

“For I Am Nothing without You”: Fragmentariness and the Transformability of Archetypal Identity in David Rabe’s *The Orphan*

Katerina Siapatori

In the field of literary refashioning and adaptation studies, ancient Greek drama has constituted an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artistic creation and production. When it comes to drama and theatrical performance, David Rabe’s *The Orphan*, the third play in his Vietnam-themed tetralogy,¹ falls precisely in this category, as it is a revised and “extensive transposition” (Hutcheon 7) of two classical works: Aeschylus’s *The Oresteia*, the only surviving Greek trilogy, as well as Euripides’s *Iphigenia at Aulis*. In adapting these tragedies, the playwright chooses to juxtapose them onstage in order to represent and record the events which mark the generational trauma and the familial war in Agamemnon’s House. Rabe’s turn to classical Greek tragedy and his vision to rely on it and inform it are two inescapably “political acts” (Sanders 97), spurred by personal experience. The playwright had attended a performance of Euripides’s tragedy and had seen in it a link between the Trojan and the Vietnam War—and by extension Iphigenia’s sacrifice and the My Lai massacre—before proceeding, subsequently, to write the play in question. His realization that “the Greeks saw that reason was the flip side or dark side of unreason” and that his novel ideas were actually rooted in the ancient past (Morphos and Rabe 81) is the drive which urges him to base his play essentially upon the parent texts while attaching it to a uniquely different trajectory.

First staged in 1972, *The Orphan*’s reception was mostly negative, even though several critics acknowledged an extraordinary potential which concluded in disappointment regardless (Kolin, *Stage* 53). Indicatively, a review entitled “David Rabe Still Has Work to Do” comments on the pointlessness that prevails in the play (Kerr 125), while elsewhere it is noted that “Rabe would rather talk his theme to death rather than dramatize it” (Leiter 298), with reference to the play’s length and philosophical tone. In spite of the critics’ dissatisfaction, Rabe is commendable for aiming high and for addressing some difficult issues, such as the relativity of reason and the clash between individual and collective interest. The appropriation and modernization of such mythic tropes, Julie Sanders suggests, should stir our attention

¹ This tetralogy comprises *Sticks and Bones* (1969), *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (1971), *The Orphan* (1972), and *Streamers* (1976), all dates referring to the first staging of the plays. In fact, all four plays were collectively titled *The Vietnam Plays* in their 1994 Grove Press, two-volume edition, which I am using for all citations of *The Orphan*.

chiefly towards archetypes (71). This paper, then, examines the way with which Rabe questions archetypal identities as formed in the source texts and, hence, the further layer of interpretation that the process of adaptation opens with connection to the *dramatis personae*. My argument is that, in order to pinpoint who his characters really are, the playwright ascribes a transformational fluidity to them in a dual manner: first, by dramatically instigating literal metamorphoses in their appearance through “expressionistic techniques” (Kolin, “Interview” 136), and second, by fragmenting and by having his re-created characters textually parallelized with each other to the extent that their singularities are eliminated.

If character fluidity is included among the playwright’s dramatic aspirations, then it has evidently been fostered by the performative exercises developed and rehearsed by Joseph Chaikin’s Open Theater, founded in September 1963, by which Rabe had been strongly influenced. The Open Theater, as well as other experimental theatre groups, deemphasized the literariness of the dramatic text in order to enhance the “immediacy” of the acting performances (Asahina 30). These exercises, whose dramatic effect Rabe tries to duplicate in his play, are commonly known as “transformations”: that is, “a shifting, fluid movement within a play by which actors change from role to role without transition, scenes merge, and physical actions counter to speech” (Rogoff 116). Transformations, as a result, test the fixity of traditional drama by inviting the audience into the acting process and by deconstructing stable components of it. For instance, a character is built not only according to the performer’s “acting” as delineated by the dramatic text, but also to the performer’s “being,” the actor’s presence and personal output in the performance.

The notions of time and place are inevitably deconstructed, too, as soon as the transformation techniques are put into effect. In this play, Rabe interweaves the mythical topography of the ancient past with the post-war America of the 1970s, to reflect on the timelessness of war and violence. The transformation of time into an entity which can be perceived only subjectively aims at reducing its reliability as a signifier of meaning, and it is a theme introduced from the very beginning of the play. The Speaker, named after a quality of hers in a distinctly Brechtian way, invites the audience to “Think of time as a pool. Do we speak to the past? Or merely look at it? Is it right? Left? Up? Down?” (90). Time is automatically turned fluid, surrounding and drenching the collective consciousness of the audience, who are reminded of its repeatability, and disorientated by its inconclusiveness. This endless confusion, which will be analyzed shortly, is mostly exacerbated by the behavior of the play’s characters, who undergo constant transformations either on an external or on a textual level. For this reason, Rabe’s play is at the same time an instance of “historicizing/dehistoricizing,” with regard to utilizing time and myth as tools to familiarize oneself with history, and of “embodying/disembodying” (Hutcheon 158), as the audience is deliberately made unsure of whether they watch the character or the actor onstage at a specific moment of the performance.

As transformations are diversified in their manifestation, the first subgroup to be examined is the divergence in characterization compared to the ancient Greek canon. Imitating the act of rewriting the tragedies themselves, Rabe constructs his characters having borrowed and (mis)appropriated certain elements from the personalities of

other dramatic figures, found either in the parent tragedies or in this adaptation of them. Consequently, several characters seemingly dissimilar to each other are brought together by the playwright owing to their newly-formed, altered identities. The most emblematic example of this divergence is found in the protagonist of the play, Orestes, who is now given the opportunity to offer his own revised perspective on the familial decadence, stripped of the heroic code of conduct pervading Greek tragedy that originally restrains his expression. This current version of Orestes prioritizes “justice—goodness—virtue and understanding” (137) over honor and revenge, although in the Aeschylean trilogy this attitude is attributed to Electra, with Orestes serving as the executor of her will and ideals, as well as of their mother. The individuality of Clytemnestra Two, the second version of a split archetype which is discussed in more detail later on, is similarly undermined and purloined in that her serpent-related nightmares are taken away from her and dreamt by her lover instead. In a metadramatic narrative, Aegisthus confesses that he “dreamed that [she] dreamed of giving birth to a snake,” while Clytemnestra Two misunderstands him and retorts that she has “had no such dream!” (111). While the symbolism behind the dream that the snake is an omen for Orestes’s vengeance is retained, the fact that Clytemnestra Two distinctly renounces any connection to it is a small announcement of deviating from the parent text. Iphigenia shares another dream, wherein snakes are carried by monkeys and they end up killing Agamemnon (108), and she is brought closer to Clytemnestra, being the dreamer as she is. On top of that, if the snake symbolizes Orestes again though, the addressee, Agamemnon, becomes the slaughtered-to-be, and thus shares Clytemnestra Two’s fate as well. In either of these examples, a particularized quality associated with one archetypal character is snatched and ascribed to another one—in these cases, Electra’s moral compass and Clytemnestra’s maternal sensitivities, hinted at by the breastfeeding of the snake. Instantly, this means that one character forfeits some of his/her archetypal value, while another acquires it at the former’s expense; both, however, are equally distanced from their tragic counterparts.

Character fluidity might as well be best exemplified in the face of an original character, The Figure, whose anonymity mirrors his onstage transformability. Unlike the previous instances, The Figure does not draw on a particular archetype, yet his identity is highly elusive because of his literal and metaphorical polymorphism. From the very beginning, he establishes himself as the director of the play, manipulating everyone into acting in a certain way; occupying a visually elevated position on the stage, he bids Orestes that he is to murder his mother once more, a command which Orestes reluctantly repeats verbatim, like a robot (91). Therefore, The Figure takes the liberty of becoming the prompter of the theatrical performance as well, reminding not the actors of their cue, but the characters of who they are supposed to be and how they must behave. His towering presence, in terms of both his assigned spot on the scaffold and his patronizing tone, alerts the audience to his divinity, which is confirmed by two female characters. No sooner is he identified with the god Apollo by Clytemnestra Two (93), than The Girl hails him as Abbadon (95), the angel of the abyss, who is related to chaos and catastrophe. This binary divinity, besides interweaving Greek with Christian mythology, insinuates an intrinsic interconnection between them, since Abbadon is alternatively named Apollyon, which is translated in Greek as the

one who brings destruction in his wake. The homonymity of the two names, told apart by just one extra syllable, indicates that both mythic figures are the two sides of the same coin, representing the light and the darkness of godhood.

Most of The Figure's polymorphism, however, is displayed by the use of masks, a prop which not only is conjoined with the spirit of Greek drama, but which functions as a medium to signal a character's metamorphosis. At several parts of the play, The Figure "*puts on the mask of Calchas*" (99; [stage directions]), the political instigator of Iphigenia's execution, and becomes the mortal representative of the god whose role The Figure enacted moments ago. This transition from god to prophet signifies that Calchas's words may contain light and truth, since they are going to resolve the problematic situation at Aulis, but they also foretell the catastrophe which is materialized upon Iphigenia's body and which will eventually extinguish her whole family. Moreover, the inability of the god to divulge that Iphigenia has to die because of the divine plan, and his being forced to disguise himself as a mortal to do that, raises the issue of accountability. The same issue comes more intensely to the surface, after The Figure has portrayed Charles Manson and is about to switch back to Apollo's role: "*if he has worn a mask to be Manson, or added costume, or changed his hair, it is all back now*" (174; [stage directions]). This metamorphosis "is evidently modelled upon the practices and transformation techniques" of the Open Theatre (Blatanis) and it takes place so that Orestes can be acquitted from committing matricide. The abruptness with which the transformation happens raises the question of whether Orestes is exonerated by divinity (Apollo) or by the self-entitlement to resort to violence stemming from the American political reality of the 1970s (Charles Manson). The same idea is also articulated by Agamemnon: "is that any reason to allow them to kill you? Because it is possible that they have the right" (105). In fact, Orestes becomes both perpetrator and victim of that logic, since he is killed off right before he is brought into the world and so before he entitles himself to exert violence and kill his mother.

The annihilation of Orestes's pre-existence happens via role-doubling, a theatrical technique which is included among the transformations, and according to which the actor playing a specific role enacts at some point another character. In my viewpoint, role-doubling is a tool thanks to which the dramatic interrelationship of the characters played by the same actor may be inspected. In *The Orphan*, this occurs only once and, fascinatingly enough, when Orestes replaces Agamemnon in the scene of the latter's slaughter. Clytemnestra Two, oblivious to the theatricality of this replacement, does not attack Agamemnon, but the unidentifiable person portrayed by "*the actor who will be ORESTES*" (101; [stage directions]). As a consequence, the actor playing originally Orestes poses as Agamemnon but essentially plays neither; he solely becomes the Man in Tub (110), again according to the Brechtian way. On the dramatic level, both characters upset and disrupt the flow of their history and, by extension, are dissociated from their archetypes. Agamemnon, instead of being murdered following his mythological destiny, is forced into extinction as if he never existed, whereas Orestes is obliterated before he even gets his chance to live. Like Iphigenia, he is turned into a sacrificial lamb by his parent's hand, for Orestes is stabbed and Iphigenia wails as if expressing his pain (122). Their main difference is

that Iphigenia is eternally sacrificed, whereas Orestes will be reborn, albeit without his sister's young innocence.

If the positional exchange at the tub provokes the characters to alternate their archetypal identities, then the tub functions as a transformational prop, as well as an index of archetypal value. Agamemnon is "important in the tub" (93), because the conditions under which his ancient counterpart dies are singular and, thence, their representation and reconstruction would bring Rabe's character closer to Agamemnon's archetype. Subsequently, when he "*climbs from the tub*" (99; [stage directions]), he becomes no one: a version of Agamemnon debased to simply "Aga... num...num" (111). Apart from him, any other character partaking in this episode similarly endures a change in his/her individuality. In the second act, right before they are killed, both Clytemnestras are positioned inside the tub, in an attempt to be attributed to Agamemnon's identity; Clytemnestra Two is even clothed with the net (93) in the same fashion Agamemnon was supposed to entangle in it, which highlights their shared ruthlessness when it comes to killing. Additionally, Clytemnestra Two becomes the female version of her much-hated husband again, since she slays her own child and, for that matter, does so when he is in an embryonic phase.

The opening of the second act dramatizes a transition from death to life; Orestes's pre-existence is now about to be incarnated. According to the stage directions,

ORESTES *peeps out from the tub, as both CLYTEMNESTRAS scream and collapse.*
 . . . THE FIGURE *pulls the knife from between the legs of CLYTEMNESTRA ONE.* . . . ORESTES *slowly reappears, wary and wrapped in the placenta-like gory net in which his father died.* (126; [stage directions])

Therefore, the tub is comprehended as an enlarged womb, whose transformative powers are not always detrimental, and from whose bloody waters individual identity may either be turned fluid or come into life. Orestes, however, sees in these same waters a microcosm of Hell (129), which drastically transforms the identity of anyone who dives into it. The association between the female womb and Hell suggests that Clytemnestra, who gives birth, and eventually ends up massacred in the same tub, is eternally doomed to die unavenged. Indeed, she will be the only character participating in the circle of violence and will be held accountable for her deeds, unlike her murderer, for example.

Its phallic symbolism put aside, the knife is another transformational prop, because its wielding allows connections to be drawn between the characters. Orestes, for instance, wielding the knife, becomes relatable for the audience in the sense of their "doing Manson's bidding in bombing Vietnam" (Kerr 125). Orestes is soon joined by Electra in experiencing familial betrayal and in sharing Iphigenia's immolation, when, at the moment of her sister's execution, she exclaims "Father cut me" (156). Accordingly, all characters are in fact ensnared by violence, while the defilement of spilling blood among family becomes a feature to which they must all lay claim. In addition, the knife, which is the fruit of Clytemnestra's labor in the stead of Orestes, is a phallic symbol of self-subterfuge. Clytemnestra is given the knife by The Figure as Apollo in order to slay Agamemnon, but it peculiarly returns against her, as she loses

it into the human body carried in the tub/womb (124). What is more, the very act of handing the knife is an attempt to penetrate and impregnate Clytemnestra, since Apollo endeavours to claim Orestes and establish himself as the one who fathered him. Even though Clytemnestra Two recognizes Agamemnon as the child's begetter, the physical proximity The Figure as Apollo imposes upon her by touching her belly and by commanding that she give birth against her will (125) suggests that she is raped and inseminated by the god, at least in a metaphorical way.

The idea of dramatizing metamorphoses onstage in order to alternate identities between characters is significantly assisted by the textual parallelisms that the playwright creates and repeats. These parallelisms could perhaps be classified into those wherein the characters wish to trade identities with one another, and those wherein they inevitably trade their identities in spite of their wishes. The most obvious example falling into the first category would be the curious relationship between Agamemnon and Aegisthus. While Agamemnon sees in Aegisthus a version of himself which will outlive him and enjoy all of his prerogatives, the latter, an anti-hero by definition, lusts after the former's heroic feats and glory. Their mutual desire to exchange places is initially suppressed by The Speaker, who restores order and reminds them that each is captive in his own body (96). This parallelism having been articulated, and as the play progresses, the audience gradually reaches the conclusion that their wish has been granted, for they scarcely differ from each other. Agamemnon murders Clytemnestra One's son from her first marriage and, likewise, Aegisthus kills an infant mistaking him for Orestes (170); further, they are both warriors who would be labeled by an American audience as "criminals and 'baby killers' rather than as heroes" (Saddik 179). Besides that, they seek sexual gratification in their female slaves, as Agamemnon goes so far as to introduce Cassandra to his wife and Aegisthus throws himself at his maidens (165).

Contrary to the above pair, the exemplary case to illustrate the second category would be Electra and Clytemnestra Two—that is, if the affiliation between the latter and Agamemnon is excluded. Unlike her Aeschylean counterpart, this reinvented Electra is far from keeping her virginity intact, since she pursues several men, stimulating Aegisthus's fear of her producing a son (135-36). Electra has the potential to become another Clytemnestra in the sense of conceiving an Orestes, a child who will avenge his parent when old enough. This commonality between mother and daughter is validated to a certain extent, since Electra exercises her right to her own sexuality—even if she is infertile—following Clytemnestra's seduction of Aegisthus. Also, both women are forcefully silenced by their male enemies: Electra has allegedly had her tongue cut out by Aegisthus, while the Clytemnestras are "*gagged with masking tape*" (169; [stage directions]) right before they are slain by Orestes. This analogy indicates that Electra largely deviates from her archetypal identity and is drawn closer to her diametric opposite, which would be Clytemnestra's. Electra's disgust for her mother may only vie with Clytemnestra Two's for Agamemnon. Although her involuntary parallelism with her husband has already been partly discussed, it is still important that her identification with him both as sacrificer and as sacrificed be stated. Moments before stabbing Agamemnon, Clytemnestra Two calls him "bride of Achilles" (123) and, hence, juxtaposes the circumstances of his death with Iphigenia's. By assigning

him her daughter's innocence, Clytemnestra Two absolves Agamemnon of his crime and makes herself definable and relatable to him; even Orestes is concerned because "Apollo says [she] murder[s] infants" (156).

Generally, the transformability and fluidity of the revised characters aligns with the whole conception and reception of postmodernism. Being the movement's most central feature, the notion of fragmentariness influences and applies to the play in various ways. On the personal level, the playwright seems to have been heavily affected by the horror of war, often showcased by physical dismemberment, which he attempts to depict and engrave onto his characters' psyche. For Rabe and for the other Americans, the "awareness of the physical body . . . becomes the primary source of [self-]identity" and self-definition (Saddik 176). On these grounds, the idea of fragmentation is brought into play both literally and figuratively, as regards the manner with which the characters understand and relate to themselves.

Literal fragmentation is closely linked with iconoclastic imagery, namely with ruined objects epitomizing the internal struggle of the characters to piece the aspects of their individuality together and recover their archetypal identity. This trope is firstly introduced with Agamemnon's bust, which is "*a fragment of what was once a larger statue*" (128; [stage directions]): the dismemberment of the statue tellingly mirrors Agamemnon's detachment from his archetypal self. A similar fate awaits the objects affiliated with Aegisthus and Clytemnestra Two, another marble statue and a flag respectively, which are endangered due to Orestes's misdirected anger. Concerning Aegisthus, Orestes exclaims: "With the shattering of this stone, I will break into your mind. . . . In the shattering of this statue you will see your shame and guilt and ruin revealed" (138). To put it differently, Orestes plans to break the statue in order to fragment Aegisthus's spirit and soul; hence, to deny him of any identification with his archetype and thus condemn him to an existential crisis. Likewise, the tearing of Clytemnestra Two's flag is a misaddressed effort to distort her sense of being by means of destroying the index of her archetypal identity. Yet, Orestes's plan is doomed to backfire against him, since by undoing Clytemnestra's identity, he instantly renders himself motherless, and thus unavoidably fragments his own self. The manner with which literal fragmentation is dramatized in the play accords with the idea that in postmodern adaptations "the reader is asked to be aware of the constructing author, of the artifice of the piece" (Sanders 64). Interestingly enough, this statement synthesizes the literary contribution of Rabe's play to the adapted content of the parent tragedies: the easiness with which an object may be shattered, and with which individuality may be disintegrated.

On the metaphorical level, fragmentation is chiefly displayed in dramatic dichotomizations. The splitting of Clytemnestra's self into two versions throughout the play is a direct outcome of the playwright's "double vision" that heightened his viewpoint on his work (Savran 193), and it is the most characteristic example of embodied fragmentation. Having a ten-year age gap between them, Clytemnestra One differs from Clytemnestra Two in small ways, which make a big difference, such as, for instance, their romantic partners; the former's husband is Agamemnon and the latter's Aegisthus (170). Next, Clytemnestra One sees in Orestes her only son, while her older version births her killer and not her child (95). This implies that

Clytemnestra Two is purged from any maternal instincts and sensibilities, so these are part of solely Clytemnestra One's emotional capacity, whose last words in the play are a clamor for reclaiming her stolen motherhood: "Let me have my baby, Iphigenia!" (173). Last but not least, Orestes's confusion is interpreted differently by the two sides of his mother, as Clytemnestra's younger and milder self believes that her son is privately reflecting all those thoughts that restrain him from acting, in opposition with Clytemnestra Two, who asserts that Orestes is actually externalizing these same thoughts that will lead him to kill her (151).

Contrary to Clive Barnes, who understands Clytemnestra's divided selves as "unfraternal twins" (51), I read the idea of splitting as a way to introduce and discuss the dynamics between her adultery and the act of infanticide. Particularly, throughout the first act, child murder is presented as more heinous than marital inconstancy, which nearly justifies Clytemnestra Two's action of killing Agamemnon, who is guilty of both. This standpoint is radically overturned in the second act though, when Agamemnon's death must be avenged and the Clytemnestras must be punished for committing adultery. The Clytemnestras' sexual promiscuity is criminal, for "Helen was a whore and they called her honor—and goodness, just like [Clytemnestra]" (148). In order for Orestes to have an "excuse" to kill her and meet his destiny, that promiscuity must become the ground on which she will be tried and found guilty of the bloodshed which has afflicted the whole family. As a result, Clytemnestra is held accountable not merely for being unfaithful to Agamemnon, but more importantly for sexually provoking him and for manipulating him into killing her infant from her first marriage (149); at the end, adultery and infanticide meet and coexist in her person.

Clytemnestra's physical and dramatic dichotomization bears resemblance to the psychic fragmentation that Orestes experiences in the second act. In comparison to Clytemnestra, Orestes appears wholesome and contained within one body until the split images of his mother hand him "babies of [him] wrapped in blankets and fast asleep" (152). Naturally, this trichotomy of Orestes opens a range of disparate interpretations, one of which could be that the infants, coming from an obedient and a vindictive Clytemnestra, emblemize his eternal dilemma concerning taking sides in his parents' bloodstained conflict. Notwithstanding the symbolism behind Orestes's threefold fragmentation, the staged image of him holding the babies insinuates that he is as elementally innocent as the infant variations of him. A similar deduction can be made from the following dialogue:

CLYTEMNESTRA ONE. He deserved the death I gave him.
 THE FIGURE. Who?
 ORESTES. Who's that?
 CLYTEMNESTRA ONE. Agamemnon.
 ORESTES. Who's talking about Agamemnon?
 THE FIGURE. We're talking about the infant. (172-73)

Lost in translation, Clytemnestra One draws a comparison between Agamemnon and her murdered first infant and, thence, attributes the same tender innocence to her murdered husband. In that way, Agamemnon emerges as not guilty of his war

crimes, whereas Clytemnestra appears to have a twisted understanding of justice. This dramatic technique, then, guides the audience to coordinate this fabricated innocence with Orestes's divine acquittal by The Figure as Apoll(y)on at the end of the play: "You have killed your mother and it means nothing and you have seen the nothing that it means" (175). Orestes epitomizes the "cynical acceptance of violence but also of the very failure to oppose its force and question its far-reaching repercussions" (Blatanis). Along these lines, it is equally important that Rabe has thoroughly omitted the presence of goddess Athena and her vindication of Orestes (Cohn 120), which highlights the fact that Orestes is not taken to court as in *The Eumenides*, the final part of Aeschylus's trilogy, but is arbitrarily exculpated by his advocate, Apollo, instead. Even though he is acquitted all the same following the canon, the nothingness that Orestes has seen is his own estrangement from his archetype, which effaces his individuality and situates him to a space of self-unknowingness and utter confusion.

In turn, this sentiment becomes a "conflictual *topos*" (qtd. in Blatanis) where violence resides and is inflamed. The combination of violence and "the atmosphere of confusion and indeterminacy" that existed in the American political scene at the time (Blatanis) forms a vicious circle in which all characters encountered in the ancient tragedies are caught, and which perpetuates the fragmentation of their identities. Following this, the psychically incomplete dramatic figures of the play set upon the quest of meeting and conforming to their archetypes, which results in their trying to fathom themselves through the "other." Still, if one compares and relates oneself to another character either consciously or involuntarily, both internal and external conflicts ensue. Subsequently, whatever the concrete outcome of these conflicts, characters always experience an extreme disorientation and thus further fragmentation: "Which way shall I go? . . . That way... or... that way...?" (134). Even lesser than fragments of the playwright's self-understanding and self-projection onto his work, as Stuart W. Little sees them (256-57), the *dramatis personae* are reduced to a state of nonexistence, signifying nothing and being irreparably detached from their counterparts in the Greek tragedies. Their disorientation is absolute, irreversible, equally shared:

CLYTEMNESTRA ONE. Agamemnon!

IPHIGENIA. Father?

CLYTEMNESTRA ONE. I'm here.

AEGISTHUS. I'm here. (103)

This predestination and existential breakdown is keenly conveyed by Iphigenia, whose mere presence is a constant evocation of Clytemnestra's slain infant. A while before Agamemnon sacrifices her, Iphigenia's anguish is focused not simply on what sort of transformation she will undergo by dying, but on what her living time has amounted to: "will I be merely changed or will I be nothing? . . . I fear, Father, that I shall vanish" (109). Her looming demise strikingly comes full cycle with her initial appearance. More specifically, Iphigenia enters the stage right from the moment the play commences, but occupies it silently, as an unspecified existence, for several minutes. When she finally speaks in order to introduce herself to the audience, her

first words allude straightforwardly to her problematic identity: “I do not know I die. Iphigenia does not know she dies” (97). Namely, Iphigenia explicitly disassociates herself from her archetype by overlooking her imminent death and by expressing her confusion over who she actually is. Ensuing from this, the audience becomes subjected to the process of defamiliarization, which invites them to contemplate on what differentiates the adaptation of the source text from the way they have known the latter thus far (Sanders 99).

The cyclical pattern of violence and disorientation culminates in the impossibility to bring the play to a close with catharsis, which might be the adaptation’s greatest deviation from the source texts. Despite Rabe’s ideological contraposition with the Aristotelian ideas (Kolin, “Interview” 144), including in fact the pursuit of catharsis, its absence in the play—just as dramatically as textually—is probably more of a failure on the playwright’s part rather than a conscious choice. This is illustrated by the fact that he is overall interested in achieving “catharsis of certain emotions” in his works, such as *Hurlyburly*, since this would be an indicator of the play’s quality (Kolin, “Interview” 155). Regardless, this impossibility affects characters and audience alike, as Rabe denies the latter the opportunity of feeling empathy in this context of uncalled-for violence, which in turn impedes mutual catharsis from building. Consequently, the audience goes through a transformation of its own, since from a part of an anonymous crowd each member experiences a disillusionment as regards their being an entity culturally separate from the events unfolding onstage (Wade 42). As far as the characters are concerned, the more they stray from their archetypal value, the more detached they become from the very idea of catharsis; indeed, how could catharsis be achieved, if nemesis, the godly wrath, is prevented because of the divine always placing the knife in the characters’ hands for them to kill? Or, how could Orestes be purged of his matricide, if his crime is not important enough to hold him accountable for it? Simply, if the reinvented versions of the characters do not comply with their archetypes, then no one’s “name” can “be sung with reverence into time” (120), as *The Figure* alleges.

In conclusion, Rabe demonstrates an acute understanding of the literary archetypes’ influence, ubiquity, and malleability, since he utilizes all these traits with the aim of challenging their stability and dominance. In having his characters reject their own ancient destiny and be involved in a never-ending exchange and alternation of identities, the playwright ventures to disclose and at the same time to deconstruct the uniqueness of the archetype, flaunting its transformability alongside. Under this prism, Orestes emerges indeed as “the orphan of the title,” as Ruby Cohn avers (120), yet I propose that he is not the only one eligible for this designation. Precisely because all of Rabe’s refashioned dramatic figures are metaphorically orphaned of both individuality and identity in view of their inner fragmentariness and the multiple transformations they go through; orphanity becomes a communal concept, instrumental and indispensably pertinent to all. At the play’s close, it is up for debate to decide on whose behalf *The Figure* speaks, when he remarks: “For I am nothing without you. What am I without you?! For you are all. All. You are all, Orphan!” (176). Granted the post-war thematic convergence between 1970s America and the Americanized setting of the adapted Greek tragedies, *The Figure*’s comment

could prove universal; it is geared from the play's characters in respect to their limited sense of self-awareness, and the average American citizen, towards anyone whose individuality has been mutilated by the disorientation war has caused.

Works Cited

- Asahina, Robert. "The Basic Training of American Playwrights: Theater and the Vietnam War." *Theater* 9.2 (1978): 30-37. Print.
- Barnes, Clive. "Stage: Rabe's 'The Orphan' Arrives: Last of Vietnam Trilogy Comes to..." *New York Times*, 19 Apr. 1973: 51. Print.
- Blatanis, Konstantinos. "Rewriting Greek Tragedy / Confronting History in Contemporary American Drama: David Rabe's *The Orphan* (1973) and Ellen McLaughlin's *The Persians* (2003)." *American Drama and Theatre (JADT)*, 31.2 (2019): n. pag. Web. 2 June 2020.
- Cohn, Ruby. *Anglo-American Interplay in Recent Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Kerr, Walter. "David Rabe Still Has Work to Do." *New York Times*, 29 Apr. 1973: 125. Print.
- Kolin, Philip C. *David Rabe: A Stage History and a Primary and Secondary Bibliography*. New York: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- . "An Interview with David Rabe." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 3.2 (1989): 135-56. Print.
- Leiter, Robert. "Theater Chronicle." *The Hudson Review* 38.2 (1985): 297-300. Print.
- Little, Stuart W. *Enter Joseph Papp: In Search of a New American Theater*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1974. Print.
- Morphos, Evangeline, and David Rabe. "David Rabe." *BOMB* 93 (2005): 76-81. Print.
- Rabe, David. *The Vietnam Plays: Streamers and The Orphan*. New York: Grove, 1994. Print.
- Rogoff, Gordon, ed. *The Drama Is Coming Now: The Theater Criticism of Richard Gilman, 1961-1991*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2005. Print.

Saddik, Annette J. *Contemporary American Drama*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. Print.

Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Savran, David. *In Their Own Words: Contemporary American Playwrights*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988. Print.

Wade, Les. "David Rabe and the Female Figure: The Body in the Boom Boom Room." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 12.1 (1992): 40-53. Print.