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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Re-examining the Myth of Dionysos:
A Study of Euripides, Ibsen and Duras**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of
English and Comparative Literature
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Nada Ghazy Nasser

Thesis Advisor:
Professor William D. Melaney

November 2014

The American University in Cairo

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Nada Ghazy Nasser

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Has been approved by

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To my Father, Ghazy Nasser

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I dedicate this thesis to my father Ghazy Nasser, who has inspired me, encouraged me, nurtured me and supported me to continue my journey in English and Comparative Literature. You have actively helped me and inspired me in so many ways. You have helped me in my determination and persistence to find and realize my ability and potential and to make this contribution to the world of literature, a world that many do not understand as having prominence and power.

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the conflict between the Dionysian, considered as a principle of heightened excess, and social constraint as demonstrated in three different texts from distinct time periods. I will demonstrate how patriarchal and repressive social norms can demolish the sense of individuality that is assumed to be central to society as a whole. The conflict between these two tendencies as expressed in Euripides's *The Bacchae* continues to resound in the modern world and explains how a disregard for the Dionysian can lead to destruction and chaos. In this thesis, this conflict, rather than the opposition between Apollo and Dionysos as presented by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is discussed in terms of Euripides's *The Bacchae*, Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, and Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile*. In re-examining the myth of Dionysos, I discuss in conclusion the importance of acknowledging the Dionysian, the danger of over-conforming to standards of constraint, and how the neglect of the Dionysian can lead to destruction, chaos, and disorder.

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Introduction:

Dionysos and Modern Literature

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche introduces two distinct art forms, calling them the Apollonian and the Dionysian, where both principles represent different aspects of tragedy but somehow work together to produce a unified result. The Apollonian principle rules in the world of dreams, visions, and visual art forms, whereas the Dionysian rules the world of music, ecstasy, drunkenness, and intoxication. The Apollonian approach to life encourages restrained behavior while the Dionysian approach encourages the abandonment of all restrictions on human behavior. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes the Dionysian experience as a transformative one in which “[s]inging and dancing, man expresses himself as a member of a higher community,” rather than as a separate individual:

The enchantment speaks out in his gestures. Just as the animals now speak and the earth gives milk and honey, so something supernatural also echoes out of him: he feels himself a god; he himself now moves in as lofty and ecstatic a way as he saw the gods move in his dream. The man is no longer an artist; he has become a work of art: the artistic power of all of nature, to the highest rhapsodic satisfaction of the primordial unity, reveals itself here in the transports of intoxication.

(Nietzsche 13)

But for early Nietzsche, the need to recognize the balance between these two approaches is essential, and the combination of the two principles allowed the ancient Greeks to produce tragic literature.

The need to combine and unite the Apollonian and the Dionysian is explained when Nietzsche states that Greek tragedy provides us with the unique spectacle of a form of creativity that connects what is normally maintained in separate spheres. Admittedly, the Greeks recognized that the Apollonian had its home in the visual arts, whereas the Dionysian was played out in the sphere of music. And yet, the opposition between the two principles was finally mitigated in Greek tragedy:

These two very different drives go hand in hand, for the most part in open conflict with each other and simultaneously provoking each other all the time to new and more powerful offspring, in order to perpetuate in them the contest of that opposition, which the common word 'Art' only seems to bridge, until at last, through a marvelous metaphysical act of the Greek 'will', they appear paired up with each other and, as this pair, finally produce Attic tragedy, as much a Dionysian as an Apollonian work of art. (Nietzsche 11)

Nietzsche's subsequent development indicates the increasing importance of Dionysos to his view of the world, thus supporting a reading of his early work that allows us to relate his interpretation of Greek tragedy to this basic principle. We even see that when read as a narrative of decline, Nietzsche's first major work connects the death of Dionysos to the demise of tragedy itself. For Nietzsche, Euripides is the first major dramatist in whom the tragic impulse falls into decay. Compared to Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides is considered to be the most 'modern' of them all. While Nietzsche condemns Euripides for this reason, we might trace the fate of Dionysos in the plays of this late Greek dramatist to a tale that is told repeatedly in our own modern literature.

Charles Segal expresses a similar view of Euripides in his more recent pronouncements. In the poetry of "Homer, Hesiod, and Aeschylus the myths of gods are a source of order. In the poetry of Euripides the myths of the gods, are more often than not, a source of disorder" (Segal 339). We might consider Euripides to have been a 'modern' tragedian because he depicted sturdy and determined female characters and parodied many Greek heroes. With respects to Euripides, he writes: "The *Bacchae* is strikingly modern not only because it invites reading contemporary concerns into the fifth century B.C. or fifth-century concerns into the twentieth century but because Euripides was confronting a crisis of belief and of language, indeed a crisis of all symbolic expression" (Segal 272). Moreover, Euripides acknowledges a world that is empty of rational and civic order and emphasizes the distinction between conventional and traditional customs and the reality of human nature and

the human psyche. He prepares us for modern authors such as Ibsen and Duras since he emphasizes the encounter between the Dionysian sense of life and the problem of constraint in his famous ‘modern’ play, *The Bacchae*.

In this thesis, Nietzsche’s theory of the potential opposition between the Dionysian sense of life and the forces of constraint—rather than the ideal unity of Dionysos and Apollo as discussed above—will be used to read Euripides’s *The Bacchae*, Henrik Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*, and Marguerite Duras’s *Moderato Cantabile*. By examining a Greek play, a modern play, and a modern novella, the opposition between the Dionysian sense of life and the forces of constraint will become evident and will reveal how this ancient conflict still reverberates in Western culture. The examination of the selected literary texts will highlight how the criticism of patriarchal society still carries weight in modern literature. Hence, this thesis will basically focus on the myth of Dionysos and the problem of constraint, as opposed to Nietzsche’s traditional Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy and the ideal unity of both in classical drama.

Euripides (480 – 406 BC), Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) and Marguerite Duras (1914-1996) are all authors who reject the traditional forms of literature. All three authors deal with the human being’s place in society; they criticize society itself and reveal the conflict between the Dionysian sense of life and the problem of constraint. Although they are not directly influenced by one another, all three texts depict the conflict between the Dionysian sense of life and the forces of constraint that turn against life and damage the human community by repressing vital instincts.

Charles Segal explains that the “Dionysiac includes the dissolution of limits, the spanning of logical contradictions, the suspension of logically imposed categories, and the exploration of in-between-ness and reversibility in a spirit that may veer abruptly from play and wonder to unrestrained savagery” (Segal 4). All three texts give us different standpoints

on how patriarchal social mores destroy the individual's unique and chosen identity. Moreover, restrictive social customs and traditions also affect society as a whole, and this is also represented in all three literary works. The major protagonists and the characters within each play develop different tactics for resisting the constraints that are posed by social values and customs. The recurring theme of the Dionysian versus the problem of constraint, which is first expressed in Euripides's *The Bacchae*, continues to resonate in Western culture and in the contemporary world, revealing how the repression of a basic and necessary part of human nature threatens patriarchal societies, resulting in violence and destruction.

Euripides's *The Bacchae* is a tragedy based on a mythological story of the King of Thebes, Pentheus, and the god Dionysos, who punishes those who refuse to worship him. The play opens with Dionysos, disguised as a stranger, explaining the story of his origin and the purpose of his arrival to Thebes. As soon as he arrives in Thebes, Dionysos drives the women of Thebes, including his very own cousins and relatives, into euphoric frenzy. They subsequently indulge in Dionysian festivals and rituals, heightening and intensifying the conflict between the Dionysian realm and the problem of constraint, causing social and personal disintegration as well as collapse. The tragedy ensues either because people do not recognize the basic component of their being, the Dionysian, or else they indulge in it excessively.

Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is a play that ridicules the bourgeoisie society that the author knew so well. Hedda Gabler's innate rebellion against her provincial milieu is highlighted from the very first page in the play. She yearns to live in a more open society and to break free from all forms of constraint that surround her. She tries to achieve her goals by living vicariously and imposing her desires on her former paramour, Løvborg. Not able to live the life that she wants to live, Hedda entices him to seek Dionysian abandon, even at his own expense. Since she cannot live as she wants to live, social constraints bring about her

own destruction when the desire for control that she cannot attain results in her own ruin. Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* basically presents the conflict between excess and constraint in late nineteenth-century Norwegian life. It uncovers the destruction that occurs when someone denies an intrinsic aspect of the human personality and psyche, the Dionysian component that is part of human nature.

Marguerite Duras' *Moderato Cantabile* describes the patriarchal society from which Anne Desbaresdes, the protagonist, suffers. A murder that takes place in a working-class café becomes the pivotal event that Anne desires to re-create with a complete stranger, Chauvin, whom she encounters in random meetings. While accompanied with her own son in a piano lesson, Anne hears a murdered woman scream with passion. That scream captivates her and moves her in ways that she cannot herself understand. While attempting to re-create the event and imagine the narrative that leads to the woman's murder by her lover, she drinks cheap wine and trespasses the boundaries of her social position as mother and wife. The repetition of the wine scenes, which display her need to drink and calm herself and her senses, evokes the Greek god Dionysos, the god of intoxication and excess. Anne's daily engagement with Chauvin in the working-class café, where she converses and imagines a murder story filled with passion, captivates her and causes her to escape her banal life, underscoring the repressed condition that society imposes upon her. Again, the novella depicts a woman who wants to break free from the shackles of society, marriage and the monotonous life that she continues to live. It thus represents the conflict between the Dionysian, as a component in human nature, and the constraints that society imposes on individuals.

Richard Seaford's *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City State* is also used as a complement to the three works examined in this thesis. This work helps explain how the Dionysian cult is prominent in the social and political developments. Seaford criticizes traditional Homeric society and government in favor of a more modern

conception of civic order. He champions a new awareness that emerges in late antiquity when women who were previously bound to their homes and households are able to become a part of the larger community. His research helps us better understand how Dionysos has acquired a significant prominence and presence in modern life. No longer worshipped as the god of theatre and wine, Dionysos lives on in modern times as an archetype of extremity, intoxication, madness, and ecstasy.

Chapter 1:

Dionysos in Euripides's *The Bacchae*

Euripides' *The Bacchae* highlights the conflict between Dionysos and societal repression where Pentheus, the ruler of Thebes, is the personification of constraint, and Dionysos, the personification of instinctual impulses. As Pentheus continues to impose and reinforce limits and boundaries, Dionysos dissolves and disperses them, uncovering the horrors that result from the repressive denial of human nature. Moreover, the play also emphasizes the consequences of Dionysian excess, especially through the portrayal of Pentheus's mother, Agave.

The play opens with Dionysos, disguised as a stranger, convincing the citizens of Thebes that he is the son of Zeus, and that he is considered to be a god and deserves worship. He explains that Semele is his mother, Zeus is his father, and he has arrived to Thebes from Asia to show mortals "that the child of [Semele] bore to Zeus is a diety" (Euripides 96). In Greek mythology and in *The Bacchae*, Dionysos is the god who provides human beings with rapture and ecstasy, since they exert this vital energy through Dionysian cults and rituals as modes of expression. In *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides's Bacchae*, Charles Segal states that Dionysos is "a male god, but he has the softness, sensuality, and emotionality that the Greeks generally associate with women. He has the force and energy of a vigorous young man, but the grace, charm, and beauty of a girl. He is Greek, but he comes from barbarian Asia, escorted by a band of wild Asian women" (Segal 10). Dionysos shortly claims in the play that he has driven the women of Thebes into the mountains, stating "there are they whom I have driven frenzied from their homes, and they are dwelling on the hills with minds distraught; and I have forced them to assume the dress worn in my orgies, and all the women-folk of Cadmus's stock have I driven raving from their homes, one and all alike" (Euripides

96). Since Semele's sisters did not believe her when she told them she bore a child from Zeus, Dionysos drove his aunts to the mountains as well, frenzied.

As the play's actions intensify, Tiresias explicitly explains to the ruler of Thebes, Pentheus, the benefits and influences of worshipping Dionysos. He tells Pentheus that Dionysos is the god "who discovered the juice of the grape and introduced it to mankind, stilling thereby each grief that mortals suffer from, soon as e'er they are filled with juice of the vine; and sleep also he giveth, sleep that brings forgetfulness of daily ills, the sovereign charm of all our woe" (Euripides 101). However, Pentheus thinks that Tiresias and Cadmus have been driven mad when they dress up in fawnskins and go about preparing to indulge in Dionysian rituals. He mocks them and states, "Touch me not away to thy Bacchic rites thyself! Never try to infect me with thy foolery," and claims that he will "hunt down this girl-faced stranger, who is introducing a new complaint amongst our women, and doing outrage to the marriage tie"; thus, introducing the conflict between order and chaos (Euripides 103). Pentheus, the embodiment of constraint and order, is depicted as the overly masculine ruler and systematizer who will hunt down the 'girl-faced stranger,' Dionysos.

Dionysos has come to Thebes to dissolve set boundaries, but "the drive for pleasure excites in the self, in society, and in the authority-figures of society a paradoxical resistance to pleasure" (Segal 10). Dionysos provides the women of Thebes supernatural strength and powers that Greek society and Pentheus have denied them. In *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, Helene P. Foley claims that "women's special vulnerability to Dionysiac possession strikes terror into the hearts of men determined to keep women in their place, that is married and inside the house" (Foley 43). Foley provides important details on the situation of women in classical Greece:

[The] Greek wife had no fully autonomous sense of self, no muse, no public voice. As we have seen, legally she was under the permanent supervision of a guardian and could make no significant decisions. Any independent action on

the part of a classical Athenian woman, or any pursuit of her own desires, was not acceptable in a wife unless it involved carrying out household duties such as weaving, cooking, or guarding and caring for household property and children. Nor did a woman, living confined to the household and religious activities, have the knowledge or the educated discipline needed to make independent decisions. (Foley 262-63)

This clearly shows that the typical woman during Greek times was confined to the household and nothing else. However, this confinement comes to an end when Dionysos takes the women of Thebes away from the city, into the mountains, and allows them to indulge in frenzies.

Through the Dionysian rituals, the women of Thebes are lifted from the lineaments of despair since they are taken into the mountains where they can re-connect with nature and liberated from the travails of domestic life. Dionysos releases the women from civic restraint and provides them with temporary release from the pressures of the civilization. This new space “opens into the unknown, the boundless, the wild realms beyond the ordered framework of the city-state, the places where the individual, surrendering too much to that joy, may lose himself entirely” (Segal 9). In “Ecstasy and Possession: The Attraction of Women to the Cult of Dionysus,” Ross S. Kraemer explains that the Dionysian rituals included “nocturnal wanderings on the mountains, the nursing of baby wild animals, frenzied dancing, the consumption of wine, honey, and milk, and possibly the performance of a two-part sacrificial ritual, the *spargamos* (“rendering apart”) and *omophagia* (“consuming raw”) of a wild beast identified simultaneously with the god and with one’s own son” (Kraemer 60). He also explains that while women engage in the Bacchic rites, they “might have worn appropriate ritual clothing, including perhaps fawnskin, and carried a *thyrsus* wand,” which plays a prominent role in Euripides’s *The Bacchae*, where of all those who go to the mountain are dressed in ritual clothing (Kraemer 60). Moreover, Kraemer further discusses how these rituals impacted the domestic lives of the women involved:

Women possessed by Dionysus are compelled to abandon, at least temporarily, their domestic obligations of housework and child-rearing in favor of the worship of the god. While in the service of Dionysos, their activities express a marked ambivalence towards the neglected roles. On the one hand, *The Bacchae* mimic their normal roles, in a transmuted form, as they nurse baby wild animals with milk intended for their own young. (Kraemer 67)

Dionysos, disguised as a stranger, not only lures women to join his cult but can be associated with women in physical appearance. Charles Segal explains that “Dionysus is felt to have a special affinity with women not only because he symbolizes the repressed emotionality associated with the female but also because he himself spans male and female” (Segal 159). Pentheus, the masculine and rational ruler, criticizes and mocks Dionysos’s appearance repeatedly by stating, “thy hair is long because thou hast never been a wrestler; thy skin is white to help thee gain thy end, not tanned by ray of sun, but kept within the shade as thou goest in quest of love with beauty’s bait”; however, Pentheus cannot hide his curiosity and his fascination with the Dionysian rituals (Euripides 105). Segal states that the Dionysian cult gives women the power that they could not claim for themselves in their private lives:

Dionysus’ cult gives to women a power and importance that were denied to them, on the whole, in fifth-century Athens. Yet it does so in a complex and ambiguous way. Dionysus releases the emotional violence associated with women and gives it a formalized place in ritual, a ritual not in the polis but in the wild, particularly in the *oreibasia*, the revel on the mountains where those emotional energies, repressed in the city, can have full play. (Segal 159)

Pentheus is eager to know what the women do in the mountains and asks, “What profit bring they to their votaries?” However, Dionysos tells him, “Thou must not be told, though ‘tis well worth knowing” (Euripides 105). By stating that it is “a pretty piece of trickery, to excite my curiosity,” Pentheus reveals his repressed state and the emotionally detached attitude that eventually leads to his brutal death and destruction (Euripides 106). Through his person, the struggle between the Dionysian realm and the problem of constraint

becomes apparent. Euripides's aim is to display the errors of the Athenian patriarchy through both the fate of Pentheus, who represents the problem of restraint, and that of Agave, who represents the problem of extreme excess.

Pentheus's tragic flaw is his inability to listen to others due to his excessive hubris. He orders people to bring Dionysos in chains "to be stoned to death, a bitter ending to his revelry in Thebes" (Euripides 103). He disregards Tiresias's and Cadmus's advice on the worship of Dionysos. When the messenger tells him of their ability to extract wine, milk, and honey by striking their thyrsuses, Pentheus only focuses on how the women their display brutality in killing cattle. Eventually, despite his one-track mind and refusal to understand himself, Pentheus is finally transformed. His failure to recognize his own nature causes his own doom, since he basically denies that Bacchus is indeed part of human nature and part of himself. The development of Pentheus demonstrates an eagerness to indulge Dionysian longings and his deadly fate is the outcome of constraint and repression. Charles Segal explicitly explains his transformation through a confusion in roles:

Pentheus, who has obtained his kinship through his maternal grandfather, Cadmus, father of Agave (as also of Semele, of course), is concerned to defend the authority and prestige of the male warrior class, the hoplites, with whom he identifies. The two figures mysteriously exchange roles. The effeminate, languid prophet suddenly becomes the vigorous, energetic, controlling master of the situation. The threatening, vociferous, fear-inspiring king suddenly becomes pliant, confused, and vulnerable. (Segal 168)

Pentheus' intense curiosity about women and their ritual performances in the mountains leads to his downfall and transformation, which brings to light the Dionysian instincts in human nature. When Dionysos offers to take him to see the women, Pentheus reveals his sexual curiosity by stating, "methinks they are already caught in pleasant shares of dalliance, like birds amid the brakes" (Euripides 120). Moreover, his foolishness is heightened when he asks Dionysos, "Pray, what do I resemble? Is not mine the carriage of

Ino, or Agave my own mother,” after he has changed his clothes and dressed up like a maenad (Euripides 119). Pentheus’s external transformation is also proof of his repressed, natural and sexual curiosity, since Dionysos manages to dress up the masculine and apparently rational ruler as a female bacchant. He becomes king and bacchant, both male and female, Pentheus and Dionysos, as he leaves the city and delves into the wild; he transforms into a figure full of contradictions, paradoxes, and ambiguity.

Pentheus, the man who mocks these women and calls for the death of Dionysos, becomes one of the bacchants. In addition to being externally transformed, he is mentally transformed as well. Due to the extreme repression of his impulses, he sees “two suns, and two towns of Thebes,” a vision that manifests the complete disintegration of his mind as he is struck by Dionysian madness and frenzy (Euripides 119). Pentheus’s transformation results in the complete loss of his identity as a man and ruler through his seduction by Dionysos, the one man he criticizes and ceaselessly mocks. Thus he becomes “not only a crypto-maenad, but also a crypto-Dionysus” (Segal 29). Through abrupt transformations, Euripides dramatizes the consequences of refusing to acknowledge and accept the impulses and urges found in human nature and to heed the dangers of constraint that are unleashed when he sends Pentheus to his deathbed in female attire.

Once Pentheus goes down to them, the women literally hunt and attack the representative of patriarchal society. Pentheus’s mother, Agave, indulges excessively in Dionysiac frenzy and madness. She finally kills her son by tearing his shoulder from his socket and, while the other bacchantes provided assistance, his “ribs were stripped of flesh by their rendering nails” so that “each one with blood-dabbled hands were tossing Pentheus’s limbs about” (Euripides 125). At last, “scattered lies his corpse, part beneath the rugged rocks and part amid the deep dark woods,” rendering the savage attack of Pentheus metaphorical of the emotional stripping bare that the individual suffers when she denies her own nature

(Euripides 125). Through Pentheus's transformation from ruler to female bacchante, the aftermath and result of constraint and restriction is highlighted. Moreover, the character of Agave most strongly reveals the consequences of Dionysian excess, since, as Segal states, "the pleasure of Dionysiac wine and ecstasy is full of contradictions, surrounded by dangers," whereas "Pentheus's physical defeat is the visible expression of his failure to learn and grow," revealing that an acknowledgement of the Dionysian within provides a key to the problem of constraint (Segal 9, 194).

When Agave kills her son unknowingly, she enters carrying Pentheus' head and tells the rest of the women, "I caught him with never a snare, this lion's whelp" (Euripides 126). She mistakenly thinks that Pentheus is a lion and does not recognize him due to the rituals in which she blindly indulges. While killing him, Agave does not even recognize him as her own when he cries out for his mother to stop, which further indicates how mad she has been driven by the Dionysian rituals. Later, Cadmus, her father, helps her realize that it was Pentheus whom she killed. Realizing that she has killed her son, she states, "Ah, woe is me! O sight of awful sorrow!" (Euripides 129). The consequences of these excesses are dramatized through Agave's immersion in Dionysian madness.

Kraemer states that "the death and dismemberment of Pentheus reflects the inversion of their maternal loyalties—the slaughter of Pentheus is the vicarious slaughter of each woman's own offspring" (Kraemer 67). She states that "further indications of sex-role reversal in the Dionysiac rites appear in the hunting activities of the maenads, climaxing in Agave's slaughter of Pentheus and her victorious boasts to her own father, Cadmus, upon her return to Thebes" (Kraemer 68). The fact that Agave is then banished and commanded to leave Thebes highlights both the danger of excess and the outcome of repression. It reveals the conflict between excess and limitation, showing how "Agave has become, in her own crazed mind, a hunter, rejecting the pursuits of women for the higher achievements of men,"

and how her restricted society causes her to deny her own nature, and as a result, indulge in Dionysian excess (Kraemer 68). There is a difference between acknowledging and accepting the Dionysian as opposed to indulging excessively in it. In this play, Agave shows us that the outcome of excess is always ruin and destruction. In contrast, Tiresias and Cadmus are the only characters in Euripides's *The Bacchae* who accept the Dionysian as part of their nature without being completely possessed by it.

Agave's banishment from Thebes results from her excessive abandon in the Dionysiac rituals; however, this excessiveness is due to the repression that women during that time were forced to endure. Kraemer states:

That participation in the Dionysiac *orgia* afforded Greek women a means of expressing their hostility and frustration at the male-dominated society, by temporarily abandoning their homes and household responsibilities and engaging in somewhat outrageous activities. It seems clear that one of the main results of Dionysiac possession was that it enabled Greek women at least temporarily to defy their normal roles and participate in activities which were normally not permitted to them, within a framework which prohibited the exercise of any serious sanctions against them, since the possession was, in most instances understood to be amoral and irresistible.

(Kraemer 80)

Pentheus as the personification of constraint helps us understand the inevitability of Agave's fate. In *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, Segal states that "Pentheus becomes the reason for Agave's 'misery' and exile from Thebes" (Segal 29). Furthermore, he goes on to explain that the suspension of boundaries in the Dionysiac cult occurs on two planes, the psychological and the cultural, and that "Dionysus signifies the free flow of the emotional life, untrammelled by the restrictions of family, society, traditional religion, or personal morality" (Segal 21). He also explains that "Dionysus becomes for Pentheus, who has blocked that expression, the 'return of the repressed,'" and continually calls Dionysos the god who 'unbinds' what Pentheus has 'bound up' and "releases what Pentheus has held constrained and tight," and finally "lets loose in Pentheus his own interior bestiality and

sexuality” that he himself has denied (Segal 22). Segal mentions as well that those who resist this natural component in their nature would throw “city, house, and psyche into chaos,” because “[w]hen Dionysus’ ecstatic madness meets resistance, it takes the form of violence rather than joyful release,” which was exactly what happened in Euripides’ drama, *The Bacchae* (Segal 22, 30).

In modern societies and communities, we still find patriarchal societies repressing and controlling individuals, especially women who are mostly associated with domestic life and the household; however, as seen in Euripides’s *The Bacchae*, destruction occurs when the Dionysian component of our nature is repressed. Pentheus’s trials and efforts to impede the women from becoming bacchantes and maenads symbolize and reveal an internal struggle in which he represses his own instinctual drives. Incongruously, Pentheus is not maintaining order when he represses his own nature; he interferes with the natural world, creating a society of dissonance.

Segal explains how Pentheus’s actions created a society based on tension and unrest: “As Pentheus also fulfills the symbolic role of sacral kingship, bearing the responsibility for integrating the supernatural into the social order, his death simultaneously reflects the city’s inability to integrate rational and irrational, public and private needs, social order and personal fulfillment” (Segal 206). Pentheus fails as the king of Thebes and fails as an individual by repressing a vital part of human nature, since an acknowledgment of the Dionysian is required for development and for the fulfillment of the individual’s full being.

The term *anima* is introduced in the *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* by C. G. Jung, who explains that it “names the feminine unconscious factor in a man”(Leeming 38). Pentheus in this case disregards his anima, or feminine side, the Dionysian impulse that is considered to be a vital part of our individuality and self. Segal also explains Pentheus’s neglected anima when he states, “His contact with [Dionysus] releases the savage aspect of

his adolescent personality, that part of the not yet civilized self that belongs to the raw and wild,” emphasizing that this neglected part of his personality is a necessary component of his psyche and being (Segal 166). The women who are on the mountain practicing Dionysian rituals and attaining an ecstatic state of mind represent Pentheus’s disregard for anima that eventually led to his ruin and destruction. In “Dionysus in *The Bacchae*,” George Grube he explains that Dionysos allows us to understand the emotional side of human nature. The emotions associated with Dionysos are potentially helpful but harmful if ignored:

Recognise them as a necessary and welcome element in human life, allow them to live in you and with you; they will give you loveliness and joy. Ignore them, and they will conquer you as they did Agave, and become themselves ugly in process. Deny them altogether, fight them, proclaim that they do not exist, and they will tear you limb from limb like Pentheus. And in the process the god has in truth become a fiend. (Grube 53-54)

In *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City State*, Richard Seaford argues that females should be part of the community, and not only party of domestic sphere. He explains that in *The Bacchae*, the polis was not the target of Dionysos’s destructive actions; on the contrary, he invades the household from the very beginning. He explains that Euripides’s intention is to show how liberating women from the household environment would make them part of the community as whole. Seaford explains that the Dionysian cult in *The Bacchae* is not a rejection of the polis but a means by which the polis achieves unity and harmony. The Dionysian cult is indeed an integral part of society and demands recognition and acceptance because it plays a vital and prominent role in constituting the body politic. It provides an imaginary and ritualistic model that requires a change in awareness from a household-based outlook to a more cohesive and collective mindset that crosses the whole community. Finally, the incompatible combination of Pentheus and Dionysos in the tragedy constitutes a wide array of meanings. It incorporates

the duality and divergence between the needs of the polis to maintain restricted and contained order and the desire and need of the individual to voice and practice freedom and different modes of expression. Dionysos enters Thebes and takes its inhabitants outside the restrictions and margins of the city and what the city represents.

Chapter 2:

Excess and Constraint in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*

In Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, the characterization and conflict of the protagonist, Hedda, emphasizes the theme of the Dionysian and reveals the problem of constraint. Hedda is a romantic heroine confined to a provincial society who is torn between the way that she presents herself socially and her authentic self, or the person she wants to be. In nineteenth-century Norway, men are represented in literature as active and rational; they are shown to be at home in the public spheres. Women, in contrast, are represented as mothers and wives with passive and emotional attitudes; they are also strongly associated with domestic and household duties.

Hedda, the daughter of General Gabler, inherits and uses her father's pistols. She yearns to live in a more open society because she wants to break free from any form of restraint. Hedda rejects stereotypical female roles, refusing to submit to society's expectations. While entertaining visitors, she continually plays with her father's pistols, an object usually associated with men. The many instances when Hedda is seen playing with pistols in the play reveal her rebellious nature and the rejection of her female role as passive and inactive. Not being able to live the life she wants to live, she lures Eilert Løvborg to return to alcoholism, and also tries to impose her own values and desires on him. Hedda's loathing of society, her boredom in marriage with George Tesman, her yearning to live beautifully and freely highlights the conflict between the Dionysian and the problem of constraint in this play.

To further depict how Hedda is torn between the person that she projects socially and her more authentic self, Ibsen places her in situations where she directly states how unhappy and bored she is with life and particularly with the demands of her marriage. In Act I, while conversing with her husband, George Tesman, Hedda communicates to us her intense sense

of frustration with her current existence:

HEDDA [Goes up to the room]: Well, I shall have one thing at least to kill time with in the meanwhile.

TESMAN [Beaming]: Oh thank heaven for that! What is it, Hedda. Eh?

HEDDA [In the middle doorway, looks at him with covert scorn]: My pistols, George.

TESMAN [In alarm]: Your pistols!

HEDDA [With cold eyes]: General Gabler's pistols [She goes out through the inner room, to the left.

TESMAN [Rushes up to the middle doorway and calls after her]: No, for heavens sake, Hedda darling—don't don't touch those dangerous things! For my sake Hedda! Eh?(Ibsen 69)

This conversation indicates how Hedda is basically killing time with her recurrent routine of playing with pistols, which symbolize masculinity, power and control. Playing with her father's pistols is a way of breaking a social norm and expressing the idea of being powerful. However, Hedda only toys with the idea of power; she is never actually powerful or in control. Moreover, the guns that are symbolic of power are representative of her defeat as well, of the intense hunger and passion that come from being subjected to the obligations of society. In some respects, Hedda Gabler can be said to represent the situation of women who lack power and prominence in nineteenth-century provincial society.

Throughout the drama, Ibsen places Hedda in situations where she directly states how unhappy and bored she is with the demands that are imposed on her. In Act II, Hedda directly tells Judge Brack, "Mr. Brack, how mortally bored I have been," and she even elaborates that she cannot stand living with her husband because he does nothing but talk about "the history of civilization, morning, noon, and night" (Ibsen 74-75). Hedda repeatedly tells Judge Brack

that she is an unhappy wife, and through her actions, she increasingly finds a world of customs and rigid convention that closes in on her, dictating who she marries, when she marries and that she must be a mother defined by her domestic obligations. Løvborg tells her that she has a certain “craving for life”; however, she cannot live the life she desires since she is a “terrible coward” and has “such a dread of scandal” (Ibsen 105-106). Nonetheless, the audience sympathizes with her desire to free herself from the confines of a closed and empty society.

Hedda tells Judge Brack how unfulfilled she is, stating that what she finds most intolerable is “being everlastingly in the company of—one and the same person” (Ibsen 74). Her sexual nature cannot endure confinement since she is the embodiment of the Dionysian passion, vitality and chaos, and her free spirit clashes with the customs of society. She is both unable to live with social demands and unable to live according to her impulses since she fears scandal and, in a later conversation with Løvborg, Hedda identifies herself as a coward.

The relationship that Hedda Gabler had with Løvborg before her marriage was that of an intimate friendship. He asks Hedda, “Was there no love in your friendship for me either? Not a spark—not a tinge of love in it?” She tells him that they were “two good comrades—two thoroughly intimate friends,” and then she goes on to say that she thinks “there was really something beautiful, something fascinating—something daring—in—that secret intimacy—that comradeship which no living creature so much as dreamed of” (Ibsen 102). The fact that this relationship was something beyond the realm of marriage, that it was ‘beautiful’, ‘daring’, and ‘fascinating’ as she states, reveals the Dionysian within Hedda. The fact that Hedda Gabler, the daughter of General Gabler, has “such a dread of scandal,” shows that, even as a woman in revolt against a rigid world, she is torn between social constraint and Dionysian exuberance (Ibsen 106).

Mrs. Elvsted, or Thea, is a very important character in the play as well. She is a very passionate and persistent woman who left her husband and became attached to Løvborg while he was tutoring her children. She comes to the Tesmans because she is afraid that Løvborg would return to alcoholism after he achieved sobriety, and in addition, she helps him in his writing and research. When Mrs. Elvsted arrives at the Tesmans, Løvborg is furious that she came after him and accuses her of being a spy, so in defiance, he raises a glass of punch to his lips, saying to her: “Your health, Thea!” (Ibsen 112) His drinking ominously continues. Hedda is clearly manipulating Løvborg to drink, to party and to indulge in the Dionysian in an open way. After Løvborg, Judge Brack and Tesman leave for the party, Hedda tells Mrs. Elvsted, “At ten o’clock—he will be here. I can see him already—with vine-leaves in his hair—flushed and fearless.” She then goes on to say that, in time, “he will have regained control over himself. Then he will be a free man for all his days” (Ibsen 117).

The fact that Hedda mentions vine leaves invokes the god of Dionysos, and suggests how she has lured and enticed Løvborg to indulge in excessive behavior, which she is forbidden to experience. Moreover, she associates Dionysos with a sense of freedom and hints that Løvborg’s return with vine leaves in his hair will involve his liberation. In this case, Hedda is attracted to Løvborg’s Dionysian traits. The vine leaves are a symbol expressing what she herself desires. In “The Apotheosis of Hedda Gabler,” Errol Durbach claims that Hedda always undergoes “the same pattern of frustration—passionate desire, repressed by the stringent moral code of her tradition, and finding release only by a vicarious indulgence in the erotic confessions of her lover. As General Gabler’s daughter, she is debarred from normal sexual experience,” so that her own Dionysian impulses inevitably find release in her entanglement with Eilert Løvborg (Durbach 148).

Durbach also explains that Hedda is a character who seeks freedom and is “the embodiment of anarchic passion which neither finds nor seeks liberation, too fearful, perhaps,

of confronting its own reality and too repressed by the iron demands of Gablerian self-control (Durbach 148). Hedda Gabler is always powerless to act because she dreads scandal, but she is also torn between social propriety and her Dionysian urges. She lures Løvborg and tempts him “to magnificence, persuading him by her power to indulge in the liberating madness of alcohol, smashing Thea’s hold over him, and then sending him away to Brack’s stag party as if to some wild Bacchanal” (Durbach 150). Durbach directly compares Løvborg’s fate to what might have occurred in the Dionysian rituals, but his analysis of Hedda allows us to better understand her repressed needs and craving to indulge in the Dionysian herself.

Hedda Gabler is repressed because of the traditions of Gablerism, which “superimposes upon the passionate disorder of life a code of civilized decorum” (Durbach 153). Hedda is “the father’s daughter—impressing that image of herself upon a world incapable of either sustaining or understanding the values by which she lives,” and, although she wants to indulge in the Dionysian, she is “oppressed by her environment, limited by its limitations” (Durbach 154). In the play, shortly after the party, Løvborg tells Mrs. Elvsted that he destroyed the manuscript he has written but tells Hedda that he lost it, which is the truth. Tesman finds the manuscript, and Hedda later burns it without informing Løvborg. The manuscript symbolizes the unborn child of Eilert Løvborg and Mrs Elvsted. She burns it due to her jealousy and the fact that she loathes anything that binds anyone to a sense of domestic duties.

In “Hedda’s Silences: Beauty and Despair in *Hedda Gabler*” we learn that “Hedda’s agitation also stems from her experience of power, for in this moment, she has total control over Thea and Løvborg’s destiny,” which emphasizes her need to manipulate and her demanding nature (Moi 441). But she isn’t only concerned with power; she is basically the “director of Løvborg’s and Thea’s tragedy,” a role that begins to emerge when Løvborg

converses with her and explains to her that his life has no purpose (Moi 441). Now that he is without the manuscript, he wants to kill himself:

HEDDA: What path do you mean to take then?

LOVBORG: None. I will only try to make an end of it all—the sooner the better.

HEDDA [A step nearer him]: Eilert Lovborg—listen to me. —Will you not try to—to do it beautifully?

LOVBORG: Beautifully? [Smiling.] With vine-leaves in my hair, as you used to dream in the old days—?

HEDDA: No, no. I have lost my faith in the vine-leaves. But beautifully nevertheless. For once in a way!—Goodbye! You must go now—and do not come here any more.

LOVBORG: Goodbye, Mrs. Tesman. And give George Tesman my love.

HEDDA: No, wait! I must give you a memento to take with you. [She goes to the writing-table and opens the drawer and the pistol-case; then returns to LOVBORG with one of the pistols.] (Ibsen 149).

The dialogue between Hedda and Løvborg emphasizes Hedda's desire to control someone's life. She wants to control how he dies, and because she yearns to live in the Dionysian realm, she wants him to die beautifully. After their conversation and as Løvborg was about to leave, she tells him again, "And beautifully, Eliert Lovborg. Promise me that!" (Ibsen 150). She tries in this way to gain as much control and power over him as she can. She even previously tells Mrs. Elvsted, "I want for once in my life to have power to mould a human destiny," which clearly demonstrates Hedda to be someone who craves control over someone else since she cannot control her own life (Ibsen 117). Durbach states that Hedda can "inspire him to die in splendor, so that the freedom attained through death, if not through his life, may secure a victory over her environment; and she gives him one of the Gabler pistols, confident

that the act of destruction may be transformed into a creative act of nobility and beauty” (Durbach 151).

When Løvborg takes the pistol, he puts it in a pocket near his chest and dies accidentally. His death leaves Hedda unfulfilled because he did not die ‘beautifully’ but accidentally, shot in the stomach. Brack later on finds out that Hedda owned the pistol that killed Løvborg, so he implicitly threatens her:

HEDDA: But I have nothing to do with this repulsive business.

BRACK: No. But you will have to answer the question: Why did you give Eilert the pistol? And what conclusions will people draw from the fact that you did give it to him.

HEDDA [Lets her head sink.]: That is true. I did not think of that.

BRACK: Well, fortunately, there is no danger, as long as I say nothing.

HEDDA [Looks up to him.]: So I am in your power, Judge Brack. You have me at your beck and call, from this time forward.

BRACK [Whispers softly.]: Dearest Hedda—believe me—I shall not abuse my advantage.

HEDDA. I am in your power none the less. Subject to your will and your demands. A slave, a slave then! [Rises impetuously.] No, I cannot endure the thought of that! Never!

(Ibsen 176-177).

Since Hedda cannot be under someone’s control, she decides to die beautifully herself, in the Dionysian mode, and to escape the repression that society imposes on her. Hedda goes to the backroom, shortly after her conversation with Brack, and Tesman hears her playing a wild song on the piano. Before committing suicide, she exclaims, “Now that you are the one cock in the basket—” (Ibsen 179). After hearing a shot fired in the other room, Tesman tells them, “Oh, now she is playing with those pistols again” (Ibsen 179). The fact that Hedda Gabler commits suicide means that she does not fail as a person but rather succeeds in defying the society she loathes and escapes it beautifully. Hedda cannot endure the fact that Judge Brack

is in control. She knows about the pistol that she gave to Løvborg and decides to escape from the confines of the life to which she has been condemned.

In his discussion of the play, Durbach claims that “Hedda’s death is, perhaps, the last great tragic gesture in modern drama. It asserts the furious Dionysiac struggle for spiritual freedom and vitality through an orgiastic action which, in the ordering and beauty of its execution, allows us to contemplate the suffering and the ecstasy through an image of calm Apollonian control” (Durbach 147). Hedda’s violence is assumed to be a response to the repression that she feels and the circumstances that shape her world. For Hedda, death is not a defeat at all; on the contrary, it is a victory over the society that she lives in. Death is ultimately “the act of magnificence, the ultimate assertion of personal freedom through an action at once beautiful and controlled” (Durbach 152). For Hedda, death is affirmation and confirmation of the beautiful, and the pistol used in suicide becomes “the instrument of creative achievement, the symbolic means to ecstatic freedom through an act of beautiful self-discipline” (Durbach 157). Durbach comments on the symbolic significance of her suicide in the following summary:

Hedda withdraws into the aristocratic sanctuary of the small inner room, closes the curtains and suddenly bursts into a wild dance tune on the piano, unleashing momentarily her Dionysiac vitality, triumphantly proclaiming her nature. The music, the dithyrambic frenzy, the dance rhythms, evokes ingeniously the apotheosis occurring behind the curtain, the perfect emotional accompaniment to the mystery of Dionysos. And then she shoots herself, in the temple, beautifully, heroically, in style, channeling her anarchic energies towards a decisive act of willed control, dying beneath the portrait of General Gabler whose tradition she has redeemed. The apotheosis is complete (Durbach 158).

Hedda Gabler is situated in a society that denies her freedom and liberty. She insists that Løvborg should go to the party with Judge Brack and Tesman because she yearns to see him return with vine leaves in his hair; however, when he returns with nothing, she is disappointed and she gives him the pistol to kill himself, insisting in the long run that suicide

can be an act of beauty and liberation. In “Hedda’s Silences: Beauty and Despair in *Hedda Gabler*,” Toril Moi comments on why his death is so important to her: “When Hedda learns the truth about Løvborg’s death, she realizes that acts of heroic beauty have become impossible,” and that’s why she decides to die beautifully (Moi 448). Moreover, Hedda dies offstage, as in Greek tragedy, and again invokes the god of Dionysos through the peculiar nature of her own suicide. Hedda is basically a character who requests, longs, and craves to have the power of a man; thus, she plays with her late father’s pistols. She achieves this power through her own death, through taking her own life, where death transforms her symbolically from a fragile woman to a woman who has broken the bonds of repression and despair.

In “Ibsen and Nietzsche,” Thomas F. Van Laan states that “Hedda’s pervasive attraction to the image of the hero appearing with vine leaves in the hair, a motif clearly influenced by Nietzsche’s concept of the Dionysian principle in classical Greek Tragedy,” explains the protagonist’s “yearning for something so suppressed in her society that most of those to whom she mentions vine leaves in the hair can only look at her in bewilderment. The exception is Løvborg, who knows about Dionysus but celebrates him only in the kind of bacchanals his society acknowledges” (Van Laan 285- 286).

Ibsen’s peculiar adaptation of Euripidean themes can perhaps best be understood in terms of Nietzsche’s remarks on Greek tragedy and also help explain why we respond to Ibsen as a preeminently modern dramatist. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche explains that “Greek tragedy died in a manner different from all its ancient sister artistic styles: it died by suicide” (Nietzsche 39). Nietzsche argues that Euripides marks the beginning of the end of tragedy, which was completed by the rise of Socratic rationalism. He asserts that “in Euripides the spectator is brought up unto the stage,” which testifies to the decline of the Dionysian spirit. Moreover, his psychological realism and attempts to depict the everyday

lives of characters compromised the heroism to be found in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. For instance, Euripides's *The Bacchae* focuses on the psychological realm and weaves new societal developments into the dramatic narrative. For Nietzsche, since Euripides' characters resemble people in modern and contemporary society, his plays look forward to the less impressive achievements of the New Attic Comedy.

Nietzsche's theory of classical Greek drama suggests that before Euripides and Socrates, the Dionysian and the Apollonian were harmoniously intertwined but that the moment of aesthetic unity was short-lived. In "Last of the Detractors: Friedrich Nietzsche's Condemnation of Euripides," Albert Henrichs states that "Euripides is praised for his powerful portrayal of women" but blamed for "indulging in exaggerated depiction of raw passion [*Leidenschaft*] at the expense of true nobility of character [*Schonheit des Charakters*], and for destroying the dramatic coherence and unity of his plays through the use of excessively long speeches and philosophical arguments" (Henrichs 272). However, we might also argue on his behalf that Euripides portrayed contemporary Athenians, focused on the individual psychology and illuminated the irrational aspects of human behavior

In "Henrik Ibsen and the Revival of Euripides," Jorgen Mejer reveals that "students of modern drama have—though less often—hailed Ibsen as a modern Euripides" (Mejer 399). Both Ibsen and Euripides are considered to be pessimists and psychological writers who at least imply that freedom is crucial to personal development; however, they also demonstrate how the Dionysian sometimes has negative, violent and destructive implications. Both Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and Euripides's *The Bacchae* demonstrate how mythic thinking structures political and social life in a manner that is consistent with René Girard's theory of mimetic desire. Girard explains that Dionysos is often considered to be a dark figure in Greek drama, rather than the affirmative god that Nietzsche wants to place at the center of the tragic experience.

Girard asserts that people tend to view desire as non-violent; however, in his theory on mimetic desire, he claims that desire is sometimes the cause of violence (Girard 153-155). The association between Dionysos and violence is seen in *Hedda Gabler* and *The Bacchae*. The negative view of Dionysos explains the fate of both Løvborg and Hedda, whose lives end badly due to their embrace of the Dionysian impulse. On the other hand, we see Pentheus dismembered by female bacchantes due to the fact that he suppressed the Dionysian within him. *The Bacchae* and *Hedda Gabler* are plays that reveal the extremity of both reason and emotion, and both dramas illustrate the negative effects of social repression on human conduct.

Chapter 3:

Trauma and Decorum in Duras's *Moderato Cantabile*

The conflict between the Dionysian impulse and social constraint is abundantly evident in the events that take place in Marguerite Duras's novella, *Moderato Cantabile*. While Anne Desbaresdes, the protagonist, takes her son to a piano lesson, she hears the scream of a woman who was murdered by her lover. This scream and murder lures and captivates her. Anne then decides to relive and re-create this murder with a complete stranger, Chauvin, whom she meets in the same working-class café in which the murder takes place. Throughout the novella, the conflict between the Dionysian flux and the orderly patriarchal world in which Anne lives is often brought to the foreground whenever she escapes her dull and empty life by conversing with Chauvin and recreating a murder scene.

At the piano lesson, as Anne's child performs a sonatina, "the noise of the crowd grew increasingly loud, becoming too powerful, even at that heights, that it drowned out the music" (Duras 67). Since the murder that took place lured Anne to leave her son in front of the piano teacher's door, she went to observe the commotion:

[She] joined the body of the crowd, and made her way forward till she reached the front row of silent people looking through the open windows. At the far end of the café, in the semi-darkness of the back room, a woman was lying motionless on the floor. A man was crouched over, clutching her shoulders, and saying quietly:

"Darling. My darling."

He turned and looked at the crowd; they saw his eyes, which were expressionless, except for the stricken, indelible, inward look of his desire. The patronne stood calmly near the van and waited.

"I tried to call you three times."

"Poor woman," someone said.

"Why?" Anne Desbaresdes asked.

"No one knows." (Duras 67-68)

She examined the murderer holding his lover, "his face pressed to hers, in the blood flowing from her mouth," and as she would remain haunted by this turn of events, Anne took her child to the same place on the following day (Duras 68).

Anne then enters the café and orders a glass of wine to calm her senses. After her first glass, she quickly orders another and “drank the second glass of wine without pausing” (Duras 71). Chauvin, the stranger, approaches Anne and addresses her in this way:

“May I?”

“It’s just that I am not used to drinking, Monsieur.”

He ordered some wine, and took another step towards her.

“The scream was so loud it’s really only natural for people to try and find out what happened. I would have found it difficult not to, you know.”

She drank her wine, the third glass.

“All I know is that he shot her through the heart.”

Two customers came in. They recognized this woman at the bar and were surprised.

“And I don’t suppose you can tell me why?”

It was obvious that she was not used to drinking wine, and that at this hour of the day she was generally doing something quite different (Duras 72).

The fact that Anne, the wife of a factory owner, is in a working-class café, conversing with a complete stranger and drinking wine, foregrounds the recurrent theme of inebriation in the novella. This theme conjures Dionysos, the Greek god of wine, intoxication, ecstasy, and excess. By conversing with this complete stranger, Anne escapes her dull life, and her desire to become a devotee of Dionysos is subtly revealed. Anne feels drawn to this café because she is unhappy with her own bourgeois life, and because re-creating the murder with a complete stranger offers her a distinct experience of frenzy. Anne’s abrupt insistence on knowing what has happened and her persistence visits to the café dramatize her actual condition and highlight her passionate nature that marriage and domestic life have completely repressed.

Marguerite Duras does not give psychological details in her novella, *Moderato Cantabile*, since she is examining the role of a mother, housewife, and female, rather than presenting Anne’s mental history. The theme of silence is highlighted since nothing is really said; however, concurrently, the silence intensifies the events that occur in the novella and calls attention to the theme of psychic pain. The fact that Anne desires to re-live this

passionate story with the stranger, Chauvin, shows us that her passionate nature has been repressed by societal mores. Her marriage and role as a mother hamper her growth, and Duras's limited explanation of the events that occur in the narrative induces the same confusion in the audience that the characters experience. Anne's continuous visits to the café continually recreate her repressed passion, and they are considered disgraceful since they show how she is becoming separated from her domestic role as the wife of a factory owner.

During the time spent in the café, Anne becomes "slightly drunk," and "because of her growing intoxication, she brought herself to look directly at the man in front of her" (Duras 73). During her conversations in the café, she talks to Chauvin about her child and tells him that it "would be better if we were separated from each other once in a while. I can't seem to understand this child" (Duras 75). Anne's role as a mother is paradoxical since it is both agonizing and crucial. Her relationship with her son is that of an untainted but consuming kind of love that causes her to be separated from both her own self and from others.

When conversing with Chauvin about the murder that took place, Anne claims that the scream she heard reminds her of the birth of her child. She told Chauvin, "I think I must have screamed something like that once, yes, when I had the child," which reveals the painful procedure of giving birth and how her domestic status has limited her personal development. Anne does not stop drinking throughout the whole novella, and the narrator states that "nothing made Anne Desbaresdes drink except her nascent desire to become intoxicated from the wine. She drank, then paused, and in a soft, half-guilty voice began to question the man again" (Duras 86). The fact that Anne desires to be intoxicated from the wine reveals a parallel with the Greek god, Dionysos, and highlights the theme of inebriation. Moreover, the fact that she desires to drink continually and visits the working-class café almost everyday to escape her dull and conventional life dramatizes the problem of constraint.

When Anne takes her son again to Mademoiselle Giraud, the piano instructor, he defiantly refuses to play the piano. Mademoiselle Giraud tells Anne, “You shouldn’t explain anything to him. It’s not up to him to decide whether or not he’s going to take piano lessons, Madame Desbaresdes. That’s what is called education” (Duras 96). She goes on to further state that “he thinks he can decide for himself he doesn’t like to study the piano. But I know perfectly well that I’m wasting my breath saying that to you, Madame Desbaresdes” (Duras 96). In this case, the piano instructor represents and epitomizes rules, conventions, societal mores, and the idea of confinement, whereas both the child and the mother have rebellious natures. The fact that the piano instructor tells Anne, “We might try having someone else come with him to his lessons,” shows how she thinks Anne is not suitable to assume her role as a mother. After the piano lesson, Anne abruptly enters the café again and tells Chauvin, “I never really knew how much I liked wine,” revealing her desire to become a follower of the Greek god, Dionysos, and succumb to intoxication (Duras 100).

Spending the prohibited time with a complete stranger in a working-class café causes Anne to forget that she has to be home for a dinner party with her husband. She continues consuming wine and then leaves, arriving “well after her guests had arrived” (Duras 107). The narrator claims that “she has entered that glittering assembly without so much as the slightest apology. Someone apologized for her” (Duras 107). While the women “stuff themselves with mayonnaise” and “devour it to the last mouthful,” she “contributes nothing to the conversation” (Duras 107-108). Anne feels out of place and keeps on drinking since “her mouth is desiccated by another hunger that nothing, except perhaps the wine, can satisfy,” revealing her Dionysian impulses (Duras 109-110). Anne finally leaves her guests and goes upstairs:

From the big bay window of the long corridor of her life she will look at the boulevard below. The man will already have left. She will go into the child’s room, and lie down on the floor at the end of the bed, paying no attention to

the magnolia crushed to pieces between her breasts. And to the inviolable rhythm of her child's breathing she will vomit forth the strange nourishment that has been forced upon her (Duras 112).

The next day, Anne goes to Chauvin and tells him that she agreed to let someone else take her child to the piano lessons and goes on by further claiming that she had to stop drinking wine and that "it wasn't any longer a question of wanting or not wanting to" (Duras 115). Although Anne wanted to continue intoxicating herself, she realized that she needed to fulfill her role as a mother and housewife. The fact that she vomited the wine in her son's room symbolizes her need to develop a new equilibrium, a lifestyle that fits into the boundaries of her role as a mother. When Anne decides to consume cheap wine in a working-class café daily, she basically abandons her role and the ordered routine of her life. Anne feels drawn to the café because it is considered to be restrictive yet liberating. She sees the murder that happened there as a scene of passion, rather than a scene of violence, that contrasts with her domestic and married life. By the end of the novella, Chauvin tells Anne, "I wish you were dead," and Anne answers him stating, "I am," again revealing the banality of her married life and her negative view of her role as a mother (Duras 118).

In "Crime and Detection in the Novels of Marguerite Duras," Erica M. Eisinger states that "[t]he basic theme of Marguerite Duras' novels, plays, and films is the interplay between love and destruction, conflicting drives which are often resolved in the violence of a criminal act," showing how Duras's *Moderato Cantabile* is a certain kind of narrative (Eisinger XV, 4) Eisinger also explains:

Duras's women readily slide into someone else's drama because their own lives are so empty and devoid of action. Women make good detectives (in the standard literature) because their passive role requires them to be observers, to rely on intuition rather than experience, and because, simply, their lack of employment gives them the leisure to devote themselves wholeheartedly to an investigation. Duras's heroines have no existence prior to the crime; like the pure detective, they gain their identity through the investigation.

(Eisinger 505)

This clearly makes sense. *Moderato Cantabile* is about Anne, the protagonist, who had no life prior to the crime. The murder that took place is what she yearns and desires to re-create and re-live. Moreover, Eisinger comments on the rhetoric of the novella and introduces the theme of alienation by claiming that “the absence of first-person possessive adjectives reveals [Anne’s] alienation from her surroundings” (Eisinger 508). Remarking on Anne’s association between the murder and her experience during childbirth, Eisinger states that “[t]he only time she has screamed in a comparable way to the murdered woman was in childbirth. Her investigation of the murder becomes an effort to duplicate this powerful experience of childbirth; the investigation results in a birth, the creation of a new consciousness,” so that Anne herself becomes a new person after the murder took place in the working-class café (Eisinger 509).

In “Resurrecting Desire: Wine and Dramatic Imitation in Marguerite Duras’ *Moderato Cantabile*,” Nancy Arenberg explains how “the brutal murder of an unknown woman in a popular café becomes a pivotal event, drawing her repeatedly to the scene of the crime where she will dwell on the tragedy with an unfamiliar man, who is equally captivated by what he has witnessed” (Arenberg 62). Arenberg also claims that Anne “can escape from her empty, dull existence in the provincial town” through the re-invention of this crime of passion that she witnessed while accompanying her son at the piano lesson (Arenberg 62). Arenberg comments on the role of alcohol in the novella and states that Anne’s visits to the café are “immediately viewed as scandalous: the owner is astonished because she is drinking red wine during the day in a working-class café, which highlights the class difference,” and further states that “society considers a woman who drinks alone in a café as disgraceful, a first step in her separation from domestic status” (Arenberg 63). Basically, by drinking wine, Anne and Chauvin indulge into the Dionysian while ignoring their societal roles, thus calling attention to the conflict between wild ecstasy and constraint.

Anne's desire and yearning for intoxication can be viewed in the fact that she always searches for the glass of wine that "underlines her growing need to drink" (Arenberg 64). Arenberg states that through Chauvin and Anne's encounters, "they have come to share a mutual appreciation for the house wine, to the point of excessive consumption, which evokes imagery often identified with Dionysus," highlighting the parallel between Anne and her need for transformation (Arenberg 66). Like Dionysos, Anne consumes wine and "tries to break through the rules of her class in society by becoming fascinated with a realm with no rules—the realm of revulsion, alcoholism, vomiting, and death (Piper 167). In Greek literature, Dionysos is the god who liberates women. Arenberg states that "the altered state of intoxication also fosters spiritual freedom, with inebriation expanding human consciousness and thus allowing the drinker to explore unlimited creative opportunities," and that in the case of Anne, "whose existence is characterized by an absence, or lack of identity, drinking allows her to fill her inner void with passion" (Arenberg 69). Arenberg summarizes the importance of wine and alcohol in the novella:

We have seen that the ritual of visiting the café to drink with Chauvin allows Anne to forget her dull, loveless life. Indeed, wine engenders social contact between two strangers so that they may create their own passionate story. Through the course of their conversations, drinking alcohol liberates the passionate narrative, as the two actors are drawn ever deeper into their fantasy of illicit desire based on the unforgettable crime that they have both witnessed in the café. At the same time, their daily encounters boldly shake up the social order of a small town in Provence. (Arenberg 73)

In "Death and Desire in Marguerite Duras' *Moderato Cantabile*," Bruce Bassoff comments on the importance of death to the novella. He claims that "it is death alone, as supreme otherness and repudiation, that will satisfy Anne," revealing the conflict between wild ecstasy and constraint (Bassoff 729). Piper also claims that "Anne is sexually seduced by the idea of death, and Chauvin is the narrative vehicle: he brings death to her with his

story” (Piper 167). But in “Women and Fictions in Marguerite Duras’ *Moderato Cantabile*,” George Moskos comments on death differently. He explains that “the negative cry of death evokes at the same time a positive one: the cry of the mother giving birth,” and goes on to explain that “birth is a sort of death into life” (Moskos 33). Marianne Hirsch claims that the “key to Anne’s identification with the other woman lies in her privileged ability to hear the scream, which takes her back to her child’s birth. The novel equates the moments of birth and death, both situated between fusion and separation, separation and fusion” (Hirsch 76). Hirsch claims that “the intensity of the mother-child bond is both painful to sustain and devastating to break,” revealing Anne’s dilemma of wanting to live her life and grow as an individual, while having a child that continually hampers her growth. This is also underscored by Julia Kristeva, who states that Anne’s son “absorbs her much like the wine she drinks” (Kristeva 147).

Hirsch also explains the conflict between wanting to indulge in the Dionysian and the rules and regulations that patriarchal societies have set to curb its potential for disturbance. Hirsch explains that “Anne’s obsessive interest in the scream and the murder can be explained primarily by the absences of her life, by the novel’s ellipses” and further explains that “[j]ust as the music teacher’s room separates Anne from the vitality of the town and the ocean, so her entire life is subject to the constraints of routine and the bourgeois social roles she is forced to play. The scream with its echoes of madness, passion, and violence lures Anne out of her sterile and solitary existence” (Hirsch 72). Much like Henrik Ibsen’s character, Hedda Gabler, who yearned to break free from the constraints of routine and the boredom of her married life, Anne does the same and is captivated by the scream that involves violence and destruction. Hirsch directly claims that “[d]estruction, madness, and murder provide, for Anne, the possibility of escaping from the sterile order of her life,” which is again seen in Henrik Ibsen’s Hedda, the woman who escapes the banality of her life

through suicide (Hirsch 72). The difference between Hedda Gabler and Anne is that Hedda escapes her tedious life through suicide, whereas Anne continues living as if she were dead.

The dinner party that Anne at first completely ignores and then enters late is a pivotal event in the novella. Many critics talk about the importance of the dinner party and the flamboyant imagery that emerges in this episode. Arenberg elaborates on the symbolic significance of Anne's refusal to eat in contrast to the eating habits of her milieu, but which also plays itself out in her rebellious consumption of wine. Anne's fate is expressed in her changing appearance:

As the evening progresses, she gradually withdraws from the guests. With every drink, Anne becomes more and more detached and, unable to follow the conversation, she eventually refrains from speaking. Her subversion is also manifested physically by her unkempt hair and inappropriate clothing, her sparsely clad body exuding bold sensuality. Her provocative attire signals the shift to a double narrative. On one hand, her outrageous dress violates the conservative social code of her friends; on the other, her sexy apparel shows her preparation to play out the 'other', passionate story, reinforced by the omnipresent image of the magnolia worn between her breasts, the emblem of her unspoken desire for Chauvin. (Arenberg 68)

The distance that Anne creates between herself and her guests expresses the actual distance that prevails between Anne and society. Her disheveled state during the dinner party causes her to be transported "into another spatial territory beyond the confinement of her domestic duty as a hostess" (Arenberg 68). Arenberg also associates Anne with Dionysos by stating that "[a]nalogous to the famous god of wine, Anne becomes more imaginative when intoxicated; she loses herself in this liberating game of erotic reverie, and moreover, Anne demonstrates some of Dionysus' famous theatrics" (Arenberg 70). This clearly establishes another parallel between Euripides's *The Bacchae* and *Moderato Cantabile*, since the characters in the Greek tragedy lose themselves when intoxicated and ultimately abandon their social roles.

In *Moderato Cantabile*, during the dinner party, "the salmon passes from guest to

guest, following a ritual that nothing can disturb” (Duras 106). The word ‘ritual’ highlights the ordered, systematic and monotonous life that Anne yearns to escape. When the narrator states that the women in the dinner party smother “a duck in its orange-shrouded coffin,” we learn how food itself conveys the quality of death (Duras 106). In “Gender, Reading and Desire in *Moderato Cantabile*” Hirsch states that “the salmon and duck function similarly as objective correlatives for Anne’s condition. Originally free, they are now victims of a social ritual, killed and refashioned into their natural appearance, before being consumed and digested” (Hirsch 80). Anne’s life is full of repetitive, rituals, and tedious patterns. This is apparent from the piano lessons, the dinner party, and the societal mores that are incorporated into the patriarchal system that controls her life. Moskos states that the “murdered woman is a symbol of the violence done to women in a culture that depends for its existence (as subject) on their ‘elimination,’ their relegation to the status of object. This inert body, however, silent, passive, exactly as Man wants her to be, moves to escape his grasp,” revealing again the presence of patriarchy and the reality of constraint (Moskos 42).

The piano lessons are also structured ritualistically. Welcher explains that “Diabelli’s sonatinas have simple themes which are set forth, interrelated, developed by means of melodic fragmentation, counterpointing, and inversion, to end in a final recapitulation. This eighteenth-century form, especially familiar as an exercise for piano students, is modest but strictly stylized, classically Apollonian in essence,” revealing the problem of constraint in bourgeois society. Welcher contrasts the sonatina that is “characteristically Apollonian” and the broader music sphere of Dionysos:

Dionysus is the god of mystery and paradox, seductive, awesome, irrational, benign, terrifying. He cannot be ignored because he is the god of nature, but unlike Apollo, he lays down no laws. His art embraces disorder and destruction as well as order and creation. His devotees express themselves in violence and self-indulgence: erotic bliss, the narcotism of dreams and intoxication, insanity, the longing for death, and ultimately death itself. (Welcher 372)

Anne's meetings with Chauvin involve a kind of individuality since she consumes wine and indulges in the Dionysian, allowing herself "to replay her own repression, to mimic her own murder, in sum, to conjure the very obstacles that deny her existence" (Moskos 46). In her identification with the murdered woman, Anne discovers her own identity and is able to move beyond her role as mother and wife. Similarly, Hedda Gabler is also identified with the Dionysian realm since she expresses herself through violence, self-destruction, and the longing for death. Karen Piper claims that the meetings between Anne and Chauvin were destructive, and claims that "the destruction that was occurring was not only the (apocalyptic) abolition of class distinctions, but the destruction of society itself," depicting how the act of repressing the Dionysian results in the destruction of society (Piper 169). It is apparent that ignoring the vital component of one's human nature, the Dionysian, can bring about destruction, and this is depicted in *The Bacchae*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *Moderato Cantabile*.

In *Reciprocity and Ritual*, Richard Seaford discusses the conflict between the polis and the household. He argues that women should be a part of the polis, and the fact that the god, Dionysos, in *The Bacchae* invades the households initially indicates the need for women to be part of the community and part of the polis as a whole. He explains that in this Greek play, "the communality of the polis is established at the expense of women who have little (other than cultic) presence in it," explaining how they are repressed when they are only a part of the household and associated with the domestic sphere alone (Seaford 258). Seaford also states that "the disasters averted by cults are realized: when resisted, the god of the polis reverses excessive female adherence to the household by imposing a frenzy which both destroys the household and overturns male control to the public sphere," and then goes on to claim that the "Dionysiac cult is not a rejection of the polis but a means for the polis to achieve unity," showing the need for women to step outside their domestic roles (Seaford 259, 293). Lastly, in order to explain the need for women to associate themselves with the

rest of the community, he examines the importance of the Dionysian cults:

Dionysian cult must be accepted, not only because it defines and confirms the structures of the polis by expressing their temporary suspension or reversal, but also because in doing so it provides a cultic paradigm for that transcendence of the individual household on which the polis depends.

(Seaford 301)

Seaford directly states that “community is achieved by the liberation of enclosed women from their homes,” which calls for the liberation of women, and depicts the conflict between the Dionysian and societal constraint (Seaford 310). In Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* and Duras’s *Moderato Cantabile*, the heroines of the texts suffer from constraint and from their inability to indulge in the Dionysian since the patriarchal societies that exert power over them expect them to be restricted to their household duties and domestic spheres.

Conclusion:

The Persistence of Dionysos

This thesis uses three texts to examine the crisis that occurs when individuals in social situations neglect the Dionysian, an integral component of human nature. It highlights the conflict between the Dionysian and constraint by examining three main protagonists. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche introduces the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in terms of art, where the Apollonian is associated with the world of visual art, dreams, and hallucinations and where the Dionysian is associated with music, intoxication and abandonment. Nietzsche argues that a combination of both approaches is essential and that Euripides marks the beginning of the end of tragedy. He further explains that before Euripides, the Dionysian and Apollonian were harmoniously intertwined. This thesis discusses the potential opposition between the Dionysian sense of life and the forces of constraint—rather than the ideal unity of Dionysos and Apollo. Euripides's *The Bacchae* is analyzed to further examine the conflict between the Dionysian and constraint in modern texts such as Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile* to show how this ancient conflict still resonates in modern Western culture.

Human beings are forced to accept social restrictions that, under certain situations, hinder individuality and personal development. The protagonists in the three texts examined come up with different strategies for defying these limitations that are imposed by a society to which they attempt to adapt themselves, and this leads to their destruction. In Chapter 1, the character of Pentheus in Euripides's *The Bacchae* is examined to reveal the importance of the Dionysian realm and to highlight the conflict between excess and social constraint. In Chapter 2, the character of Hedda in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is examined to reveal her struggle in coming to terms with her own identity in a patriarchal society. Finally, in Chapter 3, the character of Anne Desbaresdes in Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile* reveals a woman

who is captivated by a passionate murder scene that she attempts to re-create in order to escape her tedious domestic life. Euripides's *The Bacchae*, Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, and Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile* all reveal the continuing conflict between Dionysos and social restrictions, as opposed to Nietzsche's traditional Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy and the ideal unity of both in classical drama.

In *The Bacchae*, the characters of Dionysos and Pentheus are integral to understanding the opposition between the Dionysian and the tendency to repress instinctual urges that sometimes dominates society. Pentheus, the ruler of Thebes is characterized as a rigid rationalist, an overly systematic man, who only cares for order in Thebes. However, after arriving from Asia, Dionysos threatens the social norms that have been strongly reinforced by Pentheus himself. Women in Thebes are confined to household duties and are only associated with the domestic sphere, but this confinement comes to an end when Dionysos takes the women away from the city, driving them into the mountains to indulge in frenzied religious rituals. Pentheus's refusal to acknowledge his own curiosity and irrationality, or, in other words, the Dionysian aspect of his own nature, leads to his destruction and to the destruction of society. Pentheus's character transforms both externally and internally due to his resistance to recognizing the Dionysian realm within him, thus highlighting the enduring conflict that is the theme of this particular drama.

In Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, the protagonist, Hedda, is unable to find her place society. She rejects her femininity due to the masculine and patriarchal society that she lives in, and attempts to find freedom through suicide. Hedda seeks liberation but is somehow fearful due to the endless constraints that her provincial society imposes upon her. She yearns to live in a more open society and to break free from all forms of inhibition, to become someone other than the person she does not want to be. While struggling to find her identity, she also lives vicariously, imposing her own desires on her former lover, Løvborg, when she entices him to

seek Dionysian abandon. Hedda, unable to live the life she wants to live, seeks freedom in suicide. Her death highlights how difficult constraints are affecting her life and bring about her own destruction and ruin. The play reveals the dangers of denying an inherent aspect of the psyche, the Dionysian component of human nature.

In Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile*, the protagonist, Anne Desbaresdes, suffers from the patriarchal society in which she lives. The murder that takes place near a working-class café becomes the event that Anne desires to re-create with Chauvin, a complete stranger. Being the wife of a factory owner and a mother, Anne is considered disgraceful for spending time with a stranger in a working-class environment where she tries to re-create the passionate murder scene. Anne does not only spend time with this stranger, but repeatedly drinks wine and trespasses the boundaries of her social position as a mother and as the wife of a factory owner. The repetitive use of wine in the novella, which is combined with Anne's need to drink, connotes the Greek god, Dionysos, the god of intoxication and excess. Anne's meetings with Chauvin and her indulgence in drinking wine everyday serve cathartic purposes, helping her escape confinement and monotony. Her obsessive interest in the scream and the murder scene itself are in some sense justified by the privations of her life and of the constraints that society imposes on her. Anne yearns to break free from the ritualistic aspects of her life, and this is indicated through the piano lessons that her son is obliged to take, and also by the formal dinner parties that she must host and attend as the wife of the factory owner. Anne's identification with the murdered woman allows her to indulge in the Dionysian and escape her banal and tedious life, which is full of constraint and limitation.

It is apparent that denying one's own nature, which involves the rejection of the Dionysian, can lead to the destruction of the self and society. This is illustrated in the three texts that are examined in this thesis. Pentheus is destroyed when he rejects a part of his own

nature, the Dionysian; Hedda escapes life through death when her society forces her to live a life that she does not want to live; and Anne seeks madness, destruction, and violence when she is denied an intrinsic aspect of her personality, the Dionysian component of human nature. The three protagonists defy society or adapt to it in different ways. The appearance of the god, Dionysos, in *The Bacchae* threatens the established norms of Thebes and reveals the drawbacks of neglecting the Dionysian. Pentheus, the king of Thebes is transformed externally and internally and is reduced from King to female and, finally, to animal. Pentheus's mother Agave is destroyed from indulging in the Dionysian, which calls attention to both the danger of excess and the outcome of repression and constraint. Hedda Gabler, on the other hand, commits suicide to escape a banal life that forces her to deny her own nature, revealing the conflict between the Dionysian and the forces of social control that overwhelm her. Finally, Anne Desbaresdes rejects her role as a mother and wife when she indulges in excessive drinking since she suffers from the limitations that have been imposed on her externally.

The three texts examined in this thesis depict characters who want to break free from the shackles and constraints of society, marriage, and the monotonous lives that they are forced to live, thus representing the conflict between the Dionysian, as a component in human nature, and the often exorbitant constraints that society imposes on its members.

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