide the infant through it.¹¹⁶ A subject that has self-awareness, and benefits from the epistemologically-inquisitive nature of the transcendental ego, but lacks the civilizing influence of higher psychic structures, such as ethics and inviolable social rules, should not be able to exist. Indeed, it can be argued that the type of subject described is the psychotic subject, one that lacks any psychic structure to regulate his subjection to reality. Yet it is important to reemphasise that the type of claim I make is radical: while, as I argue in Chapter 4, the element thus born will be psychotic, it would not be a *psychotic subject*. The subject structure I propose, which I term the '*non-Symbolic subject*', would not be, like the psychotic subject, unable to make decisions that conform to the cultural and ethical standards of phallic society. If we consider the 'normal' subject accedes to the Symbolic by undergoing some form (even partial) of prohibition, we can argue that the psychotic subject undergoes a failed, partial, or even defective oedipal stage, while the non-Symbolic subject is a type

¹¹⁵ See Henry Krips, "The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Žižek", *Culture Unbound—Journal of Cultural Studies*. 2010. Vol.2 and 77; and Lacan, *Seminar II*, 1991.

¹¹⁶ See Freud, *The Standard Edition*, 1960:VII.

of subject for whom the oedipal stage *is not ever initiated*. The subjectification process is halted before the subject has the chance to internalise the Father.¹¹⁷

If such a non-Symbolic subject were to exist, I believe it could be argued that it would be a creature capable of extreme acts of violence: in the absence of the process through which one becomes part of the Symbolic, the non-Symbolised subject would lack the normalising influence of the superego. If the superego is the psychic structure that forces the ego into moral, as opposed to utilitarian, rational or instinctual patterns of behaviour, then its absence is not sufficient to reduce one to reflexivity (as the absence of a transcendental ego would), but would simply render the person amoral.¹¹⁸ Thus, whilst capable to delay gratification and use its ego to the full extent of its capabilities, including intellectual pursuits and abstract reasoning, the non-Symbolic subject would be unable to comprehend the necessity of a third entity that is meant to dilute intra-subjective aggression and force it into channels of expression harmless to the male imaginary. Here, I am still working in a Freudian/Lacanian framework, and speak of two psychic structures, and a missing third one (the superego). In the third chapter, I address the formation of psychic structures from a Kleinian perspective and situate the violent tendencies of the Kleinian subject in relation to both the barriers instituted by the male imaginary and the (existent) persecutory superego. It is for this reason that, in addressing the mother, I speak of her as a presence comparable to that of the Father but not, in the Lacanian picture, a structuring element. I will return to the figure of the mother and argue for her structuring capacity, as theorising subjectification without accounting for the place of the mother means theorising kinship without acknowledging the maternal plays a part in the process.

If only two psychic structures (the id and the ego) act to shape the livelihood of a subject, significant changes occur: most importantly, in the absence of guilt, there can be no consideration for others—which is to say that the subject would lack the ability to empathise.¹¹⁹ Empathy is a by-product of one's ability to form narcissistic cathexes, which, in the absence of an internalised Father-figure, become meaningless. Without the common ground that this image provides (a central internalised icon, which can be

¹¹⁷ I will use *The Bacchae* to explore this alternative type of subjectification and show that Dionysus, who I use as the skeletal structure of the non-Symbolic subject, enters the Symbolic clandestinely.

¹¹⁸ Although in normally habituated individuals the influence of the superego is not easily seen, it is present, and the rules set in the Symbolic have become so ingrained (i.e.: the influence of the superego over psychic structures so strong), that they are common sense, as opposed to morally-guided actions. It is when acting against the rules of the Symbolic that a clash between the ego and the superego appears, in the form of guilt: as Anna Freud explains, "...our picture of the superego always tends to become hazy when harmonious relations exist between it and the ego. We then say that the two coincide, i.e. at such moments the superego is not perceptible as a separate institution either to the subject himself or to an outside observer. Its outlines become clear only when it confronts the ego with hostility or at least with criticism. The superego, like the id, become perceptible in the state which it produces within the ego: for instance, when its criticism evokes a sense of guilt." – Freud, Anna, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, (London: Karnac Books, 1936), 5.

¹¹⁹ Greenson, "Empathy and Its Vicissitudes", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, XLI:418-424.

understood as the core of the Symbolic), the subject cannot form narcissistic bonds, as there exists no appeal in the image of the Other for the subject to be drawn into forming them: although the child has also internalised, and perhaps even absorbed by this stage the image of the mother, the incomplete separation from her makes her image unsuitable for forming narcissistic cathexes. Since she is a doubly menacing element, one that threatens the dissolution of the self, abjection and death, it is counterintuitive for the subject to cathect onto and replicate an image that arouses such anxiety. Without narcissistic cathexes, another essential ability disappears, that of forming relations with others. The non-Symbolised subject can, from this viewpoint, only exist on the outskirts of society, as its inability to fashion itself through the Other's desire excludes it from human society. Finally, the amoral character of this type of subject necessarily implies the existence and exertion of extreme levels of violence. Combined with the remaining inter-subjective aggression, particularly directed against the mother and the self, the subject's amorality empowers it to manifest the aggression that, in normal subjects, would be repressed and diffused into different outlets. This adds another important trait, which is the propensity for unmediated, pure violence.

Why posit the existence of such a subject?

Despite the impossibility of an adult non-Symbolic subject to exist in everyday life, we cannot assume that the influence of the non-Symbolic subject is completely lost once the image of the Father is internalised. Indeed, the non-Symbolic subject can be seen as the first (and only) moment in the infant's life when it can attain some degree of omnipotence whilst in the possession of an ego. Up to this point, the degree of omnipotence allowed to the not-yet-subject was limited to lapses into union with the mother, which, in turn, were translated into perfect, or near-perfect control of the physical environment.¹²⁰ However, once the infant becomes a subject, it exists for a brief time in a period of self-awareness, but unrestrained by the mediating influence of the superego. This translates into complete freedom, in the sense that the subject can reason and act upon its desires without feeling guilt and without having to subject itself to the rules of the Symbolic.¹²¹ I would argue that this state of Being comes close to, if not embodies, the omnipotence the adult subject craves once he begins the permanent

¹²⁰ Here I refer to the fact that, in the monadic and dyadic stages, the mother anticipates the infant's needs without the infant being required to do anything. Once the separation between the mother and the child begins, and frustration invariably appears, the degree of omnipotence of the baby decreases exponentially. Mahler, *The psychological birth of the human infant*, (London: Karnac, 1989).

¹²¹ At this point, I am still employing a Lacanian framework. Although Klein pinpoints the emergence of the superego far earlier than Lacan, I now argue from a phallogocentric perspective, in which the superego serves to protect the male imaginary from the destructive influence of the id. The Kleinian superego is a far darker structure, which does not serve the same purpose. I will return to this idea in Chapter 3.

oscillation between the extremes of social domination and submission. The most significant element in this context is that this omnipotence, even if short-lived, is superimposed on a mode of Being of the subject, as opposed to its usual mode of (quasi-omnipotent) non-Being, as is the case prior to subjectification. Consequently, when attaining omnipotence as a non-Symbolic subject, one has far less cause to fear the dissolution of identity inherent in attaining omnipotence by return to the dyadic/monadic (abject) state; furthermore, it implies that the omnipotence of the non-Symbolic subject is, while not necessarily exempt, at least shielded from the annihilating influence of the Real. The non-Symbolic subject must necessarily have ties with both the Symbolic, by virtue of its being self-aware, albeit not yet in the image of the Father, and the Real, as the non-Symbolic subject retains its links with the elements that pertain to the mother and are cast out of the Symbolic by the male imaginary. While the oscillation between the Real and the Symbolic reinforces the non-Symbolic subject's liminal character, it also points to the reason the image of such a subject may appear as a cultural product throughout time: a completely self-sufficient, rational subject, who can allow its id free reign without fearing social retribution or guilt captures the omnipotence the adult subject craves, yet can never achieve for fear of dissolution of identity and return to non-Being. For the regular subject, the dread of the Real forever lurks outside Symbolic boundaries.

To explore the non-Symbolic subject and its manifestation in contemporary culture, I turn to literature: the literary medium, René Girard explains, is one of the most prolific grounds for the study of human typologies, peculiarities, and customs. Literature allows one to chart the recurrence of patterns, whether in the presence of characters or types, or in their absence. I hope that, through a return to ancient Greek tragedy, I could provide a modern rereading of subjectification, one that could propose an alternative to the oedipal model. As outlined earlier in this thesis, I use literature as a tool to identify and trace the evolution of quasi-transcendental elements, as well as changes in épistème, the status of representation, and the place of the transcendental subject in his lifeworld.

The problem of violence and its links to sacrifice

To explore the non-Symbolic subject in more detail, I concentrate on the figure of Dionysus in *The Bacchae*. I use this tragedy to propose that the non-Symbolic subject as a structure is connected to the figure of the mother as structuring element (although not reduced to it), and serves to stretch, test and threaten the boundaries of a male-only Symbolic. As the non-Symbolic subject's existence is inherently violent and deeply

dangerous for the Symbolic, I will use Girard's theory to interpret the type of violence we see in *The Bacchae* and show that literature has the potential to contain (and psychosocially manage) violence to allow for a non-annihilating breakdown in the Symbolic. Through the non-Symbolic subject, we witness the exposition of a lack at the heart of the Symbolic (the mother), which, in the play, is brought forward through a rupture amid kinship.

My main proposal is that the non-Symbolic subject is a structured form of subjectivity at the heart of the psyche that allows us to experience (and, in the play, precipitates) the dissolution of the Symbolic. I argue that the existence of this type of subjectivity opens the way for us to begin to think of alternative, more inclusive, forms of psychic structuring, which go beyond the oedipal model and do not expel the mother from the psychic space, but instead acknowledge her. I will show the non-Symbolic subject represents a collection of elements the everyday subject craves (self-sufficiency, guilt-free life, complete omnipotence), but which, through their existence, threaten the Symbolic. The dissolution of Symbolic boundaries the non-Symbolic subject announces is mirrored by a similar dissolution in the play: that of kin relations, which, following Butler, I understand to be a "set of relationships of dependency", recognisable through time and space, which are to do with life and death.¹²² In this thesis, I will take kinship to reveal the subject's inner development, and regard it as regulatory of the way the subject orients itself towards life and death.

I will return to Butler's theorisation of kinship in Chapters 3 and 4 and will argue that the existence of the non-Symbolic subject shows the failure of the relations of dependency at the heart of kinship to organise kin relations in a categorical way and delineate the limits of kinship. Yet it is important to briefly consider kin relations and their links to the non-Symbolic subject now. If kin relations are modelled on the psyche and the psyche reflects the way kinship works, their fluidity will necessarily be translated into similar fluidity at the heart of the psyche, which the non-Symbolic subject shares. I do not wish to posit the existence of a fixed structure and suggest that the psychic apparatus would be complete if only for the inclusion of reference to the non-Symbolic subject. On the contrary, I argue that it is this very fixity associated with the makeup of the psyche that is problematic; I propose we need to move beyond it and define the organisation of the psyche in a way that recognises and allows for fluidity. My reading of psychic structures is based on the idea that both the structures and the spaces in which these exist are moveable; attempts to pin them down in immovable boundaries are inherently destructive exercises, and what constitutes the hubris in *The Bacchae*. Working against

¹²² Butler, "Kinship Trouble in *The Bacchae*", 2017.

the fluidity of structures and registers would only re-inscribe the problems generated by fixity, and would fail to go beyond its limits, thus also failing the Irigarayan project. Considering psychic structures and the spaces in which they exist to be fluid, however, would allow us to show where constraints upon fluidity result in damage being done to the way the subject exists in the world, and would encourage us to consider an alternative understanding of structure.

As outlined in Chapter 1, psychic structures, and, in particular, their immovability, protect the (male) Symbolic from destruction; similarly, kin relations seek to ward off violence at the heart of the family and preserve its integrity. In this context, the non-Symbolic subject becomes the manifestation of the vulnerability of the Symbolic, of the violence amidst kin relations, and of the way the subject positions himself towards life and death. The non-Symbolic subject, and, in *The Bacchae*, Dionysus and the destruction he brings, are reminders of the reason safeguards are needed to protect the ego; yet by facilitating a rift so dangerous as to threaten the integrity of the subject, they also reveal that its vulnerability lies in its immovability.

Violence, however, is fundamental to the subject, and is, in many ways, its driving force, as Hobbes suggested in relatively recent philosophical history. From the viewpoint of psychic development, Freud pioneered a similar idea by charting infantile sexuality, strengthened, later on, by Klein through her theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, which situates violence at the core of psychic development. Similarly, Lacan proposed the notion of intra-subjective aggression, manifested as *affairement jubilatoire* and *connaissance paranoïaque*, and suggested that the existence of the Real, with the Maternal Thing at its centre, poses a constant threat to the subject, to which the natural response is tension that evolves in violence.¹²³

Through violence, one allows more primal instincts to resurface and degenerate into mindless bloodshed, which is why the possibility of violence generates negative responses. It is therefore interesting that Girard¹²⁴ differentiates between two types of violence, pure and impure, both connected to sacrifice. It is important to consider sacrifice when discussing violence at the heart of the psyche, especially when the violence proves indiscriminate enough to transgress Symbolic boundaries and threaten the integrity of the Symbolic. Sacrifice helps neutralise violence and diffuses it to reinstate the boundaries that protect the male imaginary. All violence, Girard argues, has a sacrificial aspect attached to it, much like all sacrificial acts are violent in nature.

¹²³ See Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, (St Ives: Oxford University Press, 2008); Freud, *The standard edition*, 1960); Klein, *The Writings of Melanie Klein, Volume 1-4*, 1975; Lacan, *Écrits*, 2006; Kristeva, *Powers of horror*, 1982.

¹²⁴ Throughout this chapter, I will make reference to the theories of René Girard to explore the place of violence in society, particularly its purifying aspects. I do not intend, however, to chart the history or theory of sacrifice, and do not engage with the concept further.

While impure violence is mindless, self-perpetuating aggression that threatens to destroy communities, pure violence (sacrifice) is the kind of aggression that can end all violence and restore peace. It is meant to appease violence that cannot find its true victim: as it is unable to attack the real object of ire, violence finds a surrogate victim, chosen because of its vulnerability and proximity.

“[S]ociety”, Girard writes, “is seeking to deflect upon...a “sacrificeable” victim the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect.”¹²⁵ In choosing the victim of a sacrifice, one must look towards those who have a liminal character; in Greek tragedy, these would be those who live on the fringes of society: uninitiated children, unmarried adolescents, prisoners of war, and the King.¹²⁶ For a human or category to become sacrificeable, they must have no ties to the wider community, to avoid fear of retribution, or volunteer to be sacrificed. Sacrifice must also distance itself from the idea of vengeance, which is seen as self-perpetuating violence, and draw participants in a mutually accepted act of sacrificial substitution, through which the characteristics of the object of anger are transferred onto the victim. Sacrificial substitution “must never...cease to be aware of the act of transference from [the]...object to the surrogate victim; without that awareness, no substitution can take place and the sacrifice loses all efficacy.”¹²⁷ The sacrificial victim is always a substitute for all members of a community, offered by members themselves, to protect the community from its own violence: “[t]he elements of dissention scattered throughout the community are drawn to the...victim and eliminated...by its sacrifice.”¹²⁸

The most prominent context in which the need for a sacrifice is felt is that of a specific type of crisis, which Girard terms *sacrificial*. Going back to Greek tragedy, he argues each tragic instance depicts such a crisis by illustrating the dangers of allowing chaotic violence to spread through the community, threatening it from within. By portraying events that take place at the top of the social hierarchy, the tragedy paints a situation that pervades the whole community: when characters’ motives can no longer be easily quantified as ‘legitimate’ or ‘illegitimate’, the violence each inflicts is legitimate and self-perpetuating. In this context, only sacrificial violence can purify and restore order.

The dissolution of boundaries and identity threatens violence, as it prefigures the dissolution of a cultural order, of the boundaries of Symbolic rationality and logic. To Girard, it is this dissolution and the perpetuation of ‘sameness’ that Greek tragedies

¹²⁵ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 4.

¹²⁶ The King, Girard explains, is on the margins of society, escaping it “via the roof”, just like the Greek *pharmakos* escape through the cellar. Although the King has a double (the fool), who serves a semi-sacrificial purpose in the sense that he is vulnerable to the King’s own aggressive tendencies, the King himself is sacrificeable to a far greater extent than the fool. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 5.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 8.

analyse: they explore instances of duality in which tragic characters become 'twins' and make claims to violence that are legitimate to the point of becoming identical, and thus impure. We see this confusion of identity and perpetuation of sameness in the case of Antigone: in trying to fulfil her familial duty, she becomes a mirror image of Polyneices, the brother decreed by Creon to be in the wrong. As a result, she is exposed, left to die. However, the similarities between characters make both Antigone's and Creon's claims founded, and the two characters alike. By attempting to kill Antigone, Creon falls prey to the violence set in motion by the appearance of a double, and the play culminates in bloodshed, in undifferentiated violence that contaminates the whole community.¹²⁹ The proliferation of the double is associated with the dissolution of the self and threatens to allow violence to spill into the community and plunge it into chaos, or undifferentiatedness: in *The Bacchae*, the arrival of Dionysus, the double of Pentheus and his kin, followed by the violence initiated by Pentheus against Dionysus, is what leads to the tragic outcome of the play. Some reparation is done through the sacrifice of the twins: Pentheus is killed (a scapegoat elected from within the community), while Dionysus leaves Thebes as a god. Pentheus becomes an ideal (eminently sacrificeable) leader, who values order and rationality, and who suffers to make these a possibility.

Undifferentiatedness is, perhaps, the most threatening aspect of a sacrificial crisis: the loss of distinction between individuals leads to the homogenisation of the community, jeopardising language, rites, thinking and rationality itself. Uncontained sameness also threatens kin relations, the relations that exist to protect those who belong to them, and makes it impossible for kin to tell kin apart, rendering prohibitions against violence and incest moot. In the absence of difference, a suitable victim cannot be chosen, and the sacrificial act only perpetuates impure violence. In this context, the need for an outsider is felt, one that can appal through his/her non-conformity, but also enchant through his/her presence and similarity to the members of the community. Through the disruptive presence of an outsider, a scapegoat can be identified from within the community and sacrificed so that the necessity for rules, rationality and reason can be reasserted. In *The Bacchae*, it is interesting that the scapegoat, Pentheus, should be the outsider's, Dionysus, double; the killing of Pentheus has strong echoes of a ritual sacrifice, yet is unwilling—Pentheus is murdered when mistaken for a mountain lion. I will return to the relationship between Pentheus and Dionysus in Chapters 3 and 4, but it is worth noting that, although duality is present in the play, these double strands are not narrative structures, and do not order the plot; as Butler shows, in being delineations of kinship, they become constitutive binds, definitive and approximate, and

¹²⁹ Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

constitute the lives of those enmeshed in them, but their punishments and boundaries remain fluid.¹³⁰

Sacrifice, as defined by Girard, serves a cathartic function; once this function is lost, a crisis occurs that renders void both the purpose of sacrifice and cultural distinctions. This crisis is ended by the collective directing of violence towards a surrogate victim, someone whose death restores difference and the cultural order and makes sacrifice meaningful again. The sacrifice of the surrogate victim begins a new sacrificial system, whose point of origin is itself. This implies that the surrogate victim cannot *fully* pertain to the society plunged in a sacrificial crisis; s/he must have connections to the outside, or at least have some trait that renders her/him different from the homogenized masses; otherwise, the ritual sacrifice would not be distinguishable, and the surrogate victim's death would be another act of impure violence. At the ritualistic moment of the sacrifice, the victim is considered a receptacle of all the ills that plagued society, a polluted object whose death would purify the community. Yet the sacrificed object is dual in nature, both polluted and venerated, as it is through her/his death that purifying violence can be reinstated.¹³¹

The sacrificeable outsider must possess traits that alter his/her condition as member of society. Although different, the victim must belong to the community, but have suffered some form of crucial modification, such as having been in contact, cursed by, or targeted by an outsider. Pentheus, the leader who opposes the god Dionysus, is the pillar of the community. His strong and sudden obsession with Dionysus, his desire to be close to him (initially to enact violence, then to revel in his power), and the taboos he breaks in achieving this desire make him unrecognizable. Being a leader, he is sacrificeable, as he is on the fringes of society; in stark contrast to Dionysus, he stands for everything rational, while Dionysus stands for everything instinctual; finally, after his 'contamination' by Dionysus that leads to transgression into taboo and undifferentiatedness (ecstatic revelry and cross-dressing), Pentheus becomes both outcast and integral part of the community—the ideal sacrifice. At the very least, the sacrificial victim shares its liminal character with the outsider, both existing on the fringes of society, never fully embedded in its fabric. In enacting sacrificial violence the transition from the chaotic violence of the sacrificial crisis to the order restored by the targeted act of sacred violence is displayed: the victim is abused, special emphasis being placed on his/her genitals, as recognition of the intrinsic link between violence and sexuality. Following this abuse, the victim is honoured and treated with reverence,

¹³⁰ Butler, 2017.

¹³¹ In Greek, *pharmakos*, the sacrificeable population, means both 'sickness' and 'cure', both 'poison' and 'antidote', making sacrifice an ambiguous act best left to those specifically trained: shamans, priests, magicians, doctors.

allowing him/her to finally come to embody both toxic, indiscriminate violence, and the beneficial, purifying kind. In *The Bacchae*, Pentheus is murdered by the women he had considered powerless, in a ritual act of castration: the fir tree (*axis mundi*) in which he had climbed to escape them is uprooted, and Pentheus falls to the ground, where he is dismembered by the crazed Bacchantes. It is his mother who beheads him, and carries his head mounted on a staff, having mistaken him for a mountain-lion. The person who performs the sacrifice in this situation is compelling: sacrifices are traditionally performed by the initiated, which Agave is not; nonetheless, she is initiated in the Bacchic rites and the best equipped to sever the ties of kinship from within. Once the ecstatic revelry is over, the remains of Pentheus are honoured, although not as if they had been an intended sacrifice. Interestingly, in the play the sacrifice happens suddenly, and is never marked as such; in the end, it can only be identified from a third-person perspective, retrospectively, like the process of subjectification itself.

The hostility the members of a community feel for one another is concentrated against the scapegoat; the community is attracted and repelled by its origins, and feels the need to re-experience them, which results in overabundant aggression towards the Other. Yet the elusive nature of the Origin suggests that “the source of the evil is the community itself”, Girard writes, as the only way it could witness its origins would be to allow violence free play, in a reiteration of the original human condition.¹³²

Yet allowing violence free play would only succeed in returning the community to an (original) state of non-Being, without allowing its members to re-experience it. Subjects are unable to trace the origin of their own empirical determinants, despite being aware that a point of origin must exist. Thus, subjects’ attempt to succumb to violence to return to their point of origin is destined to fail: subjects’ origin remains fundamentally untraceable, as any return to origin can never go beyond the constitution of the first subject. Thus, the Origin remains fundamentally unknowable. Although Foucault (and Heidegger) speak of the origin of language, the fact that Foucault identifies language as an empirical determinant suggests that language encompasses rationality, logic and cultural boundaries, and, along with other empirical determinants, describes the condition of the subject as transcendental ego. A return to the point of origin of quasi-transcendental elements would entail the dissolution of the transcendental ego and an exercise to which subjects could not be privy.¹³³

¹³² Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 99.

¹³³ Arguably, this impossibility is something early communities have long understood: as the point of Origin lies outside the Symbolic and pertains to an ‘untraceable anteriority’, they have tried to capture a surrogate Origin through ritual. See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1979 and Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1959).

The desire to return to the point of origin is, according to Girard, but also Freud, Kristeva, Lacan, Foucault, and Heidegger, a very potent one, but one that cannot ever be fulfilled. One type of wish-fulfilment that could provide a modicum of relief is, I would suggest, the doubling of the self, and the scapegoating of the double. The double is already a threatening presence, one that forebodes the dissolution of the self by means of its presence. To Freud, the double is a means of distancing oneself from death, and a harbinger of death itself. This idea is taken further by Girard, who argues that the twin is a harbinger of violence, someone who can collapse the world into a sacrificial crisis and whose sacrifice can purify the community. For this reason, the scapegoat can be read as a twin image of the average member of the community, his double; the original oppressor is always the member of the community, as the evil comes from within, and the victim is the spitting image of the original oppressor. His creation momentarily satisfies the wish for return *ad-originem*, as through the presence of the double the boundaries of selfhood are dissolved, while its sacrifice enables the purification of society and the return to 'normality'. For the scapegoat to function as a double, all members of the community must participate in the ritual sacrifice; otherwise, the sacrifice becomes murder and loses its purifying function. In *The Bacchae*, the revenge of Dionysus takes the form of an act of sacrifice—the killing of Pentheus. As a double of Dionysus, the stranger who brought chaos and had to be destroyed, Pentheus too causes chaos by intruding in a god's religious rituals. His murder comes at the hands of maddened Bacchantes, who act as a religious ecstatic community.

If the quintessential trait of the scapegoat is the dilution of violence, then that of the non-Symbolic subject will be its proliferation. An essential element in violence, Girard argues, is desire, not for an object, but for violence itself: desire desires violence because violence comes to symbolise the prerogative of the divine being.¹³⁴ In other words, the perfect act of violence (spontaneous, unprovoked and extreme) is the mark of the divine, of the one who requires no Other for self-constitution, and thus need not act in response to any external event. As a result, the non-Symbolic subject will necessarily display propensity for extreme violence by virtue of its being independent of Symbolic constraints and not reliant on intersubjectivity.

In the mechanisms of desire, Girard identifies three elements: the subject and the rival, which are of primary importance, and the object, which is of secondary importance. The rival occupies the most prominent role, as he desires the same object as the subject, thus lending the object its desirability. Girard's argument is Lacanian, in the sense that he argues desire always arises as a result of the Other's influence and

¹³⁴ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 145-151.

cannot exist in the absence of the Other. Desire becomes a mimetic act, directed at imitating the desire of the Other to mask the subject's own lack of Being. This implies that there is no original desire, other than that of covering up the subject's lack of Being through mimesis, and that, consequently, all subjects are the same; by this token, any community can collapse into violence, as the endless repetition of the same typology of subjecthood annuls identity and gives rise to a sacrificial crisis. The outsider who can break the crisis must therefore be *different* from the other subjects, in the sense that s/he cannot be driven by the same mimetic need. At the same time, s/he can also be almost identical, but threatening in his/her potentially un-structuring quality, as shown in both Freud's narrative of uncanniness, and Lacan's exploration of Das Ding.

The outsider (such as Dionysus) calls to the subject because s/he has managed to *fill* his/her lack of Being, and no longer needs to replicate a subject-typology (the image of the Father) to maintain his/her desire; at the same time, the outsider is seen as abhorrent, as s/he has transcended the limitations imposed by his/her lack of Being, and is not dependent on intersubjectivity for self-constitution. The outsider can appear a monstrous double, both in him/herself, in the form of two characters (human and animal, possessed, etc.), and the double of the (future) scapegoat. This type of monstrous duality announces indiscriminate violence and the sacrificial crisis.

The 'difference' exhibited by the outsider points to another essential character of the non-Symbolic subject: it must be self-sufficient, which means that it cannot be constrained by Symbolic boundaries, but must be free to move between the Real and Symbolic; in other words, it must be both feminine and masculine and reflect the failings of the subject's self-constitution through (mis)representation.

The character of Dionysus in *The Bacchae* captures all the characteristics of the non-Symbolic subject, and I use his figure as the framework onto which the prerogatives of the non-Symbolic subject can be illustrated. There is, however, more than one reason I suggest *The Bacchae* can be used to explore the non-Symbolic subject. The tragedy was written by Euripides in the final years of his life, and it premiered posthumously at the Dionysia Festival, in 405 BC. The period in which it was written is important: the ancient world pertains to the social organisation that regards life, language and labour as quasi-transcendental elements; however, it precedes the shift in *épistémè* that propelled the subject at the centre of scientific and philosophic inquiry, situated by Foucault in the 17th century, and belongs to the type of ideology that saw man as an orchestrator, rather than producer of knowledge. This implies that texts from this period use a different system of reference to quasi-transcendental elements, particularly language, and manage to by-pass the subjective, introspective character of

anthropocentric texts that necessarily follow the shift in ideology. The model one can derive from working with such texts will be descriptive of human vicissitudes, and it will resist contextualising these in an anthropocentric framework. Finally, the text belongs to a period which is exempt from what Nietzsche calls 'slave morality', as it was written before the onset of Christianity.¹³⁵ Nietzsche's thought is that 'slave morality' is based entirely on the desires, hopes and fears of a conquered people, and is thus opposed to displays of power, domination and aggression, which it sees in a negative light. By choosing a text that precedes this type of morality, I do not seek to idealise a 'pure' ancient past, but to gain sufficient clarity to flesh out the non-Symbolic subject outside the pauses of post-Christian language on intra-subjective aggression. With this in mind, I argue that the figure of the non-Symbolic subject will display the following traits:

Androgyny: the non-Symbolic subject must be independent of Real/Symbolic constraints, and free to move between them; both feminine and masculine, it will display deviant, overabundant sexuality, like a child in a state of polymorphous perversity. In the case of Dionysus, androgyny is the first trait others notice: he is an effeminate god, and throughout the play we see instances where he appears to be male, but acts and is seen by others as female. In his interactions with Pentheus (as representative of the male imaginary), Dionysus occupies the female, inferior subject position, a position mirrored by the one he occupies in relation to his father (Zeus), and his sister (Athena). Dionysus comes from the outside (Lydia), an exotic element that disturbs the peace of the home-town, the hearth. His sexuality is overabundant, combining phallic elements and feminine *jouissance*, and is perceived by those who oppose him as a corrupter of rationality and morality, for whom the only acceptable fate is death through castration (beheading): he is described by Pentheus as "a wizard, a sorcerer from Lydia, with fragrant golden curls and ruddy face and spells of love in his eyes,...[who] spends his days and nights in the company of young women, pretending to initiate them in the bacchic mysteries." Enraged by the apparition of the stranger, Pentheus declares: "If I catch him in this house, I'll stop him from beating his thyrsus and tossing his curls. I'll cut his neck from his body."¹³⁶ Dionysus has the power to initiate a sacred rite that exists independently of the precepts of Symbolic order and linear time; however, this rite affects the Symbolic, changing it irremediably and disrupting the (apparently uninterrupted) flow of rationality.

Unusual birth/parentage: for the self-sufficiency of the non-Symbolic subject to be apparent, the circumstances of its birth must be unusual, and display its ability to move freely between the Symbolic and the Real, not belonging to any one register, but

¹³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, 1990.

¹³⁶ Euripides, *Ten Plays*, 323.

existing within them at will. Unlike mortals (or even other gods), Dionysus had a double birth: with the death of Semele, he was taken from her by his father, Zeus, and allowed to reach viability in his thigh. Therefore, he does not undergo a traditional transition from the Real to the Symbolic, from maternal *jouissance* to paternal rule; rather, he exists always-already in the Symbolic, having been born in it. He has not undergone a period of omnipotence from which to break free, but enjoys the liberty of the Real in a Symbolic setting: he can move between the two registers without fearing dissolution of identity. I will return to Dionysus, but it is important to note at this point that his birth is not only problematic, but also unclear: he is born by either (both?) a woman (Semele) or/and a male (Zeus), and he lives his childhood as a boy, or, in some versions of mythology, as a girl. Dionysus is also referred to as 'the bull-horned god', and accounts of his childhood mention that he can shape-shift.¹³⁷

Like a disruptive element, Dionysus appears as unhindered id, as pure libidinal energy, but, crucially, capable of measured (albeit violent) decisions, uprooting rationality and instilling chaos. He is a phallic god: he is the bull-horned god, whom the fates adorned with coils of serpents, and who is worshipped through displays of violence (sexual, like orgies, and physical, like the hunt). Nonetheless, his Maenads enjoy a surreal setting that blends elements of violence (such as the delight of killing and revelling in the blood of the killed creature) with bucolic scenes, as "the ground [that] flows with milk, flows with wine, flows with the nectar of bees", and the air that is as "fragrant as Syrian frankincense."¹³⁸ Descriptions of Dionysus capitalise on the fluidity of his gender, and his ability to occupy various and multiple subject positions at will: he is male, female, *and* animal.

Propensity for pure, extreme violence: not being constrained by the influence of the superego, the non-Symbolic subject can release the full potential of its id without fearing retribution or guilt. In the case of Dionysus, he chooses, for no clear reason other than vengeance against a specific group of people, to plunge the whole of Thebes into chaos and set in motion a sacrificial crisis through the dissolution of individuality. Although he announces he seeks vengeance for the destruction of the tomb of his mother, it is interesting that the destruction of Semele's tomb was not inflicted by the people of Thebes, which makes Dionysus's acts of violence unprovoked. One could, to an extent, consider most Greek gods manifestations of unbridled id-energy that emerge from the subject's desire for guilt-free aggression; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* shows the capacity of gods for horrific violence in, at times,

¹³⁷ For a detailed discussion of Dionysus, see Graves, *The Greek Myths*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960) and Theoi, "Dionysos".

¹³⁸ Euripides, *Ten Plays*, 320.

grotesque ways (for example in the stories of Marsyas, Arachne, Actaeon, and Prometheus). However, these stories depict punishments, which, although not always proportional to the harm inflicted, are seen as retribution.

Furthermore, the violence depicted in myths is often physical, and rarely threatens the dissolution of the self; in the case of Dionysus, however, the type of violence he inflicts or causes to occur is unhinged and leads to the dissolution of the limits of the self, and of the polis as extension of the self. The violence that plagues Thebes results in the destruction of boundaries, and makes its inhabitants repetitions of a particular model of sameness (the maddened/confused woman); confusion is especially important in the play, as it prefigures the destructive violence that ensues from subjects' inability to tell each other apart. As an external element, Dionysus acts as a catalyst that precipitates events that break the fragile ties of kinship that hold the polis together; through his fluidity, he brings to the fore the same type of (repressed) fluidity in the leader of the polis, contaminating the city. In making Pentheus a double of himself, Dionysus hastens the unravelling of a tenuous weave of kin relations and of delicately balanced subjectivities.

Dual characteristics: due to its subjectification, the non-Symbolic subject retains elements from both the Real and the Symbolic. Therefore, it cannot belong to either, and appears often as a double or as Other, and of dual nature itself—male/female; human/non-human or animal. Dionysus has changed form (from divine to human), and has come to Thebes to avenge his mother, whose tomb he finds struck by lightning. The destruction of the tomb comes to symbolise the denied maternal *jouissance* that precedes the familiarization of the infant into norms, and stands for Dionysus's refused transition into the phallic rule. As a result, Dionysus becomes a figure of incomplete subjectification: he seems to lack both a mother and a father (although, as I will show in Chapter 4, he has both) and becomes incompatible with the Symbolic, a disruptive force that disturbs order and rationality. By means of his birth in the Symbolic, his status as disruptive element is reified.

Mimetic quality: like a mirror, the non-Symbolic subject can reflect the desire to constitute oneself through mimesis of the Other's desire. This characteristic is essential in making the fabric of the Symbolic unravel, and it is only through the sacrifice of the scapegoat that the Symbolic boundaries can be reasserted and the desire to oscillate between Real and Symbolic/return to Origin temporarily appeased. In the case of Dionysus, this ability is evident in the way he bewitches the population of Thebes: from the beginning, he shows himself as subversive, as capable of upturning the order from inside. He becomes manifest as an ancient power that forces people into orgiastic

celebrations of unbound id. Furthermore, his followers are allowed respite from rationality, and are instead encouraged to revel in the hitherto forbidden (maternal) *jouissance*. Their revelry is seen as a spell, as madness, and is rejected by Pentheus (the embodiment of reason); rationality in the context of Bacchic revelry is perceived by revellers as sophistry.

Interestingly, Dionysus comes from Asia, a 'barbarian' land, and brings with him his rites, his "dances...and mysteries", turning Thebes into a mixture of Hellenic and barbarian, of the rational and the instinctual.¹³⁹ The rites initiated by Dionysus are seen by Pentheus as shameful, as contrasting with the expectations of decency, morality and rationality. He regards the Bacchantes as prostitutes who, bewitched by Bacchus, become sexually promiscuous. In response to their debauchery, he shackles and imprisons those he captures, to put an end to their immorality. Once more, the insistence on the superiority of rationality over instinct points to a deeper, untenable obsession with the fixity of boundaries, which proves self-destructive. Yet in *The Bacchae*, to maintain strict delineations is as foolish as to deny a god's divinity, and it is often the barbarians, the mad, the women and the blind that speak most *rationaly* and convincingly.

Dionysus's disruptive power, his ability to bewitch people and make them renounce the requirements of rationality put him in an ideal position to link the Real and Symbolic. He can initiate an experience that transcends the limits of understanding and push the boundaries of normality. As Pentheus decides to hunt Dionysus down, he sets in motion events that mark him the true outsider of the play: his transgressions of phallic rationality and his deliriousness make him an alien element in the Symbolic; once in Dionysus's territory, he is identified as an outsider by the Bacchantes and killed the same way he had promised to kill Dionysus if he set foot in his territory.

The mimetic act that the existence of desire presupposes corresponds to a primal instinct that can only be channelled in constructive directions through cultural constraints.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, mimesis as a presence in the subject's life means the subject oscillates between extremes, between the desire to imitate and to resist imitation, between submission to social constraints and (imagined) omnipotence. It is impossible, or at least enormously difficult, to identify an origin when it comes to the True Oppressor or the True Oppressed: as Girard argues, tragedy shows these positions alternate, making characters occupy both roles depending on circumstance and context. It is this alternation that creates the premise for tragedy, as it renders

¹³⁹ Euripides, *Ten Plays*, 318.

¹⁴⁰ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 147.

characters sufficiently alike for sacrifice to occur. The surrogate victim, at once monstrous double, must die for the rest of the community to endure. His death is tied to life: only through the death of the victim is life possible.

Nietzsche and the aesthetics of the Dionysiac

Nietzsche's text, *The Birth of Tragedy*, can be read in conjunction with Lacan and Girard for a more holistic picture of the relationship between the Real and the Symbolic. I do not intend to suggest that Nietzsche's work should be understood as similar to Lacan's, nor do I argue that their theories are complementary. However, there is a strong case to be made for the idea that Nietzsche's return to classicism and his reading of ancient morality opens a space for enquiry that allows for a better understanding of Lacan's differentiation between the Real and the Symbolic.

Nietzsche's theory returns to a time prior to the shift in *épistème* that propelled man to the centre of philosophical enquiry. More importantly, he adopts an *amoral* stance to bypass the Christian bias against the ego and gives an impassionate account of the human condition before the current era.¹⁴¹ The text leaves the reader with a dual picture of morality (Apollonian and Dionysiac) that is not illustrated in 'good' and 'bad' terms, and which allows for different psychic structures to become more readily visible.

The Birth of Tragedy, one of Nietzsche's earliest works, was met, as Nietzsche himself had anticipated, with what David Allison calls "a cry of outrage", as it presented a reinterpretation of Greek tragedy that drew too comfortable a parallel between Hellenism and late 19th century Germany and rejected current approaches to human existence, as those of Kant and Schopenhauer.¹⁴² To Nietzsche, these accounts of human existence advocated an almost decadent withdrawal from life, and encouraged hostility to the world. The thought of Kant and Schopenhauer presents the subject as guilty of original sin, which he must overcome in desperate acts of redemption. Despite being the quintessence of Christianity, redemption originates in hatred and rejection of the ego, in judging the world from the viewpoint of Christian morality and in finding it

¹⁴¹ Of course, one can argue that, even if Nietzsche speaks of a time prior to the shift in *épistème*, he is still doing so *a posteriori*, and is already embedded in a new ideology. Shifting away from Christian morality would necessarily entail using the same morality as a reference point, therefore causing the entire discourse to gravitate around the object it tries to avoid. Nonetheless, even if this is the case, having identified the turning point of ideology and its manifestations makes it more likely to be able to uncover its traces in discourse and, if not avoid them, then take note of them.

¹⁴² In effect, the socio-political situation of 19th century Europe anticipated the decline in values that characterized the 20th century: "the entire age," Allison writes, "was abandoned to nihilism, ...mediocrity...and self-annihilation"; consequently, Nietzsche's act of grounding Classical tragedy in contemporary society was part of a widespread movement of reviving Classical values and returning to a moral golden-age. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000, 15. The same type of movement took place in 19th century Britain as a revival of the cult of masculinity amongst boys and a return to the glorification of the male body. See Easthope, *What a man's gotta do*, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

responsible for individual shortcomings. In this sense, *The Birth of Tragedy* proposes an 'amoral' understanding of the world based on aesthetics and on the glorification of various forms of beauty (Apollonian and Dionysian extremes), rather than the condemnation of pleasure and excess.

Nietzsche sees European society as trapped in a social, political, intellectual and aesthetic crisis, which he proposes to resolve by returning to an image of the self congruent with the image of the artist-god, Dionysus—one that does not disavow passion, violence and activity, but regards them as *aesthetic* attitudes to life. To an extent, Nietzsche's work is a reaction against an obsessive cult of the superego that became evident with the onset of Christianity, an act of fetishizing guilt and transforming it into the holy Grail of modernity. In contrast to this type of morality, the ethical system of the ancient world revolves around tangible ideals: power and lack thereof, social domination and submission, and the cyclicity of these extremes.

The Birth of Tragedy accounts for two contrasting psychological attitudes that shaped Greek culture, symbolized by the gods Apollo and Dionysus, by looking at the way these attitudes were expressed artistically. Despite occupying socially and religiously complex roles, both Apollo and Dionysus are described by Nietzsche from the viewpoint of their involvement with aesthetics. They enter a binary opposition, and encompass order, form, enlightened art, restraint, reason and limitation on the one hand, and instinct, sensuality, intoxication, frenzy and madness on the other. Despite being random states of the mind, the Apollonian and the Dionysian were attitudes that came as responses to the problem of existence, and symbolized two different valuations of life and reality. It is the acceptance of both tendencies, towards order and chaos, that allowed the Greeks to establish a set of values that transcended basic morality and led to the genesis of the highest state of Being in ancient Greece, which facilitated the creation of the great tragedies. The Dionysian and the Apollonian illustrate the two opposing tendencies of man, the struggle between formal organization and natural expression. Nietzsche goes as far as to identify the satyr, frequently depicted in Dionysian celebrations, with the natural being, and contends the effect of the satyr on the man of culture was the same as that of music on civilization: just as music, the language of the Dionysian, nullifies civilization, the presence of the satyr as embodiment of desire and irrationality defies the cult of the Apollonian by making evident the necessity of balance.¹⁴³ The satyr becomes a way to bridge the gap

¹⁴³ "Perhaps we can reach a starting point for this discussion when I offer the claim that the satyr himself, the imaginary natural being, is related to the cultural person in the same way that Dionysian music is related to civilization. On this last point Richard Wagner states that civilization is neutralized by music in the same way lamplight is by daylight. In just such a manner, I believe, the cultured Greek felt himself neutralized by the sight of the chorus of satyrs, and the next effect of Dionysian tragedy is that the state and society, in general the gap between man and man, give way to an

between the extremes of rationality and sensuality; through his nature, he embodies the fluidity necessary to navigate both registers. As I will show in Chapter 4, the chorus in the play serves a similar function, and seeks to negotiate between the masculine and the feminine. Nietzsche sees modern civilization as trapped in excessive morality and rationality to the point of being entirely divorced from passion and instinct. Without the Dionysian, the Apollonian enters an unbalanced cyclical process, soon consuming and castrating itself.

Nietzsche proposes that the Dionysian attitude, the natural man, is the underlying foundation of all subjectivity, arguing for a psychic structure that is transmissible and common to all subjects—although, I would argue, decidedly historical. Yet the quixotic search for pure rationality and the obsessive rejection of instinct gave rise to insurmountable intrasubjective tension, calling for the creation of a non-Symbolic subject. The sway of Christian morality advanced the thought that the ideal subject must deny his instinctual side, which led to an identity crisis and a culture of guilt. This, in psychoanalytic terms, could be translated as stepping away from trying to attain balance between the id and the superego, and favouring the superego as the sole compass for a meaningful life. The result was an act of self-castration of the phallic superego, which became manifest as a crisis in morality and activity, and which stood in contrast with the Greek idea of balance, creativity and artistry.¹⁴⁴ This reading provides a further explanation for my previous contention that there must always be a degree of identification between the subject and the victim of a sacrifice: in the context of ritual sacrifice, the scapegoat is elected based on his/her similarities (and differences) to the outsider. If these similarities help those who perform the sacrifice identify the scapegoat with the outsider, the differences help them find some common ground between themselves and the scapegoat. This identification with the outsider by proxy offers a facile, guilt-free and readily available avenue for indulging in the fascination the outsider exerts, without falling into the trap of complete identification, and, consequently, into the dissolution of identity and Symbolic boundaries.

invincible feeling of unity, which leads back to the heart of nature. The metaphysical consolation — with which, as I am immediately indicating here, every true tragedy leaves us, that, in spite of all the transformations in phenomena, at the bottom of everything life is indestructibly powerful and delightful — this consolation appears in lively clarity as the chorus of satyrs, as the chorus of natural beings, who live, so to speak, indestructibly behind all civilization, and who, in spite of all the changes in generations and a people's history, always remain the same." Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals*, 28.

¹⁴⁴ It could be argued the modern world is now moving away from pure Apollonian pursuits and is becoming more accepting of the naturalness of instinct. However, a very telling example of the tension between reason and instinct, and the crisis to which it gave rise is the Chivalric Code. In Arthurian legend, or even in later tragedies, such as Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, there is an almost palpable discrepancy between characters' actions and the high standards of conduct, integrity and civilization to which they are held. In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare (perhaps unwittingly) introduces a hint of postcolonialism by showing the barbarians, who cannot aspire to same ideals of pure rationality as the civilized Romans, are less savage and capable of more refined language than the Romans themselves. (See Tamora's speech.) Similarly, we see the same tension in chivalric love, for example in Lancelot's duty to his King, and the nobility he must show by loving Guinevere unconditionally, as in Mallory's *La Morte d'Arthur*.

When applying this idea to an ethical system divided between 'good' Apollonian tendencies, and 'bad' Dionysian ones, it becomes clear why identification with the outsider would be sought through an intermediary, and how the sacrificial victim might serve to facilitate this process of identification. Through the destruction of the scapegoat, any affiliation with the outsider, even momentary, can be denied, and the bias for pure reason reasserted. Reading the outsider as an embodiment of a rejected ethical system might provide a potential answer to the idea that the original aggressor must come from within the community. If evil, in Christian morality, can be found through a return *ad-originem*, then the 'evil' it seeks to refute can only be the common ground of all subjects, embodied, in Nietzsche's theory, in the natural man, whose id is allowed respite from Symbolic constraints.

In tracing the history of Christian morality, one can note the shift between situating evil on the outskirts of the (spiritual) world, from where it could exert its destructive influence, to situating it within the individual. This paradigmatic shift goes hand in hand with a similar one identified by Foucault to do with regarding the mechanisms of desire as external, then internal to the subject.¹⁴⁵ Both refer to the idea of evil existing in a liminal space, either on the fringes of the physical world, or, in modern day, on the fringes of one's conscience.

In the context of stepping away from the idea of balance towards unconditional internalisation of the Father, followed by strict adherence to the dictates of the superego, it is expected that tension should arise, which becomes manifest as periodic surges of instinct into rationality, of elements of Dionysian psychic organisation into the Apollonian rule. It is important to emphasise that I am not arguing for the non-Symbolic subject as a manifestation of instinctual drives that surge into the Apollonian. The argument I make is broader: I associate the Dionysian tendencies, which we see displayed in *The Bacchae*, not with instinct, but with a psychic structure that revolves around the mother, and contrasts with that which revolves around the Father. I return to this in Chapters 3 and 4, when I explore the reason the repression of these elements is needed. The Dionysian element serves to symbolise not just unbridled id, but rather energy that *must* be balanced, and not annihilated by the Apollonian. This element can be read in terms of an unbound ego, that is, an ego un-tempered by the (phallic) superego, capable of interrogating the makeup of the transcendental ego and of asserting the necessity for balance, but also capable of *rejecting* the homogenising influence of the Apollonian: the Dionysian element is translated, in psychic terms, into a

¹⁴⁵ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

non-Symbolic subject—not common to all men, as Nietzsche proposes the satyr to be, but bound by language, manifest in culture and determined by history.

Ultimately, *The Birth of Tragedy* can be used to understand the interplay between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac as aesthetic attitudes. In the context of these two contrasting attitudes, the non-Symbolic subject serves simultaneously as mediator, necessary developmental stage and structured entity, and is not to be regarded simply as surplus psychic energy. When understood as a product of the regulation of interplay of the relations of kinship, and of the repression of the feminine by the phallic, the non-Symbolic subject serves to mediate between structuring elements, but also reveal them as doubles of each other, proving boundaries to be fluid, and inviting their de(con)struction.

Summary of Chapter 2

In this chapter I have looked at the idea of violence that arises at the heart of community and the remedies available to restore peace. Using Girard's understanding of sacrifice, I have fleshed out the characteristics of the non-Symbolic subject, and argued that it is at the same time a liminal presence that threatens the integrity of the Symbolic, and a double of someone within the Symbolic that can serve as its most prominent representative. In the context of *The Bacchae*, I have argued that understanding Dionysus as the manifestation of the non-Symbolic subject, a double of the enforcer of rationality and representative of the phallic, can help us begin to explore the process of subjectification and the left-behind subject. I have also suggested that the non-Symbolic subject, being a (transcendental) subject but not habituated into the Symbolic, has certain defining traits, most prominently its propensity for violence, mimetic quality, and ability to move between the Symbolic and the Real. Finally, using Nietzsche's reading of the Apollonian and the Dionysian as *attitudes*, I have argued that the theorization of a non-Symbolic subject is borne out of quasi-transcendental determinants and is meant to enrich, not supersede the oedipal model.

Chapter 3

God, man and country: limits of feminine agency in the male imaginary

Up to this point, I have argued that self-sustained, non-psychotic forms of subjectivity can emerge in the absence of the Father; to substantiate this claim, I will now look towards the mother as a potential structuring element in the psychic life of the child. In this chapter, I will explore her existence in the Symbolic, and the way her figure can be generative of psychic structures even when absent from the space of representation.

The psyche and structure: against monadic (mis)representation

In her book on matricide, Jacobs argues that we may have made the move away from the position of Lacanian psychoanalysis, that of a monadic structuring of the psyche, and can now begin to argue for alternative ways to go beyond this model. As I suggested in previous chapters, the debate surrounding available avenues for thinking outside Lacanianism is important, as it deals with feminist politics of social transformation, and stems from the question as to which figure (the paternal, the maternal or both) can play a structural role in the organisation of the psyche. To Lacan, Jacobs explains, “the founding scene of the symbolic order is the repudiation of the feminine that assumes its status as the limit of representation,”¹⁴⁶ which is to say that for phallic (i.e.: socio-Symbolic) life to be possible, the representation of the feminine must necessarily be impossible. The alternative, in the Lacanian picture, is psychosis.

The generally accepted assumption, Jacobs writes, is that “the symbolic order is a condition of sanity”, and feminism seeks to uncover femininity in this setting rather than posit it outside of it, in the un-representable dimension of abjection.¹⁴⁷ Lacanian feminists hold that the phallus is the only possible signifier of sexual difference, and the one element that structures the subject’s psychic life: “to have or to be the phallus

¹⁴⁶ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 8.

becomes the pivotal split determining the position one can take within culture.”¹⁴⁸ From this perspective, *The Bacchae* can be read in a faithfully Lacanian way by interpreting the phallus, in the play represented by the arbiter of order and rationality, Pentheus, as the civilizing element with which the (effeminate and non-Symbolised) Dionysus clashes. Yet the play also lends itself to a (contemporary) anti-Lacanian reading, as it shows how the culture in which the phallus represents the condition for sanity is anything but sane. In this chapter, I will show the women in *The Bacchae* have the potential to uncover the underlying problem with monadic psychic organisation, and that they do so by exploiting the limits imposed on them by the phallic rule.

To understand why an analysis of femininity in *The Bacchae* can shed light on the reason the society presented in the play collapses into madness, I will return to Irigaray’s views on Lacanianism, and in particular her reading of the place femininity occupies in the Lacanian picture. To Irigaray, as I mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, femininity is not a position that can be readily occupied by women in culture; culture is founded on the male imaginary and does not allow female difference (and implicitly female psychic structures) to be represented. Rather, culture, including speech, is dominated by a male understanding of the world, and only allows for male identities to exist. Female identity is obliterated, relegated to undefined and un-Symbolised spaces, and allowed into the phallic culture only as manifestations of madness. The phallic woman (the woman that can exist in the phallogocentric society), must show no traces of femininity, but be another representation of the phallus, albeit a defective one. Both identity and difference are assumed through language; yet, since language pertains to a particular Symbolic system, the only possible subject-position is male, making all other positions a) of non-subjects, and b) of non-males, that is, defective, castrated men. As Whitford puts it, “women are not symbolically self-defined”.¹⁴⁹

If speech is the authority on what type of identity can be constructed through language-as-Dasein, then the patriarchal system Lacan theorises silences female speech and excludes it from the (phallic) framework, lest it produces madness within the system. By this token, the way to liberate speech and allow both sexes to make use of it is to show how the phallic rule itself produces psychosis inside the Symbolic, rather than guaranteeing sanity and keeping psychosis at bay. It is in this direction that Butler steps when she argues for the performativity of gender: in positing gender fluidity and performativity, Butler shows the structuring effect can be theoretically exorcised from the phallus. Butler does not simply suggest subjects decide their gender or that gender decides the subject; in *Bodies that Matter*, she argues that the performativity of gender,

¹⁴⁸ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Irigaray and Whitford, *The Irigaray reader*, 3.

the critical agency she had identified in *Gender Trouble* as key in both upholding and subverting the dominant ideology, must be understood “as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.”¹⁵⁰ While some form of fluidity remains, gender and culture appear to be tied in a cyclicity, reinforcing and subverting each other, constituting the materiality of sex.

This is to say that, even in the context of performativity, normativity remains, and the phallic organisation occupies the normative position. For this reason, ‘willing’ oneself into one gender identity or another is a subversive practice that nonetheless depends on working within language-as-Dasein, not a widespread characteristic of gender of being mutable. When understood through the lens of deviance, Dionysus’ sexuality is aimed at overturning the sexual law from within. But perhaps a further question can be asked, as to why Dionysus’s sexuality is subversive. Is it because it is a *feminine* sexuality that is seen as monstrous and therefore exorcised from the phallic setting? Or is it more plausible to understand Dionysus as a manifestation of feminine sexuality that appears and overthrows the Symbolic order *precisely because* it has been exorcised from the normative setting? To answer this question, we need to interrogate the type and degree of agency the Bacchantes have in the play and the reason their sexualities are overabundant, and explore a fundamental aspect of the non-Symbolic subject: its relation with the mother.

Jacobs emphasises what she terms “the determining power of the symbolic order”, that is, “the order of meaning to which all human beings are subjected if they are to become part of the social world.”¹⁵¹ This definition of the Symbolic features in Irigaray’s understanding of the Imaginary structured by the Symbolic: it is only by means of a Symbolic order that can shape the livelihood of every subject that we can speak of an Imaginary created in relation to this Symbolic. As the dominant order that governs the Imaginary is male, it follows that the Symbolic order must necessarily also be male, elevated to the status of social law. This, as Jacobs puts it, means that “projections of male unconscious phantasy achieve the validity and the weight of a powerful symbolic order.”¹⁵² For this reason, Irigaray argues, one must interrogate the Symbolic, and, by extension, the Imaginary by returning to tragedy and myth.

In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray argues for the existence of a non-masculine discourse, which can be unearthed by looking at the oedipal structures of both language and culture, which form the basis for the distribution of social roles. Irigaray’s

¹⁵⁰ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

¹⁵¹ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 18.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

argument for power and social structures being embedded into language is substantiated by her findings in *Sexes et genres à travers les langues*, which show that men are more likely to take up a subject-position in language, while women efface themselves and their subjectivity. Following Irigaray, we could argue that the act of speaking in a phallogentric society reinforces the male subject-position and makes it impossible for women to express a feminine subjectivity. By this token we can argue that the moment of subjectification-proper is itself gendered, and only allows the subject to undergo the process of subjectification by referring to itself as male—not, as Lacan argued, because other identities are psychotic, but because the structuring discourse is closed to female subjectivity.

Analysing the position of subjects in relation to quasi-transcendental elements is hindered by one's own investment in said elements; for this reason, it is easier to see how this applies to a society by looking at mythology, and the way myth is absorbed and modified in culture. To Irigaray, mythology "is one of the principal expressions of what organises a society at a particular time"¹⁵³ and "formative of the collective unconscious", constituting a "culture's self-image".¹⁵⁴ Myth can interrogate the ideological systems to which subjects pertain at a given time, and help identify their breaking points, raising one's consciousness with regard to changes in thought systems and psychic organisations. By tracing speech and understanding who wields the power to censor or facilitate it in mythology and in cultural products in which mythology is engaged, one can glimpse the oedipal structures that dictate power-relations within language and the wider society.

The place of femininity in culture and the relation between the masculine and the feminine is important, as it concerns the status of culture itself: the question that arises is whether we can understand culture as a product of the interplay between femininity and masculinity, the same way we understand subjects. Yet if we take this view of both culture and subjectivity, a further question arises: who is the non-Symbolic subject? In previous chapters, I presented the non-Symbolic subject as a structured subjectivity that is not accounted for in theory. In this chapter, I would like to explore the influence kinship has on the subject's positioning within culture.

In *The Bacchae*, feminine subjectivity appears linked to female independence, and tied to the setting in which women manifest themselves. The phallic society, represented by the polis, not only impedes female expression, but stunts it the moment it shows signs of manifesting itself: Pentheus orders the maddened women to be locked away,

¹⁵³ Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, 28.

¹⁵⁴ Whitford and Irigaray, *The Irigaray reader*, 11.

removing them from society the moment they deviate from their set identities. It is solely when the phallic society collapses that female identity becomes possible, and then only destructively.

The Bacchae exposes the modern male-centric system of representation: by failing to acknowledge its debt to the mother, modern thought (and psychoanalysis and philosophy as complicit discourses) only represents the male imaginary, imposing phallogentrism on society. The project of this thesis is to intervene in psychoanalytic discourse and enable it to move beyond the oedipal paradigm towards a plurality of subject positions. By tracing subjectification in myths, we can see the structuring elements that contribute to the development of the subject and assess their mutability.

The Symbolic order is built contingently, based on conglomerates of symbols that the male imaginary chooses to incorporate and treat as law, suggesting that, while Freudian psychoanalysis identified one element that structures the psyche, it is likely that there are more such pivots that display different phantasies, and do not revolve exclusively around the Father.¹⁵⁵ “In myth”, Jacobs writes, “we witness what is left of the delirium of the (male) imaginary once it has been structured and “installed in the imagination”...The delirium and symptoms expressed through myth allow us to glimpse...a kind of cultural dreaming.”¹⁵⁶ The danger of not analysing these phantasies is real: if not exposed, they become rationalised and embedded into social norms.¹⁵⁷ Such an ingrained social practice is the ostracism of the mother: she is never theorised in her structuring function, as a quintessential element in the psychic life of the baby who organises the baby’s psyche by means of her own mind-work, but only as a mirror that reflects the baby back to itself and forces it into the phallic organisation. The elimination of the mother perpetuates a monadic subject position that replicates almost through parthenogenesis, narrowing the possibilities of subjectification.

Jacobs goes on to argue that matricide itself, or, rather, the silences and lack of attention that surround it, warrant scrutiny. The occlusion of matricide as a concept from psychoanalytic theory is unusual when the practice of matricide appears throughout myths and tragedies. It is this systematic caesura that suggests matricide *functions* as an (un-theorised) concept that, like patricide, may serve a structuring function. Matricide, in Jacob’s theory, becomes a standalone unconscious fantasy, which plays a structuring part despite having been excluded from the oedipal situation.

¹⁵⁵ This is, to an extent, the project that Jacobs undertakes to demonstrate in *On Matricide*: that there is such a thing as a *law of the mother*, whose existence is not erased or nullified by that of the Father. Stone undertakes a similar project in *Feminism, psychoanalysis, and maternal subjectivity* and argues for matricide as being foundational in the development of patriarchal Western society.

¹⁵⁶ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 20.

¹⁵⁷ The example provided in this sense is the analysis undertaken by Carol Kohn, who identifies in the intellectualized discourse about nuclear destruction a deep male wish for parthenogenesis. Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 21.

Jacobs uses the myth of Orestes and pays attention to both the matricidal component and the judgement imparted by Athena, using these threads to uncover the underlying un-theorized matricidal structure. Up to this point, Jacobs argues, what we have witnessed is a model of the Western psyche from which the figure of the mother is absent, and in its absence reveals the blind spot of Western phallic organisation. In formulating a structuring matricidal concept, what is achieved is a different type of structuring of the psyche, one that does not hold the castrating loss at its core and that “is not reducible to the logic of patricide”.¹⁵⁸ This reading remains close to Green’s, as it does not link all unconscious phantasies to castration anxieties, like the Freudian and Lacanian models. While one paradigmatic centre around which psychic organisation can revolve is the bloody mutilation of castration (the Red anxiety), the other is that of separation from the mother, which, although traumatic, is not a severance, but a (potentially non-permanent) loss that leaves no traces on the body (i.e.: castration). The loss of the mother is not generative, and is not seen as a moment when psychic structuring is precipitated into being. The type of structuring the absence of the breast gives rise to is fundamentally different from the structure based on castration.

And yet, any type of maternal structure must be uncovered, as it always appears concealed, as silence, not presence. Like Jacobs’ Metis, the mother in *The Bacchae* appears in two different guises. In her weaker form, she is present in the figure of Agave, while in her more structurally potent form, she appears through Dionysus (albeit indirectly), as that which is created *on its own* amid the Symbolic. Dionysus is, in this context, a manifestation of maternal *jouissance* that infiltrates the Symbolic. From his birth, which is, to an extent, a process of parthenogenesis, to his desire to avenge his mother, Dionysus is a product of maternal energy, which springs forth in the phallic, to upturn and re-organise it.

The absent mother, Jacobs demonstrates, cannot have the same structural influence as the dead Father. The dead mother is never unquestionably dead, and her departure leaves no trace (no castration), making it impossible to reduce matricide to patricide; it is, Jacobs writes, “programmed by a different phantasy and a different kind of loss from that of patricide”, and produces “different modes of mourning, of remembering, of symbolising.”¹⁵⁹ For this reason, the mother readily *haunts* in texts and undermines the phallic through her simultaneous *being and not being* there.

To define matricide and the phantasies that call for a matricidal law, Jacobs introduces what she terms “the story of the origins of patriarchy”: Zeus’s parturition. According to

¹⁵⁸ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 34.

¹⁵⁹ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 36.

the myth, Zeus lusted after Metis the Titaness, priestess of all wisdom and knowledge, who did not respond to his advances. Despite trying to elude him by changing into various forms, Metis was eventually caught and raped, and she fell pregnant. Before giving birth to Athena, she was tricked by Zeus and swallowed whole. Athena emerged fully armoured months later, from Zeus's brain, amidst his roars of pain. In his stomach, Metis remained hidden, fuelling his omniscience and wisdom. Zeus, Jacobs writes, achieved his immense power and knowledge through "rape, incorporation and appropriation of the woman/mother. He cannibalized Metis in order to rob her of her knowledge and wisdom, together with her reproductive capacity."¹⁶⁰ Following her incorporation, she remains silent and invisible, the forgotten source of Zeus's power.¹⁶¹

The rape and incorporation of Metis give course to events that (graphically) delineate the boundaries of patriarchal law. Both the mother and the daughter are absorbed by the father, becoming subordinate to his will. The literal brainchild of this union, Athena, is the epitome of male phantasy: a vengeful, aggressive, asexual female, whose femininity is a facet of masculinity, not a standalone trait. As Jacobs puts it, "Athena becomes...proof that the father is the prime author of identity"¹⁶² and, in a further ironic twist, the warrant of democratic justice, tasked with deciding whether women's voices are heard, erasing any trace of Metis's existence. In the Oresteia, Athena judges whether reparation for violence against the mother is necessary, and she reasons the murder of the mother is justified; she becomes the advocate of the phallic law, and the woman through whom the existence of womanhood is irremediably denied. In her book, Jacobs shows the matricidal law lies at the root of male phantasies; in this thesis, I work with a similar concept, but will show that the pre-oedipal is structured, and in so doing argue for a new model of subjectification.

¹⁶⁰ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 63.

¹⁶¹ Fry's account is different, and it is important to consider why these differences arise now, in this current socio-cultural climate. He writes: "Zeus ran in pursuit [of Metis], transforming himself first into a bull, then a bear, next a lion and then an eagle. Metis hid behind a pile of boulders deep in a cave, but Zeus, turning himself into a snake, managed to slither through a gap in the rocks and wrap his coils around her. Metis had always loved Zeus and, both worn down and touched by his persistence, she finally consented.[...]Afterwards, as playful pillow talk, they fell into a conversation of the subject of transformations.[...]She congratulated him on his skill at this art.

'Yes,' said Zeus, with some self-satisfaction. 'I pursued you as bull, bear, lion and eagle, but it was as a snake that I captured you. You have a reputation for cunning and guile, but I outsmarted you. Admit it.'

'Oh, I'm sure I could have beaten you. Why, if I had turned myself into a fly you could have never caught me, could you?'[...]With a buzz and a whizz she turned into a fly and darted about the cave. In a twinkle Zeus transformed himself into a lizard and with a quick flick of a long sticky tongue Metis...had been safely transferred to his interior.[...]Metis had been uncharacteristically foolish. Or so it seemed. In fact she had not been tricked at all. She had done the tricking. Metis means 'craft' and 'guile' after all. She had deliberately allowed herself to be consumed by Zeus – more than that, she had duped him into doing so. She saw that, if she sacrificed her freedom and remained inside him always, she could assume the role of a wise counsellor[...]forever able to whisper advice to him. Whether he liked it or not. Those who speak truth to power usually end up in chains or an early grave, but inside Zeus' head Metis could never be silenced. She would be a prudent check on the reckless excesses and headlong passions that often threatened to get the god of thunder into trouble. His storms of temper, lust and jealousy needed to be balanced by her calm voice, a voice that could urge his instincts into more rational and enlightened channels.[...] [Metis'] shrewd inner guidance...helped raise him into a great ruler whose attributes far outshone those of his father and grandfather..." Fry, *Mythos*, 81-89.

¹⁶² Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 64.

The monstrous mother: Dionysus and Agave

Despite their differences, Dionysus and Athena share the same father, and are very similar in their births: both were born of Zeus himself in acts of parthenogenesis. Nonetheless, while Athena remains ignorant of the existence of Metis and proudly takes ownership of her being born of no mother, Dionysus honours Semele's memory. Dionysus arrives in Thebes to avenge the destruction of his mother's tomb. While the destruction of the tomb by lightning does not warrant bringing chaos and destruction on the people of Thebes, Dionysus feels compelled to avenge her, and pursues this revenge with as much fervour as Athena pursued the pardoning of the murderer of the mother.¹⁶³ Although there are numerous characters involved in the *Oresteia* and *The Bacchae*, one of the central themes of the two plays is the status of the mother in relation to the father: the children side with a different parent each, and, in choosing their allegiance, reveal important aspects of their psychic makeup: Athena is a representative of patriarchy, and Dionysus is the advocate of an absent, faceless mother. In his clash with the male imaginary, he reveals the shortcomings of prioritising the Father as structuring element over any possibility of a maternal role.

Unlike Dionysus, Athena acts as an enforcer of patriarchy, the ideal phallic female, who has no sexuality and instead perpetuates the phallic one. Athena's emergence from Zeus's head as an armour-clad adult means she had no childhood and experienced none of the complexes an infant would experience, including castration anxiety and penis envy. If we assume mythical characters embody coded cultural wishes (after all, none of them *actually* have childhoods), Athena is shorthand for a broader wish of the male imaginary to be rid of its infantile dependence on its caregiver(s). Due to her unusual parentage, Athena becomes a poster-child of patriarchy: a vengeful virgin, developmentally immobile, who serves to further the phallic rule by advocating a type of femininity like her own, modelled on the requirements of patriarchy.

Dionysus sprang from Zeus, too, but he orchestrates a corruption of the phallic from within, becoming a disruption that penetrates the Symbolic clandestinely. His disregard for boundaries contrasts with Athena's pursuit of rationality. In the play, Dionysus describes himself as vengeful and cruel when wronged and improperly worshipped, but otherwise kind to humans. He displays nurturing and caring characteristics, but makes

¹⁶³ Although the destruction of the tomb may not warrant vengeance as drastic as Dionysus', the destruction of the *womb* might. When interpreting the tomb as symbolic of the maternal womb, Dionysus' action may be seen as revenge for the foreclosure of the mother, the erasure of her structuring and generative functions and her exclusion from the space of representation.

an important point: that no such kindness is possible in the absence of proper recognition, in the way the subject himself wishes to be recognised. Unlike Athena, he brings chaos, not closure. It may be relevant that Dionysus sprang from Zeus's thigh, while Athena from his head: while ancient Greeks had a monadic understanding of the subject, Armand D'Angour writes that Athena's birth from Zeus' head prompted the Stoic philosopher Khryssippos of Soloi to interpret her birth "as symbolic of the fact that wisdom originates in the head."¹⁶⁴ We could therefore consider Dionysus's birth closer to the liminal character of femininity than that of Athena and argue that, with him, Zeus unwittingly brought forth the type of femininity he attempted to smother with Metis: the vengeful mother that upturns rationality from within. Dionysus becomes a symptom of the killing of the mother, and displays all the characteristics that had hitherto been denied to her - maternal *jouissance*, and a structuring role in the infant's life.¹⁶⁵

Athena and Dionysus are engaged in a binary opposition, and Dionysus is a double of Athena, a position he mirrors in his relationship with Pentheus. In the Athena/Dionysus binary, Athena occupies the male subject-position and Dionysus the female one, reflecting his own lack in comparison with the male subject-position. Female identity, when defined as complementary to male identity, takes the form of lack; yet, as Irigaray shows, the relation is paradoxical, as in describing women as a mirror in which the male reflects itself to fashion its alter-ego, the male/female binary opposition is subverted. In being a vessel to contain male identity and reflect it back onto itself, the woman becomes that which dictates the terms of the male's (re)fashioning of his identity. As Penelope Deutscher writes, "the representation itself is paradoxical and auto-destabilizing. It limits the feminine to atrophy but destabilizes itself by indicating the possibility of excess."¹⁶⁶ By the same token, Dionysus destabilises the phallic society of Pentheus by making Pentheus himself succumb to excess and be overwhelmed by it.

¹⁶⁴ Armand D'Angour, *The Greeks and the New* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 140.

¹⁶⁵The problematic nature of natality has been addressed by philosophers, including Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, and more recently Irigaray and Stone. In her 2018 lecture "Being born and its significance for philosophy", Stone discusses natality in the context of her upcoming book, *Being Born: Birth and Philosophy*. To Stone, emerging in the world through birth has a strong ethical dimension, and can constitute an equalising factor between subjects, who become empirico-transcendental subjects by virtue of having been born. Stone, "Being born and its significance for philosophy", 2018. Unlike modern conceptions of natality, however, Greek myth operates with an exceptionally fluid notion of what it means to be born: the mythical womb can be situated inside or outside the body and can pertain to females, males, asexual or inanimate beings. The specificity of one's birth, that is, the manner in which the subject (often, a god) enters the world prefigures to some extent his/her life: Athena springs from Zeus' head and comes to symbolise wisdom, rationality and the rule of law; Dionysus is twice born (of both woman and man) and evolves into an almost transitional space between the two; Aphrodite emerges from Ouranos' semen as his severed testicles touch the sea and embodies abundant sexuality, love and procreation; men are fashioned from clay by Prometheus and brought to life by Zeus and Athena, becoming mortal beings with the capacity for reason and forethought. To be born is to enter a phenomenological field, but *how* one is born predetermines the way the subject is positioned into this phenomenological field and in relation to other subjects. In *The Bacchae*, the specificity of Dionysus' birth provides a rich (counter-)material that adds a further layer of complexity to the understanding of his place relative to the Symbolic, and, by extension, of the place of the male imaginary relative to its relationship with the mother and subjectification.

¹⁶⁶ Penelope Deutscher "The Only Diabolical Thing about Women...": Luce Irigaray on Divinity." *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994):92.

To understand why Dionysus can be read as a symptom of the repression of the mother, it is helpful to turn to the theories of Melanie Klein. Klein returns to the image of the mother and gives her a voice, different and almost always incongruent with that of the Father. Klein's work exposes the mother as a potent, violent structure that threatens the child through her power to annihilate. Klein both hints at the structuring power of the mother, and gives convincing arguments as to why it is imperative for the safety of the male imaginary that the figure of the mother be excluded from the Symbolic. Klein makes a strong argument for regarding the mother as one of the quintessential monstrous figures, hence her exclusion as a structuring presence in the psychic life of the subject.

Klein's theory of subjectification

Klein approaches the formation of monstrosity through the structural construction of the subject and identifies envy as one of the main drives in the formation of the subject. To Klein, the care and nourishment provided by the mother (the breast), give rise to two conflicting emotions in the newborn: gratitude and hostility. If gratitude is connected to the satiety that comes after feeding, hostility stems from realising that the breast is separate from the baby, and the source of food/pleasure is external and unreachable. As the baby is aware from birth of its instinct for death, the ego employs all available means to ward off demise, which translates into a raging, primitive hatred directed at its main caregiver: the mother. Klein relates this hostility to envy, which is constitutional in the life of the infant and occurs developmentally before the formation of the ego.

Envy, the derivative of the Death Drive or its psychic form, becomes essential in the formation of the psyche and lays the foundation for what we later call aggression (although the latter can be sexualised), both intra-subjective and against the Other. Envy seeks to destroy, to spoil and poison a good object to achieve enjoyment; it is not guided by reason and is aroused by the very existence of the object. To Klein, the breast can arouse envy in the infant in two ways: through the enjoyment the infant experiences when suckling at the breast (gratification), which testifies to the object's elusive plenty; and through the frustration experienced when hungry, perceived as a denial of gratification caused by the object enjoying its own richness.

The relationship between envy and the breast is unilateral, and plays a part as important in the development of psychic structures as the pleasure-seeking dimension of the id. To Klein, the subject strives towards both pleasure and destruction, which

occupy crucial roles in the shaping of the psyche.¹⁶⁷ Unlike Freud, Klein proposes that destructiveness is the first driver of the subject, not pleasure, and re-reads the birth of psychic structures through the prism of the mother, whom she takes to be the catalyst for the genesis of the ego and superego. Klein concludes that the foundation of subjectivity lies in the infant's envy for the breast and its violent phantasies of destroying it, hinting at the structuring role of the mother and giving it developmental primacy over that of the Father.

As envy is fundamentally destructive but crucial to the baby, the internalisation of the image of the mother will necessarily incorporate this residue as intra-subjective aggression, leading to the splitting of the object into the good and bad breast. The process is concomitant with the infant occupying the paranoid-schizoid position, a period of (psychotic) oscillation between pleasure and violence, between the love for the good breast and the hatred for the bad one. The guilt inherent in enacting, even if only in phantasy, destructive violence onto the breast generates splitting, which presupposes the internalisation of both the nourishing and persecutory aspects of the maternal object and results in a primitive form of superego. As it stems from the internalisation of the child's own violent tendencies, the Kleinian superego is persecutory in nature and an essential trait of the paranoid-schizoid position. The paranoid aspect will become manifest as the paralysing fear of being devoured by the monstrous mother, while the schizoid aspect will consist of the defence mechanism that splitting provides, meant to ward off anxiety and fear. In normal development, this position is followed by the depressive position, when the infant realizes the two 'breasts' are aspects of the same object and is plagued by guilt for the violence inflicted on the bad breast. The two phases are *positions*, meaning the subject oscillates between the more stable depressive and the split paranoid-schizoid positions throughout adult life.

A point of contention in Klein's and Freud's theories is the superego: while Freud regards the superego as a result of the internalisation of the Father, Klein argues that this sophisticated psychic structure can be organised around the mother. The Kleinian superego is based on the internalisation of the mother, which the male imaginary ejects from phallic social structures. As a result, clinging onto the maternal superego in a space dominated by the male imaginary (as is the case of Dionysus, as he has not been Symbolised into the paternal rule) necessarily threatens the dissolution of the

¹⁶⁷ It is true that Freud identifies the existence of two drives and moves towards incorporating both in the structure of the psyche with the theorisation of the death drive; Klein herself to some extent relates envy to the death drive. However, it is Klein that explains the part this violent tendency plays in the structuring of the psyche, and integrates it with the pleasure-seeking dimension from early infancy.

male imaginary, and, implicitly, of the limits of selfhood, as it implies bringing an unrepresentable image in the realm of representation.

When translating the non-Symbolic subject in Kleinian terms, envy appears to be the quintessential trait of the subject, a type of catalytic violence that propels the infant into subjecthood and opens the way for experiencing guilt. If both the newborn and the adult subject can experience envy, then envy, in its primal form, exists throughout adult life as an underlying presence, even after accepting the paternal rule as law and excluding the mother from the space of representation. As a primordial emotion, envy is a destructive force that attacks everything *good* as soon as it realises it lies outside the subject, and an emotion that the non-Symbolic subject will experience.

Nonetheless, the understanding that, through envy, everything good is attacked can only be a retrospective understanding, from a post-oedipal, Symbolic position. If quantifying moral judgement is a product of Symbolisation (and possible only with the internalisation of the Father and the creation of the superego), the violence against the (m)other, the hatred for the breast, the splitting of the breast in good and bad parts can be neither moral or immoral, good or bad. They *are*, as they take place (i.e.: are carried forward) post subjectification, into the type of organisation that allows for the existence of a transcendental ego, but are outside any possibility for moral judgement.¹⁶⁸

From this, we can infer that, if guilt followed by the desire for reparation is possible only with the coming into being of the superego, then this type of guilt can only exist in the Symbolic. This means that the depressive position can *only* exist in the Symbolic, and as such is closed to the non-Symbolic subject, who must be structurally incapable of experiencing the necessity for reparation.¹⁶⁹ Since qualitative judgements are only possible with the appearance of a system capable of understanding morality, it also follows that neuroses are a Symbolic product.

Like neurosis, splitting cannot *be de facto* paranoid or schizoid, but only apprehended as such retrospectively, from a Symbolic viewpoint. In other words, both neurosis and psychosis are products of the Symbolic, as the process of splitting requires an object (a sign) to split. In the absence of a register capable of containing signs, the sign itself cannot exist in a form that allows splitting. This raises the question as to whether psychotic behaviour can be experienced in the pre-Symbolic; I would argue that whatever symptoms mimic psychotic ones outside the Symbolic require different

¹⁶⁸ I am, at this point, translating Kleinian theory in a Lacanian framework; this move is not without its difficulties, and I will return to my reasoning for holding Klein and Lacan together (and the way I propose to do so) later in this chapter.

¹⁶⁹ Dorothy Dinnerstein makes a similar point when arguing that the basis of the psychic organisation of the child is laid by the relation the child develops with the mother. If we consider neuroses are possible only after the apparition of the superego, then the relation with the mother up to that point is essentially conflict-free. Dinnerstein, *The rocking of the cradle and the ruling of the world*, (London: Souvenir Press, 1978), 34.

theoretical and structural leverage to be unpacked, and cannot be labelled 'psychotic' within a system that does not employ the same frame of reference. The non-Symbolic subject's capacity for aggression and pleasure, for violence and transcendental reasoning are never incongruent with one another, and, as a result, never in need of repression; they coexist smoothly, and do not lead to neurosis or psychosis until *after* the internalization of the father-figure and the transition into patriarchal organisation.

This prompts an interesting question regarding the ability of the non-Symbolic subject to make a qualitative judgement: we could argue the non-Symbolic subject is neither solely rational in decision-making, although capable of sophisticated reasoning, nor solely instinctual, although capable of experiencing emotions. This leaves us to conclude that some form of qualitative judgement is possible for the non-Symbolic subject, one that is not *moral*, as it does not meet the Other's need for recognition, or *immoral*, as it does not inflict on the Other violence that is unpalatable to the non-Symbolic subject's frame of reference. It is *amoral* as it is constituted subjectively, from a position where narcissistic cathexes are impossible as the Father has not been internalised, and no typology can be replicated. The image of the mother, although internalised by the infant, is equally unsuitable, as it would imply replicating an unrepresentable image in a Symbolic setting, which would invariably lead to the unravelling of the Symbolic. The non-Symbolic subject is not, therefore, operating within the constraints of either a positive or a negative appreciation of emotions; the aggression and gratification it seeks are neither good nor bad. If any type of qualitative analysis of these tendencies, particularly aggression, is possible, then it is nothing more (or less) than a defence mechanism: in destroying the object, violence successfully keeps at bay the envy the distance of the object creates, and in so doing the ego protects itself.

In fact, if we argue that issues of splitting, repression and oscillation only arise after the internalisation of the father-figure, and that the organisation of the psyche around the figure of the mother is more-or-less smooth (albeit fraught with tension and fear of disintegration), then a stronger point can be made: that the oedipal stage does not solely serve to create a triangular structure with the introduction of the father, but to overwrite existing psychic structures. Once the patriarchal rule has (partially) overwritten the maternal one and translated psychic structures into structures that are organised around the phallus, the mother is erased from the picture. The sophisticated psychic structures with which the child entered life, organised around the mother, have now been transposed into the Symbolic, and reinterpreted so as to support and perpetuate the male imaginary.

The question that arises is whether these new structures can fully overwrite existent ones. I argue that they cannot. Up to this point, I have analysed the functioning of psychic structures from the perspective of the phallic rule, and have found, especially when using the figure of Dionysus as a model, that tension does arise, particularly in the presence of elements that do not pertain exclusively to the Symbolic. When combining this idea with Klein's theories, it becomes possible to argue for the existence of two registers of psychic organisation—one created around the mother, and one around the Father as structuring elements—that clash in the moment of the oedipal crisis, and exist concomitantly throughout the infant's life. Yet I do not wish to imply that both registers are equal, despite the fact that the two drives that prompt their emergence are. On the contrary, it seems that the register created with the mother as a structuring element in mind and prompted by envy or the drive towards destructiveness, is forced into submission and (almost) entirely incorporated by the one created by the pleasure drive, with the Father as the structuring element. It is precisely this unevenness at the core of psychic organisation, the over-writing of the mother and her complete incorporation by the father (as shown in the myth of Metis), that gives rise to violent clashes between registers. If the structuring of the psyche depends on both life and death instincts, then attempting to give one primacy over the other is always an ill-fated attempt, as it inevitably generates intra-subjective tension and oscillation between the two.

Accounts of subjectification: Klein and Lacan

In Chapter 1, I gave a (Lacanian) account of subjectification and presented the emergence of the subject from a phallogocentric perspective; above, I proposed a Kleinian reading to discuss the transformations that occur in the infant as a result of the mother's structuring capacity and inserted Kleinian concepts in a Lacanian framework. There is tension between Klein and Lacan, and it is important to explain how I use their ideas in this thesis, as it is through theoretical abstraction that we can uncover the theoretical space for the development of alternative forms of subjectification.

I employ Lacan's theoretical body as the structural framework into which various psychoanalytic theories can be fitted. The reason for this is the exceptionally strict definition of structure Lacan uses, particularly in relation to the structuring quality of language and the implications this has for the project of the non-Symbolic subject. When understanding the Lacanian framework as the type of structure that enables a certain organisation of the psyche, it becomes more evident how and why the non-

Symbolic subject acts as a disruptive presence and cannot exist in the (Lacanian) structure.

In “Of Structure as the Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever”, Lacan argues for the primacy of structure in the organisation of the unconscious. The unconscious, he explains, is structured like a language (*langue*) by the materiality of words themselves. The linguistic structure of the unconscious becomes useful when subjects interact with each other: this interaction is never conducted between subjects, but following a linguistic structure, between subjects and signifiers. The act of constituting meaning within the Symbolic is always closely connected to the type of linguistic relation subjects have with signifiers around them, and to the self-representation of the subject, also intrinsically linked to unconscious linguistic structures.

Lacan understands structure as the condition for the existence of the Symbolic subject. Interestingly, he refers to Dasein as a definition of the subject, which suggests he positions the subject in a phenomenological field. The phenomenological field of the Dasein is constituted through the subject’s interaction with the environment around him: the phenomenological field of the subject appears through “thoughts thinking thoughts”, but is mediated by the existence of an unconscious structure that enables the connections between signifiers that, in turn, result in thoughts thinking thoughts.¹⁷⁰ It is interesting that Lacan refuses to refer to the language of the unconscious as a meta-language as this points to a rather different understanding of the structure of the unconscious; in calling it a *langue*, Lacan suggests not a meta-structure, but an *underlying* structure, common to all thinking subjects, that enables their positioning as subjects in the Symbolic.

From this perspective, Lacan is making a bold universal claim, and argues that for the subject to exist, they must go through a structuring process. In a phallogocentric psychoanalytic picture, the element that prompts and ensures the process of structuring is complete is the phallus, and, at a linguistic level, the Name of the Father. In the course of the oedipal stage, the infant is separated from the mother by the intervention of the Father. As André Green argues, this separation takes the form of bloody mutilation, of the threat of castration, and is final, in the sense that any attempt to go against the established structures threatens disintegration and the loss of the self.

¹⁷⁰ “When I prepared this little talk for you, it was early in the morning. I could see Baltimore through the window and it was a very interesting moment because it was not quite daylight and a neon sign indicated to me every minute the change of time, and naturally there was heavy traffic and I remarked to myself that exactly all that I could see, except for some trees in the distance, was the result of thoughts actively thinking thoughts, where the function played by the subjects was not completely obvious. In any case the so-called Dasein as a definition of the subject, was there in this rather intermittent or fading spectator. The best image to sum up the unconscious is Baltimore in the early morning.” Lacan, “Of Structure as the Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever”.

By this token, the only influence in the existence of the infant that can have structuring power is the Father, as he sets the structure in place. So far, the argument I make is orthodox Lacanian; but it is important to also interrogate what 'structure' means, and what it is for an object to have structuring power.

Lacan introduces the idea of structure as not referring to a unity and proposes the subject need not be a Gestalt subject to be structured. On the contrary, he argues that no subject is a unity, but a plurality. The subject, he explains, is constituted through repetition: it repeats itself to constitute itself, but only one such repetition is needed for self-constitution to be precipitated. The repetition is not of sameness, but of an unconscious 'mark', which opens the possibility for the initial subjecthood to be repeated. Yet, crucially, the subsequent repetitions are not identical to the original subject, but only related to it through their sharing of the same *mark*. The mark because of which the repetition of the initial subject becomes possible for subsequent subjects must necessarily have vague, non-discernible traits, so that it effectively becomes a mark of sameness, a common denominator between subjects. Through the repetition of a generic, undefined self, the initial subject is lost, therefore making each subsequent subject effectively a repetition of a lost object.¹⁷¹

In the Lacanian picture, the subject is always divided, and always caught in a web of signifiers (the Others) that can articulate their meaning based on a similar trait, a mark, that they share with the subject. At this point, Lacan goes one step further and argues that the same structure we see in the creation of a subject, the repetition based on the existence of a mark, can be seen in language, in the repetition of signifiers. The paradox becomes clear: both the subject and language are created through repetition, through an overabundance of signifiers that are repeated and, with every repetition, slightly modified. And yet, the essence of the subject, and that of language, is loss: in the plenitude of repetition, the one element that cannot be represented or captured is the original (lost) object. The subject becomes "the introduction of a loss in reality", which, however, "nothing can introduce...since by status reality is as full as possible." This depleted, "fading subject yearns to find itself again by means of some sort of encounter with this miraculous thing defined by the *fantasm*", Lacan writes, and is sustained in this endeavour "by...the lost object."¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ "The mark has the effect of rubbing out the difference, and this is the key to what happens to the subject, the unconscious subject in the repetition; because you know that this subject repeats something peculiarly significant, the subject is here, for instance, in this obscure thing that we call in some cases trauma, or exquisite pleasure. What happens? If the "thing" exists in this symbolic structure, if this unitary trait is decisive, the trait of the sameness is here. In order that the "thing" which is sought be here in you, it is necessary that the first trait be rubbed out because the trait itself is a modification. It is the taking away of all difference, and in this case, without the trait, the first "thing:" is simply lost." Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

The argument here is that the subject seeks to recapture the initial self, which cannot become part of a structure, perhaps in a search like the one for the originary. However, the subject is not looking for a point in history, not even in the history of the subject himself, but for an irrecoverable 'entity' that does not make it into the structure of which history is part—he is looking for the original subject that must be repeated for subjecthood within the Symbolic to be possible, the subject that nonetheless must remain lost for the Symbolic itself to exist. Lacan pinpoints the subject to an existence within a structure (defined by his three registers), but, I would suggest, does not make a definitive argument that the entirety of the subject's existence lies within the structure. He leaves an important aspect unanalysed, the original lost subject, and does not pay much attention to the way the infant becomes part of a structure.¹⁷³ Lacan offers a compelling (and convoluted) explanation for the existence of Dasein, but does not go beyond (or before) Dasein itself. This means that the structure Lacan identifies does not extend to the entire existence of the subject, but only to a part of it—the phenomenological field, that in which Dasein exists, and that which Lacan defines in terms of the three registers. Even though the Real refers to something which is outside the reach of the subject and serves to destabilise it, it is nonetheless part of the phenomenological field, as the classification itself (i.e. the Real as a register of abjection) can only be made retrospectively, from within the phenomenological field. To put it otherwise, the Real can only threaten the subject once there is a subject that lives outside it. The links between the structures that the subject develops once it becomes part of the phenomenological field (i.e.: the unconscious, the superego, etc.) follow the same structure—that of a language. The linguistic structure is not only reflected in the relations that form between subjects in the phenomenological field, but also underpins the structure of the field itself, by being embedded into the unconscious. The subject's role in defining (and enabling the existence of) the phenomenological field means that it encompasses all three registers, which are named from within this field.

From the Lacanian perspective, therefore, the subject exists in a phenomenological field, which is governed by a strict linguistic structure that permeates all strata of the field—from the subject's unconscious, to the relations between subjects and the way subjects constitute themselves and meaning. Following this thread, we notice an interdependence between the unconscious, language, the subjects' livelihoods (the way subjects relate to each other) and the phenomenological field. This interdependence is not meant to suggest that the linguistic structure is the condition of possibility for the existence of the subject, nor that the phenomenological field is the

¹⁷³ By 'the lost subject' I do not refer to the existence of the infant at birth, as I do not wish to suggest the infant is *born* with a transcendental ego—although being born is a condition for possibility for a transcendental ego to emerge. Rather, I propose that the infant *develops* into a subject, and does so before being forced into (Symbolic) structures.

condition of possibility for the existence of language. Rather, it shows that the subjects' inner life, language itself and the subjects' activity are quasi-transcendental elements that shape the phenomenological field to the same extent that they are dependent on it to exist. In other words, the structure of the phenomenological field is dependent on the perpetuation of the quasi-transcendental elements, which, in turn, can only be perpetuated within said phenomenological field. The relationship is not one of dependence, but of interdependence; it is fluid, not static, and in its fluidity it allows the subject to develop, at least to the extent permitted by the fading of the mark.

In this structure, the Father acts as a structuring presence. The neurotic phantasy produced by the subject's imagination sees him not as an already castrated presence, but as a threatening figure that both separates the child from the mother (castrating the child), and completes the child's transition to the structure of the phenomenological field. What I am interested in examining, however, is what happens to the subject *before* it enters the structure of the phenomenological field and, more importantly, if and to what degree the mother acts as a structuring presence. It is important to consider the theoretical implications of the definition of structure when discussing subjectification, and the extent to which the Lacanian structures (Real, Imaginary, Symbolic) encompass the totality of subjective experience. A traditional view would argue that they do, and that no subjectivity other than the phallic one is possible within them; however, I seek to demonstrate that the Lacanian structures exist within a phenomenological field in which they manifest as conditions of possibility for the existence of the phallic subject, but that the phenomenological field allows for the development of a plurality of modes of subjectification—including a form of Being structured around the mother. Through the non-Symbolic subject, we can begin to explore the phenomenological field and probe the permeability of the male imaginary and of Lacanian structures (as emanations of the male imaginary)—and one of the first steps in this direction is to unpack the function of the mother.

According to Green, the separation from the mother (the withdrawal of the breast) is sterile and cannot have structuring capacity. As it is not bloody, it is more of a gradual retreat, subject to (potential) reappearance. Structures and boundaries, it would seem, can only be put in place by castration and death, and the loss of the breast does not qualify for the task. In other words, what lies outside the Symbolic stays outside, and plays no part in the structuring of the infant in line with the requirements of the Symbolic. By virtue of its being on the fringes of structure, the breast, or the mother as the object with which the baby forms a connection before it is Symbolised, does not play the same role as the Father. As an element with structuring power, the Father

exists always already in the Symbolic, and severs the ties of the subject with that which is not structured—the lost subject.

Yet, by following the thought of Klein, we may still be able to distil the way the mother is, in fact, a structuring presence. Klein's thought differs from Lacan's, and the greatest difference appears to lie in the locus of each thinker's theories. If Lacan's argument is a top down one (or bottom-up, given that he departs from the structure of the unconscious), Klein's deals more with the behaviours of the phenomenological field and of the subject that exists in it. By concentrating on the early stages of development, Klein trespasses the boundaries of the phenomenological field, and moves into the pre-structural, into that which is not yet governed by linguistic structures. In so doing, she lays the foundation for discussing the existence of the non-Symbolic subject (the lost subject, to some extent, although I am not trying to suggest the non-Symbolic subject can be reduced to the *petit objet a*) in not entirely uncharted territory.

On the contrary, rather than considering the pre-structured to be uncharted, Klein offers an important insight into the influence exerted by the mother on the non-Symbolic subject, and opens the way for arguing that the mother is a structuring presence in the sense that she enables the entry of the non-Symbolic subject into the Symbolic. In other words, Klein shows why and how the relationship with the mother is the condition of possibility for the existence of the subject by delving into the physicality of the mother-child relation. There are tensions between Klein and Lacan, and reading Klein through Lacan (or vice versa) is bound to be fraught with tension—especially as, while Lacan read Klein, it is unlikely she read him; yet what I propose is, firstly, that tension arises in the area where their theories overlap, that is, in the phenomenological field, and, secondly, that Lacan and Klein can be held together when one uses their understanding of structure.

Thus, firstly, I argue that the tension between Klein and Lacan manifests itself most poignantly within the phenomenological field, that is, once the subject has been through the process of subjectification and has been irreconcilably separated from the mother. However, I am more concerned with the Kleinian take on the relationship between the mother and the infant in the monadic, and later dyadic stage of mother-child development; I therefore analyse what happens to the subject after it becomes an ontological subject, but before it is absorbed into Symbolic norms—a stage that I argue is occupied by the non-Symbolic subject.

Secondly, I propose that understanding Klein in a Lacanian structural framework is not necessarily impossible, as the structures they propose operate at different levels. While Kleinian structures refer more to functions of the psyche (e.g.: the superego), Lacanian

structures deal with universal modes of organisation that depend more on quasi-transcendental elements than on the on-going development of the baby. While both argue for the primacy of the subject and seem to avoid making top-down claims, Kleinian structures appear to operate from within, while Lacanian ones from without. By this token, reading the mother as having structuring capacity from a Kleinian perspective would entail reading her as a *sine-qua-non* condition for the organisation of the infant's psyche in a way that allows future integration in a Lacanian structure. The mother's structuring of the baby's psyche becomes a form of enabling the development of the functions that allow the subject to become integrated in the Symbolic.

By using a Kleinian approach, I look at the (allegedly) unstructured period of the psyche (the non-Symbolic subject) and understand what happens to the non-Symbolic subject once it effects the transition to structure. More specifically, I am interested in whether the non-Symbolic subject can be regarded as the lost subject, and, if so, whether this subject is, indeed, lost. My purpose in analysing the figure of the mother, however, is to also explore the idea that the mother has structuring capacity (although this capacity for embedding structure into the infant will not be understood in a Lacanian way), and that she relates to both non-Symbolic and Symbolised subjects.

The mother and the non-Symbolic subject

The relationship the non-Symbolic subject has with the mother will be radically different from that of the 'normal' subject; as one of the characteristics of the non-Symbolic subject is unusual parentage, it will implicitly lack the initial object-relation elements that appear in regular development. More specifically, the non-Symbolic subject enters the Symbolic in an unconventional way, as existing always-already in the midst of it, never fully pertaining, but moving freely between the Symbolic and the Real, as a transcendental subject not yet habituated into phallic norms. We have already established that the non-Symbolic subject lacks traditional Symbolic structures, such as a (phallic) superego, as it has not undergone the oedipal crisis and the internalisation of the paternal figure, but its unusual parentage also has repercussions on its relationship with the mother. Since the non-Symbolic subject exists at the height of the subject's independence, as a transcendental subject for whom the laxity of the boundaries between Real and Symbolic means it can come as close as possible to the omnipotence of the Imaginary, it follows that the type of bond it has with the mother lacks the persecutory nature of a typical (Kleinian) bond. In lacking a phallic superego, the non-Symbolic subject can bypass the distress its own inadequacy as a subject causes when compared to its ego-ideal inherent in the male subject position. The

relation of the non-Symbolic subject with its ego-ideal is more or less non-existent, in the sense that the non-Symbolic subject has no need to relate to a hierarchically superior ideal and an inferior locus of lack to define itself; thus, the sudden disappearance of the mother cannot, by definition, cause the same level of distress as it does in the case of a subject habituated in the patriarchal.

It is important to explore the relation of the subject to the (male) ego-ideal to understand the distance between the non-Symbolic subject and the mother. The relation of the subject to the ego-ideal in patriarchy is essentially, as Irigaray argues, the relation between man and God, a relation in which the woman is relegated to an inferior position. In *Divine Women*, Irigaray shows it is impossible for women to establish an alternative to patriarchy in the absence of a female divinity to which they can relate, in a comparable (albeit dissimilar) fashion to the way men relate to their God ego-ideal. "If women have no God, they are unable either to communicate or commune with one another." In the absence of a goddess in her image, "she [woman] cannot establish her subjectivity",¹⁷⁴ which makes it impossible for women to become Symbolised in language. Irigaray correlates the absence of female identity and the absence of a female deity in Western culture: it is due to the existence of a male God, she explains, that man could define his identity and exist; on the other hand, the absence of a female divinity contributes to "the atrophied state of women's identity, subjectivity and community".¹⁷⁵

To provide leverage for women, Irigaray attempts to find a counterpart onto which the creation of feminine identity can rest and argues that one can trace throughout cultural history both the representation of women as lack, and the auto-destabilization that this representation entails. Like the man/woman binary, the man/God binary also implies an essential excess in femininity that is crucial for the self-definition of man. Thus, the presence of a male deity becomes of paramount importance and the 'ideal ego' in male Western culture. If the woman comes to represent the baseness of human nature, the sensuousness from which man must distance himself, God comes to symbolise noble pursuits, reason, and the cultural horizon of the male. The image of the male of patriarchy rests, on the one hand, on the image of God, and, on the other, on the that of the woman. And yet the image of God, Irigaray argues, represents an important 'blind spot' in consciousness, which attempts to efface the fact that man falls short of the divine potential of his ideal ego. Man regards God as a guarantor of masculinity, yet

¹⁷⁴ Irigaray and Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, 63.

¹⁷⁵ Deutscher, "Luce Irigaray on Divinity", 92. There are feminine aspects of God as well, and, indeed, female divine figures – Irigaray herself explores at length the relation with the Virgin Mary in Christian tradition. The point here, however, is to do with the hierarchical relation with (the male, Christian) God, which, Irigaray argues, should not be replicated in a relationship with a feminine divinity.

remains oblivious to the way he differs from this divine ego-ideal, a difference which severs him from God. The divine ego-ideal is so distinct from man that it cannot be grasped. Thus, man needs femininity as a subservient ego by contrast to which he can hallucinate himself closer to God than he can ever be. Both God and the women are 'props' for the male identity, in whose absence the male imaginary would come undone. In the context of man/God/woman being instrumental for self-definition, another interesting question arises regarding the relationship between the three terms. Irigaray does not address divinity in the context of the ancient Greek world, but from a contemporary (Christian) perspective. I contextualise her theory in the space created by *The Bacchae* not to suggest that patriarchal and religious hierarchical structures are universal, but to demonstrate a contemporary rereading of the play would situate subjects in a similar position relative to divinity in the play as if it were a contemporary male God.

The idea of 'coming undone' is especially important, as it is precisely the process we witness in *The Bacchae*: modern audiences can detect in the events that culminate in the murder of Pentheus the contemporary loss of religious devotion and dissolution of the notion of divinity, and the failure of the lower form of the binary (women) to remain within the confines of their roles. Throughout my discussion of divinity, I explore the part divinity plays (or can play) in the lives of modern subjects; I refer to divinity in *The Bacchae* not to contrast ancient and contemporary forms of worship, but to interrogate the mythical aspects that can be appropriated for contemporary use in discussions of subjectification. For the fabric of the male imaginary to unravel, what is needed is a direct link between male divinity (in this case, symbolised by the son of Zeus, Dionysus) and women, which precipitates the manifestation of womanly excess (also represented, to an extent, by Dionysus). The destabilization of the props that hold male identity together is catastrophic.

To Irigaray, the schism between man and God is one man brought onto himself, through the dissociation from the figure of God in religion: in situating himself as God's Other, man has severed all links with his ideal ego, and has downgraded himself in the man/God hierarchy. For femininity, the impact is profound: not only do women occupy a secondary role in relation to men, in virtue of their being the Other from which men must distance themselves, they also occupy a tertiary role in relation to God, by becoming the Other to God's Other. The effect this has on contemporary female subjectivity is significant, as it makes it nearly impossible to unearth it from under successive layers of cultural cover-ups: female identity is excluded from language, women occupy a tertiary position in relation to God, the role of the mother is obliterated from culture, and female drives (particularly the female death drive) are not Symbolised

in the phallogocentric society. And yet, the silencing of female subjectivity through successive renditions of oedipal structures is only fragile, as the edifice of phallogocentrism is founded on the murder of the mother. By the token of deconstructionism, it is precisely the murdered (silent/absent/unnamed) mother that can unravel the male imaginary.

By distancing itself from the phallic ego-ideal, the non-Symbolic subject becomes somewhat independent, and needs no (m)Other to exist in a tertiary relation with the aforementioned ego-ideal. When reading Dionysus from a Kleinian/Irigarayan perspective, it is easier to understand the structures around which his psyche is organised if we consider the figure of the mother an element that has structuring power. When seen from the mother's viewpoint, the Dionysian picture allows the reader to identify more readily the tropes that are *omitted* from *The Bacchae*. There are at least two ways of reading the play (and, perhaps, any Greek tragedy) in the current socio-historical setting: from the perspective of the male imaginary, whilst bearing the paternal law in mind, and from the perspective of the mother. In Chapter 2, I employed a phallic reading that interprets Dionysus as a disruptive element, a type of subjectivity that must be excluded from the Symbolic for rationality and order to exist, and for the phallic rule to be perpetuated.

From a Kleinian framework, however, it becomes possible to explain how the psyche of the infant is organised around the mother. It is for this reason that Klein is radically different from Freud: she addresses different underlying phantasies that do not perpetuate and reinforce the phallic law. Through her theories, the mother becomes a presence, not an absence, and is exposed as a potent, violent structure that threatens the child's livelihood. The mother is revealed as monstrous, and the reason for her obliteration is the threat to the infant's existence.

If we combine an Irigarayan reading with a Kleinian one, we could argue that the transition from seeing the mother as absence to understanding her as monstrous presence constitutes a reversal of roles in the hierarchy of the binary: the mother's (or silenced woman's) second rate status is not enough to keep her from upturning the phallogocentric order that had relegated her to an inferior position. The upturned binary shows that it is seldom as simple as a binary organisation: the deconstruction of the male imaginary does not occur simply as a reversal of roles in the father/mother or male/female binary; rather, the disavowal of the mother as an underlying thread becomes more visible with the reversal of the binary, making deconstruction inevitable. Yet this is not to say that the female voice did not exist before the reversal of the binary; on the contrary, is it because of its existence that the reversal became possible.

If we understand *The Bacchae* as a (mythical) cultural product that captures the male imaginary, and start from the idea that Western civilisation rests on the murder of the mother, then we should, theoretically, be able to use the play to understand the female difference that the male imaginary attempts to silence, and extrapolate this to a more generalised 'law', one that may better explain the reason behind the male imaginary's institutionalised rejection of the mother, as well as the reasons behind the formation of taboos around her body.¹⁷⁶

A good start is to look at how female desire is represented in the play: according to Irigaray, it is women's death drive in particular that has failed to be Symbolised, and which threatens destruction for both men and women. As Whitford explains, Irigaray fully understands the importance of the death drive, and ascribes to it the tendency towards sacrifice, crime and war. In the case of men, the death drive is Symbolised and allowed to take manifold forms, including, but not limited to, institutionalised violence, linguistic violence (in the form of refusing the subject position to the other sex), and any type of violence that rests on denying the Other liberty of expression. In the case of women, however, the death drive is not allowed to surface in the Symbolic, and is not tied to cultural practices.¹⁷⁷ The solution is not as simple as allowing female death drives to become Symbolised: in *The Bacchae* the cult of Dionysus does precisely this—it allows the manifestation of female *jouissance*, and does not impede the expression of female violence, even when it bursts through the fabric of the Symbolic and threatens the male imaginary. And yet the exercise fails: the expression of female drives leads to the collapse of the male imaginary and to the undoing of the phallogocentric social order, not to the acceptance of difference. This may be because, as Irigaray argues, women are unable to articulate their difference, and cannot present themselves as such. They are "torn between the sons and the fathers, the stake of sacrifice of disputes between men...fragmented into bits and pieces," and find it impossible to represent themselves other than as feminine-mothers, which is the male conception of women. Accepting the alternative, that motherhood is a facet of

¹⁷⁶ I here say more or less because generalising a law centred on the mother is not as easy as generalising one around the Father: female desires and drives, as Irigaray argues, are not Symbolised, and therefore any material that can be used to theorise a law must necessarily come in the form of slippages that seep through male-dominated language. The danger is that, if we try to put into language non-Symbolised drives, we may re-inscribe these into a (male) oedipal linguistic structure.

¹⁷⁷ As Whitford argues, it is important to read Irigaray as a rather pessimistic thinker, who surfaces in her critique of patriarchy, and as a constructive one, who envisions a harmonious future in which the death seeking male imaginary is revolutionised and bettered by the acceptance of women and of difference. "Irigaray's work", Whitford notes, "is at its best when these two elements are held together in tension. When one or the other – the pessimistic or the optimistic – gains the ascendant, the tension is lost, and the danger of ordinary banality is then never far away." Irigaray and Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, 12.

femininity, would entail the acceptance of archaic fears of castration and death: woman, to men, is “the heterogeneous other”.¹⁷⁸

The mother and the Symbolised subject

When reading *The Bacchae* with the possibility of the mother to structure the psychic life of the infant in mind, it becomes easier to interpret the clashes between the two cults (that for rationality, represented by Pentheus, and that for sensual frenzy, represented by Dionysus) as occurring between two psychic registers: one structured around the Father, and one around the mother.

The picture Klein presents of the development of the infant under the influence of the relation with the mother puts her in an unfavourable light, as the first monster of the child’s imagination; the ambivalent place the mother occupies elevates her to the status of an unmentionable trope, something beyond what is conceivable. In an argument that departs from Klein, Lacan places the mother, the Maternal thing, outside the limits of representation, reifying her status of monster. If, to Klein, the subject attempts to atone for the damage inflicted in phantasy onto the mother’s body, to Lacan the subject expels the mother from the space of representation, allowing her (and her body) to only inhabit the Real. This way, the mother becomes an outsider, lurking on the margins of the Symbolic as a presence that threatens to dissolve the boundaries of selfhood and re-assimilate the subject into the dyadic union, in an act of castration. Once absorbed, the subject is rendered powerless yet again, dependent on the mother for survival.

If we regard the mother as a truly monstrous figure, someone—or *something*—whose presence threatens not only the safety of the subject, but of the subject’s social order, then it follows that this monstrous presence should be ostracized to a liminal space, far from the subject himself. Yet, if we argue the monstrous mother is a structuring element that orchestrates the first psychic organisation of the subject, then we must concede that there exists common ground between the mother and the subject, like it does between the Father and the subject. Although not recognised as such, this common ground would account for the oscillation between the Symbolic and the Real and the pull of the abject. In short, we could argue for the existence of two (almost) fully formed registers, one centred on the mother, and the other on the Father, which split the subject, making his complete adherence to the phallic rule fraught with difficulty, be it in the form of a death drive, or, in its weaker guise, as repression and neurosis.

¹⁷⁸ Irigaray and Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, 27.

For this reason, I argue a reading from the perspective of a maternal structuring element is fruitful in *The Bacchae*: understanding the women in the play, and Dionysus himself through something akin to a maternal rule can reveal an attempt to recover the initial maternal figure through the characters of Agave and Dionysus. It can also shed light on how the non-Symbolic subject can function as a tool that hastens the unravelling of the patriarchal order, called for by the female/maternal imaginary.

In the play, we witness the destruction of a cultural order, catalysed by discordant elements; some, like Agave and the other Bacchantes, are dormant and await the proper impetus to awaken; others, such as Dionysus, are brought clandestinely into the Symbolic, and, once there, instil chaos through madness and confusion. Confusion plays a crucial part, and may provide the key to reading the plot from a non-phallic perspective. From the beginning, we see the fear of confusion as the most prevalent one, kept at bay through splitting in the paranoid-schizoid position. Pentheus, the pinnacle of rationality and the representative of the phallic rule, fears that the arrival of the stranger from Lydia may bring confusion between the socially acceptable and the taboo. Women, we understand as the play unravels, are caught in the spell of the stranger, and can no longer distinguish between the limits imposed on their prerogatives and their own (traditionally repressed) desires. The type of confusion Pentheus (i.e.: the male imaginary) fears most is that between identities, the dissolution of individuality and of subjecthood. To preserve these boundaries, which, from a Lacanian perspective, form the core of the Symbolic, Pentheus himself falls prey to the type of undifferentiation he seeks to avoid. Far from acting as the epitome of rationality, Pentheus adds another layer of sensual confusion when he spies on the women. His role and limits are tested, and, as his involvement with Dionysus increases, so does his willingness to push the boundaries of what is acceptable. Eventually, in his effort to preserve social norms, Pentheus breaks taboo (e.g.: by crossdressing) and forces social expectations onto others, distorting and perverting their original purpose, such as chaining the Bacchantes *for their safety*. The death of Pentheus is the point where it becomes clearest that the limits of subjecthood have become fluid: Pentheus is murdered by his own mother, who does not see him as human, but as an animal. She delights in hunting him and tearing him apart, completely oblivious to his individuality. Ultimately, Pentheus's fears become reality: as boundaries are dissolved, social norms are upturned, and the type of rationality that made the quintessence of the phallic rule becomes irrational. According to Butler, it is at points such as this, when tragedy occurs in the midst of a family and death is rendered unnatural because it comes as a result of breaking taboos (infanticide) that kin ties are exposed. I will return to the centrality of kinship later in this chapter, but I would like to note the place of the mother amid kin relations: Agave becomes the monstrous mother. Powerful and cruel, she is blind to

the child's individuality, and feels no remorse in annihilating it, absorbing it into herself. It seems as if Agave uses the confusion created in the dissolution of the boundaries to manifest her own (death) drive.

In the context of such a reading, it is imperative to identify where femininity, eruptions of non-phallic language that cannot be represented in the Symbolic, can be extracted from its phallic setting in *The Bacchae*. The plot of the play appears simple: tempted by a demigod (daimon), the women of Thebes become crazed, and in their madness, succumb to violence, orgiastic revels and irrational outbursts. Despite attempting to contain their madness and restore order, the leader of the city, Pentheus, is captured and killed by the women, an event presented by the demigod as the culmination of an orchestrated (albeit not entirely motivated) act of revenge. If we understand the women's madness as the only instance when femininity can seep through the fabric of the male Symbolic, Pentheus' attempts at restoring order become cover-ups of a clash between two registers. The madness of the Theban women and the events that follow their crazed lapses can be read as manifestations of repressed drives, which must find expression and surface as neurotic symptoms.

In a way, madness is in the play a way of *being woman*, similar to Irigaray's *parler femme* or Cixoux's *écriture féminine*. And yet, *The Bacchae* does not allow much space for female voices, especially when it comes to the voice of the Theban women. It is interesting that the Chorus of Bacchantes does have a voice, one that is on more than one occasion the voice of reason: it is the Chorus that draws the audience's attention to Dionysus' cunning, Cadmus' and Tiresias' political savvy and Pentheus' foolhardiness in challenging a god. The Chorus proves invaluable in transitioning between psychic registers (organised around the mother and the Father) and helping the audience perceive the switch between the two as between two different forms of organisation, not a transition from rationality to madness. And yet, the Chorus' advice is seldom heeded, and, like female speech, it ends up framing the male-dominated Symbolic. It is through silences and absences that female voices make themselves heard. If through speech, as Irigaray argues, one assumes the male subject position and disavows oneself of female identity or difference, silence becomes a form of resisting appropriation by the phallic, a refusal of being (re)inscribed into an oedipal (linguistic) structure and re-silenced.

The silence of the Theban women is, however, only pre-linguistic; it is not pre-verbal, and reminds one of the semiotic *chôra*,¹⁷⁹ of the state of undifferentiatedness that

¹⁷⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1982.

preceded the superimposition of oedipal structures onto language—the women of the play can only be confined to silence in the phallic system, but retain their voice outside it. It is their lack of speech, their stillness that draws men to them (Pentheus, the herdsmen) and marks their difference. They manifest themselves through dance, movement, song and shouts, and in so doing reject institutionalised language.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the women of the play is their lack of cooperation in upholding the fragile balance of the patriarchal system. Instead of *performing* their role of the binary, of acting as feminine mothers, they present the one aspect of their femininity that has remained un-Symbolised and cannot be contained by the Symbolic: their drives. In manifesting unbridled *jouissance*, sexual drives and violence, the women present themselves not as mothers, but as *women*, non-maternal and non-phallic. This hypostasis is particularly threatening to the male imaginary and cannot safely exist in the Symbolic. In presenting themselves as *women*, the maddened women go one step further in unravelling the fabric of the Symbolic, and identify with an image the male imaginary attempts to repress: that of the absent mother, who announces the annihilation of the baby and has separated herself from the infant, but only partially, always threatening to return.

It is interesting that the figure of this absent, beloved, yet destructive mother is not named: various translations refer to her by different names, as Kybele, Demeter or Rhea, or simply as the Mother, but we are never sure who the Mother is. The figures of these goddesses are, themselves, elusive, and appear in interchangeable guises, easily confused with one another, as well as with Aphrodite, Aphrodite of Mount Ida or Venus Barbata and the Queen-Bee or Bee Woman. It is fascinating to note that the older translations generally provide a name for this goddess, but one of the most recent translation (Carson's) refers to her simply as 'The Mother'. The avoidance of naming is, I would argue, a further thread that unravels in the fabric of the phallic subject. The failure of language-as-Dasein to *name* testifies to the subject's historicity and to the ever more pressing need to reform language and move beyond inert oedipal structures. Ultimately, the Mother's *real* identity is irrelevant (or uncapturable) for modern audiences; it is more important that her figure escapes definition, and helps revive ancient fears of castration and annihilation in the infant. That the Theban women identify with this divinity is, arguably, a step towards attaining a positive form of identification with a female identity, as Irigaray suggests in *Divine Women*.

The schism between man and God, and the identificatory function God serves in this relation, prompts Irigaray to conclude that some form of divinity is necessary for identification to be possible; for women to be able to create a sense of identity that is

independent of being the twice-mirrored Other of a patriarchal transcendental figure, a feminine divinity is needed. To prevent the feminine divinity from becoming a schism between women and God, like it has become for men, Irigaray proposes a divinity that dwells on the difference between men and women. Deutscher writes that “Transcendence would exist between men and women, rather than between human and divine,”¹⁸⁰ but highlights that Irigaray operates with more complex notions of ‘divinity’ and ‘transcendence’ than what we regularly mean by these terms. Thus, to argue that women need a form of feminine divinity to define themselves is not to say that women lack identity and that a goddess revered in the same way as the patriarchal God would help remedy this situation. Irigaray suggests that women’s identity rests in their difference, that female divinity *is* the idea of ‘woman-as-difference’, and that the ‘diabolical’ thing about women lies in regarding them as atrophy, as being vessels in which male identity can be shaped. To Irigaray, the idea of divinity is that of a vastly improved culture of sexual difference, in which the difference between sexed subjects is respected, and identity is not created through a hierarchy of the sexes. The divine becomes an aspirational ego-ideal, attainable through a process of becoming, and not something from which women are severed.

In the context of this understanding of divinity, we can formulate an ideal of human relations by saying that this ideal should resist appropriation. As Deutscher shows, the relationship between men, the patriarchal God and women simultaneously implies renunciation of identity and the appropriation of the Other to fill the lack created by the severance from God. Once man situates himself in opposition to his ego-ideal, as not-God, he both creates and rejects his identity, as aspiring-to-be- and never-to-be-God. In this context of failed identification, man needs woman as a negative specular image to situate himself (by contrast) closer to the unattainable ego ideal. This form of relating to one’s ego-ideal generates a spiral reaction, which is felt at the level of all human relations: the need to define others in relation to the self, as part of the self/non-self dyad, which follows naturally from self-definition as God/not-God and man/not-man. Consequently, all relations are redefined from the perspective of their impact on the self, and become exercises in possessing the Other, rather than understanding, accepting or relating to the Other.

The relations between men, women and God, as those between the mother, father and subject, are complex and essential in shaping the subject and culture. Yet, as I mentioned in earlier chapters, I do not wish to suggest that these positions (particularly that of the mother and the Father) should be occupied by one female or male person,

¹⁸⁰ Deutscher, “Luce Irigaray on Divinity”, 98.

as I do not argue that the process of subjectification is fixed and only possible in the nuclear family; rather, I suggest that subjectification is fluid, and sits in a nexus of relations between a plethora of elements, that may serve maternal or paternal functions for varying periods of time. The relation between the elements of this network and their relation to structures of power has been explored in an edifying way by Butler through her work on kinship; her theories illuminate tragedy through kinship (and kinship through tragedy), and look at the way kin relations link to the dissolution of the self. More importantly, Butler's work can bridge the seemingly irreconcilable theoretical gap between subjectification driven by the Father, which belongs to the Symbolic, and the subjectification centred on the mother, which sits squarely in the Real.

Kinship and tragedy

To Butler, the issue of kinship raises a critical question: whether kinship really works, and, if it does not, when and where it fails. Tragedy, she argues, allows us to interrogate the workings of kinship, as relationships most often presented as problematic in tragedy. Through 'kin relations' Butler refers to a particular "set of relationships of dependency" that regulate the way a subject orients himself towards life and death.¹⁸¹ Yet kin relations are confusing to subjects, and can be some of the relationships with the highest potential for strife, anguish and misunderstanding. In *The Bacchae*, the relations between those of the same blood are simultaneously those that ward off tragedy, by setting clear boundaries and power structures, and the relations that, through their strict delineations, set in motion the tragic course of events. The issue of recognition (or lack thereof) is interlinked with kin relations, and figures prominently in the process of subjectification: from its first months, the child is taught to recognise its parents, and is directed into appropriate forms of recognition by its main caregiver(s). The child is not yet allowed to question whether recognition in this form works, or whether it wishes it to work: questions that doubt the appurtenance to one's family can only arise later, once the proper way of recognising one's kin has been successfully embedded into the subject.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Butler, Judith. "Kinship Trouble in *The Bacchae*," 2017

¹⁸² "Kinship first gets established by someone else giving an authoritative narrative of the relationship, one that involves a form of instruction: "Say mama" or "papa" when a child starts sounding out what he's heard, and then some preliminary form of recognition takes place that starts to install kin relations in linguistic ones. Getting the sound right, directing it to the appropriate object is among the first forms kinship recognition takes. There is someone there who has been designated as kin. There is no way for an infant to evaluate the claim that this is your mother or your father; that emergence finds its way into the incipient moments of speech relying on directive methods, which are composed of sounding forms of address and naming stray objects – usually 'cat' and 'ball'." Ibid.

To recognise kin relations, then, is to become part of a complex system of reference that brings together not only family bonds, but also issues of legitimacy and social norms. Recognising one as one's mother also necessarily entails recognising oneself as a subject that is part of a web of socio-political relations and exists in a nexus of already-there concepts, such as that of 'family' or 'society'. Subversive forms of kinship also presuppose appurtenance to pre-defined categories, even if such categories are loose and meant to designate deviations from the norm.

To question kin relations is, therefore, to question established norms and categories, which transcend the life of the family and spill into transmissible categories and quasi-transcendental elements. The confusion of who one's kin is, and, especially, whether one's kin is animal or human, goes back to confusion relating to one's subjecthood and its limits. There is no kin category attached a priori to a person that designates said person into a mother or any other role, which makes confusion not an exception, but a defining rule of kinship. To be someone's kin, then, is to question whether you are that person's kin.

The problem with recognising one's kin, and the question this gives rise to in relation to doubting one's belonging to kin relations, leads us to an interesting aspect of the process of subjectification and its relation to recognition. If we accept that the child identifies with the image of the main caregiver, internalising it for future reference in the fashioning of one's own subjecthood, then recognition of one's kin should not be subject to doubt.¹⁸³ As lack of recognition does enter kin relations, it raises an interesting conundrum regarding the place of recognition in subjectification: if you internalise the image of your mother to become a subject, and are then unable to recognise your mother, you either did not internalise the image of your mother, or the person you fail to recognise is not your mother. The impossibility to recognise one's kin may be an instance of transference, in which misrecognition is directed at one's self: when I cannot recognise myself, I start doubting that you are my mother. This, in *The Bacchae*, is shown in the fascinating, albeit distressing scene at the end: in her madness, Agave identifies with the god and with animals, and no longer with herself. Her lack of self-recognition translates into her questioning the identity of her son. Misrecognition ends in death and despair.

As Butler shows, one of the defining characteristics of kin relations is the possibility of rupture due to the (temporary) impossibility to recognise one as kin. Yet if kinship regulates intimate intergenerational relations, its failure must be treated as subversive.

¹⁸³ This should also hold true in societies where the primary caregiver is not a blood relation of the infant; the infant should be able to recognise the caregiver as kin, testifying to the fact that kin relations are not reducible to blood ties.

This seems to be the case in *Antigone*, when kin relations are revealed to be interwoven with state relations and representative of the militarised state. By defying Creon's command, Antigone not only defies filial duty, but also acts against the decree of her sovereign, committing treason. In *Antigone*, kin relations are twisted, and in some sense Antigone can only show recognition towards her kin (her brother) by defying her uncle and dismissing her sister, and refusing to recognise Creon and Ismene as also her kin. Matters are further complicated by the fact that kin relations in *Antigone* double as political relations, and the site of kinship is, at the same time, a site of civil war.

Kinship represents a nexus of relations that is unique, and opens up the possibility for forms of rupture and dissent that would simply not exist were it not for the enabling existence of kinship. For example, familial crimes, such as matricide, infanticide and parricide only make sense in a context of kin relations. The heinous dimension of these crimes is such because they are interlinked with kinship. Paradoxically, the same site that enables crimes that become taboo to exist also enables society to exist, in a form that is recognisable precisely due to its affinity to kin relations. If kin relations are closely related to both social organisation and crimes within the family, kinship will also be implicated in crimes within society, and crimes concerning society will follow a similar structure to that governing kin relations.

In Greek tragedy, crimes that happen within the family permeate relations and are transmitted intergenerationally through kinship lines. Familial crimes designate a type of rupture that requires both perpetrator and victim to be related for the violence to be pervasive. In ancient tragedy we witness heinous, taboo crimes that culminate in the destruction of a nexus of kin relations and of society, and are somehow enabled by the same kin relations that are destroyed. In *The Bacchae*, the House of Cadmus falls, showing that it is not only the family that crumbles, but also sovereignty and the polis itself. The crimes that happen within the confines of kinship reverberate into society and are potentiated by their relation to kinship.

To imbue kinship with the power to govern the family and, indirectly, the state, we must regard it as a set of relations capable of organising relations across generations, regardless of how these relations are established, and whether they are legally binding or not. Yet this definition for kin relations, Butler argues, might be too idealised, and fail to recognise that kinship is defined not externally, but from within, by the way kin relations are practiced and enforced. The fluidity of kin relations means they cannot be considered binding, limited to human relations, or able to regulate these throughout time and space. Kin relations can encompass forms of attachment to animals, and can

endure once one is no longer alive, perhaps more strongly, since the kinship bond is no longer subjected to violence, or is only subjected to unilateral violence, inflicted by the living party.

We can therefore assert not only that kinship signifies much more than family ties, but that kin relations are permeable, and can stretch to accommodate human and non-human participants. Yet once one or more of the participants to these relations cease to exist, so does the fluid character of the relation; once a character is dead, the relation becomes fixed and subjects remaining participants to inescapable rigidity. To an extent, we can explain the threat of the figure of the mother precisely through its fixity: the mother's absence, indeterminate as it is, makes her role in kin relations static and potentiates her influence. In addition to the difficulty of defining what or who kin relations refer to, Butler argues it is difficult to differentiate between "family, kin, friendship, cross-species cohabitation and community, and even broader modes of belonging that provide some kind of provisional and iterable structure of intimate and social relations." The result is widespread confusion and disorientation "by virtue of the instability of the categories themselves."¹⁸⁴

This impossibility of differentiating brings us back to the initial question, of finding a defining trait of kinship, one that endures in the face of confusion with other modes of belonging, such as friendship. Butler uses the opaqueness of kinship to advance her argument that kin relations can only be known once they are breached, once violence affects the bonds to the point of making them visible again. The issue is that kin relations can, and sometimes do, become unknown, and need to be uncovered, exposed for what they are. Exposition is only possible through the breach of the relations themselves, one of the main lessons of Greek tragedy. The questions to ask, Butler argues, are:

"at what particular moments does someone become kin or is someone recognised to be kin? And at what point, and for what reason do they become unknown or unknowable as kin? Why is it that kin relations make them known precisely when they are less easily recognised or in the aftermath of not having been recognised at all?"¹⁸⁵

Although it is difficult to assign one definition to kin relations, it seems safe to say that the web of relations they form, and the utterances that exist in this web, echo through subjects' everyday lives, and impact on much more than just the subject himself. The influence of one's kin relations, whether immediate caregivers, partners or distant relatives, leaves a footprint on the subject's psychic life. Yet only in moments when

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

rupture is imminent do kin ties become evident: the desire to both love and harm another, to live with them or far from them, and the necessity to admit all ambivalent feelings hold true at the same time usually, Butler argues, designate one as kin.¹⁸⁶

Butler goes on to argue that the ambivalence one feels towards loved ones is symptomatic of kinship, and signals tension that exists within kinship bonds, and which needs to be 'set right' by means of a law. The implication of this claim is that laws and rules that govern kinship are always necessarily external to kinship itself, and seek belatedly to re-establish order in kin relations. Destabilising kin crimes, such as matricide, infanticide, parricide and incest, are not only enabled by the web of kin relations in which they exist, in the sense that they would not be designated as such had they occurred under different circumstances, but are also necessary for the law to have effect. For the incest prohibition to work, one needs incest to be a pervasive fear that permeates kin relations; it is only due to this pervasiveness that a law can exist.

And yet, as Butler shows, the fear of transgression is seldom enough to stop the transgression from happening, although, when it does happen, its effects are destructive enough to reassert the importance of the rule of law. Kinship relations "are from the start subject to...murderous confusion," which is why they can call for the enforcement of a rule of law.¹⁸⁷ Thus, in a myth such as the one of Oedipus, the problem is not that he is unable to recognise his mother and his father, but rather that what makes them recognisable as such is a desire for parricide and incest.

In Butler's analysis, *Oedipus* operates on two different levels: firstly, there is the parents' infanticidal wish, which makes Laius and Jocasta abandon Oedipus to die; secondly, there is the story of Oedipus' killing of a stranger, who also happens to be the king, and the act of wedding the former king's wife, common when a king is dethroned by another. The complication appears when the murder is exposed as parricide, and Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta as incest; this recognition does not *happen* to the characters, but is imposed on them from the outside, through an authoritative narrative that has the power to decide what the 'normal' course of events should be. Like the subject's entry into the Symbolic, Oedipus' life is ordered from without, by a third that imposes restrictions on the mother's body through bloody mutilation.

Oedipus is forced to rely on external narratives that govern the course of his life twice, once when he leaves Polybus and Merope's home, and once when he acknowledges

¹⁸⁶ "Kinship might arise at a moment when one feels acute forms of ambivalence such as "I cannot live without this person", and "I must absolutely live with this person", or "I must absolutely live without this person", and all of those being true at the same time. There is a good chance that person is your kin. Or "this person loves me madly, and so I will surely be killed by this person if I am killed by anyone at all." Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

his two crimes. On both occasions, the external narrative is needed to regulate entangled kin ties, and illuminate bonds that had been forgotten: firstly, Oedipus' parentage, unknowable because of his parents' attempted infanticide, and secondly, his acts of parricide and incest, overshadowed by his assumption of the throne along with the former king's possessions. It is interesting to note the double nature of sight, most evident in the impossibility to see what is in front of one's eyes, and the understanding that comes with blindness. Double sightedness also appears in *The Bacchae*, an aspect to which I will return in the following chapter. What is essential to recognise in the story of Oedipus is that he does not know his kin relations, because, if he had, he would also understand their violent dimension. If Oedipus had been raised by Laius and Jocasta knowing he was prohibited from killing his father and having sexual relations with his mother, perhaps tragedy would have been avoided, not because kinship lines were made clear from the beginning, but precisely because they remained untested. He might have then felt sexual desire towards a wet nurse, or some other form of caregiver, and might have experienced murderous thoughts against this nurse's partner. In such a case, however, these desires would not have been considered incestuous and parricidal, although, technically, Oedipus might have related to the nurse and her partner as if they were his mother and father. The same is true of Oedipus' relationship with Polybus and Merope: could we conceive of a version of the story where Oedipus were told he would feel incestuous desire towards his mother and experience murderous thoughts towards his father? And, if such were the case, would he recognise he feels these towards neither Merope nor Polybus, and thus conclude the authoritative narrative was false, or, on the contrary, conclude that Merope and Polybus are not his parents?

The authoritative narrative that reveals kin relations is needed in tragedies, as characters rely on external forces to understand events. In *Oedipus*, the drunken stranger gives a truncated version of an authoritative narrative that causes Oedipus to leave the safety of Merope and Polybus' home; at the end of the play Tiresias sheds light on the events, and shows how Laius "becomes the father at the moment of the murder" and how Jocasta "ascends to her maternal place at the moment at which a belated recognition is made," in so doing causing anguished pain and shame.¹⁸⁸ The belated recognition represents a tightening in the usually fluid web of kinship, as it signals a transgression that will be transmitted throughout all kin relations, as was the case with Polynices, Eteocles, Antigone and Ismene. In *The Bacchae*, the authoritative narrative, re-established at the end by Cadmus, brings to the fore the pervasive influence of kinship in the unfolding of the play, and establishes kin ties as quasi-

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

transcendental elements that regulate the lives of subjects, regardless of the ways in which their subjectivities were formed. In the following chapter, I will look at the way femininity appears in the play and will argue that the emergence of the non-Symbolic subject is symptomatic of the repression of the mother, perpetuated structurally through kin relations.

Summary of Chapter 3

In this chapter I have looked at a different account of subjectification, one that gives the mother more prominence in the psychic life of the infant, and have discussed the problematic nature of the mother's existence in the Symbolic, made difficult by her exclusion from the space of representation. Yet instead of concluding that her being theorised out of the Symbolic makes it impossible to argue for a form of subjectivity that goes beyond the oedipal, I have proposed that it is possible to theorise a new form of subjectification when operating with a particular understanding of structure. Using Butler's definition of kinship and its role in shaping the quasi-transcendental elements of the subject's lifeworld, I have shown we can bridge different models of subjectification and bring them together in the same theoretical framework and phenomenological field. Butler's theorisation of kin ties, especially their (potential) transcendence and prolonged influence, demonstrates how the subject continues to constitute himself after the period of subjectification is over, not around the Father as structuring element, but in a web of relations in which the mother and the Father play key parts, without being the sole actors. Kinship adds an important dimension to theories of subjectification, as its ties make up the condition of possibility for the existence of subjectivity. In the following chapters, I will consider the process of subjectification not as a developmental stage that exists in isolation, but as a multifaceted, fluid process that hinges on more than one structuring element and exists in a nexus of relations that qualify the subject's existence.

Chapter 4

Little women: femininity in The Bacchae

In Chapter 3, I have analysed the mother's tense existence in the Symbolic and have explored a different account of subjectification that gives her more prominence in the psychic life of the infant. In this chapter, I will look at the way femininity becomes manifest in *The Bacchae* and will attempt to distil the role of the mother in the play.

The mother-child dyad: Agave and Pentheus

When understood through the prism of Irigarayan divinity, as positive self-definition that need not 'absorb' the Other, the mother-child relationship in *The Bacchae* becomes doubly problematic. Part of the tragedy of the play lies in the fact that Agave unwittingly beheads her son and presents his head as a hunting trophy. The play's intense effect rests on the impact Agave's horrified awakening from her Bacchic revelry has on the audience, who may empathise with her impossibility of balancing love and maternal care with her duty towards the polis, especially when it conflicts with religious devotion. However, there is space to interpret Agave's impossible situation as the natural culmination of (failed) male self-definition: Agave's crime is the ideal form of 'love-as-possession' and self-definition as 'appropriation of the Other' advocated by patriarchy.

Agave's actions are directed by Dionysus and symbolise his revenge on Thebes for not acknowledging his divine status. Yet when understanding the relation between the god and the human from an Irigarayan perspective, it becomes clear that Agave acts in accordance with the place of women in the patriarchal system: as the male fails to recognise himself in the image of the god, the woman becomes a contrasting element that helps the male attain some form of agreeable self-definition. In this picture, the woman is doubly removed from the god, and must submit completely both to the god and to the male. In *The Bacchae*, Agave does just that: initially, she submits to Pentheus and does not recognise Dionysus as a god—we learn towards the end of the

play that she had “blasphemed the god”, and had “denied his deity,” as had Pentheus.¹⁸⁹ As the god exacts his revenge, the women become possessed, and must submit to his demands. In the case of the Theban women, this double submission highlights their status as objects through which the patriarchal system is both upheld and destabilised, denying their agency as subjects.

Perhaps the most pitiful scene of the play, and also one of the most horrific, is the final one, when Agave comes to realise her actions. The scene arouses feelings of pity and compassion in the fervent worshippers of Dionysus, the Chorus of Asian women, and faces the audience with the pathetic despair of a human forced to submit to a god, while allowing glimpses into the dignity with which Agave accepts her anguish. The scene emphasises the crucial role Agave plays in the unfolding of events: on the one hand, she is the most important piece of Dionysus’s carefully orchestrated event, without whom his actions would remain the mere vengeance of a god, as opposed to the cruel, unnatural, and almost perverse violence of an elemental spirit with no comprehension of human passions. She is what makes Dionysus’ revenge savage, and the reason identity, boundaries and Symbolic laws are dissolved: Agave comes to embody the monstrous mother, who takes pleasure in asserting her power over the helpless infant, and delights into tearing him apart and returning him to a state of non-Being. Combined with Agave’s near-cannibalism (the ingesting of the animals of which her son is one), the picture comes to resemble the innermost fears of the subject, only tentatively held at bay by taboo and repression. Her ‘monstrosity’ seeps through when she is shown to take delight in her kill as she is coming down the mountain, still in a Bacchic trance. The parallel between her ‘high’ and ‘low’ moods mirror the incompatibility between the unbound excess represented by Dionysus, and the frigid rigidity of the Symbolic (Pentheus).

However, although briefly, Agave is also a Bacchant, who worships the Mother Goddess: her actions, up to the beheading of Pentheus and her awakening, are not tied into a phallogocentric system, but guided by a different type of (non-Symbolised) identification—that with a female divinity. Despite being part of a larger ploy for revenge enacted by an androgynous, non-Symbolised element, orchestrated according to the rules of the phallic God/male/female triad, Agave exists for a brief interlude in a non-Symbolic space, where she need not assume an object-position and male identity with the purpose of upholding patriarchy. The identification in *The Bacchae* is not the type Irigaray advocated: while there is no binary or tertiary relation between women and divinity and the divine figure enables feminine difference, the tragic outcome of the play

¹⁸⁹ Euripides, “The Bacchae”, 214 and Euripides, *Bacchae*, 77.

shows identification alone cannot warrant the smooth coexistence of two psychic registers built around competing elements.

And yet, it is possible to read a counter-narrative in the relationship Agave develops with Pentheus, which deviates from the uniform type of relation the phallogocentric system expects of male/female pairings. The relationship between mother and son, particularly its culmination, reflects the phallic conception of love as appropriation. Agave becomes an embodiment of the primal fears the male child feels in relation to its main caregiver. Subjected to the mother's power and faced with his own powerlessness, the child's paranoid fears, as Klein shows, develop into scenarios of annihilation at the hands of the mother, which can only be kept at bay by containing her into rigid, restrictive 'phallic-friendly' boundaries. Failing to do so risks allowing the mother to divorce her motherhood from her womanhood and act erratically. Although uncertain, the threat of destruction at the hands of the mother is always there, and all the more pressing when she is not contained.

The love for the first object in the infant's life, the one around which complex oedipal structures develop in the case of the male child, is an all-encompassing, cannibalising form of love: the male infant fiercely desires the mother, and hates the father for coming between him and the object of his desire. Yet, paradoxically, this consuming type of love the infant seeks to subject the mother to becomes one of the main fears of the male imaginary: that of being consumed, of being swallowed by the mother, subordinated to her devouring subjectivity, never to *exist* again. The best protection against this threat is to restrict the boundaries of femininity and redefine it to only include phallic-oriented mothering that enhances, and never threatens the male imaginary. The consuming love of the male becomes manifest as an appropriation of the mother, of the possibility of femininity (that is, of femininity understood as the ability to subordinate, to occupy a unique subject-position) and of the ability to make one into Other (like a mother would *other* her child in refusing him the assumption of a subject-position). To protect itself from being subjected to the same violence to which it subjected the mother, the male imaginary transforms this form of love as appropriation into taboo: making the Other less than the self and rendering the Other a non-subject becomes an unpardonable transgression. And this is what Agave does: she sees Pentheus as an animal which, possessed by her death drive, she hunts and kills. The barriers of the Symbolic had been erected to protect the male imaginary from such occurrences: in transgressing these limits, Agave renders these moot.

The beheading of Pentheus is a convoluted scene, which reveals characters' complexities: in what concerns Dionysus, the scene shows the full extent of his

amathia (brutish ignorance). Dionysus sought to prove he was a god, *to avenge the death of his mother* at the hands of an oppressive (patriarchal) divinity (Zeus/Hera). He comes to Thebes to seek revenge and exacts it by forcing the women of Thebes away from their homes, driving them mad with the sensuous madness his own mother had been accused of possessing: the type that makes women commit lewd acts and sleep with random men. In instilling this type of insanity, he allows them to break the confines of the male imaginary by dissolving Symbolic boundaries and reclaim a (lost) female *jouissance*. This, by extension, amounts to a form of revenge against the Symbolic that lays it bare before the Real, vulnerable to it. From this viewpoint, the beheading of Pentheus becomes the Symbolic castration of the male imaginary, the epitome of highly orchestrated poetic justice and the physical erosion of the censor that had maintained the repression of female agency. Pentheus denied female agency not only by being possessive of the women of Thebes, but also by slandering Semele and rejecting the importance of the rites of Dionysus, the representative of the mother-goddess. Audiences become privy to an intricate scheme, and are let in on details of Dionysus' revenge through double-entendres uttered in private scenes: for example, when helping him into a woman's dress, Pentheus thanks Dionysus for "spoiling him", to which Dionysus replies that he *means to spoil him*.

Yet the exacting of his revenge, cunningly planned as it is, becomes almost perverse in its cruelty and comes at the cost of what Dionysus seeks to regain: female agency. His quest against the offence brought upon his mother (her stripping of agency and transformation into an object in the play of the male imaginary, subject to Zeus' lust, Hera's hatred and Thebes' mockery) is cleverly coordinated, and he pursues the object of his ire with the cunning of a hunter; however, in doing so he treats Agave the same way Semele herself had been treated, and uses her as an object, essential in an elaborate plan, but nevertheless devoid of agency. Through his use of Agave, Dionysus slips into *amathia* and foregoes his *sophia* (divine wisdom). As Irigaray showed to be the case with hierarchical pairs of opposites, the passive/active binary is self-subversive, as is the use of the lesser term to define the other. In the play, the passive role of Agave ends up actively destabilising the claims to activity of Pentheus and Dionysus and nullifying their claims to *sophia*.

As Agave and Cadmus are receiving their punishments, Cadmus attempts to bargain for leniency. At this point, we first see Agave taking an active stance and displaying female agency, despite her despair: while her father attempts to use his wisdom to gain the favour of the victor, she accepts her fate, as Arrowsmith argues, in the only true display of wisdom in the play—the acknowledgement of the necessity of anguish—making the audience question who the true monster is. Yet, ultimately, the meaning of

monstrosity remains elusive. Agave is monstrous only inasmuch as she threatens taboos and acts in a way that is potentially damaging to the male imaginary, while Dionysus is only monstrous when regarded through the prism of Symbolic morality. Outside it, he is neither monstrous nor kind: he is an elemental force, gentle and cruel, defined not by ethics, but by fluidity.

Yet the role Agave plays is even more complex: she is at once engaged in the transgression of Symbolic boundaries and in a power-play with the other side of the binary which defines her role. As the lower half of the binary, she is less than the male; as the play shows, Agave behaves like (and becomes) an animal, an identification that may be driven by the desire to identify with the (shape shifting) god. However, from the viewpoint of her relation with Pentheus, her regression to animal state is important, as it puts her on the same footing as Pentheus-mistaken-for-an-animal himself. From this perspective, Agave's delight in ingesting the animals she kills and their blood, as well as the pleasure she takes from hunting, overpowering, and destroying the mountain lion (Pentheus) are not just murderous, but cannibalistic. It is only when Agave-the-mother becomes equal to Pentheus that the complexity of their relation is revealed: in appropriating and displaying the love the male imaginary bestows onto the mother, Agave transgresses taboos, and becomes the monstrous, feared and rejected mother from which the male imaginary had been protecting itself. Like the Queen-Bee, she symbolises both nourishment, life and sustenance (honey), and excess libido, rape, cannibalism and death (also honey). I will return to the Queen-Bee in later chapters.

When enmeshed in the complexity of these relations, Agave can (paradoxically) become free of the constraints of the patriarchal, and hint at a type of Being that goes beyond the limited to-and-fro movement the male imaginary allows. She is no longer confined by narrative logic (a mark of the Symbolic), and can express herself through a combination of pre-oedipal, pre-linguistic means; she can explore her un-Symbolised death drive, and allow it free play with her pleasure-driven instincts.

Ultimately, her drives remain un-Symbolised, and incompatible with the male imaginary. Her existence in a pre-oedipal space cannot be sustained, while inclusion in the Symbolic is impossible as long as the Symbolic continues to reject the structuring role of the maternal. The complexity of Agave's way of relating to the society around her, her becoming entangled in a seemingly contradictory relationship with the god in a bond that is at the same time empowering and stifling, and her inability to Symbolise her death drive and sustain it alongside her love for her son gives us a glimpse into what I would suggest Irigaray meant by feminine identity. Agave becomes a fluid mass of contradictions that cannot and, importantly, have no reason to seek to cohabit

smoothly with the phallic narrative; in being refused a subject-position in the Symbolic for fear it would lead to its destruction, Agave is paradoxically enabled to become that which the male imaginary fears most, and perform the (female) violence the phallic seeks to ward off. The conflicting nature of Agave's relationship with the phallic belies the manifold repressions that overlap to shield the male imaginary from the influence of the female structuring element. Ultimately, in the absence of an appropriate form of reconciliation of patriarchy with the variety of modes of subjectification open to the subject, intrusion of feminine elements in the Symbolic only results in death, destruction and confusion.

Objectification: the Theban women as the structural base of patriarchy

There is a clear distinction, discernible across translations, between the maddened women of Thebes and the chorus of Bacchantes, which becomes more pronounced towards the end of the play. The discrepancy can be articulated in terms of the two groups' claim to reason, and the ability with which they manipulate male discourse. While one group (the Theban women) is objectified and reduced to the status of animals, the other becomes the voice of reason, calling out other characters for their transgressions and their *amathia*. The women of Thebes act erratically and are caught up in maddened hysteria, but the Chorus ponders philosophical questions on the nature of life and death. The Chorus is at all times differentiated from the women of Thebes (of whom only Agave speaks), and is presented in stark contrast to them.¹⁹⁰ As Arrowsmith argues, the main difference lies in the way the two worship Dionysus: the women of Thebes have been maddened and driven from their homes, but the Chorus displays calmer, quieter worship, and lacks the frenzy of the Theban women. While the Theban women's frenzy is a form of regression to the pre-oedipal, the Chorus is able to mediate between the pre- and post-oedipal. It is clear from the beginning that the Theban women differ from the Chorus and are instruments in the Dionysian plan: even in speech, Dionysus refers to the women collectively as "Maenads", "Bacchæ", "Bakkai", and "army" (depending on translation) and uses them as tools for battle, to be unleashed on Thebes if it opposes him. In the modern translation he addresses the Chorus differently, highlighting his affinity with them and distancing himself even further from the Theban women. The Chorus is made of "dear women", Dionysus'

¹⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that Gordan Maričić and Marina Milanović argue the gender of the chorus often reflected that of the main protagonist. Maričić and Milanović, "The Tragic Chorus In Ancient Times And Nowadays", *Istraživanja, Journal of Historical Researches*, 2016, 58-68. The play, as I argue throughout this thesis, revolves around women, and the place they occupy in society; the gender of the chorus may serve to reinforce the focus of the play being on the social and political condition of women in ancient Thebes.

“cadre,...sisterhood,...fellow travellers – ...who left...[their] distant lives to wander all the way from Lydia with [him].”¹⁹¹ A similar distinction can be seen in the Murray translation, where Dionysus addresses the Chorus as:

Lydian band, my chosen and mine own,
Damsels uplifted o’er the orient deep
To wander where I wander, and to sleep
Where I sleep¹⁹²

while the Arrowsmith¹⁹³ translation reads:

On, my women,
women who worship me, women whom I led
out of Asia where Tmolus heaves its rampart
over Lydia!
On, comrades of my progress here!

Dionysus herds the Theban women like animals: “[h]e touches them to fire if they lag/ and rouses them with shouts if they wander...”,¹⁹⁴ whipping them if they disobey.

The difference between the two groups is important, as it allows us to glimpse a middle ground between an organisation around the phallus and one structured around femininity. The Chorus bridges the two registers through its claim to reason and its unique ability to exist concomitantly with their allegiance to the god, and reveals the rigid male/female, reason/unreason binary to be artificial. Similarly, the Theban women act as the structural base of patriarchy, without whom the phallic edifice crumbles. In a quasi-Marxist turn, the relationship between the Theban women and male Theban society mirrors relations of production: as second-class citizens, women have a reproductive role, and little to no political power; and yet, they are instrumental in the production and perpetuation of Theban society, including of Theban men and the phallic rule. The maddened women are structurally indispensable for the existence of the male rule and of the Symbolic itself. It is interesting to compare the way the two groups of women are presented in the play, to understand males’ and females’ claims to having a structuring function.

Unlike the Chorus, whose origin is not discussed beyond mentioning they come from Asia and follow Dionysus willingly, the Theban women are described like animals, being driven from their home by a foreign ailment. The women’s status as objects of Dionysus’ revenge is emphasised in the Murray’s translation, where Dionysus explains he has “bound the harness of his rites” on their necks.

¹⁹¹ Carson, *Bakkai*, (London: Oberon Books, 2016), 15.

¹⁹² Euripides, *Bacchae*, 10.

¹⁹³ Euripides, “The Bacchae”, 157.

¹⁹⁴ Carson, *Bakkai*, 18.

Thus must they vaunt; and therefore bath my rod
On them first fallen, and stung them forth wild-eyed
From empty chambers; the bare mountain side
Is made their home, and all their hearts are flame.
Yea, I have bound upon the necks of them
The harness of my rites. And with them all
The seed of womankind from hut and hall
Of Thebes, bath this my magic goaded out.
And there, with the old King's daughters, in a rout
Confused, they make their dwelling-place between
The roofless rocks and shadowy pine trees green.¹⁹⁵

The reduction to animal state is something different translations convey, as is the importance of Dionysus' only having selected women for his revenge: without women, Thebes is left without an identity, with no mirror-other to help self-definition, and collapses into similar madness. Through his actions, Dionysus highlights women's lack of agency and reifies their status of less-than-subject, less-than-male Other, to the point of forcing them to renounce the Symbolic. In a way, he facilitates the expression of their femininity, and the renunciation of the roles imposed on them. In making them mad, he allows them *to speak female (parler femme)* in a pre-linguistic fashion.

The language surrounding the Theban women is crucial for understanding the phallic expectations of them, and consistent throughout translations: they "wander, crazed of mind", "compelled" to perform Dionysian orgies:¹⁹⁶ the "whole bursting female seed-pod of Thebes is gone mad" and sits beneath fir trees "staring at their own green hands", seemingly unable to comprehend what is happening.¹⁹⁷ Tiresias blames their madness on their nature, not outside influence: "Dionysus does not compel women to go mad for sex, / their own nature determines that,"¹⁹⁸ exposing once more the tension between the two types of treatment of women in the Symbolic: on the one hand, they are animals, unable to grasp their situation or external determinants; on the other, their madness comes from within, a manifestation of their nature, revealed in the presence of the god.

The descriptions of the Theban women come together to picture the quintessentially 'bad mother': maidens and women who had just given birth had left their homes, abandoned their husbands and children to go to the mountain (a safe space, a surrogate womb) and indulge in varied types of excess (portrayed in the play as milk, honey and wine—that is, excess of food and sex which degenerates into cannibalism). They are devoid of reason, and react instinctually to noise and movement. The

¹⁹⁵ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 9.

¹⁹⁶ Euripides, "The Bacchae", 156.

¹⁹⁷ Carson, *Bakkai*, 14.

¹⁹⁸ Carson, *Bakkai*, 23.

herdsman explains he had stumbled upon them, and found them fast asleep. “They were all so still... / Calm as buttons on a shirt”, he explains, which he had found curious, as Pentheus has told them “to look out for drunkenness, / wild music, / wantoning through the woods - / there was none of that.” However, when they hear the noise made by cattle, they

spring straight up,...
somehow instantly organised – I [the herdsman] was impressed.
Young women, old ones, girls unwed,
they shook out their hair and fastened their fawnskins,
with snakes that slid up to lick their cheeks,
some (new mothers who’d left their babes at home)
cradled wolf cubs or deer in their arms and suckled them...¹⁹⁹

When threatened by herdsman who try to seize them, the women react violently. When their targets flee, they redirect their aggression towards the herds, and dismember the cattle, attack the nearest village, steal goods and children, and return to the woods. Their behaviour is classic male plunderer behaviour, yet it arouses captive dread in onlookers, who are both horrified and bewitched.

Throughout the play, the Theban women are systematically objectified: to Dionysus, they are his army, which he unleashes against Thebes to uproot rules and punish blasphemy. To Pentheus, they are those who ensure the successful breeding of Thebans, and the perpetuation of Theban laws and customs (*nomos*). To Cadmus and Tiresias, they represent the bulk of a political and religious movement, which, if nurtured, could ensure prosperity for both: to Cadmus because he would have a recognised god in the family, and to Tiresias because it would mean more chances to pass down prophecies for money. To the herdsman, the women, particularly Agave, represent a good bargaining chip, and something which could win them the king’s favour if returned home safely. The women are crucial to either uphold a system that supports the perpetuation of male prerogatives, or uproot it and install a new one. They are both objects and enablers of the Symbolic.

The underlying structure of the play, which treats the relationship between men and women similarly to that between consumption and (re)production, has another, more fluid stratum, which allows the rigidity of the male/female binary to be broken: that of wisdom, or lack thereof. The idea of divine wisdom (*sophia*), Arrowsmith explains, is “primarily a moral rather than an intellectual skill”. *Sophia* “implies a firm awareness of one’s own nature and therefore of one’s place in the scheme of things... [It]

¹⁹⁹ Carson, *Bakkai*, 38-39.

presupposes self-knowledge, an acceptance of those necessities that compose the limits of human fate.”²⁰⁰ The opposite of *sophia*, also evidenced in the play, is *amathia*, a way of acting which is unaware of the self, violent, brutal and harsh, and shows no regard for the necessities of life. All male characters display *sophia*, and yet all must be disavowed of it as they become *amathēs*. Pentheus is an intellectual and a sophist, but cannot accept the necessity that Dionysus represents—indeed, as D’Angour argues, he considers Dionysus to represent “an unwelcome religious innovation”;²⁰¹ Cadmus and Tiresias are shrewd and understand what needs to be done to ensure prosperity, but the practical men fail to convince the audience of their devotion. Finally, Dionysus possesses the cunning of a hunter and the ability to chase his prey into an orchestrated trap; however, past this point he falls into mindless bloodshed that is not godly, and reminds one of Aphrodite in *Hippolytus*. Dionysus forfeits his *sophia* for *amathia* the moment he proves he is not a god, but a spirit, a necessity—a *daimon*. (It is only in the Carson translation that Dionysus introduces himself as a *daimon*, although he oscillates between naming himself *daimon* and *god*.)

The struggle between *sophia* and *amathia* becomes the struggle to navigate the complex relations that form quasi-transcendental elements (life, language, labour), and negotiate between two different structuring elements. The Theban women play a vital part: through destructive madness, they reveal the madness of Pentheus’ disavowal of Dionysus and of the necessities of life he represents. (The Herdsman says: “Whoever this *daimon* is, sir, welcome him into Thebes. / People say he is important. / Extremely important. / They say he gave the gift of wine to men: / why, without wine we’ve no freedom from pain. / Without wine there’s no sex. / Without sex / life isn’t worth living.”²⁰²) However, if at the beginning they link the necessities of life, sexuality and excess to the Apollonian, the rational and the phallic law, they are also revealed to be what underpins and undermines phallogocentric society. The second-rate treatment the maddened women receive contrasts with the part they play in upholding and reifying the male Symbolic; once removed from it, the phallogocentric society descends into the chaos of over-rationalisation, of *amathia*, while the frenzied organisation proposed by Dionysus appears not only necessary, but more organised than the polis itself. The role the women play is doubly subversive: on the one hand, they allow glimpses into a dormant female agency, while on the other they expose the primal fears of the male

²⁰⁰ Euripides, “The Bacchae”, 145.

²⁰¹ D’Angour, *The Greeks and the New*, 158. Novelty in the play has a problematic existence: Pentheus is firmly opposed to it, seeing the new religion as a pretence for debauchery, while Cadmus and Tiresias understand it will transform Greece and accept it. Yet the Chorus explicitly states that the Dionysian rites are not new, but represent ‘old ways’ of worship. As D’Angour explains, Dionysus himself was considered a new god to the Greek pantheon, an assumption overturned by archaeological discoveries that suggest Dionysus’ cult may have existed on Keos as early as the third millennium BCE. Ibid.

²⁰² Carson, *Bakkai*, 41.

imaginary that calls for female agency to be silenced for the male imaginary to survive. Ultimately, femininity in the play structures a new subjectivity, while un-structuring the male subject.

The female chorus: the negotiation between the feminine and the masculine

The treatment the chorus of Asian women receives from Dionysus contrasts with the way the maddened Theban women are regarded. The Theban women are infantilised, mere tools to support phallic self-definition; in contrast, the Chorus becomes an advocate for female agency, the one the male imaginary seeks to silence. The repeated displays of *amathia*, most prominently in relation to the treatment of women, testifies to the fact that the male imaginary in the play fails to acknowledge its debt to the mother, and is unable to recognise in the unfolding of events its own archaic fears.

Yet female agency becomes evident from the beginning: the language in the Chorus' song is rhythmic, rich and possessive; it associates from the beginning with the Mother Goddess, a female divinity that guides their actions, yet who is not present and who does not act as an ego-ideal, as Zeus does.²⁰³ The Chorus does not adhere to convention: the sentences it uses are shorter, its song contains repetitions, enumerations, exclamations and onomatopoeias. Most importantly, although it is at times the voice of reason, the Chorus distances itself from speech, preferring passionate, rushed expression through song and dance. Its movements are halted, then free-flowing and sensuous again. The modern translation teases out the combination of movement and verse, and emphasises the almost alien nature of the Chorus:

From Asia I come,
from Tmolos I hasten,
to this work that I love,
to this love that I live
calling out
Bakkhos!
Who is in the road?
Who is in the way?
Stay back,
stand quiet.
I shall sing Dionysos –
I shall make the simplest sentence explode with his name!²⁰⁴

²⁰³ In the Murray and Arrowsmith translations, the deity is identified as Kybele, Rhea or Demeter – all facets of the same goddess, Mother of all gods and impersonation of life. In the Carson translation, the deity is not identified, but simply referred to as Mother, emphasizing further the Chorus' non-hierarchical relation to the female divinity.

²⁰⁴ Carson, *Bakkai*, 15.

From the beginning, the Chorus questions identity (“Who is...?”), accepts its part in promoting the Dionysian cult, and acknowledges its role in relation to both the *daimon* and the Mother. It takes pride in being instrumental in establishing a new cult, and willingly creates a relation of dependence between them and Dionysus, in which neither can exist without the other. Nonetheless, the Chorus also announces the *godly* purpose of Dionysus, that from which he strays in exacting his revenge: to honour the Mother, and to act on her behalf in enticing the population into frenzied worship through song and dance. From the Chorus the audience learns Dionysus is a representative of the Mother, and his cult is a by-product of her religion, especially the use of kettledrums and ritualistic dance.

O
blessed is he who,
blessedly happy is he who
knows the holy protocols, who
makes his life pure, who
joins his soul in congregation
on the mountain of Bakkhos!
Honouring the Mother
and the mysteries
with his thyrsos,
his ivy,
his submission to the god.
Come, Bakkai!
Come, Bakkai,
bring your god home!
Bring Bromios down from the mountains of Phrygia
into the wide dancing streets of Greece!²⁰⁵

The Chorus’ movements appear halted as it foretells of the victorious adoption of the Dionysian rituals by Thebes, something which only exists in the modern translation.²⁰⁶ Sacred objects, the woods or mountains and the city, reason and delirium, joy and violence all become elements (at times even pairs of opposites) that make up the lifeworld of Thebes on the one hand and of the Bacchants on the other. Their association shows the new religion seeks to unify contrasting elements, not erase them, and not place any in a hierarchy to define them and the self.

²⁰⁵ Carson, *Bakkai*, 15-16.

²⁰⁶ A note on translations: the play has been translated numerous times and filmed and dramatized at length. From the 19th century onwards, it appears to continue to exert lasting fascination over the Western world and inspire countless retellings, particularly in the 20th century. The play appeals to each generation, and the differences between each director’s artistic choices suggest the play lends itself to being adapted and moulded to meet the needs of the age. For the purpose of this thesis, I use a limited number of translations, both prose and verse. I have sought to consult primarily modern translations (from the 20th and 21st centuries) to contrast the broad changes in attitude towards womanhood in the play depending on the socio-historical context. I have used editors’ notes, but have not included a detailed comparative study of all different translations, as an in-depth reading would have provided limited additional insight in the way the play can be used in a contemporary setting to argue for a move beyond the oedipal.

Interestingly, the Carson translation includes a short poem constructed around the colour green. The poem does not expand on the significance of the colour, and limits itself to listing different types of green. As the poem progresses, it becomes less and less logical, resembling an incantation; while the colour may be a reference to ancient Greece's colour for victory, or to the colour of the forest where the Bacchae run, it is not the symbolism itself that matters, but the appropriation of speech by the Chorus. The Chorus is the middle ground between the pre-oedipal (and non-narrative, pre-linguistic) feminine *jouissance*, and the Symbolic patriarchal, dominated by strict rules, logic, and oedipal structures. Although made up of women, the Chorus is rational, eloquent and sensible (it adheres to the principles of the Symbolic), and is equally aggressive, seeking pre-Symbolic modes of expression through song, dance and violence, thus mediating between the patriarchal and the (hidden) feminine voices of Thebes.

O Thebes! garland yourself
 in all the green there is –
 ivy green,
 olive green,
 fennel green,
 growing green,
 yearning green,
 wet sap green,
 new grape green,
 green of youth and green of branches,
 green of mint and green of marsh grass,
 green of tea leaves, oak and pine,
 green of washed needles and early rain,
 green of weeds and green of oceans,
 green of bottles, ferns and apples,
 green of dawn-soaked dew and slender green of roots,
 green fresh out of pools,
 green slipped under fools,
 green of the green fuse,
 green of the honeyed muse,
 green of the rough caress of ritual,
 green undaunted by reason or delirium,
 green of jealous joy,
 green of the secret holy violence of the thyrsus,
 green of the sacred iridescence of the dance –
 and let all the land of Thebes dance!
 with Dionysos leading,
 to the mountains!
 to the mountains!²⁰⁷

It its role of spectator, the Chorus also denounces slippage into *amathia*, albeit the full extent of its knowledge is not evident until the end of the play. When Cadmus and

²⁰⁷ Carson, *Bakkai*, 16-17.

Tiresias urge Pentheus to worship Dionysus, and Tiresias loudly defends the god's rites and blames the women of Thebes for their degeneration into orgies, the Chorus mockingly congratulates him:

Good speech, old man, you've kept your Apollonian poise
and made the right noise
for Dionysos, an important god.²⁰⁸

In the first choral ode, the Chorus reveals Pentheus' madness, and aligns itself with the necessity of the Dionysian rites. Importantly, the Chorus seems not to praise Dionysus, nor scorn Pentheus as it had previously, but acknowledge the importance of balance, the part the sensuous, the Dionysian plays in attaining wisdom, self-knowledge, and a successful, coherent definition of oneself. In the modern translation, the ode is physically balanced (aligned to the centre of the page).²⁰⁹ In the second choral ode, the Chorus once again reiterates Pentheus' folly, who "pits himself against the gods", and denounces it as lack of wisdom. The third ode opens with a nostalgic reminiscence of

²⁰⁸ Carson, *Bakkai*, 23.

²⁰⁹ *Holiness*
is a word I love to hear,
it sounds like wings to me,
wings brushing the world, grazing my life.
Pentheus has a harsh sound,
a negative sound.
He's a negative person.
He's against Dionysos,
against rejoicing,
against laughter,
against flutes –
not to mention the transcendental gladness of grapes and wine
so beneficial to the body, soul and psyche's
interior design.

I'm saying
his tongue is unbridled,
his reasoning reckless,
his end may be hot and hard.
A life of quiet discretion,
still as a summer day,
holds a house together.
Cleverness is not wisdom. (my italics)
Far off in the sky live the gods who never die
but the watch us.
They watch how far we press our limits:
there is a morning star,
there is an evening star,
don't press too far.
...
Our god loves festivity,
he loves serenity.
Whether you're high
or low
or rich
or simple,
all the same
Dionysos will fill your soul with peace.
It's not about intellectual prowess,
it's not about true and false,
it's pure release. Carson, *Bakkai*, 25-26.

the Dionysian rites, and a tacit warning of the way these would degenerate.²¹⁰ In the modern translation, the ode is no longer aligned to the centre, but undulating, its verses jagged, adrift. It warns that the will of the gods is not reduced to fate, but is a force of nature, a necessity of the psyche that must be carried out, and, as a result, has become ingrained into law and custom (*nomos*). Pentheus' *amathia* was to disregard custom; once this transgression is complete, the Chorus becomes instrumental in orchestrating Pentheus' murder. It abandons meditations on wisdom, and concentrates on punishing transgression and reasserting the agency of the Theban women by repeating a ritualistic call to violence addressed to them. The fourth ode is not against Pentheus, but against he who rejected customs, thus plunging Thebes into chaos; it is not a call for violence, but a violent denunciation of the patriarchal renunciation of that which it fears, for the sake of protecting the fragility of the Symbolic. It calls for a holistic, inclusive approach to everyday life, which encompasses both wisdom (in all its guises), and the instinctual (the death drives of women, violence, aggression). The Chorus denounces the blind refusal to acknowledge the mother as the main cause for *amathia*, and, implicitly, for the failure to negotiate a middle ground between femininity and masculinity.

His judgment is wrong,
his anger chaotic,
his arrogance out of control.
He dispatched himself against you,
Bakkhos,
against your mother,
against your holy rites.
He is a violent man.
But
Death will discipline him.
Death takes no excuses. (AC, 52)

...
Into the throat
of
the
ungodly
unlawful
unrighteous
earthborn
son

²¹⁰ Slow but unmistakable
the might of the gods moves on.
It punishes that man,
infatuate of soul
and hardened in his pride,
who disregards the gods.
The gods are crafty:
they lie in ambush
a long step of time
to hunt the unholy.
Beyond the old beliefs,
no thought, no act shall go. Euripides, "The Bacchae", 194.

of Echion
let justice
sink her sword
!

Possibly the most striking contribution of the Chorus is its conversation with Agave as she returns from the mountain with Pentheus' head. It is the Chorus, before anyone else, who elicits from her the details of Pentheus' / the mountain lion's beheading. The Chorus acknowledges the way Dionysus has forfeited *sophia*, and is horrified by the events caused by their god.

The Chorus is made up of frenzied women worshippers, who are at the same time poised Hellenic thinkers. This duality may be an attempt on Euripides' part to differentiate between the Theban women's madness and the accepted, controlled Dionysian worship of the time, and situate itself neither in opposition, nor in full agreement with the god. The Chorus is not possessed; they are devout worshippers, but they retain their agency and are aware of their actions. For this reason, their duality is even more striking: although they rejoice at Pentheus' death, understanding it as rightful revenge on Dionysus' part, they are also aghast when they see Agave and the impact awareness of her deeds has on her. As Arrowsmith writes, the pity the Chorus feels for Agave is how the Bacchante differentiates herself from the god, and separates her humanity from the divinity of which she partakes through the Dionysian ritual. If through the orgiastic revels, the cannibalistic rituals, the dances and ingestion of milk, honey and wine the Bacchante 'ingests' and displays the same divinity that drives her actions and passions, through the pity it manifests for Agave, she displays her humanity. Their pity marks disapproval of Dionysus' inflexibility, his cruel and ruthless actions, and allows them to show compassion for Agave and Cadmus. "In this they declare", Arrowsmith writes, "their humanity and a moral dignity which heaven, lacking those limits which make men suffer *into* dignity and compassion, can never understand or equal."²¹¹ Ultimately, the Chorus delineates boundaries and their absence.

Firstly, they address the boundaries of identity, which are self-subversive in the case of the males of the play, as they rely on self-definition through the prism of an essentially fragile and fickle entity—the second-rate, hierarchically inferior woman, who nonetheless topples the male Symbolic.

Secondly, they tackle the boundaries of compassion, morality and ethics, and highlight the discrepancy between the civilised Greeks and the barbarian Easterners, portrayed

²¹¹ Euripides, "The Bacchae", 153.

as binary opposites. As the play unfolds, the audience is left to decide whether the barbarians do not prove more civilised than the Greeks. The Chorus also reveals the *daimon* to be incapable of such considerations—of morality, wisdom, compassion, mercy—as Dionysus cannot be expected to subject himself to human constraints and limits, as it exists outside Symbolic boundaries, outside time and reason—an elemental force that drives the psyche, as opposed to *understanding* it.

Thirdly, they bring into question the boundaries of moral excellence, particularly in terms of wisdom; the Chorus denounces the profound *amathia* of all characters, and only reveals the possibility of true wisdom (*sophia*) in the acceptance of the necessity of anguish and despair, of violence and pleasure, of manifest and Symbolised death drives for both men and women. The Chorus shows and explicitly states that the happy man is he who understands the need for balance, for peace and harmony between reason and the elemental forces (of nature, or, more convincingly, of the psyche), and demonstrates that the current organisation of a Symbolic orchestrated by the male imaginary fails to accommodate these needs. The happy man, the Chorus sings, must be capable of understanding the play between domination and submission, and, in Irigarayan terms, must not fashion gods into ego ideals, as these are fundamentally unsuitable for such purposes. It is, ultimately, the urge to rival the extremes of the gods that constitutes hubris: Pentheus attempts to be like the god, have the final say in who is worshipped and who is rejected, be either entirely rational or entirely delirious, but, due to his bound nature, falls short of being godly himself. In the absence of the women he discounts, Pentheus can only measure himself against the god as an ego-ideal, but his measurements prove self-subversive and leave the male ego empty, susceptible to consumption and annihilation by the female agency it had painstakingly silenced to avoid such risks.

Finally, the Chorus reveals the boundaries of worship in relation to self-definition to be fragile. Both men and women have a deity they worship, who they more or less fashion into an ego-ideal: for women, it is the figure of the mother, while for men it is the figure of Zeus. However, while Zeus is present in the polis, the mother is absent, revered not for what she embodies, but for what she enables humans to become: in providing nourishment, fertile crops and wine, she allows men to live, forget their toils, and die. Zeus, on the other hand, is an active presence, shaping the male imaginary and the organisation of the Symbolic. The moment the necessity the male imaginary seeks to repress becomes manifest, the Symbolic edifice crumbles, and necessity itself maddens subjects and causes them to consume each other, to partake of each other for continued self-definition. This repression is part of a closed cycle, destined to consume itself.

Through the exclusion of femininity and of what it represents, the male imaginary inscribes itself in a loop that threatens to allow repressed elements to burst through, subvert the mechanism of repression and turn it against the psyche it protects.

The absent mother

The figure of the mother dominates the play, but never becomes explicit. The mother appears in different guises, some stronger than others, as mothers that refuse to mother (such as the Theban women who forsake their new-borns), or as mothers whose love becomes all-consuming (such as Agave). It is, however, in the figure of the absent mother that the structuring female function can be best read; in the play, the figure appears in the main female deities: Kybele, Rhea or Demeter.

As the play opens, the audience learns Dionysus came to Thebes to avenge his dead mother, Semele, killed by Hera. He wishes to prove to everyone, including Semele's sisters (his mother's main accusers), that he is a god, and that Semele's story of his conception was not a fabrication meant to conceal her promiscuity. Dionysus' revenge is directed at those that preserve the phallic by silencing women, much like Zeus had silenced Metis.

From this perspective, it is interesting that Dionysus is presented by the Chorus in some translations as a representative of Kybele. To introduce this comparison, the Chorus first extends an invitation to "holy silence", to a way of worship that precedes rationalised religious rituals; Dionysus, it explains, must be worshipped "in the old, old way". The fortunate man, the Chorus continues, pledges himself to Dionysus: "In the mountains he knows the bacchic thrill, the holy purifications; he observes the orgies of Kybele, the Great Mother [...]."²¹² The reference to Kybele and the explanations regarding the appropriate ways to worship Dionysus mark an important aspect of the play in relation to reading it from the viewpoint of the mother.

Firstly, the Chorus emphasises the current ways of worshipping gods will not suffice for Dionysus; what is required of his subjects is a return to the "old, old way[s]" of religious devotion, archaic, pre-verbal methods that precede language, rationality, and logic. The type of devotion Dionysus seeks is instinctual and requires the devotee to abandon modern thought; to worship Dionysus, the individual must revert to a state prior to subjectification, one of *undifferentiated-ness*.

²¹² Euripides, *Ten Plays by Euripides*, 319.

Secondly, the Chorus explains that the worship cannot take place in profane settings, but must be carried out in sacred spaces, in the mountains (a surrogate womb), where return to archaic modes of praising the gods is possible. The impossibility of establishing a connection with the god outside a sacred space points again to the inadequacy of the rites set in place by the male imaginary: the polis, the space of rationality and logic, is hostile to the type of devotion Dionysus demands.

Finally, the most poignant reference to the cult of the mother is the mentioning of the Great Mother, Kybele.²¹³ Dionysus and Kybele share several characteristics: they are foreigners associated with ecstatic revelry, wine, dance and music. They come to Greece and demand to be worshipped in ways that differ fundamentally from the usual customs of the Greeks. They are both connected in some way to Zeus, associated with nature and wild animals, cold rationality devoid of morality, and capacity for extreme acts of violence. Most importantly, Kybele is the mother of the Phrygian god Sabazios, identified by the Greeks with Dionysus. The orgiastic cults of Dionysus-Sabazios was derived Kybele's orgies, and Dionysus performs his mysteries in her honour.²¹⁴

One of the most prominent myths surrounding Kybele depicts her distant relation with Zeus: the latter, consumed with lust for Kybele, masturbated while watching her and let the sperm fall on the rock called Agdos, from which the hermaphrodite Agdistis sprung.²¹⁵ Agdistis' sexual urges soon proved impossible to control, so the gods decided to castrate it: after getting Agdistis drunk by pouring wine in the spring from which it drank, Liber (a god very similar to Dionysus) tied Agdistis' testicles to its feet, so that, when it rose, it detached them from its body. The castration of Agdistis produced immense quantities of blood, and from the blood-soaked earth sprung an almond tree. Nana, the daughter of the river Sangarius (and one of the hypostases of Kybele) ate an almond and became pregnant with Attis. As the child was unwanted, Nana exposed it, only to have it brought up by Phorbas, a goat-herder. When Attis

²¹³ Kybele was, originally, Phrygia's only known goddess, possibly its state deity, whose cult was adopted by Greek colonists and spread to mainland Greece. Kybele has been partly assimilated to aspects of Gaia and Rhea (and ultimately identified with Rhea in Phrygia), and occasionally associated with Demeter. Kybele (like Rhea) resides on Mount Cybele, and is depicted as an exotic goddess, a foreigner who travels in a chariot drawn by lions, always accompanied by music, wine and ecstatic revellers. Unlike any other Greek cult, Kybele's most devout male followers castrate themselves, presumably to emulate Kybele's castrated shepherd-consort, Attis. She is associated with mountains, fertile nature, and wild animals. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 1960. In Phrygia, Kybele's worship was universal, and she may have also initiated Dionysus in her mysteries. Theoi, "Kybele". I refer in this thesis mostly to Kybele, primarily because of her similarities to Dionysus: her status as an outsider and her association with ecstatic revelry. It appears Kybele's foreign status allowed her to resist appropriation better than other female deities; if what we witness in contemporary culture is an erasure of the mother from the space of representation, her image will be more easily identifiable in aspects that have not been fully absorbed by (and translated into) patriarchal tropes.

²¹⁴ Theoi, "Kybele". In some versions, the god Hermes brings the infant Dionysus to Rhea/Kybele to rear him. Semele (who becomes on Olympian Goddess) remarks later to Hera that Dionysus was reared by Kybele, the same one who reared Zeus himself: "this Kybele... who is called your mother brought forth Zeus and suckled Bakkhos... in the same lap! She dandled them both, the son and the father." Ibid.

²¹⁵ Agdistis is Kybele herself in Pessinus; she is born of the sky-father (sometimes Zeus) and the earth-mother. She is often conflated with Rhea, who is Zeus' mother. Note that seeing Rhea/Kybele as Dionysus' mother means Dionysus is Hera's half brother. Ibid.

reached adolescence, his incredible beauty caused everyone to fall in love with him, including the now female Agdistis (another hypostasis of Kybele). In an incestuous twist, Agdistis/Kybele took Attis as her lover.

When Kybele discovered Attis was about to marry Ia, the daughter of King Midas of Pessinus,²¹⁶ she wreaked havoc on the wedding party. Filled with despair and rage, she maddened all male wedding guests, and made them emasculate themselves in public. Attis mutilated himself under a pine tree, dying from the blood loss; his bride, affected by the same craze, cut off her breasts, her blood causing violets to spring where it spilled on the ground. This aspect of the myth is of particular interest: I argued earlier, quoting Green and Jacobs, that the separation from the mother cannot fulfil a structuring function due to the sterile way in which this separation is achieved. The absence of the mother is not physically felt, as it does not involve bloody mutilation. And yet the myth of Kybele presents precisely such a mutilation, showing a breast that is taken away by being literally chopped off. The Kybele/Attis story repeats tropes we find in other myths that are foundational in subjectification and the creation of the male imaginary: we see an unwanted child who is left to die or abandoned, but is rescued and raised by benevolent creatures in a pastoral setting until such time when he is ready to kill the father in both the stories of Oedipus and Zeus. In Attis' story, it is the father that is absent, and the mother that births the child and takes him as her lover. Through the father's absence and the mother/child love story, the myth bypasses the oedipal hierarchy, precipitating subjectification through separation from the mother.

Although the pairing is not the classic mother-son one, and the one who inflicts the mutilation onto herself is the bride, the act of taking the breast away comes at the hands of Kybele, who is both mother and lover. Kybele inflicts the self-mutilating madness onto the wedding party, and, by extension, takes away both the penis and the breast from the baby (Attis). The story of Kybele and Attis is convoluted, with Kybele fulfilling several roles at once, and appearing simultaneously in different guises/sexes. This mimics the dream-logic of phantasies, and the myth may present the narrative of the structuring function of the mother, especially if we consider that such a narrative would necessarily be 'told' from a different perspective than the phallic one.

Overcome with grief, Kybele asks Zeus to resurrect Attis. Zeus accepts, but makes Attis' immortality manifest by allowing his body to never decay in his tomb. A further sign of his godliness is that his hair grows, and he can move his little finger, presumably in an emulation of his lost penis. The cult of Attis is associated with the

²¹⁶ Kybele is sometimes referred to as King Midas' mother. Ibid.

decay of fruit, and its rebirth the following year, while the pine tree became his symbol as a god. Kybele loves the baby, and, like Agave, also murders the baby by castrating him. In love, Attis and Kybele are inseparable; in death, their dyad is broken, and Attis can grow into his own subjecthood—symbol of life and death, plenty and decay. Like Pentheus, Attis' relationship with his mother allows him to experience life and death.

A parallel between the bacchants' ecstatic revelry and the cults of Kybele and Attis reveals numerous common elements, ranging from the nature and location of their rites (drunken orgies conducted in a glade surrounded by pine trees), to their affinity for nature and animals. In some versions of the myth, Dionysus himself is a priest of Kybele, and promotes her mysteries; although not castrated like the priests of her cult, Dionysus is described as a beautiful young man, whose effeminate features could be associated with androgyny or castration.

The cult of Kybele, as appropriated by the Greeks, rejected masculinity and evicted men, the phallic law and the male imaginary from the feminine setting. When understanding the Bacchic rites as directed at the (absent) figure of Kybele, it becomes apparent why the bacchants displayed such aversion for accepted social mores and the lesser roles of women in the life of the city. Moreover, it illuminates the matriarchal structure of the bacchants' internal organisation, and it invites a closer reading of Kybele (and, to an extent, Agave) as the monstrous mother.

As the quintessentially destructive, all-powerful mother, Kybele impregnates Nana with Attis, effectively giving birth to him, seduces him, takes him as a lover, castrates him, and eventually kills him. Once dead, she brings him back to life, yet offers him an immobile existence: confined to the tomb, Attis cannot speak or move (aside from his little finger); he is, once again, returned to the status of an uncoordinated babe, wholly dependent on his mother/lover, to whom he remains forever attached. Kybele simultaneously fulfils infantile phantasies of destruction, incest, omnipotence (in the form of immortality), and dissolution of selfhood, proving, like the monstrous mother of Kleinian theory, incompatible with the Symbolic, and dangerous to the male imaginary.²¹⁷ In calling for worship outside of the city walls, she invites her adepts to renounce Symbolic constraints and return to origins, to a state of undifferentiated-ness, of non-logical, non-linear time and narrative.²¹⁸ She represents a way of thinking from

²¹⁷ In her manifestation as Rhea, the mother of all gods is equally dangerous for the male imaginary. When pregnant with Zeus, she duped Kronos into swallowing a large stone instead of the newborn Zeus, thus carefully crafting the collapse of the social order from within.

²¹⁸ Tiresias, the blind prophet, further supports this point in the play when he explains that "We do not rationalize about the gods." He recognises the clash of two systems of worship, or of two systems of psychic organisation: "We have the traditions of our fathers, old as time itself. No argument can knock *them* down..." Euripides, *Ten Plays by Euripides*, 322. While making a case for the necessity of patriarchal boundaries and rules, his words also point to the fact that these

without patriarchal confines, and of organising the psyche around feminine elements while renouncing masculine ones, in the same way the phallic law requires that all feminine elements be renounced for the phallic way of thinking to be adopted. She is never present, reminding one of the absent mother, whose disappearance (not death) makes it impossible for the infant to not fear her imminent return. Yet Kybele also, paradoxically, enables a new form of subjectivity by allowing the baby (Attis) to fulfil all infantile phantasies, including those of death and destruction at the hands of the mother, and obtaining for him immortality and omnipotence. She is simultaneously mother, lover and goddess, present and absent, creating a new, horizontal form of relating to and identifying with an ego-ideal.

At the centre of the Bacchants' sexual frenzy, the absent figure of Kybele appears to have been summoned through a collective genesis, an attempt to recover the original maternal figure through orgiastic states that celebrate maternal *jouissance*, and are manifest against the phallic law. As the absent core of this type of organisation, Kybele becomes the paradigmatic monstrous mother, who un-structures and re-structures the male imaginary (Pentheus), reaffirming the structuring role of the mother. From this perspective, Dionysus becomes a priest in Kybele's cult, a tool to coordinate and hasten the unravelling of the Symbolic and the structure of the social order. He is called into being by the female/maternal imaginary (should it be possible to speak of such an entity), and it is on its behalf that he acts. In orchestrating the unravelling of the male imaginary, Dionysus re-creates the story of Kybele and Attis in the characters of Agave and Pentheus: much like Kybele herself, Agave gives birth to Pentheus, seduces him into renouncing his masculinity and kills him.

In the presence of the monstrous mother women and men who have renounced their masculinity become empowered, while (phallic) men become weak. Pentheus, in his attempt to cling onto his masculinity and end the crazed revels of the women, starts behaving like the crazed women themselves, illustrating the full extent of the reversal of social roles caused by Dionysus. It is relevant that Kybele herself is never named explicitly by any of the characters of the play; in being the absent mother, she becomes at the same time both the Kleinian monstrous mother, a structuring element of the psyche, and the Lacanian maternal Thing, who exists unnamed, on the outskirts of the psyche, threatening the phallic law. Once the action of the play moves to the mountains, so does the social order: the mother is no longer on the fringes of the Symbolic, looking in, but an orchestrator of the unravelling of the phallic law, and of the (new/old?) maternal rule. In the play, this shift becomes apparent in the subtle change

rules are only valid within the time structure created for them, and cannot transcend the limits imposed on them by Symbolic constraints (i.e.: time, reason, logic.)

in language and behaviour characters undergo; Pentheus especially is overcome by a madness that not only makes him irrational to the point of breaking taboos, but also brings to light vulnerability not apparent before. He is dependent on the stranger to see and move, and is absorbed by the spectacle of the maenads; he is blind to everything that happens around him, including the superhuman display of force shown by the stranger who bends a fir tree to the ground, and is hypnotically drawn to the dances of the bacchantes around the absent figure of Kybele. His destruction comes at the hands of Agave, who, like a hypostasis of Kybele herself, murders her son/lover and then, overcome with grief, mourns his loss. Ultimately, the pull of the monstrous mother/maternal Thing proves so strong that the male imaginary cannot help itself from gravitating around her; the monstrous mother is as destructive and dangerous to the male imaginary as the baby phantasizes her to be.

Yet the unfolding of the story shows the mother to have structuring capacity, in the sense that she causes patriarchal constructions to come undone and guides the infant out of Symbolic constraints and into new forms of existence. We do not get to see in the play this structuring capacity leading to a reorganisation of the psyche with the maternal figure at its core, as in the story of Attis; due to the clash between the two registers of subjectification, breaking free from the bounds of the phallic imaginary, even if only momentarily, leaves no room for the subject to return.

On the surface, the picture *The Bacchae* paints is depressing, as it confirms that stepping outside the Symbolic and organising subjectivity around a structuring element other than the Father can only result in death. Yet such a reading truncates the complexity of the story by not considering the crucial role Dionysus plays: through Dionysus, and, more importantly, through his actions that stretch and test kin ties, the space of the Symbolic widens momentarily to allow subjects (such as Agave), to exist *qua* subjects in a different form of psychic organisation. The intrusion of the phallic in this alternate model proves untenable, and results in death and suffering—but, as I will argue in Chapter 5, not because the existence of structured subjects is not possible outside the confines of the phallic, but because the phallic itself is incompatible with a different mode of subjectification. If, as the myth of Metis shows, the phallic is dependent on the murder and absorption of the mother to exist, then for the phallic to step outside of its own condition for possibility necessarily entails its own destruction. As the representative of the Symbolic, Pentheus cannot exist outside the Symbolic; his death at the hands of the mother does not show that subjectivity is impossible outside the Symbolic, but that the Symbolic cannot exist outside itself, and that the form of subjectivity the Symbolic creates rests on perpetuating incompatibility with the mother. I will return to this idea in Chapter 5, where I will explore the potential reason behind the

creation of a register from which the mother is banned, and whose existence is almost impossible alongside the mother.

The play may be a reminder of the destructive, but liberating potential of the imbalance of structuring figures; the misrepresentation of any structuring element in the picture of the psyche leads to madness and tragedy. Euripides' sensitivity to the condition of women makes him particularly receptive to the problem of women with no rights, and, by extension, to that of figures too long ignored, and the destructive force they pose if smothered indeterminately. Euripides' tragedies are often incisive social critiques and analyses of the means by which madness permeates the social. In the current context, if we read the play as a manifestation of the absence of the feminine from the social, it follows that madness itself is founded on this lack: repressed from the phallic imaginary, the mother returns to haunt, her absence unravelling society.

The unfolding of events in *The Bacchae* reveals the structuring capacity of the mother, but not by replicating the oedipal organisation with the mother at its centre. Rather, the mother's structuring capacity becomes apparent through her absence being enough to make the Symbolic unravel, to strip it back to its constituting parts and return it to its origins. As Dionysus makes his entrance and starts to influence events, the mother's presence is felt *because she is absent*, and because of the fragility her absence reveals at the heart of the phallic. Once Dionysus is gone, the picture returns to its Symbolic normality; yet, albeit briefly, the manifestation of the non-Symbolic subject opens a space for a different mode of psychic organisation, one that reveals a lack at the core of the Symbolic. As the layers of the Symbolic are 'peeled back' and the Symbolic comes undone, the figure of the mother emerges, hidden beneath phantasies of the male imaginary, and yet foundational in its constitution.

Kinship ties and their opacity in *The Bacchae*

The rich complexity of *The Bacchae* is fully revealed when considering the context in which events unfold—that of the family, which is complicatedly embroiled with matters of the state and religion. The currency of the play is female desire: under Pentheus, it is controlled and used for domestic purposes, while under Dionysus it is unbridled, and used to usurp the legitimacy of the law and the sovereignty of patriarchy. Female desire becomes a weapon, destructive when not contained by the phallic. Female desire and, implicitly, the act of repressing the figure of the mother, becomes the *agon* of the play, and the fight for control over women reaches a climax when situated in the midst of kin relations. Dionysus, the son of Semele, Agave's late sister, seeks to

expose the repressed figure of the mother, while Pentheus, his first cousin, goes to self-destructive lengths to keep it hidden.

Yet, as the play descends into *amathia*, chaos and undifferentiatedness, Dionysus and Pentheus grow similar, becoming doubles of each other, driven by an identical goal. As embodiments of the Symbolised and non-Symbolic subjects, Pentheus and Dionysus are revealed as facets of the same character, necessarily alike, yet fundamentally different, enmeshed in a nexus of kin relations.

Throughout the play, Butler shows, kinship is revealed as an accusation, with kin ties being hidden or erased by those closest to them. When Dionysus arrives in Thebes, he informs the audience that Semele's sisters, his aunts, had claimed Semele had not borne Dionysus by Zeus, but had instead had a love affair with a mortal man and claimed Zeus to be the father at Cadmus' advice, to avoid a scandal. In other versions of the myth, we learn Semele was one of Zeus' priestesses, whom Zeus witnessed slaughtering a bull. He visits her as a giant eagle on several occasions, until she falls pregnant. Hera, having found out about her affair with Zeus, tricks her into persuading Zeus to reveal his divine form, which kills her instantly; we also learn her sisters claimed the divine fire was Zeus' punishment for Semele falsely accusing him of fathering Dionysus. The authoritative narrative of the play, that maintained by the House of Cadmus, comes into conflict with the one created by Dionysus: as he seeks to demonstrate his divinity, he establishes a new authoritative narrative that effectively splits truth, and encourages doubles to proliferate at the heart of kinship. In the new register of truth Dionysus creates he is a god, the bacchants are his army, and subjecthood itself, as demonstrated by Agave, appears to have forgone the oedipal paradigm in favour of another, pre-linguistic one, focused on the mother. Yet while the splitting of the authoritative narrative makes the second register viable by allowing it a claim to truth, it is still contained by the web of kin relations, and therefore linked to the first—the polis, ruled by Pentheus and *his* claim to truth. The fact that the two registers are situated in the midst of kinship is important: as kin ties are stretched, tested, denied and reasserted, the Symbolic and the pre-oedipal are bridged temporarily. When potentiated by the existence of a fluid web of kin relations, the non-Symbolic subject's ability to transgresses boundaries allows for the creation of a moment in which two modes of psychic organisation can coexist, albeit briefly, until the non-Symbolic subject exits the picture and kin ties are broken.

Yet whilst the Symbolic and pre-oedipal coexist, engulfed by the elusive, but exacting bonds of kinship, duality permeates subjects and actions, resulting in the proliferation of double meanings, and double forms of truth. The 'authoritative narrative' that does

not accept Dionysus' divine nature, in this context, is true, and Semele's sisters, in being devoted to it, stay devoted to the truth; however, as Butler points out, in supporting this narrative they also falsely accuse Zeus of having murdered Semele. Dionysus, "acting as Zeus' emissary, punishes them all with a form of delirium that drives them from their homes, a form of radical and sudden de-domestication."²¹⁹ While Dionysus never introduces himself as Zeus's emissary and maintains he is in Thebes to clear his mother's name, through his revenge on his aunts, he acts as a force produced by the phallic to destroy the repression of the mother, thereby *becoming* Zeus' emissary. Yet in attacking the phallic, Dionysus attacks himself, as Pentheus' double. I will return to the problem of the phallic attacking itself through the non-Symbolic subject in the final chapter.

Butler notes Dionysus exists in a nexus of interconnected threads involving his dead mother, his (absent/alleged) father and his crazy aunts, which designate these threads as kin relations; by being caught in this web, Zeus becomes kin to Dionysus, whether he is the biological father or not. Semele's sisters had exposed the story about Dionysus' parentage as a lie, forcing Zeus to punish the liar. If Zeus is Dionysus' father, the punishment takes the form of the madness inflicted on Semele's sisters (the liars); if Zeus is not the father, the punishment takes the form of Semele's murder (the liar). Confusingly, Semele is dead and her sisters are mad, confirming Zeus both is and is not the father. The intricate web of relations established through the triangular relation that precedes Dionysus (Zeus-Semele-Semele's sisters) is revealed as kinship because its constitutive parts are, at the same time, both guardians of truth and liars, both fathers and not-fathers.²²⁰

But perhaps the most interesting duality is the one Butler identifies in Zeus: in being and not being the father, Zeus becomes *his mother*. When Dionysus is extracted from Semele's womb by the fire-bolt (thrown by Zeus accidentally as he was trying to reveal himself to Semele, or on purpose to kill her for her lies), the gestating foetus is caught by Zeus himself, and sewn into his thigh with golden pins, where it continues gestation until it reaches viability. Zeus gives birth to baby Dionysus, becoming not the father, but the mother, or, indeed, *both* the father and the mother. This, Butler shows, implies that Dionysus has two mothers (or three, if we also count Kybele), his gestation being sequentially divided between Semele and Zeus. In allowing baby Dionysus to reach viability in his thigh, Zeus establishes the thigh as an alternative to the womb, completing a similar parthenogenesis like his birthing of Athena.

²¹⁹ Butler, "Kinship Trouble in *The Bacchae*", 2017.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

The transformation of Zeus into a mother and not-a-mother is mirrored by the transformation of Pentheus into a woman and not-a-woman. As he puts on his dress, Pentheus starts to see double, and doubt which of the two versions of the same is true. Yet the most powerful moment of misrecognition comes towards the end of the play, when Agave leads the bacchantes in dismembering her son, who she genuinely believes to be a mountain lion. “Does she fail to recognise him,” Butler asks, “because he is for the moment a girl, or because he has not only departed from his birth gender, but has in fact *become* an animal?”²²¹ As doubling and double-sightedness are set against the backdrop of a bridging of the Symbolic and the pre-oedipal, we can conclude both versions of the truth characters see are *true* at the same time: Zeus is the father and not-the-father and thus becomes the mother, Pentheus is man and woman, and Agave kills her son who is human and animal at the same time. Similarly, the women of Thebes are domesticated wives and maddened bacchantes, Semele’s sisters are guardians of truth and liars, Cadmus is a shrewd political thinker and a devout follower of Dionysus, and the Chorus is logical and mad. But the most important transformation happens to Pentheus: Pentheus, Butler argues, first assumes the form of a man, then that of a woman, and finally appears (at least to his mother and the other Bacchae) as an animal, at which point he is killed. It is when he transforms into an animal that recognition fails, and his mother is unable to see her son.

Dionysus is going through the same transformations, but with different results: he appears in Thebes as a man, but an effeminate one. We know from versions of the myth that he spent his childhood as a girl, to remain shielded from Hera’s vengeful gaze. Finally, he is known as “the bull-horned god”, and takes the form of a bull—Pentheus himself, upon starting to see double, asks Dionysus: “...you seem to be a bull... *Were* you ever an animal?”²²² Yet Dionysus is not killed the moment he transforms into an animal, but recognised as a god. If for Pentheus recognition falters when he falls into animality, for Dionysus it emerges.

The dualities in the play and the violent fates that befall those prone to transgression is closely linked to libidinal excess. We see, in the case of the Theban women, excessive consumption of honey, associated with lust, which degenerates into violence; the same is repeated in the case of Pentheus, who is seduced by Dionysus into lustful dances that degenerate into murder. The assumption of various forms leads to misrecognition and violence; yet for both Pentheus and Dionysus, this misrecognition is precipitated, and somehow managed by a divine figure, who occupies various genders at will. “Shall we conclude,” Butler asks, “that the transposition of gender, one that already took place

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Euripides, *Ten Plays by Euripides*, 340.

when Zeus violently usurped the gestational process, continues as Dionysus beguiles with his feminine form, and Pentheus become a dancing woman?”²²³

In the course of these transformations, Agave loses the ability to recognise her son. Yet Butler poses a further challenge, and questions how this misrecognition, and the transition from human to animal, is possible. “Is it that there are already affinities, if not forms of kinship, between the one gender and the other, and between human and animal, such that they can become confused quite easily?” she asks. The transition from human to animal, from male to female, Butler argues, is not as much a transition, but rather testimony to the fluidity of kin relations. The move into animality, as well as the oscillation between genders, “are relations that work transversally across established kinship ties based on claims of paternity and maternity...and represent forms of affinity that work through metonymy and concentricity, not following the rules of kinship based only on reproductive lines.”²²⁴ Through their changes, Pentheus and Dionysus testify to the fluidity of kin ties, and threaten the clearly delineated boundaries of subjecthood and the self. Yet Dionysus is (and is not) divine, and it is only Pentheus that is punished for this transgression.

As far as Agave is concerned, she is unable to recognise her son on her own until the bridge between the Symbolic and the pre-oedipal collapses and Cadmus reasserts an authoritative narrative, re-establishing accepted norms *ex post facto*. With the recognition of her murder, Butler explains, “comes grief, another defining sign of kinship. But so too, surely, is the blindness.” In other words, misrecognition, whether by blindness or successive transformations that make the person be and not be him/herself at the same time mark a defining feature of kinship.

As Butler shows, these instances of duality are delineations of kinship, becoming *constitutive binds*, both definitive and approximate: they constitute the lives of those enmeshed in them, but their punishments and boundaries remain fluid. The fluidity of the bonds demonstrates kinship must be enacted for its bonds to become visible; yet the enactment is always necessarily by means of blindness and double-sightedness, for kinship can only be recognised through misrecognition. The bonds of kinship do not converge to form a moralising tale; according to Butler, it would be wrong to seek to extract moral teachings from such a story, as to do this would be to fail to recognise the way kinship becomes apparent, is tested and reasserted in the play.²²⁵ The point is not

²²³ Butler, “Gender Trouble in *The Bacchae*”, 2017.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ “Our standard way of reading the story is to say the reason we need rules of kinship known is that they will keep us from committing acts of murder and incest; but of course if we think about domestic violence, the propensity for murders to be committed by an intimate, and even the commission of incest, then neither murder nor incest are solved though recourse to kinship. Indeed, kinship appears to be part of the story. Further, if we seek to establish difference between

to undo the misrecognition or elucidate the instances of double-sightedness, but to recognise these as facets that cannot be treated independently, because they exist intertwined in a relation of kinship. Kinship is characterised by double-ness, by disorientation, and the punishment, marked by grief and anguish, does not merely reassert the law, but highlights that the law “depends on those traversals of categories of gender, humanness and animality that are recurrent and constitutive.”²²⁶

Ultimately, the tragedy reveals the interplay between certainty and confusion that defines kin relations and the way kinship depends on the drives that are instrumental in undoing its ties. Reading the struggles of kinship through the non-Symbolic subject and analysing the relationship between Dionysus and Pentheus reveals duality asserts and denies itself. In being the same while different, Pentheus and Dionysus not only define kin ties, but also break the bonds of kinship and expose the ego as both pervasive and fragile. The non-Symbolic subject becomes what subverts kinship, generates breakage, and, at the same time, bridges the pre-oedipal and the Symbolic to reveal the possibility of an alternative to the oedipal model of subjectification.

Summary of Chapter 4

In this chapter I have looked at the place women occupy in *The Bacchae*, and have argued that, while the status of women as objects suggests a clear binary structure, the complex nature of the relationships between women, men and divinity makes the binary too rigid to maintain and self-subversive. By showing binaries to be untenable, I have argued the mother occupies a crucial role in the play, revealed through her absence, and have suggested that it is the centrality of her absence and its ability to threaten the Symbolic that underlie her structuring capacity. Using Butler’s reading of *The Bacchae* through the lens of kinship, I have demonstrated the non-Symbolic subject facilitates a bridging of the Symbolic and the pre-oedipal that allows two modes of subjecthood to coexist momentarily, pointing towards alternative models of subjectification beyond the oedipal.

human communities and the lives of animals by claiming that humans are structured by kinship, then we invest kinship with a humanising force, one that is exercised at the same time gender is unequivocally established and heterosexual reproduction made the defining structure of kinship ties. And yet running through this story is the idea that certain equivocations tend to recur and that they cannot be legislated away by rules of any kind. Oedipus: father/stranger, mother/lover; Antigone: brother/lover, uncle/sovereign. These are all forms of seeing double, and is what is happening when Dionysus and Pentheus are at once men and woman, and when Agave’s son becomes man/woman/animal. We can read the story to get to the end and then try to figure out its moral. Or we can see what interrupts the story as it proceeds, equivocations and echoes that are the psychic reverberations or kinship found especially in structure of ambivalence. Those recurring forms of doubleness interrupt the sequence of the story, suggesting that the ties of kinship that cross and link the human and the animal are not opposites, not mutually exclusive possibilities, but cousins, even *kissing cousins*.” Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid

Chapter 5

Death, violence and self-harm: the place of the mother

In this chapter, I will explore the way the exclusion of the mother from the social sphere and from the space of literature and the refusal to accept her structuring role has impacted the figure of women in the play. In so doing, I seek to uncover the reason behind the expulsion of the mother from the Symbolic, and what it may reveal about the male imaginary.

In the play, it seems there are two possible positions for women: they are either 'phallic', such as Semele's sisters before being struck with Dionysian madness, posing limited threat to the phallic order and the male Symbolic, or non-phallic, such as Agave in her bacchic revelry and the failed mothers who leave their newborn babies to nurse calves, becoming fundamentally dangerous for the integrity of the Symbolic. There appears to be no way in which the mother that exists in the Symbolic space and is accepted by the male imaginary can be reconciled with the structuring mother, who is necessarily ejected from the Symbolic, and relegated to the Real, or at least to a space that can neutralise her structuring capacity. When Agave occupies a structuring position, she ends up killing her son, an act that brings about wide-spread despair and the destruction of two social units: on the one hand, that of a family, whose male figurehead is murdered, and on the other hand that of a state, whose ruler is sacrificed.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the strictly delineated confines of motherhood and of gender roles more widely in the play are fragile constructions that crumble under scrutiny. The positions of the play are only seemingly fixed, like an image on the water surface: the smallest ripple distorts it to the point that it becomes unrecognisable or shows the opposite of what it did at the beginning. The monstrous mother, who threatens the baby with complete annihilation, does so by displaying the pinnacle of love-as-appropriation perpetuated by the male imaginary; the crazy aunts who are devoted to the truth even when it comes at the cost of their own sister's life end up destabilising the authoritative narrative and upholding an alternative they had initially sought to deny; the representative of the phallic rule, Pentheus, is willing to go to any lengths to safeguard the polis from the threat of the stranger, yet ends up acting in

ways almost identical to Dionysus, hastening and almost facilitating the destruction of the male imaginary. People behave like animals, seem to *be* animals, *become* animals, and occasionally are simultaneously animal and human. Death and destruction in the play happen in a complex nexus of kin relations that makes everyone related to everyone else in some way, and everyone human and non-human, depending on their circumstances; the convoluted setting means that, no matter how violence is enacted or against whom, it always runs the risk of turning into infanticide or cannibalism.

Positions in the play are shifting, and hold stable only long enough so that characters are tempted into considering them fixed; at the centre of their movement, the figure of the mother is a gaping hole, absorbing characters, relationships, kin ties and the course of events, and in so doing causing the Symbolic to unravel. By the end of the play, the only things that remain are ineffable absences: of the mother, of the stranger, of a family that can govern the polis. Amidst generalised death and destruction, audiences are left wondering what if...: what if the mother, as Kybele or another mother-goddess, had made an appearance during the play, and had been at once recognised as a divine being? What if she had elucidated the Dionysian mysteries, taming the city into submission with much less bloodshed? Would her appearance necessarily entail her adopting a male subject position and replacing the figure of the Father? Or, otherwise phrased, is there any way for the mother to be present *and* a structuring element, or must she always be not-there-but-somehow-close for the psyche to respond to her by undoing and redoing itself?

The structuring capacity of the mother revolves around violence and the death drive; by virtue of the violence being directed at the infant, the violence the mother brings is always sexual, threatening the child with castration and annihilation. In the play, we witness a reiteration of the Kybele-Attis myth with Agave and Pentheus in the roles of Kybele and Attis, in which Agave takes on both the structuring and destructive traits of Kybele, and Pentheus becomes the murdered child and the castrated (beheaded) lover. The separation from the mother, from this perspective, is no longer a sterile affair, but fully-fledged bloody mutilation: for the mother to come forward, the image of the father must be erased. In this chapter, I will explore the meaning of the killing of the son by the mother, and the importance of this murder in the wider issue of the repressed motherly figure.

In Chapter 4, I looked in turn at the relationship between the mother and the non-Symbolic subject, the Symbolised subject, and the relationship between Agave and Pentheus, and concluded that the mother's full generative force is normatively contained to protect the male imaginary. In this chapter, I would like to delve deeper

into this question, and look at the reason the mother is considered threatening, and try to understand the mechanisms the male imaginary utilises to keep this threat at bay. I will show that the exclusion of the mother from the Symbolic sphere is the effect of a process of a multi-faceted repression, which is in turn attacked by the non-Symbolic subject and results in the dissolution of the social order based on said repression.

Throughout this work, I have treated the non-Symbolic subject as the subject that exists unadulterated by the containing influence of the male imaginary, and argued that it is a structured psychic excess, a form of subjectivity that exists before the internalisation of the father-figure and that needs to be *tamed* for its entry in the Symbolic to be possible. I also argued that Dionysus can be regarded as a (literary) manifestation of the non-Symbolic subject. In this chapter, I would like to also propose that Dionysus functions simultaneously as a symptom of the repression of the mother and her exclusion from the Symbolic, and analyse how this repression functions and why the non-Symbolic subject (Dionysus) and the Symbolised subject (Pentheus) can only be linked through violence. I will look at the problem of doubling as a form of violence, and at what happens when such violence occurs at the heart of the family, in the midst of kinship. I will show that the complex repression of the mother is aimed at rendering her *impotent*, unable to ever occupy a structuring male subject-position and usurp the Father, and at erasing the traces of her generative and structuring qualities, to keep the male imaginary safe from her potentially destructive influence. In the play, we see this erasure in the figure of the absent, non-threatening, sterile Kybele, and that of the monstrous mother (Agave): as Agave's structuring capacity manifests itself, her monstrosity becomes incompatible even with the violent non-Symbolic subject, and she is consequently exiled.

In order to undertake this analysis, I will look at the figure of Kybele and similar goddesses that are linked to the idea of structure and life, to show that linking the mother to birth, particularly to the birth of men in myths, generates, in itself, a form of structure, which the non-Symbolised subject adopts.

Dionysus as symptom

When we read *The Bacchae* as an exposition of two registers that clash due to the (perceived or created) incompatibility of their underlying structuring elements, we see that the tragic result of this clash is widespread madness, the dissolution of individuality and the destruction of a social order, all potentiated by the web of kinship that contains the events. To keep madness and destruction at bay, one register *represses* the other,

absorbing and neutralising it. It is therefore possible that the psychic register that represses the other experiences neurotic symptoms caused by the effort of keeping the repression hidden in the depths of the unconscious—or, in this case, outside (or inside, if we think of Zeus and Metis) of the space of representation, and into the Real.

When understanding the play in such a way, Dionysus becomes a neurotic symptom of the male imaginary (which is represented universally by Zeus), generated by the obliteration and disavowal of the mother and the systematic cover-up of the matricidal law. If a symptom, Dionysus' existence can *only* lead to the un-structuring of the Symbolic law, through its repeated and aggressive permeation by repressed elements. In being the non-Symbolic subject *carried forward into the Symbolic*, Dionysus also becomes a product of the male imaginary, a symptom of the act of repressing the mother, which has now sublimated into a different, potent and destructive form, and has resurfaced as symptom amid the Symbolic. As the mother has been ingested and incorporated by the male imaginary, Dionysus can transgress boundaries and move freely in the phallic psyche, a manifestation of the maternal law itself, not expelled, but contained. He is born of the male imaginary *in the Symbolic*, but governed by none of its laws; like a neurotic symptom, he follows no rules (or follows dream-logic), and appears as a discordant element that eventually leads to the collapse of rationality, the destruction of the phallic law, and the (re)affirmation of the mother—not as a presence that replicates the image of the father, but as indeterminate absence.

Once the play reaches a climax and ends in tragedy, Dionysus also disappears, like a symptom whose root cause has been exposed and accepted by the analysand. The product of this repression—the social organisation structured on the systematic erasure of the mother—can no longer exist, once repression has proved incapable of covering up the absence of the mother; as a result, the product (the socio-political organisation) is destroyed.

The non-Symbolic subject becomes a breaking-through of the pre-Symbolic subject in a setting created by and for the male imaginary. A remnant of pre-sexual difference that resulted in a different model of subjectification, the non-Symbolic subject is carried over in the phallic social structure. Its incompatibility with the social setting comes as a result of the lack of synchronisation between the two registers, the male and female imaginaries, and the attempted exorcism of the feminine from the social sphere. Through Dionysus, Zeus has created the type of femininity he has attempted to eradicate with Metis: a cunning, destructive mother who has the potential to upturn the

social order from within.²²⁷ When allowed to become manifest, it does so through the figure of Dionysus, who, as a clandestine element in the middle of the Symbolic, can demonstrate the full range of traits denied to the mother: it can empower women to display maternal *jouissance* and structuring power. The non-Symbolic subject is, therefore, the testimony of incongruence between a preferred social order based entirely on the structuring function of the phallus, and broader, more inclusive space of subjectification that contains both maternal and paternal elements and opens the possibility for multiple forms of subjectivity to exist. When these collide, and one represses the other, a discordant element is born, a monstrous subject, which cannot exist in either setting, but brings chaos to both.

The generative mother

Mother-goddess figurines have been found across the world, their abundance pointing to the potential existence of several mother-goddess cults and exciting the interest of contemporary theorists.²²⁸ The emphasis placed by modernity on the part the mother plays in the life of the infant, and the subsequent inference that ancient civilisations must have also revered the mother offers us an important insight into modern thought itself: it tells us that there is something that prompts the male imaginary to return to the image of the mother, and to go to great lengths to unearth her (literally, through digging up artefacts and displaying them in museums) and imbue her with meaning, in perhaps a figurative form of reparation for past erasure.²²⁹ For the purpose of this chapter, I will refer only to figures that pertain to Classical Antiquity, but this is not to say that the cult of the mother-goddess is not also prominent in other parts of the world; on the contrary, evidence points to the existence of such cults in Norse, Celtic and Incan societies, as well as contemporary religions such as Hinduism and Christianity, cultures in the Pacific, and modern cults.

Clay figurines of mother-goddesses date from the Palaeolithic, and have been excavated in Anatolia in the Neolithic, and in neighbouring Thrace (in the Cucuteni-Trypillian culture) in the Neolithic-Eneolithic. The cult of Kybele dates from the

²²⁷ After all, patriarchy had been tricked before by Zeus' own mother, Rhea, who had managed to preserve the element that would destroy patriarchy (Zeus) and hide it from the male imaginary's watchful eye (Kronos).

²²⁸ See Motz, *The Faces of the Goddess*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) for a detailed discussion of the cult of the mother goddess and the significance of different forms of worshipping her.

²²⁹ I will return to the idea of reparation for a past wrong (in this case, the attempt to annihilate the mother by erasing her from the social space). With a view to the act of digging up figurines of women and creating complex narratives around their potential roles as objects of worship, it is interesting to note that the way these figurines are treated in modern culture can also be interpreted as attempted reparation. Artefacts are displayed in museums, usually protected by durable glass, catalogued rigorously and labelled clearly. It is questionable whether the figure of the mother is protected this way, or, indeed, further isolated and 'contained'.

Neolithic, but her figure is not stable, in the sense that she is frequently associated (and at times amalgamated) with mother-goddesses in Ancient Antiquity, such as Demeter and Rhea, but also varying hypostases of Aphrodite.

Kybele represents the figure of the mother, and is revered as the mother of all gods, much like Rhea and Demeter. She is occasionally referred to as “The Phrygian Aphrodite of Mount Ida”, but, interestingly, also as “the queen bee”.²³⁰ Although the figure of Kybele has numerous sexual elements and is especially graphic in terms of sexual violence, particularly self-mutilation, there are not many explicit sexual references to Kybele herself. While centred on sexual practices, her cult has more to do with the removal of sexual traces than with their perpetuation: her priests emasculate themselves in ecstatic revelry, in the hope of being closer to unity with the goddess. Unity with Kybele, in this context, becomes possible only once male sexuality has been denied, and emasculation becomes the only way to achieve union with the goddess; this practice also translates in an interpretation of the goddess as a primordial element that not only precedes, but also rejects male phantasy and the male imaginary. Much like the generative mother the male imaginary fears, the Mother Goddess is incompatible with the male imaginary, and her proximity, especially when it also implies (sexual) unity, can only lead to the destruction of the male (subject). The figure of Kybele appears to be interpreted as one that precedes and is antagonistic to male figures. But it is too simplistic to argue that one structuring element precedes the other, and more productive to investigate the reason her figure has become associated with traits that are threatening to the male imaginary: what is it about the mother that prompted the male imaginary to create and proliferate an image of her that is incompatible with the Symbolic?

The cult of Kybele can be read as a return to matriarchy, as the ideas of androgyny, castration and the effeminate male feature prominently, both in myths, as outlined in the previous chapter, and in Euripides’ *The Bacchae*. The hermaphrodite, Graves writes, originated as a religious concept in the transition from a patriarchal system to a matriarchal one: Hermaphroditus “is the sacred king deputising for the Queen...and wearing artificial breasts”, while “Androgyne is the mother of a pre-Hellenic clan which has avoided being patriarchalized.”²³¹ By this token, gods such as the Cyprian Aphrodite (the Bearded goddess), and Dionysus (the effeminate god), can be read as facilitating social transitions from one form of organisation (patriarchal) to the other (matriarchal), or as a momentary bridge between the feminine and the masculine. Ultimately, they represent the rejection and subsequent subversion of patriarchy by the

²³⁰ Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 18.3.

²³¹ Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 18.8.

matriarchal, elevating the hermaphrodite to the status of a sacred figure that can belong to any social organisation by virtue of its transitional nature.

If hermaphrodite gods are transitional figures that help shift social perception, it is interesting that from the union of two gods affiliated with the matriarchal (Dionysus, in his effeminacy, and Aphrodite, in her abundant fertility) a monstrous creature is produced, a creature that, through its appearance, pays homage to masculinity. The son Aphrodite bore Dionysus, Priapus, was “an ugly child with enormous genitals”,²³² a deformity that allegedly resulted from Hera’s interference, who disapproved of Aphrodite’s promiscuity.²³³ Aphrodite’s fertility and sexuality exert a powerful pull on patriarchy, attracting not only Hera’s wrath (who, much like Athena, acts as an enforcer and guardian of patriarchy), but also Zeus’.²³⁴ Although he never has sexual relations with Aphrodite (possibly because it would have been incestuous), Zeus was consumed with lust for her.²³⁵ As a punishment, he made her fall in love with a mortal, Anchises. She “visited him [Anchises] in the guise of a Phrygian princess, clad in a dazzlingly red robe, and lay with him on a couch spread with the skins of bears and lions, while bees buzzed drowsily about them.”²³⁶ Yet the transition to matriarchy is not always successful, even when facilitated by those who display overabundant sexuality. In Euripides’ play, Dionysus becomes an enabler of the cult of Kybele; however, the repression of the mother’s generative force by the male imaginary makes her figure unrepresentable in the Symbolic, and the transition fails.

The image of honey is a returning trope in *The Bacchae*, which, in the context of the play, stands for life, sensuality and lust, which nonetheless runs the risk of becoming cannibalism and death when consumed excessively. Kybele herself is revered as the Queen bee, and associated with honey, and, like Aphrodite, with fertility and bees. The reference to honey runs throughout Greek myth, and appears time and again as a poignant warning against the *excessive consumption of honey*, in the form of the *excessive honeymoon* and the *decomposition* of honey, followed by its turning into *excrement*. In his essay, *Between Beasts and Gods*, Marcel Detienne makes a clear association between the excess of honey, or the excessive honeymoon (understood in this context as overabundant sexuality), and its degeneration into rape and cannibalism. Giving the example of Tereus and Polytechnos, Detienne argues that

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 18.e.

²³⁴ In some versions of the myth, Rhea (Hera’s mother) is associated with Kybele, and both are considered Dionysus’ mother. This means Hera is Dionysus’ sibling to the same degree as Athena – and, indeed, they both fulfil similar functions and are presented as enforcers of patriarchy: Athena as the goddess of (phallic) wisdom, and Hera as the goddess of marriage.

²³⁵ Most commonly, Aphrodite is depicted as older than Zeus, having been born of the frothing of the sea when Ouranos’ severed testicles touched the water; Homer, however, depicts Aphrodite as Zeus and Dione’s daughter. Theoi, “Aphrodite myths”.

²³⁶ Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 18.f, g.

sexual excess, and the act of taking more pleasure than is proper in the honeymoon or the relation with a lover, transforms honey from a nourishing substance into decay, rot and excrement. Both husbands (Tereus and Polytechnos) are guilty of being overly sexual, and end up being killed by honey: they both succumb to rape and cannibalism, followed by death. Tereus eats his son, and is finally changed into a hoopoe, a bird that feeds on human excrement, while Polytechnos, the master of bees and honey, is rolled in honey and left to be stung by bees. As he abandons the balanced consumption of honey (as the master of bees), and indulges excessively in honey, the excess kills him, and he is left to rot.

The transition between the nourishing, life-giving qualities of honey and its excess is facilitated by what Detienne calls a “cannibalistic phase”, which in other myths is defined as “the state prior to the discovery of honey”. In the myths Detienne quotes, “men ate each other until the Bee-Woman taught them how to feed off honey gathered in the forest.”²³⁷ The Bee-Woman (or Queen Bee, as Kybele is depicted) was the first civilising influence, the one that ended the cannibalism of men and initiated the first taboos. The possession of honey is solely the prerogative of the Bee Woman; an equivalent Bee Man does not appear to exist, and the task to regulate society, impose boundaries and delineate the limits of subjecthood falls to the Bee Woman. Yet she is not akin to a male god: she does not impose limits, but rather effects a change *within men* that enables them to set their own boundaries. After the Bee Woman ‘civilizes’ men, the way subjects relate to each other becomes regulated by their access (or lack thereof) to honey: those who know how to consume it live in civilised societies, while those who do not live in fear of being murdered and eaten by the other. The Bee Woman seems to be a catalyst, an enabler of society, not an unbreakable rule. In this particular myth, we see at play a similar process to the one Lacan captures in his theorisation of the mirror stage: unlike the Father, who, through bloody mutilation, effects change within a child’s psychic makeup, generating the creation of structures within the subject, the mother’s generative influence is different, and operates from without. Like in the mirror stage, the mother (or the Bee Woman) guides the subject (child/man) in his process of subjectification, precipitating within him a change—the first step towards subjecthood. In other words, if the Father forces a child’s impulses into acceptable avenues, the mother (Bee Woman) helps the child recognise himself as receptacle of these impulses—in the mirror stage, she does so through reassurance (‘yes, it is really you in the mirror’), while in the myth she teaches the child how and what to eat, regulating his relation with food, sexuality and the limits of selfhood.

²³⁷ Detienne, *Myth, Religion and Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 216.

The men of the myth Detienne presents live in a period before the institution of rules and rationality, one that is characterised by the constant threat of complete annihilation—represented by cannibalism. The first rules that protect the self from being destroyed by an Other are instituted not by a representative of patriarchy, but by the Bee Woman, who is the first structuring presence in the life of the subject. What we see in the story of the Bee Woman is the theoretical framework that underpins the creation of the male child. Once she has brought to the fore the structures within the child's psyche, the Bee Woman retreats, leaving the child to structure his own life, in accordance with the rules whose emergence she encouraged. The Bee Woman calls the subject into being, only to then disappear from his life, becoming an indeterminate absence that *may* return if the proper rules of consumption are forgotten.

It is interesting to note that, while the Bacchic orgies initiated by Dionysus do involve flowing rivers of milk and honey, they do not require the worshippers to engage in cannibalism-proper, in the sense that there is no mention of the consumption of another human's flesh. The politico-religious system of Ancient Greece was such that it structured itself around eating habits and sacrifice: sacrifice was the practice that codified rules about eating, and assigned men and gods their proper places. After a sacrifice, men were allowed the meat, the perishable substance that would allow them to continue living; the gods, on the other hand, were allowed the incense, the smoke and the perfume of the rite, the "incorruptible substances which constitute the superior foods reserved for the immortals."²³⁸ From this perspective, man is closer to animals in its eating habits and needs than he is to gods. However, this closeness also translates into the necessity for clear rules of sovereignty: due to his ability to reason and impose restrictions on his eating habits (i.e.: not to eat other men), man is superior to animals. This superiority translates into man's ability to divide animals into groups he protects/eats, such as livestock, and animals he hunts and/or eats. The act of eating the other, therefore, becomes a way of asserting domination, of establishing a hierarchical relation and the rules of patriarchal sovereignty.

Yet the act of cannibalism itself can be divided into two: firstly, the taboo act of actually eating and digesting another person. Secondly, the act of swallowing a person, in an attempt to assert domination over them, absorb their powers, and contain the threat they may pose should they continue to exist. The latter was the case of both Kronos and Zeus, who swallowed those that could either jeopardise or further their rule. Cannibalism, in this context, becomes the way for patriarchy to assert its legitimacy by (literally, on occasion) consuming that which deviates from the norms set forth by the

²³⁸ Detienne, *Myth, Religion and Society*, 218.

male imaginary; under these circumstances, the cannibalistic act becomes *acceptable*. This form of cannibalism is what befalls the figure of the mother: as her structuring function becomes subsumed into the role of the Father, her image is hollowed out and split into acceptable elements (which are brought into the Symbolic), and undesirable ones (which are relegated to the Real).

The type of cannibalism that remains taboo is associated, in Plato's *Republic*, with the behaviour of the tyrant: "the tyrant's behaviour is seen as the naked irruption into the world of primitive lusts which ordinarily are aroused in us only in sleep, when under the influence of alcohol the animal part of the soul...dreams that it commits incest with the mother, rapes god, man or beast, murders the father or devours its own children."²³⁹ These are, thus, the primitive fears of the male imaginary, and they are closely associated with tyranny, with illegitimacy, and with usurped sovereignty—in other words, with the impossibility of ruling without fear, or of living in a social system without fearing its dissolution.²⁴⁰ The boundaries of the city, the rules and logic that govern the polis serve to prevent such a return of man to his bestial nature. "Outside the frame of the city and the hierarchical structure with which it is linked, man, god and beast are merely interchangeable objects of the tyrant's desire, which compel him to incest and parricide and finally to auto-cannibalism.", Detienne writes. "In eating his own flesh and blood, the tyrant proclaims that he is outside the rules, a social outcast—just as the scapegoat [that] was expelled from the city..."²⁴¹

From this perspective, cannibalism is an enforcer of sovereignty, as it serves to 'swallow' erratic elements, contain them, and prevent them from endangering the integrity of the polis/male imaginary. Yet cannibalism can also be read as a form of rejection of sovereignty, especially when it is used to eliminate the hierarchical structures set in place by the male imaginary. Such is the case of Dionysus and Kybele, who pertain to this latter category due to the specific nature of their religious rituals. Detienne writes:

"in utter contempt of the rules for *polis*-sacrifice, an animal is hunted in the mountains, torn to pieces while still alive and consumed raw...[T]he boundaries between animals and men are effaced, human and animal interpenetrate, become indistinguishable...It is as if, in an attempt to become more utterly 'wild', the worshippers of Dionysus had first to soften the creatures of the wild, make friends with them even to the point of self-identification. But Dionysus the wild hunter is not simply an 'eater of raw flesh'. The practice of eating raw flesh which he demands of his followers leads them to imitate wild animals in

²³⁹ Detienne, *Myth, Religion and Society*, 220.

²⁴⁰ Similar fears can be traced in literature centuries later, in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, a work which is as much a praise of Queen Elizabeth I, as it is an attempt to legitimate her rule by tracing her lineage back to King Arthur, and thus prevent accusations of tyranny.

²⁴¹ Detienne, *Myth, Religion and Society*, 220.

performing the cruellest acts of cannibalism...On Chios, Tenedos and Lesbos, Dionysus hungers for human flesh."²⁴²

In certain Greek contexts, the cult of Dionysus incites the pinnacle of the savagery he demands from his followers. Nonetheless, Detienne continues by arguing that cannibalism as presented here is, in fact, scorned by even Dionysus: Agave is sent into exile, and her deed is seen as a form of pollution of the polis. Similarly, the act of doubling of the self (as seen in the Pentheus-Dionysus relationship), of taking on the characteristics of the other, thus 'swallowing' the other and destroying them, is equally scorned. These types of cannibalism are reserved as a punishment for those that choose not to follow Dionysus. Although Dionysus appears to promote utmost savagery as his preferred path, his followers who actually commit acts of cannibalism end up consuming themselves. Cannibalism, Detienne explains, cannot reach a peak without turning onto itself. "In its pure form, cannibalism is impossible."²⁴³ Agave's violence, by this token, is a form of failed violence, which turns onto itself and not only destroys the polis, but forces her into exile. The overlapping forms of cannibalism and their cumulative effect destabilise the polis, leading to its ultimate collapse. The cannibalism presented here is, in fact, violence at the heart of kinship, a type that breaks taboos and threatens the fabric of the Symbolic.

Cannibalism exists in the Dionysian cult as a form of subverting and even overthrowing male sovereignty: the cannibalistic act resides in Dionysus and Kybele (by association) 'absorbing' their followers, and allowing them to transform into images of the god him/herself. The Maenads, in their crazed frenzy, succumb to savagery, becoming like animals. Their sexual frenzy creates an overabundance of libidinal energy (shown in the play in the form of rivers of milk and honey, continuously flowing), and trespasses social taboos. Kybele's priests castrate themselves, so as to sever any links they may have with patriarchy and return to a time before differentiation, before the baby's unity with the mother is given up for integration into the Symbolic. The cult of the two gods revolves around overthrowing the three basic taboos of patriarchy, incest, parricide and cannibalism, subverting patriarchy from within—from the place of the 'swallowed', absorbed mother (Metis). The way the followers of the two gods *become* the deities they worship, taking on their characteristics and 'translating' them into the polis, leads to a form of doubling that is essentially cannibalistic in nature. The doubling of the self in *The Bacchae* invariably also involves the destruction of the self: the ingestion of the other, whether by doing what the other does, or by dressing, singing, dancing or looking like the other, proves too much for the self to withstand, and as a result it is

²⁴² Detienne, *Myth, Religion and Society*, 224.

²⁴³ Detienne, *Myth, Religion and Society*, 221.

destroyed. Both Pentheus and the Maenads imitate the god and take part in his rites and orgies to partake of him, shed their old identities and eventually become him,²⁴⁴ yet the process ends in their demise—the Maenads, after a period of Bacchic madness, are presumably returned to their original captor(s) (the stifling polis, with fixed gender roles and expectations). Pentheus is beheaded, and Agave is exiled, both thus being denied access to and control over the polis. As Detienne points out, the cult of Dionysus was never fully separate from the polis; although not accepted outwardly, it always took place *inside*, and only acted as a subversive force *because* of its intimate ties with patriarchy. The overlapping forms of cannibalism and their effect destabilise the polis and lead to its collapse. Cannibalism in *The Bacchae* underlines a pre-existent violence in the midst of kinship, the type that is able to break the taboos that hold the fabric of the Symbolic woven together.

When considering cannibalism in the play, it is critical to remember that cannibalism is a modern term, which emerged in response to racial difference and carries within it a complex and rich colonial baggage.²⁴⁵ The Greeks refer to eating other human beings and to eating one's children through the descriptive terms 'anthropophagy' and 'teknophagy'; in this thesis, I use the more flexible term 'cannibalism' to denote the fluid boundaries of assimilation by the patriarchal, and point to a practice of violently incorporating bodies and subjectivities, whose pervasiveness 'anthropophagy' cannot capture. However, it is also essential to note that the imagery surrounding cannibalism is historically determined, and intimately interwoven with the colonial events that produced the word. Cannibalism, then, should be treated first and foremost as a trope that contains patriarchal structures, and testifies to the male imaginary's fear of undifferentiatedness and of potential annihilation by the Other. By this token, discussing cannibalism must always entail assuming the (white) male subject position and excluding subjectivities that are marked by difference (sexual, racial, cultural).

The Bacchae can only be read through the lens of cannibalism by modern subjects, for whom the term makes historical sense; yet such a reading has the potential to illuminate psychoanalytic tropes that have endured in the male imaginary, and analyse their underlying structure. The cannibalism depicted in *The Bacchae* is simultaneously maternal and phallic: it re-enacts the deepest fears of the male imaginary, those of being absorbed by the mother, of having one's subjectivity subsumed by that of the mother and reduced to undifferentiatedness, madness and non-Being. At the same

²⁴⁴ As D'Angour notes, these initiation rituals sought to strip the initiand of their old identity so that they could become like the god. The select few could thus bypass mortality, while those who did not have access to the initiations could enjoy a similarly transformative experience in the theatre. D'Angour, *The Greeks and the New*, 158-160.

²⁴⁵ For a discussion of colonial fantasies in psychoanalytic discourse, see Marita Vyrgiotti, *The Cannibal Trope*, (PhD thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2018).

time, the taking-in of the other is foundational for patriarchy, the cornerstone of patriarchal sovereignty and an affirmation of the phallic law. Cannibalism in the play, therefore, is a practice that has dual meaning: on the one hand, it affirms the male imaginary, while on the other it forces it to face its certain death. To absorb, to become one with the other, is both a highly revered practice within the patriarchal society, especially when employed by men and most evident in the idealised forms of romantic love; when employed by women, the same practice becomes excessive, resulting in death and despair, as is the case with Agave's beheading of Pentheus.

There is value in exploring in more depth the idea of the cult of mother 'absorbing' its followers, or having certain rituals that seek to help followers achieve unity with the mother, become one with her, return to some form of metaphorical womb, to a state of undifferentiatedness or even reject the phallic from within, by operating and subverting it from within phallic confines. According to Richard Caldwell, the relationship between the mother and the baby can be regarded as triangular, the third object that enters the picture being the phallus.²⁴⁶ In other words, the baby in the preoedipal triad seeks not to possess the mother, but rather to *become* the phallus, and thus reside in the mother's body and achieve unity with her. The cult of Kybele enables its followers to become the phallus: by castrating themselves, they deny their masculinity and put an end to their oedipal strivings. They do not possess the phallus, but instead regress to a preoedipal state in which they can *become* it, and return to the mother's body, which, in Kleinian theory, is regarded as containing the father's penis and all potential rival babies. The move in this context, then, is to reject the phallic structure that comes into place after the oedipal stage and return to a preoedipal organisation that allows the subject to exist *as the phallus*, and, being in a pre-phallic state, not depend on phallic organisation. This is a mechanism we see at play in fairy tales and myths, when certain characters are allowed to mediate between men and women in the tale and move freely between two seemingly incompatible sides: for example, in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, the dwarves are pre-phallic elements that have full, unrestricted access to Snow White in virtue of their not being part of the phallic structure. They reside with her inside the tiny hut, effectively becoming manifestations of the phallus that the mother possesses and are non-threatening enough to allow her to go through some form of secondary gestation and emerge 'fully formed', ready for marriage with the prince. Similarly, in Boorman's *Excalibur*, a modern reworking of the Arthurian legend, the wizard Merlin is presented as a pre-phallic character playing no other role than to grant men access to women (or advise them on how to win wars that would

²⁴⁶ Richard Caldwell, *The origin of the gods: a psychoanalytic study of Greek theogonic myth*, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

gain them such access). He becomes the phallus, the character who understands power and politics, yet knows nothing of courtly love, of love-as-appropriation, and exists on the fringes of phallic society. He enjoys unrestricted access to the bodies of women, not as a sexual partner, but as privy to their lives and destinies.

In this and previous chapters, I proposed the idea that the mother has a dual aspect, as both a generative force, the mother who holds the phallus and rival babies and precipitates the process of subjectification in the baby, but also a terrifying entity that threatens to annihilate the baby even when gone from his life, a looming presence that can return without notice. It is this duality of the mother that is generative of psychic structures. Through the mirror stage, the mother *calls the subject into Being*, helping the baby become self-aware and differentiate himself from the body of the mother; the baby becomes not only self-aware, but also envious of its place in relation to the mother and possessed by the desire to return to unity with her. As shown in Chapter 3, the love-envy/hate relationship the baby has with the mother and the desire to distance himself from the mother and be(come) the phallus so as to return within her give rise to intra-subjective tension, to an oscillation between the two positions (of love or envy).²⁴⁷ This oscillation, along with the dual, combined aspect of the body of the mother precipitates the genesis of the ability to become structured, and, with the intervention of the Father, eventually pushes the non-Symbolic subject into Symbolic structures. In other words, the mother creates the conditions for the ability to become structured and, in instilling this ability into the non-Symbolic subject, generates a type of structure that predates the phallic one.²⁴⁸ The mother's relationship with the child becomes crucial for the child to be able to respond to structure (including the phallic one) and adopt it.

At the same time, the mother's absence can un-structure the subject's psyche and threaten the integrity of the Symbolic, a capacity which, as I suggested previously, underlines her structuring power. The centrality of the mother in the structuring and un-structuring of the infant's psyche, and her role in the forming of any type of subjectivity place her in a privileged position in relation to the infant and point to the existence of a type of link with subjectivity and the possibility of structure itself that precedes oedipal organisation. Whether we speak of the existence of the subject in the pre-oedipal or in the phenomenological field that opens after the oedipal stage, the mother remains a constant presence (or absence), a pivotal element without which the transition to the phenomenological field would not be possible. As the Symbolic crumbles in periods of

²⁴⁷ Klein, *Envy and gratitude: a study of unconscious sources*, 1957.

²⁴⁸ Of course, I am not suggesting here that the mother's influence is the only thing that 'calls' the subject into Being. Rather, she activates the potential for subjectification that already exists in the child, through reassurance (as shown in the theorisation of the mirror stage) and gradual delineation of boundaries (as in the case of the Bee Woman). It is also important to emphasise once again that the role of catalyst needs not be played by the biological mother, or by only one (female) actor; indeed, my argument revolves not around the mother as a person, but around her as a position.

great crisis and its constitutive layers fall away, the mother is revealed once again, the core around which psychic life revolves. As we have seen in *The Bacchae*, the absence of the Symbolic 'lifeline' does not translate straightforwardly into death and destruction: the Bacchantes, with Agave at their centre, are neither dead, nor in distress, and instead display modes of Being that had been denied to them heretofore. They exist in a different mode of subjectification (albeit briefly) outside the Symbolic, until the Symbolic itself infiltrates this space, bringing about the collapse of both registers.

When together with the mother, the subject is allowed to develop and go through the process of subjectification, yet only insofar as it does not spill into Symbolisation. In the context of the Lacanian understanding of structure, particularly of the idea of repetition as essential for the subject to constitute itself, coupled with this repetition not being of sameness, but of the unconscious 'mark', we can infer that the subject that exists alongside the mother outside the Symbolic is the original subject, the one that is lost the moment it is repeated and Symbolised. From this, it can further be inferred that the relationship of the non-Symbolic subject with the mother is a relationship between the lost subject that can only be created on the basis of some commonality, perhaps a link between the lost subject and the mother herself. In other words, the non-Symbolic subject is brought into Being by the generative mother, who shares some common ground with the non-Symbolic subject (the potential for Being, for positivity in Being). The mother's ability to 'call the subject into Being' can be taken to suggest that the structuring capacity of the mother lies in her having more in common with the lost subject than the structuring Father.

Yet the question that arises is whether the subsequent fading (not disappearance) of the non-Symbolic subject, and the dimming of its traits up to the point of sufficient vagueness so that it can be repeated into the Symbolic and enter it as loss (a rendition of the lost object), is also facilitated by the mother, or, indeed, by the threatening aspect of her dual nature. Even more importantly, at this point it becomes interesting to examine how the mother is carried by the Symbolised subject into the Symbolic—and this is where the analysis of generative figures such as Kybele, Rhea and others comes into play. My argument thus far has been that the generative mother cannot be adequately represented in the Symbolic, precisely because her generative aspect is threatening to the male imaginary; yet an image of the mother, albeit a faded one, does exist in the Symbolic, and it can, potentially, carry within residual traces of her (repressed) generative force. I would like to propose that cultural products such as the mother-goddesses mentioned above allow us to examine in more depth what the carrying-forward of the mother into the Symbolic can tell us about the working of the process of structuring and the place the non-Symbolic subject occupies in the

Symbolic. The figure of the mother, as she is brought into the Symbolic, carries within the potential for the repressed figure of the mother to resurface, in, at times, destructive guises, and belies an underlying self-destructive instinct of the male imaginary. As shown in previous chapters, the male imaginary whitewashes the image of the mother in order to make it non-threatening, but is not successful in neutralising it fully. In bringing with it into the Symbolic images that are not neutral, the male imaginary sabotages its own repression of the mother, perhaps as unconscious reparation for her almost complete erasure from the social sphere, and opens the way for the repressed figure of the generative mother to come to the fore. However, whilst confronting the repression is a form of working through, the aforementioned self-sabotage is unconscious, and thus not the work of analysis, but a guilt-ridden response of one element that is actively repressing another.

The Bacchae makes frequent, subtle references to the figure of the mother, who appears as various deities. However, these are but veiled references, and the mother herself remains conspicuously absent. The only mother present in the play remains Agave, who only partially and unwittingly displays the destructive nature of the generative mother and in so doing also destroys herself. When we consider the role the mother plays in the structuring of the child's psyche, it is unusual for her to be completely absent. The question that arises, then, is whether her absence does not, in fact, conceal the attempt of the male imaginary to repress her image.

The repression of the mother

There are textual elements in *The Bacchae* that prompt me to argue the figure of the mother in the play is not an actual presence, but, through her looming absence, suggests she is in fact a resurfaced repression.

Firstly, the mother is conspicuously absent, and stripped of her generative force. The only mother-figures we encounter in the play are failed or incomplete examples of motherhood that appear sterile and direct their mothering wrongly—for example, we see one of the Maenads suckling a calf, a misguided form of mothering. There is little to no reference to generative mothers, aside from fleeting comments that are, occasionally, lost in translation, such as the mentioning of the mother goddess and the qualities of honey. When mothers mother, they do so by adopting phallic forms of mothering (love as appropriation), thereby spoiling the loved object. Nourishing substances in the play also seem to only be presented in their poisonous guises. Breast milk, and the act of breastfeeding, becomes a form of complete identification

with an animal, which opens the way for cannibalistic practices to infiltrate the polis; similarly, honey is associated with excess, transgression of taboos and death, and serves to make forced transitions between pastoral and savage scenes; the Maenads are shown at rest in nature, amid rivers of milk and honey, only to suddenly transform into savage creatures when startled by the male shepherds.

Secondly, whatever residue of the mother is carried forward into the Symbolic appears sterile: either by virtue of her absence, or by being grotesquely (mis)represented, the mother is shown to hold little to no power. From Kybele, who is absent, to Agave, who is more or less ignored until she beheads Pentheus, and, finally, the Maenads, who are returned to their rightful 'owners', the vengeful female figure is suspiciously tame. Even the savagery of the Bacchants' actions (the tearing apart of cattle and babies) is lessened by being attributed to a god who is imposing his will by proxy, justifying their actions by implying the women are fundamentally domesticated, but act strangely due to the influence of the stranger. The act of attributing female agency to an external ailment that needs to be cured is by no means restricted to *The Bacchae*: female violence, particularly when coupled with overabundant sexuality, is frequently depicted in literature as driven by forces beyond the woman's control—vampires, demons, strange, inhuman powers.

Finally, the juxtaposition of male/female elements in the play lends itself to a clean opposition, which nonetheless crumbles under scrutiny. In fact, dyadic opposites in the play appear to be misguided, most notably the mother as non-generative of psychic structures, and the Father as generative. As shown above, the mother's proximity to the lost subject and her ability to call it into Being and enable it to respond to structure, as well as her capacity to un-structure the subject, makes it more likely that she has a structuring, generative function; at the opposite end of the spectrum, the part the Father plays into replicating loss at the level of the Symbolic would indicate he is non-generative. Of course, I am not suggesting the problem of subjectification and of structuring and non-structuring roles can be solved by reversing the binary, and arguing the mother is generative, while the Father is sterile. Nonetheless, it is important to note that a reversal of the binary *is possible to entertain*.

In order to analyse the way the figure of the mother is potentially repressed, I propose to look first at the way in which the dual aspect of the mother, as both generative and threatening, is carried forward into the Symbolic. If, as I argued before, the non-Symbolic subject depends on the mother to come into Being, then it inadvertently incorporates aspect of her image, of the mother-as-generative-force (with both female and male elements, with both generative and threatening sides). Nonetheless, as I

have argued in this and previous chapters, the non-Symbolic subject, with its incorporated maternal baggage, is not erased, but merely *tamed* for the Symbolic subject to exist. It follows, therefore, that whatever the Symbolic subject carries with it from the period before subjectification will necessarily be threatening to the Symbolised subject himself. If the Symbolised subject retains traces of the non-Symbolic subject, and the non-Symbolic subject, in turn, carries within the image of the generative yet threatening mother, then we can infer that the Symbolised subject himself 'remembers' and carries within the image of the mother.

In entering the Symbolic with this aforementioned maternal baggage, the Symbolised subject is essentially introducing non-Symbolised Being into the Symbolic, into a structure that functions through the replication of loss, and is thus a negative form of Being. The incompatibility of the baggage carried forward in the Symbolic with the nature of the Symbolic itself is, therefore, bound to be registered as threatening, and neutralised. As demonstrated in this and previous chapters, the easiest way to neutralise the threateningly generative force of the mother is to render it sterile—that is, to repress it, deny its nature, and translate it into the Symbolic as *impotence*. Whilst the generative capacities of the mother are repressed, loss continues to be replicated at the core of the Symbolic by the Father, generating endless iterations of subject typologies founded on loss, and perpetuating a single version of subjectivity that is compatible with the Symbolic and sympathetic to the needs of the male imaginary. The Father thus becomes the condition of possibility for the existence of the subject.

Yet for the mother-as-destructive, Father-as-generative binary to be maintained, it is not enough to merely render the residual image of the mother sterile; it must also be understood by the subject to be destructive, so that attempts to probe into this residue can be avoided. As the image of the mother is associated with the constant threat of annihilation and the destruction of the possibility of Being in the Symbolic, it becomes imperative for the subject to repress her to safeguard his own subjecthood. It appears, then, that the repression of the mother as displayed in cultural products such as *The Bacchae* is a multi-faceted one, in which the figure of the mother is harmed twice—once through the subject's attempt to render her sterile, and once through her erasure from the social space. By this token, it becomes easier to see why the mother in *The Bacchae* is a constant presence, but hidden directly and indirectly. Her existence is hinted at through Agave, who functions as a failed symbol of motherhood, and through the conspicuous absence of any 'viable', well-functioning mother figures in the play.

The problems that arise in this context concern how this multi-faceted repression of the mother behaves, in what guises it resurfaces in the male imaginary, and how the male

imaginary copes with the invasion. In *The Bacchae*, the male imaginary and the edifice of the Symbolic crumble when the presence of the mother becomes manifest, and can only restore itself once it reinstates the original repression—that it, once the figure of the generative mother is once again banished: Agave is sent into exile, and the other Maenads are reassigned to their domestic roles.

Nonetheless, the repression of the mother does not stop with her exclusion from the Symbolic. In *The Bacchae*, we also see the male imaginary staging an attack on itself, in the form of the murder of Pentheus. Pentheus' death does not simply symbolise the death of the subject and the collapse of the male imaginary—as I have shown in previous chapters, his murder comes as a result of a complex web of events, and is carried out almost simultaneously by his mother and his double, who kill Pentheus by bewildering, bewitching and beheading him, in an effective act of castration of the male imaginary. The role Dionysus plays in this process is of paramount significance, particularly because, to a great extent, Dionysus *is* Pentheus: he is his double, much like the non-Symbolic subject serves as the double of the Symbolised subject. It is important to note that Dionysus *enables* Agave (the manifestation of the repression of the image of the mother) to destroy Pentheus, her son and the Symbolised subject. Although the social order collapses, neither Agave nor Dionysus are worse off. Dionysus leaves out of his own volition, while Agave is exiled, retaining the same status of token motherhood, allowed only a fragmentary existence in the Symbolic.

I would like to propose that what we see in *The Bacchae* with the murder of Pentheus is, in fact, an attack the guilt-ridden subject mounts on himself in an unconscious attempt at reparation, with the purpose of 'freeing' the repressed image of the mother. Under the influence of the non-Symbolic subject, the fragile equilibrium of the Symbolic is jeopardised, and the subject attacks himself, by seeking to undo the original repression of the mother, that is, the act of stripping her of her generative quality. As the attack restores the mother's generative function, it also renders the male imaginary itself non-generative, in this case, of psychic structures, which in turn leads to the collapse of the Symbolic. In the play, this becomes apparent through the layering of the figure of the mother through the absent Kybele, the impotent, absent mother, and Agave, the destructive mother. The attack on Pentheus becomes a form of self-harm (harm directed towards the Symbolic), whose purpose is to restore the mother her generative function. With the collapse of the Symbolic, the non-Symbolic subject is no longer constrained, and can escape the structure of the quasi-transcendental elements.

Repression and the death drive

If we speak of a multi-layered repression that seeks to ward off an external force that poses a threat to the male imaginary, it is worth looking more closely into the reasons this force is registered as something to be resisted. It is important to ask what it is that Kybele is or does that weakens the hold that the male imaginary has on the Symbolic, or, otherwise phrased, what it is that the figure of Kybele is capable of doing and the male imaginary desires, but is incapable of doing itself.

Kybele has numerous elements that make her threatening to the male imaginary: she has immense creative power and is exceptionally fertile, being able to not only beget all the gods, but engage in what essentially is parthenogenesis by proxy in her creation of her lover Attis. Her association with bees and honey reinforce her creative powers, but situate her in a unique position, of both giver of life and enforcer of rules. In other words, if Kybele / the Queen Bee gives the gift of honey (to be read as structure, civilisation, reason), she also appears to regulate her subjects' consumption of honey, and is capable of taking life away when consumption is found to be inappropriate. From this perspective, Kybele is in an interesting position, of begetter of life and bringer of death.

In addition to her great generative powers, Kybele's cult is dangerous to the phallic: through it, she denies not only the foundations of patriarchy by systematically breaking the taboos against incest, infanticide, and castration, but also the possibility of males of existing within a patriarchal system. Adherence to her cult requires self-mutilation, renunciation of sexuality, and blind and complete acceptance of her demands, especially in relation to sexual abstinence, or, as argued before, sexual regression. Patriarchy as a construct is presented as dependent on, and younger than, Kybele herself, which explains why it is infantilised in its relation to the mother-goddess, and why men must return to a pre-phallic state to attain unity with the goddess. By virtue of her being the Queen Bee and the Mother of the Gods, preceding and, in her hypostasis as Rhea, birthing patriarchy itself (Zeus), Kybele becomes to the institution of patriarchy what the gradual withdrawal of the mother is to the baby: an overwhelmingly frightening presence, eternally absent yet forever threatening to return. Under these circumstances, the male imaginary must fight the potentially annihilating presence of the mother, and can only do so by means of projective identification, by imbuing the mother with its own impotence, and attributing to her its own destructive tendencies.

We see at least three instances in which the phallic is threatened by Kybele:

Firstly, in the manifestation of the matriarchal cult of the goddess: her cult becomes manifest as a counter-cult, which, much like a Dionysian cult, can only begin in the midst of the city. For the orgiastic celebrations to mean anything, the renunciation of the Symbolic, followed by the transition to the primordial and animalistic, must come as a form of deviation from the set rules of the patriarchal. Yet for this to be possible, the revolt against the phallic must start from within, from the phallic itself; by this token, the matriarchal counter-cult appears to reside within the phallic, a self-subversive presence that the phallic can neither see nor eradicate.

Secondly, the matriarchal appears to exist in a cannibalistic relationship with the male imaginary: Kybele's cult relies heavily on cannibalism, on the renunciation of one's morality and the adoption of animalistic traits and habits. It is not relevant for the purpose of this discussion whether the cannibalism that Kybele demands is the *actual* ingestion of human flesh,²⁴⁹ but it is interesting to note the way in which the cult of the goddess requires renunciation of the traits that define the phallic. In so doing, the cult of Kybele overtakes the phallic, taking in its defining qualities, particularly its claim to sovereignty, and redefines the phallic as illegitimate. The move is essentially the same as Zeus' ingestion of Metis, but reversed.

Thirdly, the cult of Kybele plays with deeply rooted desires and transgresses the space of taboo: in the myth, we see incest enacted by the subject/the male imaginary (Zeus) resulting in castration (Agdistis). Even more interestingly, we see attempted Symbolisation ending tragically: when Attis (Kybele's son *and* lover) attempts to distance himself from Kybele by entering a sexual union (i.e.: marriage) with another woman, he is punished by Kybele with the dissolution of the self. He is murdered, but does not remain dead—instead, he is confined to an eternity of immobility, trapped inside a coffin. In the relationship between Kybele and Attis we see clearly how the infantile fear might play out: the infant (Attis) exists as the phallus, in blissful union with the mother (Kybele), as both son and lover, in a deeply sexual, but pre-phallic, non-copulative relation.²⁵⁰ It is indicated in the myth that Attis and Kybele might not even live together, a separation which may be hinting at the mother's withdrawal. Yet once the infant attempts to stop *being* the phallus and move to *possessing* the phallus, we witness the mother's terrifying return and the extent of her destructive power: she

²⁴⁹ It most likely is not: as shown above, cannibalism-proper is bound to fail, and as a result cannot be directly required by the cult of the mother goddess; a self-destructive, unstable construction should not pose enough of a threat to the male imaginary to cause its collapse. The idea of cannibalism in the context of Kybele seems to be a failed pairing: a practice that essentially shows illegitimacy is paired with the enforcer of legitimacy itself, yet leads only to suffering and loss, and reveals itself ultimately as an ill-fated attempt.

²⁵⁰ The relation between Attis and Kybele may also incorporate maternal phantasies of remaining united with her child.

crushes any possibility for the infant to either *be* or *have* the phallus, and condemns him to death, to Being in (not towards) Death, in a somewhat Heideggerean sense. The question, then, is whether this Being in Death, the state of being eternally dead, cut off from the possibility to either *be* or *have* the phallus is indeed frightening for the male imaginary, and, if it is frightening, if it is also something the male imaginary fights to avoid. The alternative I would like to propose is that this state of Being in Death is frightening, but also is as close as the subject can get to recapturing the originary, which means that it is a both dreaded and coveted experience, driven by the subject's death drive.

When considering the threat the figure of Kybele poses to the male imaginary, I would argue it is only natural to also see instances of retributive violence aimed at reducing her impact, in effect part of the process of repression. If the repression is multi-layered, as proposed earlier in this chapter, then the retributive violence would become manifest either through the demonization of the figure of Kybele, or through rendering her sterile and tame. In fact, I would go as far as to suggest that the violence against the figure of the goddess will become apparent in the (mis)interpretation of the very attributes that define her power, which will become failed pairs of opposites.

The association between Kybele and an excess of honey, and, implicitly, her being linked with cannibalism, sovereignty and legitimacy, becomes ostracizing, and pushes her to the limits of society. The transformation of the goddess into an outcast becomes evident in the way her rituals are constructed: although revered as a goddess, Kybele's involvement with others is only minimal, at least in comparison with that of other gods. She exists on the outskirts of the gods' world, as a liminal and thus *sacrificeable* character, and is too far removed from society to pose a real threat. Furthermore, the desexualisation and re-sexualisation of her cult is telling: although she punishes severely any sexual transgression, her cult is, in fact, associated with sexuality, and revolves around traces of sexuality on the body (i.e.: genitals), orgies, ecstatic union with the goddess, and cannibalism. The image of the goddess becomes hyper-sexualised, yet the sexual overtones themselves are contained by the dangers associated with acting onto such erotic desires. She becomes an alluring sexual presence, yet one that is too far removed from subjects to be attainable. Instead of a goddess that is revered for her ability to contain the phallus, and is thus worshipped by her adepts through attempts at becoming the phallus, the layers of repression present a distant goddess, who punishes attempts at unity with death through castration. From this perspective, the myth of Kybele and the way it is registered by the male imaginary is similar to the way the incest prohibition is enforced by the Father, and the fear of castration is aroused in the infant.

Perhaps what is most interesting, however, is the difficulty of finding traces of Kybele in myths, non-specialist books and literary works: the near extinction of her myth is surprising, given her popularity in the Neolithic period, and the geographic reach of her cult. Although there are some references to her cult, details of her as a goddess are scarce. She is “the mother of the gods” and “the Queen Bee”, but the reason she attained these titles is difficult to identify. Her confusion with other goddesses also points to a dilution of her figure, tantamount to the killing of the mother, albeit not overtly. While famous mothers, like Jocasta or Clytemnestra, are murdered, Kybele simply ceases to be there, in a way like the mother as a structuring element herself. She never dies, but withdraws from the world, her departure remaining nonetheless subject to a potential return. In the few myths where she does appear, she is desexualised, and seems more like a maternal figure that comes to punish transgression, only to swiftly leave again. Moreover, she does not communicate with her disciples and priests in temples, but lives apparently secluded, on Mount Ida, from where she imparts sterile, desexualised and decontextualized punishments. Thus, rather than retaining her dual nature, both creative and destructive, both structuring and subversive, she has become an icon, with a limited but convoluted and not totally clear background story. She is disavowed of her role in laying the foundations of patriarchy, as well as of her ability to subvert patriarchy at will. Kybele is mirrored in this sense by Agave, who is portrayed only through the prism of her monstrous crime (the killing of Pentheus) and not as instrumental in both the creation and destruction of a Symbolic system, paralleling the split of the maternal from its erotic components.

The figure of the mother in the play is exceptionally difficult to capture, possibly due to the strict yet fluid delineation between masculine and feminine, between the polis and nature, between reason and instinct. This extremely structured approach gives rise to complex issues, especially in terms of the portrayal of characters, and of opposite or complementary terms, and results in a series of failed binaries: there is no Semele/Dionysus, as Semele is dead; there is no Kybele/Dionysus, as Kybele is absent; there is no Agave/Pentheus, as Pentheus is dead; there is no mother with a child. The one woman who is shown in her mothering function is the maddened Theban woman who is suckling a wolf cub—although a perversion of motherhood, this is in fact the only instance where mothering works, perhaps due to its being situated outside the Symbolic. This begs the question as to whether the series of failed portrayals, incidentally all of them of the mother in one of her functions, is to show a fundamentally impaired mothering function in the play, and to say mothering is only possible outside the Symbolic. The failed binaries point to a sustained destructive attack on (m)othering, mounted by the male imaginary, who refuses to allow anything more than a stunted mother figure within the Symbolic.

The impossibility of mothering becomes, to an extent, a form of monstrosity in the play, and, at least apparently, what generates monstrosity in others, or in the situation itself. Yet it is not the impossibility of mothering that reveals monstrosity, but the repression of the mother, the act of rendering her sterile and demonising her, which leads to failed binaries. If the binary opposition between two apparently different terms is meant to reveal not opposition, but dependence and cyclical succession of the positions terms occupy in the power relation, a failed binary would only reveal the opposition, without allowing the common ground to be explored. The failed binary, in other words, only allows subjects to occupy fixed positions, which often ends in tragedy.²⁵¹

The successive transformations of the mother, coupled with the impossibility of retaining some fluidity in the way one positions oneself in relation to the Other, makes it difficult for the ego to maintain the repression of the mother, while still keeping the Symbolic intact and functioning within its constraints, particularly, as elaborated above, given the non-Symbolic subject's pull towards death, towards recapturing the originary. The mother's generative function appears to allow some fluidity to seep into the Symbolic, into binaries and, implicitly, into the subject's understanding of himself, and it is therefore logical that the repression that hinders this function should be attacked. If I am correct in saying that the non-Symbolic subject represents a pre-phallic, yet structured subject, that belongs to a different type of Being and opens the possibility for different modes of subjectification, then it follows that it would be the non-Symbolic subject that would enable the attack on the repression. The attack onto the repressed image of the mother would necessarily translate into an attack onto the Symbolic.

In *The Bacchae*, we see this as an attack mounted by Dionysus against Pentheus, which culminates with the destruction of the Symbolic and the annihilation of the (phallic) ego. Through this generalised destruction, the subject comes as close as it can to a potential return to the originary, and to recapturing the lost subject. The dissolution of the self and the failure of the Symbolic order help, therefore, position the subject (even if only fleetingly) towards experiencing Being in Death. The non-Symbolic subject becomes indispensable in locating the mother and demonstrating that the fear of what lies outside the Symbolic comes as a response to anxieties of the male imaginary, not to a transcendental truth. Yet this is not to say that the non-Symbolic subject should be reduced to the figure of the mother or treated as its extension. Rather, what the existence of a type of subjectivity that operates independently of oedipal constraints reveals is an artificial insistence on the part of the male imaginary to prescribe a unique model for subjectification, which results in forced fixity at the heart

²⁵¹ This is not the case in this tragedy alone; other examples include "Titus Andronicus" or "Antigone".

of the process of subjectification itself. What is crucial is that this subjectification model is not universal, but bound up within the subject's lifeworld, dependent on the same quasi-transcendental elements as the subject himself. Through the non-Symbolic subject, we can propose a more flexible conception of subjectification that embraces its historicity and looks beyond the oedipal not with apprehension, but with anticipation. The possibility of arguing for the existence of a non-Symbolic subject shows existence is possible in the post-oedipal—although the task of exploring it remains ahead.

Through the influence of the non-Symbolic subject, the tenuous hold the Symbolic has onto its repression of the mother is broken, and the mother herself is revealed as a presence at the core of the Symbolic, instrumental in subjectification, but stripped of her structuring function. Yet the existence of the non-Symbolic subject points to more than the fact that the mother has been repressed and hidden within the depths of the phallic unconscious. Through its proximity to the mother, and more importantly, through its being a structured subject, as opposed to an excess that seeps from the gaping hole the erasure of the mother leaves behind, the non-Symbolic subject opens the possibility of thinking other modes of subjectification that go beyond the oedipal paradigm. The unique nature of the non-Symbolic subject suggests that different modes of subjectification that do not revolve around the Father and do not rest on the murder of the mother are within reach, and need not result in psychosis and madness. Furthermore, the brief coexistence of two modes of subjectification in the play implies that a structural intervention in the male imaginary and its relation to the mother, with the purpose of helping the male imaginary work through the repression of the mother, may pave the way towards allowing different models of psychic organisation to evolve and coexist. Ultimately, the theorisation of the non-Symbolic subject and of the space it occupies in relation to structuring elements can enable a more fluid approach to subjectification, one perhaps more faithful to subjects' initial polymorphous perversity.

Summary of Chapter 5

In this chapter I have looked at the space the mother occupies in *The Bacchae*, and have suggested that her presence is not an instance of the mother herself, but the repression of the male imaginary that resurfaces and threatens the phallic. By analysing the way the figure of the mother has been repressed, I have argued that the erasure conceals an attempt of the male imaginary to exact some reparation from the harm enacted on the body of the mother. In atoning for the violence done to the mother by rendering her sterile and exorcising her from the space of representation, the male imaginary necessarily attacks itself, identifying itself as the original oppressor of the

mother. I have shown the non-Symbolic subject to be key for the repression of the mother to be identified and attacked, and have suggested that, through the non-Symbolic subject as a theoretical construct, a more fluid understanding of subjectification can emerge, one that allows for the plurality of identities inherent in the subject to find expression beyond the exacting requirements of the oedipal model.

Conclusion

Summary of the argument

The main argument of this thesis has been that a previously unidentified and un-theorised psychic structure operates at the level of the pre-oedipal; my aim was to articulate the makeup of this structure, and show that it goes beyond the traditional theoretical conceptualisation of excess at the heart of the psyche. I have argued that this un-theorised entity, which I have called 'the non-Symbolic subject', is more than psychic excess, and is in fact a fully-fledged subject, with the capacity for transcendental introspection and an understanding of the self as separate from the other, yet dependent on it for self-constitution. The purpose of choosing this line of reasoning was to argue that the conceptualisation of the subject with which Lacanian psychoanalysis has hitherto operated is historically bound, dependent on the quasi-transcendental elements that shape an individual's lifeworld at specific points in time, and cannot therefore claim universal value; by positing the existence of the non-Symbolic subject, I sought to show that the not-yet subject has the possibility of emerging into subjecthood through a variety of modes of subjectification, and that subjectivity itself need not be restricted to the replication of the image of the Father. Using the non-Symbolic subject as a critical tool, I attempted to expand the psychoanalytical theoretical language and provide the means through which theory can move beyond the oedipal, towards a space where subjectification around the Father becomes a historical occurrence, rather than a condition that must be met for existence as a subject to be possible. My primary goal was to use the non-Symbolic subject as a methodological tool to demonstrate that the project of conceptualising alternative models of subjectification is possible, and has, in some sense, already started.

To argue for the existence of such a subject, I began by interrogating the status of representation and the place the subject occupies in history. In Chapter 1, I aimed to demonstrate that, rather than giving a universal account of subjectification and irrefutably answering the question as to what it means to be human, language, and the language of psychoanalysis by extension, is a historical construct, dependent on changes in *épistème*. Once the subject and the language that helps 'translate' the subject into the accepted terms of the phenomenological field in which he lives are revealed to be non-static, we can begin to explore further the fluidity at the heart of the psyche and the possibilities it opens up in what concerns subjectification.

In my second chapter, I started my analysis of an ancient Greek tragedy, *The Bacchae*, which I used as the framework within which the existence of a non-Symbolic subject can be explored. Following other psychoanalytic thinkers, most notably Freud and Irigaray, I returned to Greek myth and have treated this tragedy as capable of capturing the status of representation and the structure of the (male) psyche. My argument has been that, if totalising, universalising accounts of the psyche do not work because the psyche itself is fluid, then it follows that attempts to unify the subject's potential avenues of psychic development will necessarily give rise to tension. Using theories of violence and sacrifice, I have articulated a model of the non-Symbolic subject, and have argued it is at the same time a liminal presence that threatens the integrity of the Symbolic, and a double of a Symbolic entity that can serve as its most prominent representative. The purpose of this theoretical turn was to show that the non-Symbolic subject possesses the necessary psychic apparatus to exist *qua* subject in the absence of the Father as a structuring element.

Once the possibility of existing as a subject without the Father was opened up, I started to explore an alternative to the oedipal paradigm, and have looked towards the mother as a potential structuring element in the psychic life of the infant. However, the mother has a tense existence in the Symbolic, made difficult by her exclusion from the space of representation, which means that she cannot, and *she should not* simply substitute for the Father in the process of subjectification. In Chapter 3, I proposed a different understanding of 'structure' that allows for the theorisation of the mother's structuring capacity, and have shown that it is possible to bring together different models of subjectification in the same theoretical framework.

Yet if the mother can occupy a structuring position, then it becomes especially problematic that she is almost entirely absent from the space of representation, an absence which I explore through *The Bacchae*. In my fourth chapter, I analysed the role of women in the play, and in particular their objectification and subsequent inscription in rigid binaries, and have suggested that the complex nature of the relationships between women, men and divinity makes binaries self-subversive and too rigid to maintain. In showing binaries to be untenable, I opened up the possibility of reintroducing the mother in the space of representation, not as a clearly defined presence, but as *absence*, and have suggested that the centrality of her absence and its ability to threaten the Symbolic belie her structuring capacity.

While theorising the mother back in the space of representation opens the way for understanding her structuring capacity, it does not explain why she had been excluded in the first place. In my final chapter, I looked at the space the mother occupies in *The*

Bacchae, and suggested that she appears not as herself, but as a repression that resurfaces in the male imaginary. I showed that the male imaginary seeks to repair the harm enacted on the body of the mother by rendering her sterile and exorcising her from the space of representation, but that this reparation necessarily entails self-harm, the male imaginary attacking itself as the oppressor of the mother. In Chapter 5, I concluded that the non-Symbolic subject is instrumental in identifying the repressed image of the mother and enabling a more fluid understanding of subjectification.

My thesis charts the development of the psyche and argues that the forcing of the subject into oedipal structures is not necessary, and not the only way in which the subject can exist. I show that existence around the mother as an absent structuring element is possible by virtue of the non-Symbolic subject, but also argue that the imposed, yet false rigidity of the process of subjectification makes the psyche vulnerable to breakage. Overall, my argument is that other modes of subjectification are possible, but that, for these to emerge, it is necessary to interrogate and analyse the male imaginary, and help it work through the consequences of its actions towards the body of the mother. My argument at this stage is purely theoretical, but I believe it can find applicability in psychoanalytic, feminist and literary theory and help shed new light on the current status of representation, the place of the individual, and the question as to what it means to be a subject.

The drivers of the argument

The reason for positing the existence of a non-Symbolic subject was to argue that the oedipal model, which has been hitherto hailed in Lacanian psychoanalysis as more or less the only viable model of subjectification, need not be the end (or the beginning) of the psychic life of the subject, as there is a plurality of modes of subjectification that the subject can access. The argument is by no means new—in fact, feminist theory has long critiqued the Freudian and Lacanian insistence on the primacy of the phallus in self-constitution and has argued for the need to go beyond the oedipal. Yet the current theoretical framework leaves little room for this transition, as it is such that attempts to move beyond the phallus necessarily land in a space of non-representation, where only madness and psychosis are possible. Transgressing in a space where there is no phallus, the classic theory goes, is tantamount to entering a space of non-Being - for to exist *is* to exist around the phallus.

In its attempts to circumvent the totalising and universalising account of subjectification proposed by phallogocentric theories, feminism has provided proof of the existence of

excess, of some form or residual femininity at the heart of the psyche, and has shown this excess continuously influences and destabilizes the male imaginary. Yet my argument is that feminist theory does not go far enough: rather than positing some form of excess in the psyche *exists*, I propose that this excess is, in fact, a pre-oedipal, non-Symbolised subject, that has the same capacities as a 'traditional' subject, but is not confined by the structures that are dictated and shaped by the male imaginary.

To advance this line of reasoning, however, I first needed to show that the not-yet-subject has the ability to become a subject and encounters the necessary conditions to make the transition to subjecthood *before* coming into contact with the Father. To this end, I argued that self-sustained subjectivity can congeal around the mother as a structuring element and need not end in psychosis. This point constitutes a radical departure from the idea that the mother cannot serve a structuring function because she is not separated from the infant through bloody mutilation (castration). Yet such a move is not without its problems, and to substantiate it I also needed to find the theoretical framework that could support my argument.

To present a cohesive picture, I started from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Using Foucault's and Irigaray's theories, I argued that psychoanalysis is a meta-language that reflects the conditions imposed by quasi-transcendental elements upon the psyche, and which can be studied to understand what it can reveal about the structure of the psyche at a given time. The argument revolves around the idea of historicity, more specifically the historicity of thought, of quasi-transcendental elements, and of the status of representation itself. In beginning my argument with thought and language, I positioned myself in relation to the quasi-transcendental elements that make up the lifeworld of the subject (life, language and labour) and the way they have been translated into a framework that upholds the male imaginary; in doing so, I paid particular attention to language-as-Dasein and suggested that it can be deconstructed to show its constituent parts, and, more importantly, its pauses, silences and omissions. Throughout this thesis, I have worked mostly in an Irigarayan framework, but borrowed heavily from Klein and Foucault. The purpose of my methodology was to intervene in the meta-language that establishes the mode of functioning of quasi-transcendental elements, thus claiming universality, and show it to be historical and revealing of the phantasies that underpin the psyche of its creator: the male imaginary.

Throughout my thesis, I have sought to show that, if quasi-transcendental elements are historical and fluctuate in line with changes in *épistème*, then an analysis of the meta-language that governs, and in a sense orders these quasi-transcendental elements can reveal important insights about the constitution of the male-imaginary (as the speaker

of the meta-language), and the reasons this meta-language cannot be translated in any other way; in other words, an analysis can show why *the speaker must necessarily be male*. I have turned to *The Bacchae* to undertake this analysis due to the play's remoteness from current quasi-transcendental elements, which meant that a modern reading, which is what I was interested in, would not be influenced by any textual elements that could veer too closely to the contemporary understanding of what it is to be a subject. The play therefore readily lends itself to close reading from a contemporary perspective, and allows us to probe the way we think about subjectivity *now*. Yet it is important to reemphasise that I am not a Classicist, and as such do not work in a classical framework. In working with an ancient text, I have only sought to see what it can tell us about the way we are conceptualising subjectivity and what it means to become a subject in the current socio-historical context; I have not attempted to uncover universal psychic structures that transcend historical specificity, primarily because, as I have argued throughout this thesis, I am not convinced that such structures can exist. For this reason, I have, in a way, neglected the historical specificity of masculinity and femininity, and have concentrated on how we refer to subjective positions now. I chose not to delve into the way femininity has changed in line with shifts in quasi-transcendental elements, and have employed primarily contemporary readings of the text, from the 20th and 21st centuries. Indeed, my argument has been throughout that subjectivity and the quasi-transcendental elements that shape the life of the subject constitute each other and are caught in a reciprocal fluidity, which means that any account of subjectivity can *only* be a contemporary one, regardless of when it is formulated, as it relies on a very particular and unique conglomerate of factors that are inexorably embroiled with history.

As I mentioned in the introduction, my choice of text to expand the vocabulary of subjectivity is not accidental. I find *The Bacchae* enormously significant in the current socio-political context, as it allows us to use myth to work through anxieties that plague modern society: from the struggles between religion and secularism, between the order of the West and the chaos of the East, to the pull of tradition, the inescapability of change, the threat of migration from the outside and the search for meaning in an undeniably contingent world, the play becomes almost *transhistorical*—not in the sense that it transcends time and space, but in that it can reflect society back onto itself in more than one historical context. Thus, the non-Symbolic subject becomes a (necessarily contemporary) tool to interrogate the present, to probe subjectivity, and ask why: why now, why the male imaginary alone, why not difference as well.

The fundamental problem with my approach is that the meta-language functions as a closed-system and does not allow for much fluidity; as a result, I needed to borrow from

different, at times incompatible systems of thought and theoretical frameworks to underline the gaps in the meta-language and propose an alternative. While the theoretical frameworks I employed are not always compatible (such as Kleinian and Lacanian, or Foucauldian and Lacanian theories), it is important to note that my work does not seek to *make them fit together*, nor paint a cohesive picture of the psyche. I have deliberately worked at the junction of theories that do not flow smoothly from one another, and have attempted to find ways to employ conflicting theoretical frameworks to reveal different aspects of the process of subjectification. The reasoning underpinning such a methodological approach is similar to psychoanalytic practice: if we follow the lead of the analysand and do not concentrate on the points of tension, the pauses, parapraxes and omissions s/he makes, then we circumvent the root of the problem, and navigate chartered, almost harmless waters, but without making much progress. On the other hand, if we analyse the difficult and at times painful knots in the language the analysand employs, we come closer to unearthing interesting insights, even if in the beginning these may not be entirely cohesive or conflict-free. My methodological approach, in broad terms, was to ask what the male imaginary says, and then probe into the things that are left unsaid. This strategy had led me to look into the spaces that are un-representable, un-theorisable, characterised by lack, by non-being and by the impossibility of existence, and ask whether this 'unrepresentability' is, indeed, the end of the story, or if it conceals something else.

Yet probing deeply, pushing and testing the meta-language and taking the male imaginary in places that it would rather avoid almost inevitably causes damage, and some things, such as psychic structures or orders, are broken. In such scenarios, it is not only that which remains after breakage that should interest us, but also that which was (apparently) never there. Thus, in a play like *The Bacchae*, the generalised death, despair and destruction at the end should not serve as moralising tales of the dangers of questioning the male imaginary, but should raise questions regarding that which is left unsaid, unexplored, that which destroys by virtue of not being there. I employ *The Bacchae* precisely to this purpose and ask what it is that the male imaginary fears so much that it feels the need to create cautionary tales that force subjects to also fear it—even when they do not understand or know the object of fear. From this perspective, the question that drove my inquiry into a play like *The Bacchae* centres on what it can reveal about the status of representation now, the translatability of the meta-language, and the fixity of registers of psychic functioning.

My most important methodological tool has been the concept of fluidity: throughout this thesis, I have considered fluidity to be at the heart of all psychic structures, driving the fluctuations of the meta-language and forcing the male imaginary to morph to

accommodate this fluidity. At the same time, I have sought to show that the insistence of raising the meta-language to the status of universal law imbues the process of subjectification with unnecessary rigidity, which makes it vulnerable and breakable in the face of ever-shifting paradigms.

Throughout the thesis, I used a mimetic approach to interrogate the binary oppositions that are perpetuated by the male imaginary and reflect them back onto themselves—much like the project Irigaray proposes, the purpose of exaggerated mimesis is to show binary oppositions to be untenable. This move was essential in demonstrating that, from the pauses in the meta-language and the fears of the male imaginary these conceal, emerges the possibility of a new form of subjectivity already at the centre of the psyche. The value of positing this subjectivity as something that already exists and not as something that needs to be created and somehow embedded in the fabric of the meta-language lies in the fact that it shows the project of going beyond the oedipal is not only possible, but within reach.

The achievements of this thesis

Through positing the existence of the non-Symbolic subject and arguing that this form of subjectivity already exists at the centre of the psyche, I have sought to demonstrate that the feminist project can be taken forward with tools within its remit. One of the issues with attempting to go beyond the oedipal model is that the existing theoretical framework does not allow for theorisation beyond it, and any attempts to disavow oneself from Oedipus necessarily return to its paradigmatic proposition by virtue of there being no 'hook' onto which other subjectivities can latch themselves. Yet by demonstrating that subjectivity proper already exists before the infant undergoes the oedipal stage, it is possible to begin to theorise new models of subjectification that do not replicate the oedipal paradigm, but build on the existing fluidity of the psyche.

In arguing that infants enter the world in a state of polymorphous perversity, Freud liberated subjectivity and identity and demonstrated that a plurality of modes of subjectification are open to subjects, making, perhaps unwittingly, an exceptionally bold feminist claim. Yet the value of this insight has been undermined by the insistence of psychoanalysts, and of psychoanalysis as a meta-language, to gloss over the plurality of subjectivity and impose a model in the absence of which subjectivity would not be possible. Rather than being the liberating force it could have been, psychoanalysis became a restrictive discourse that closed itself off to the possibility of expansion.

Despite its flaws, however, I think it is still premature to 'do away' with psychoanalysis, as this would risk not recognising its immense potential for interrogating the structure of the (dominant) male imaginary. If psychoanalysis is the instrument through which the male imaginary has been given primacy and the mother has been erased from the space of representation, then it is only by looking back to psychoanalysis that we can unearth the reasons behind this move. As Frosh writes, psychoanalysis "is this hateful thing, ... which refuses to allow its subjects to escape their ghostly remainders, the things that are left *over* from past happenings, or left *out* of conscious recognition."²⁵² From this perspective, psychoanalysis becomes a crucial critical tool, whose value rests precisely in that it "refuses to stay silent about trouble and pain;"²⁵³ however, for it to be used constructively, it must be able to capture more of the subject's experience than just the male subject-position. If used as a meta-language, a reform of psychoanalysis is perhaps the easiest way in which the space of representation can be widened enough to allow for a plurality of modes of subjectification to become manifest.

My thesis is a step in this direction: by demonstrating the subject can exist independently from the oedipal, not just as residue, but as self-sustained subjectivity, I hope to take the theoretical framework one step closer to becoming representative of the plurality of subjectivities that are open to the subject. My proposed theoretical construct, the non-Symbolic subject, allows for a new entity to be inserted in the theoretical framework, opening up new possibilities for theorising subjectification with different structuring elements at its core. In theorising this psychic entity, however, I did not seek to replace the oedipal or to eliminate the Father from the psychic life of the infant; rather, I have sought to show that to be a subject does not have to mean to be a 'male' subject. Through the non-Symbolic subject as a methodological tool, I have tried to expand the space of subjectification to demonstrate that femininity can occupy a position in the process of subjectification that is more complex and sophisticated than the previously theorised function of the mother. In so doing, I have not tried to reduce the non-Symbolic subject to the figure of the mother, but rather demonstrate that the existence of the non-Symbolic subject points to the possibility of a plurality of modes of subjectification to exist—and subjectification around the mother as structuring element is one of these modes.

The implications of my thesis for psychoanalysis and for feminist theory, from this perspective, are profound, in the sense that they pave the way for moving towards a new conceptualisation of subjectification, one that gives the figure of the mother more centrality than before. Yet proposing the existence of a new psychic entity also poses

²⁵² Frosh, *Hauntings*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

problems, especially in what concerns established psychoanalytic theories that demonstrate subjectivity outside the oedipal is impossible. Thus, if the concept of the non-Symbolic subject is to be valuable for psychoanalytic theory, then psychoanalytic frameworks need to be revised—not in order to help the non-Symbolic subject find a comfortable fit within the nexus of theoretical threads, but precisely to ensure it disrupts the order of psychoanalysis and prevents it from becoming static. The value of the concept of the non-Symbolic subject lies in the fact that it injects fluidity and uncertainty within psychoanalysis, and seeks to expose its universality as flawed. Through this concept, theoretical frameworks such as Freudian or Lacanian theories can be read as expressions of the male imaginary that seek to preserve a Symbolic order that is sympathetic to the phallic organisation; the non-Symbolic subject thus makes a language that had hitherto been impervious to scrutiny transparent and intelligible.

In what concerns feminist theory, I hope the concept of the non-Symbolic subject can help unblock the feminist project, and push theory towards conceptualising new modes of subjectification, not instead of, but in addition to the oedipal paradigm. Through the non-Symbolic subject, the question of going beyond the oedipal model need not remain stuck in the problematic of what lies beyond the oedipal, or if anything lies there at all aside from psychosis and non-Being. The theorisation of a new entity at the heart of the psyche, of a structured subject that has the potential to evolve in various ways, can, I believe, further feminism's aims to go beyond the oedipal and create a space where the manifestation of a plurality of subjectivities becomes possible.

Finally, from a literary perspective, I hope my reading of *The Bacchae* sheds new light on the play itself, and on the way modern understanding of an ancient tragedy can be used to reveal new insights into contemporary fears and anxieties. In a time when the idea of divinity-as-ego-ideal has morphed to show divine figures as extensions of the self, benevolent, rational and immensely powerful,²⁵⁴ it is important to interrogate the fascination older forms of divinity hold on the modern imagination. Returning to ancient texts and rereading them through modern lenses is not merely a literary exercise; rather, looking at texts that pertain to a different épistème can prompt us to ask crucial questions about the status of representation today, the forces that shape our psyches, and the working of the modern (male) imaginary. What is it about the malevolence, violence, and almost animalistic savagery of this ancient text that captivates the attention of some of the most important critical theorists today?²⁵⁵ And if the insights such a text can reveal about our society and the power structures that shape it are so

²⁵⁴ I am referring here to the plethora of superhero films produced in the last decade that invariably portray godlike beings (superheroes) as exemplary versions of the self. Superheroes rarely display violence of the kind attributed to ancient gods and appear instead to be perfect images of the male superego.

²⁵⁵ Such as Judith Butler.

poignant, why is it that we see no similar texts produced today? The non-Symbolic subject in this context can be used as a tool to read texts structurally, and analyse the fluidity of power relations, gender binaries and modes of existing as subjects.

The limitations of this thesis

While the concept of the non-Symbolic subject can be useful in psychoanalysis, feminist theory and literature, and can unearth hitherto hidden meanings and interrogate the modern psyche, my thesis is limited in several crucial ways, underlining the need for further work in this area.

Firstly, despite the theorisation of an entity that allows us to go beyond the oedipal model, I am not able to actually make the move beyond the oedipal in this thesis. In Chapters 4 and 5, I show that two different modes of subjectification do coexist, but only briefly, and this coexistence ends in death, destruction and despair. The tragic ending of the play, particularly when considering the fact that feminine *jouissance* and activity directly contribute to it, may run the risk of suggesting that going beyond the oedipal model is impossible. If this is the case, is there ever a good enough reason to attempt to go beyond the oedipal? Or, even more worryingly, is the tragic ending of the play proof that subjectification around the figure of the mother is doomed to end in death and destruction, suggesting irrefutably that the mother is unsuited to serve as a structuring element?

Both questions are valid, but my project is not one of pessimism. As I have suggested in Chapter 5, while the play does end in despair and destruction, precipitated, in part, by the feminine assuming agency, the tragic ending is not the crux of the play. What is more important is the fact that two different modes of subjectification do coexist, albeit briefly. It is only when the male imaginary is faced with its own repressed memories and seeks to repair the damage done to the mother that the integrity of the Symbolic falters, suggesting that the problem does not lie with the mother's ability to function as a structuring element, but with the male imaginary's ability to withhold probing that brings to the fore fears and anxieties buried deep in its unconscious. My rereading of the play, therefore, may serve as an act of forcing the male imaginary to face repressed elements, as the only way of moving towards enabling meaningful change to occur. Through alternative rereadings that carve out ever increasing spaces for different modes of subjectification, the male imaginary can begin to work through the traumatic murder of the mother and the generalised cultural entrenchment of psychic structures to which this gave rise.

The value of my project, then, lies not in going beyond the oedipal and unequivocally solving the problem of subjectification, but in opening up a space for theorising alternative non-psychotic subjectivities. It would be regressive, I would argue, to provide totalising alternatives to the oedipal model and suggest that subjectification follows one of a number of routes. If we are to remain faithful to Freud's contention that a plurality of identities is possible within each subject, proposing a static reinterpretation of the psyche, radical as it may be, would only reinscribe the problem in a different framework, thus recreating the problems of the oedipal model and trapping subjectivity in an unproductive circularity. Through the concept of the non-Symbolic subject, I have sought to demonstrate that fluidity is a *sine qua non* consideration when discussing subjectification and that it is only by working with fluid concepts that Oedipus' rigidity can be challenged.

Secondly, despite my insistence on the need for injecting fluidity in the conversation about subjectification, I am forced by the nature of the meta-language I employ to work within its confines, thus running the risk of replicating binaries and static structures. One of the most difficult problems I encountered in this sense is the male-female binary and the way these terms are used theoretically: when discussing subjectification, we speak of the Father and the mother as structuring elements, of the maternal and the paternal as registers, painting a misleading picture of subjectification as a stream that can be dammed and directed in one of two possible ways. The problem is, to an extent, a linguistic one: it's the mother or the Father, the Phallus or the breast, the Symbolic or nothing else. I have tried to circumvent this impasse by emphasising throughout the thesis that, when I speak of 'feminine' or 'masculine', I speak of *positions* that can be occupied fully or partially for any length of time by individuals or groups of individuals. This compromise seems to help avoid some of the more difficult aspects of binaries for the time being, but it is not a sustainable distinction in the long term.

The gendered nature of language extends to the non-Symbolic subject: throughout this work, I have referred to the non-Symbolic subject as 'it', or 'he' if I spoke of Dionysus specifically, but inscription in a gendered binary is restrictive and risks suggesting the non-Symbolic subject is always already gendered, when in fact gender, as a construction, can only function in the Symbolic. I have tried to clarify this point by emphasising the androgynous nature of the non-Symbolic subject, and have dwelled at length on the difficulty of pinpointing Dionysus to a specific nature: he is male, female, androgynous, divine, human, animal and all at once. I have also considered using an abbreviation for the non-Symbolic subject (S0 or N-SS), but have decided against the formulaic approach for fear it would imply the process of subjectification is like a code that has only one 'correct' version, and it needs to be debugged until it works. While I

am not convinced that using a pronoun laden with cultural symbolism is indeed the best solution (after all, it is reserved for objects and animals, for the definitely-not-a-subject), I have opted for 'it' for now, until a more appropriate term emerges.

My hope is that the concept of the non-Symbolic subject grows to be understood as a knot in the psychic life of the subject from which a plurality of modes of subjectification and entry into the phenomenological field can spring. Calling these 'oedipal' and 'Dionysian' may prove workable, and would allow for the theorisation of new modes of subjectification in the future, based on other cultural products that capture the status of representation in a given *épistème*.²⁵⁶

Nonetheless, the problem of the limited number of structuring elements remains, pointing to the need for further work to unpack the fluid nature of the structuring elements themselves, and of the plurality of modes of structuring that are undoubtedly possible. My use of 'mother' and 'Father' illustrates the problematic nature of structuring elements, and the rigidity inherent in the concept of structuring element itself: I refer to the Father in his structuring capacity, and spell it with a capital letter to differentiate from the everyday 'father'. At the same time, I refer to the everyday mother and to the structuring mother using the more generic 'mother' written in lowercase letters. I had initially considered using 'Mother' to refer to the structuring element, but eventually decided against it: the capitalisation of the word, together with its use in a specific context (that of a structuring element) draws a definitive distinction between Mothers and mothers. While, as Irigaray shows, hierarchical structures are inherent in the way the male ego relates to its ego ideal, to divinity and to structuring elements, I wanted to avoid replicating this hierarchy in the theorisation of the mother as a structuring element. If fluidity is indeed constitutional, then it goes against my argument to argue the Mother can only be a structuring presence and never a mother.

Finally, there is the problem of the use of different and at times conflicting theoretical frameworks. As I mentioned earlier, I have borrowed from several thinkers that have interrogated the problem of subjectification, and have employed theoretical frameworks that are occasionally in conflict with each other. I explained throughout this thesis that I did not intend to make the theoretical frameworks fit together, that I worked deliberately at the junction of theories and that I used each to illuminate varied aspects of the process of subjectification. In the context of my insistence on fluidity, the question that arises is whether it would not have been preferable to veer away from

²⁵⁶ Even if I returned, following Freud, to ancient Greek tragedy and have argued it can help us see the blueprint of the psyche, this is not meant to say that only ancient tragedies are suited for the task of interrogating the status of representation. Foucault, for example, used Velázquez's *Las Meninas* for this purpose, while Heidegger used van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes*.

theoretical junctures altogether, especially given the incompatibility of my preferred theories' static character and my proposed methodology.

One of the most important theoretical points of tension that I worked with was the notion of structure in Kleinian and Lacanian theories, and indeed the 'sticking point' of my thesis: I have used both Klein and Lacan to discuss structure and the roles of structuring elements in the life of the infant (the mother and the Father), but was only able to do so by using slightly different understandings of structure, and of the 'stage' of the process of subjectification with which each thinker engages. My circumventing the problem by redefining the meaning of structure is not intended to harmonise Klein and Lacan; on the contrary, it is meant to reveal the historicity of quasi-transcendental elements, on which the definition of structure itself is based.

While not entirely orthodox and definitely not unambiguous, I would argue there is merit to this approach: for an intervention in the body of psychoanalysis to be successful, the way the intervention is structured must work within the parameters of the body for which it is meant, remaining attuned to its particularities and idiosyncrasies. Thus, in my work I have sought not to propose an alternative to the process of subjectification, but create a space within current theory to expand the understanding of the process, allowing it to become more malleable. Given the complex nature of the psyche, the fears and anxieties of the male imaginary and the repressions and pauses these give rise to, and, most importantly, the historical nature of the forces that impact on the subject, it is at best unlikely that a unifying, cohesive narrative of the process of subjectification can emerge. It was therefore important to intervene in the meta-language, concentrate on its pauses and test these against different theoretical frameworks to understand what they can reveal about the status of the male imaginary and of the quasi-transcendental elements by which it is shaped.

Future steps

Considering the limitations of this thesis, I would argue the steps I need to take next can be classed in three broad areas: one is to do with using the concept to read other cultural products; one with the uncovering of new models of subjectification; and finally, one with the need for an expanded language that allows for the existence of a plurality of subjectivities that are not always already gendered and inscribed into hierarchical structures.

a) Rereadings

Throughout this work, I have highlighted that my intention for the concept of the non-Symbolic subject is for it to be used as a tool to 'unlock' psychoanalytic and feminist theory, and help explore hitherto hidden meanings. In this work, I have used the concept to explore a cultural product that belongs to a different *épistème*, and have argued this choice by explaining the benefits of returning to ancient tragedy: on the one hand, the text is sufficiently removed from current cultural sensitivities for us to conduct an analysis as objective as possible, while on the other it is sufficiently close to our current understanding of life, language and labour to allow us to comprehend the events described.

Yet the non-Symbolic subject as a theoretical construct can be used to understand the status of representation and the place the subject occupies in the current *épistème*, as well as the way he is shaped by quasi-transcendental elements. For this reason, it is important to interrogate the way the concept applies to modern texts, and how it can be used to understand the fears and anxieties that underpin the creation of contemporary cultural products. The challenge with such an analysis is to remain sufficiently divorced from the text itself to understand and analyse it in as detached a fashion as possible, lest one replicates through such an analysis the fears of the male imaginary.

One of the questions I am interested in exploring relates to what the concept of the non-Symbolic subject can help us understand about cultural reactions today, whether these become manifest as artistic representation or socio-political movements. In particular, I believe it would be productive to use the idea of the non-Symbolic subject to analyse the shift in the nature of cultural products—to be understood to an extent as neurotic expressions of the collective male imaginary—and trace the emergence and development of different modes of subjectification throughout modernism and post-modernism, and interrogate the current status of the self and the Other in neoliberalism.

b) Uncovering new models of subjectification

One of the main drivers of this thesis was to propose an alternative that would allow us to go beyond the oedipal model and conceptualise new modes of subjectification that eschew the phallus. Yet this thesis only allowed for the theorisation of one alternative mode of subjectification, and for a brief exploration of what the Dionysian model looks like in practice. For the subject to develop into a plurality of subjectivities, it is

imperative that new paradigmatic models are theorised, and that the language of psychoanalysis is not allowed again to crystallise into immovable forms around established patterns.

The difficulty with theorising new models lies in the closed nature of the meta-language of the male imaginary: if, as I suggested throughout this thesis, the male imaginary seeks to cover up the erasure of the (m)Other from the space of representation and impose a unique pattern for subjectification onto all emerging subjectivities, then the language it employs will be constructed in such a way so as to discourage attempts to step outside it. New models of subjectification are dependent, I would argue, on identifying the pauses, slippages and omissions of cultural products, and probing deeply to understand what had caused these in the first place.

By rereading cultural manifestation through the prism of the non-Symbolic subject, it may be possible to identify these aforementioned caesuras, and move a step closer to widening the space in which subjectivity is allowed to exist. In particular, it could be productive to use the concept of the non-Symbolic subject to explore how it can inform queer theory's intervention in psychoanalysis. Through her work on kinship in *The Bacchae*, Butler is already rereading the tragedy to question normativity; employing the non-Symbolic subject to this end, especially as embodied by Dionysus, may help further this timely intervention into the language of psychoanalysis.

c) Reframing the problem

Finally, for the project of moving beyond the oedipal paradigm to be successful, it is important to reframe the discussion in terms that do not presuppose the assumption of a particular subject position. Although it is perhaps the most difficult aspect of moving beyond the oedipal, I would argue that the development of a language, or at least of a theoretical framework that allows subjectivities other than the male to occupy a subject position, is critical.

The development of a new language may be problematic, however, as it could run the risk of reproducing the binary structures that characterise the current organisation, thereby not moving beyond, but rather deeper into the oedipal. Nonetheless, it can only be through a sustained intellectual effort that the theoretical body can be expanded, that appropriate modes of naming can be developed, and that models that serve the deep-seated unconscious interests of a certain mode of Being (e.g.: the male imaginary) can be questioned and exposed.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I have begun to reframe the way in which we refer to the phenomenological field by discussing the idea of the Symbolic and kin ties in the same context, yet understanding kin ties to go beyond the Symbolic. I believe this argument needs to be expanded, and used to probe whether the Symbolic/Real/Imaginary triad is sufficient to accommodate subjectivity in its plurality, or whether the Symbolic itself can only accommodate the male subject position.

Ultimately, my thesis remains exploratory: through it, I have tried to move one step closer to allowing a plurality of modes of subjectification to become manifest by suggesting that subjectification proper need not necessarily occur within the confines of the phallic. The complicated nature of the process of becoming a subject remains as complex as before, and change is unlikely to occur swiftly. Yet I hope that, by proposing the concept of a non-Symbolic subject, I have been able to reframe the question; instead of asking whether going beyond the oedipal is possible, we can now move towards exploring the varied models of subjectification open to the subject and their historicity.

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