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## ANCIENT GREEK TRAGEDY AND THE ECOLOGY OF CULTURE\*

*ANTİK YUNAN TRAJEDİSİ VE KÜLTÜR EKOLOJİSİ*

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### **Abstract**

In the mimetic sense, Ancient Greek tragedy appears as the most straightforward manifestation of human impetus, along with forming the spine of literary history. As Aristotle puts, catharsis becomes the fundamental device of tragedy that provides the possible grounds for transmitting this sense of purification, in that it arouses the feelings of pity, fear, importance or probability on the part of the spectator and the reader. Taking one work from Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, this article aims at interpreting Ancient Greek Tragedy in the light of the theory "Literature as Cultural Ecology" which was introduced by German Ecocritic, Hubert Zapf in 2000. "Literature as cultural ecology" discusses the function of literature in the ecological balance of the universe. According to the triadic function model of Zapf, a work of imaginative literature embodies a cultural-critical metadiscourse describing the fallacies of the dominant ideological civilisatory system, an imaginative counter-discourse expressing the repressed and marginalised aspects of the so-called system, and a reintegrative inter-discourse attempting to reconcile the two poles by building a relationship between the aspects of civilisatory system and which remain outside of this hegemonic powers. The cultural-ecological function of literature is that it records every single instance and thus performs as the "conscience" of cultural history. In this sense, regarding nature and

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culture as complementary entities literature gains a holistic outlook contrary to the view of most cultural critics that claim that nature and culture are two opposing forces. Consequently, the common initiative in cultural studies that “everything is a construct” is eradicated through proposing a multi-layered perception of literature.

**Key Words:** Ancient Greek Tragedy, Literature as Cultural Ecology, Hubert Zapf, Catharsis, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides

### Öz

Antik Yunan Tragedyası mimesis kavramından yola çıkarak insan dürtülerinin en açık ve doğrudan manifestosu olarak edebiyatın adeta omurgasını oluşturur. Aristoteles’in *Poetika* adlı eserinde değindiği gibi katharsis, acıma, korku gibi duyguları hem okuyucu hem de izleyici üzerinde oluşturması itibarıyla arınma, tragedyanın en temel mekanizmalarından biri olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu makale, Antik Yunan Tragedyası’nı, bir anlamda edebiyatın en klasik eserlerini, üç büyük yazar Aiskhylos, Sofokles, Euripides’in birer eserinden yola çıkarak Alman ekolojist Hubert Zapf’ın 2000 yılında oluşturduğu “Kültürel Ekoloji Olarak Edebiyat” kuramına göre yorumlamayı hedeflemektedir. Zapf, “Kültürel Ekoloji Olarak Edebiyat” kuramını anlatırken üçlü bir işlev modeli oluşturur. Buna göre, bir edebiyat eseri kültür eleştirisinde bulunan bir üstsöylem, kurmaca bir karşıt söylem ve uzlaştırıcı bir söylemlerarasılığı içerir. Kültür eleştirisinde bulunan üstsöylem baskın ‘uygarlığın’ temsil ettiği gücün açıklarının ve çelişkilerinin betimlenmesine tekabül eder; bu bağlamda, kültürün tek yönlülüğü özellikle önem taşır. Kurmaca karşıt söylem dışlananın ta kendisini ya da diğer bir deyişle kültürün “ötekisini” dile getirir. Uzlaştırıcı söylemlerarasılık sayesinde ise dışlanan ile kültürel gerçeklik sistemi arasında ilişki kurulur. Edebiyatın kültürel-ekolojik işlevi kültür tarihinin ‘vicdanı’ olmasında yatar; bu anlamda, edebiyata daha bütüncül bir anlayış getirerek ‘doğa’ ve ‘kültür’ olgularının aslında birbirine karşıt birer söylem değil birbirlerini tamamlayan olgular olduğu iddia edilir. Böylece, son dönem kültür eleştirmenleri tarafından sergilenen ‘her şey aslında bir konstrüksiyondur’ dan ibaret bir edebiyat anlayışına ciddi bir sekte vurulmuş olur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Antik Yunan Tragedyası, Kültürel Ekoloji Olarak Edebiyat, Hubert Zapf, Katharsis, Aiskhylos, Sofokles, Euripides.

In the mimetic sense, Ancient Greek tragedy appears as the most straightforward manifestation of human instinct and impetus, along with forming the spine of literary history. As Aristotle puts it in his *Poetics*, catharsis becomes the fundamental device of tragedy that provides the possible grounds for transmitting this sense of purification, in that it arouses the feelings of pity, fear, importance or probability on the part of the spectator and the reader. As he points out:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (Aristotle 6)

Before Aristotle, catharsis was used as a socio-medical term signifying pureness and cleanness rather than a literary term. Walter Burkert claims that in ancient Greece, it alludes to the rituals of purification of murderers from blood guilt through blood; in other words, sacrifice (Burkert 56-57). René Girard, in *Violence and the Sacred*, also acknowledges sacrifice as a means of catharsis, in the sense that it functions as an instrument to reduce the tension of violence (Girard 14).

Modern societies attempt to overcome violence through establishing various institutions and control mechanisms, which actually belong to the territory of culture. As Freud asserts in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, human being is constantly dominated by and suffers from the conflict of Eros and Thanatos. On the one side there is the life-giving Eros, in other words the “pleasure principle,” governing human beings’ urge for survival; on the other side there is Thanatos, the stimuli causing restlessness when the basic needs are not fulfilled. The acts of violence become apparent when Thanatos overrides Eros, an indication of the fact that human being is ruled by the pleasure principle, which essentially belongs to the territory of nature (Freud 23). Under these circumstances, it would not be far-fetched to presume that from the archaic ages to the modern times, human beings’ ultimate and unconscious endeavour has been to attain harmony among these two territories.

In this article, my argument is that Hubert Zapf’s triadic function model within the frame of “literature as cultural ecology” inherently embodies the very notion of Aristotelian description of catharsis with respect to the three significant works of Western civilization which are among the subtexts of Zapf’s theoretical stance as well: Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*. It is particularly significant to apply Zapf’s theory to the works of ancient Greek tragedy – Aeschylus’ “The Eumenides” from the *Oresteian Trilogy*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, and Euripides’ *The Bacchae* – in that a cultural-ecological reading of the plays will not only enable us to observe the development of ancient Greek tragedy with reference to three milestones of the genre, but also confirm the organic bond between literature and the history of culture. In this respect, I will first put forward the relationship between “literature as cultural ecology” and the three theoretical texts, and then I will apply the triadic function model to the three representative works of ancient Greek tragedy which are formerly mentioned.

Hubert Zapf's theory "literature as cultural ecology" attempts to envisage the function of literature as "an ecological force *within* the larger cultural system," which in fact renders the whole history of culture as an ecological platform (Zapf 85). The foremost motivation behind such a definition is that an ecological perspective in any aspect entails the idea that culture and consciousness cannot ever come into existence independently from one another, and it reinforces a more comprehensive and embracing perspective on literature. While the ecological view is preoccupied with the physical and material instances of consumption and traditional ecocriticism mainly pinpoints the manifestation of these phenomena in literature, "literature as cultural ecology" makes a synthesis of these issues and points out the rebalancing function of literature as far as cultural history is concerned. In other words, literature acts as a mechanism of building up the reconciliation between the hegemonic power of the system and the infinite range of marginalised issues of society, which attracts attention to the relationship between imaginative literature and anthropological universals. Though "literature as cultural ecology" makes use of the devices of ecocriticism, it places the function of literature in the centre and employs an ecologically defined function model. Hence, Zapf's main argument depends on the fact that imaginative literature, very naturally, undertakes the mission of holding a mirror to the conscience of "culture." According to the triadic function model, literature performs the tasks of a cultural-critical metadiscourse revealing the imposed ideological, dogmatic values of the societal order, an imaginative counter-discourse pointing out the inconsistencies of this order, and a reintegrative inter-discourse where the former polarities are reconciled in a cathartic manner. The sacrificial rituals as the mechanism of catharsis not only function as a "rite of passage", but also provide the possible grounds for the "creative energy" to emerge in the Zapfian sense, though the outcome might not necessarily be a "superficial harmonisation of the conflict" in terms of the reintegrative inter-discourse (Zapf 93). Hence, the instance of catharsis becomes a medium where literature fulfils its cultural-ecological function.

Zapf's argument in ascribing literature such a function springs from three major theoretical works of Western civilization, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, all of which are also in a dialogic relationship with one another in the sense that they articulate the analogical correlation between nature and culture. The triadic function model Zapf draws essentially pinpoints the interaction between the Apollonian world order and the Dionysian realm, along with how the two spheres come to terms with one another to create the dynamics of culture.

Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, takes the two main deities of ancient Greece, Apollo and Dionysus, so as to explicate the devices and the development of ancient Greek tragedy. The effect of catharsis, in the Nietzschean sense, is achieved through the Dionysian constituent, as can be inferred from his statement on Dionysian orgies:

At the very climax of joy there sounds a cry of horror or a yearning lamentation for an irretrievable loss. In these Greek festivals,

nature seems to reveal a sentimental trait; it is as if she were heaving a sigh at her dismemberment into individuals. The song and pantomime of such dually-minded revelers was something new and unheard-of for the Homeric-Grecian world: and the Dionysian *music* in particular excited awe and terror. (Nietzsche 6-7)

However, ancient Greek tragedy owes its excellence to the harmonisation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian essences. In this respect, as Zapf elucidates, Nietzschean view of art appears as the “revitalisation of the Dionysian *truth*<sup>1</sup> of life against its ossification in the institutions and ideologies of a Socratic-Apollonian culture” (Zapf 85). To put it differently, Nietzsche’s foremost motivation is to expound the “dead end” of culture, which remains behind the Apollonian veil which tends to hide the Dionysian barbaric enthusiasm, along with the impact of the satiric chorus of the dithyramb.

Secondly, catharsis from the perspective of Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* forms a “rite of passage” in the sense of rendering the growing pains of civilization flesh and blood. The perception of the Enlightenment in the Western thought is rather controversial since it is both a saviour and a scapegoat. In their realistic analysis of the Enlightenment, one of the central issues Adorno and Horkheimer focus on is the mythical nature of the movement. Human being at any rate tends to fall prey to myth and spirituality no matter how powerfully the Enlightenment attempts to eliminate them through a mesmerizing fascination with rationality that would inevitably result in a ceaseless and absolute anthropomorphic attitude and interpretation. Adorno and Horkheimer continue espousing their critical attitude towards the Enlightenment by reiterating the fact that not only has culture worn a depraved aspect due to the industrialisation of culture and entertainment, but also the sources of amusement are indispensably intellectualised. Hence, amusement and consuming have become the most crucial ideals of the Enlightenment, which they relate to the effect of catharsis:

Inwardness, the subjectively restricted from truth, was always more at the mercy of the outwardly powerful they (masses F.C) imagined. The culture industry turns it into an open lie. (...) In this sense amusement carries out that purgation of the emotions which Aristotle once attributed to tragedy and Mortimer Adler now allows to movies. The culture industry reveals the truth about catharsis as it did about style. (Adorno and Horkheimer 144)

However, contrary to Adorno and Horkheimer, such an enchantment of the “blessings” of the Enlightenment, providing a sense of catharsis and purification, is

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<sup>1</sup> My emphasis.

also crucial, in the sense that it would serve for the empowerment of the creative energy as far as literature is concerned.

Thirdly, in Bakhtinian terms, catharsis primarily corresponds to the enunciation of transgression that the characters undergo. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin juxtaposes the constituents of the official speech, which can be explicated as the “systemic realities,” and the unofficial speech, which carries the implications of the grotesque, carnivalesque, laughter, and abjection. His differentiation of the official and unofficial speeches stems from the principle that the human being has to speak with “someone else’s language” in order to communicate, which actually emphasises demands of the civilisatory power and the system. On the other hand, the elements of folk culture remain at a distance from what the official speech suggests, and form the Dionysian component of culture which is also associated with the Dionysian orgy and rituals. Bakhtin, when exploring the notion of the carnivalesque within the context of Rabelais and his works, emphasizes that it becomes an instrument of catharsis in the sense that the individual is liberated, or cleansed from the requirements of the society, and penetrates into a parallel universe where “the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions” does not exist. Furthermore, “carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and ‘renewal.’ It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed” (Bakhtin 10). These attributes of the carnival provide the possible grounds for transgression in the sense that the participants of the carnival have not only entered a new terrain, but also gained a different awareness which would make it impossible for them to return to their past states even if they attempt to take their masks off.

Tragedy, but more specifically, Ancient Greek tragedy can be considered as embodying the most outstanding pieces of literature as its “raw material” is the myth itself. As in Aristotle’s description of tragedy in *Poetics*,

Tragedy, then is an imitation of an action that is serious complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. By ‘language embellished’ I mean language into which rhythm, harmony and song enter. By ‘the several kinds in separate parts’, I mean that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song. (Aristotle 10)

Furthermore, the glory of tragedy, in Nietzsche’s words, lies in the very fact that

through tragedy the myth attains its most vital content, its most expressive form; it rises once more like a wounded hero, and its whole excess of strength, together with the philosophic calm of the dying, burns its eyes with a last powerful gleam, (Nietzsche 36)

which also recalls the cathartic impact that tragedy creates upon the audience.

Of the three pieces forming the subject-matter of this paper, Aeschylus' "The Eumenides" forms the last sequel of the *Oresteian Trilogy*, along with "Agamemnon" and "The Libation Bearers." The background of the trilogy is the return of Agamemnon from the Trojan War. His wife Clytemnestra is supposed to be waiting for him, but is actually plotting revenge for the sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia and is in a treacherous relationship with Aegisthus, who believes that he fits the throne very well. Eventually, Agamemnon is killed by his wife. In "The Libation Bearers," Orestes, with his sister Electra, avenges the death of his father, and in the "Eumenides," Orestes is put to trial by the chthonic deities, the Erinyes that are responsible for avenging patricide and matricide. During the trial, Orestes is advocated by Apollo, and Clytemnestra by the Erinyes; in the end, after the persuasion of the Erinyes by Athena, Orestes is acquitted of his crime and Athena changes the names of the Erinyes to Eumenides, which means "the kindly ones." "Eumenides" marks the period of High Culture of Athens, which was prominently centred on theatre. That is why the works of Aeschylus insinuate the splendour of this period, which can also be thought of as the last period of "culture" where the mother right is taken for granted and it is the law of the father that counts. In other words, the matricide of Orestes, along with the decision mechanisms Apollo and Athena<sup>2</sup>, can be interpreted as the declaration of his independence from his mother, which would render things safe and sound in terms of a Freudian perspective. Camille Paglia also elaborates the function of woman in tragedy as being "less moral than man" (Paglia 7). She argues:

Her will-to-power is naked. Her actions are under a chthonian cloud. They are a conduit of the irrational, opening the genre to intrusions of the barbaric force that drama shut out at its birth. Tragedy is a western vehicle for testing and purification of the male will. (...) Woman introduces untransformed cruelty into tragedy because she is the problem that the genre is trying to correct.

In this sense, the cultural-critical metadiscourse appears to be based on the patriarchal elements in the tragedy, whereas the imaginative counter-discourse relates to the matriarchal within the context of the dialectic of enlightenment. Man's attempt to eradicate myths from an age of rationality and his striving to eliminate woman from tragedy appears as a similar action which results in a more intense manifestation of cruelty and violence. Moreover, Apollo functions as the assurance of order against the Erinyes throughout the play, especially where he associates them with incomplete,

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<sup>2</sup> Referred to as "unnatural gods," along with Apollo in that they both signify the attributes which are associated with culture – civilisation, law and justice, mathematics, medicine, arts, etc.

osmotic, and uncanny bodies, which relates to the grotesque nature of the Erinyes. He addresses them as such:

Out of this temple! I command you, go at once!  
 Quit my sanctuary, lest you feel  
 The gleaming snake that darts black foam that you suck  
 From the sour flesh of murderers. What place have you  
 Within these walls? Some pit of punishments, where heads  
 Are severed, eyes torn out, throats cut, manhood unmanned,  
 Some hell of maimings, mutilations, stoning, where  
 Bodies impaled on stakes melt the mute air with groans –  
 Your place is there! Such are the feasts you love, for which  
 Heaven loathes you. Is not this the truth, proclaimed in you  
 By every feature? Find some blood-gorged lion's den,  
 There make your seemly dwelling, and no more rub off  
 Your foulness in this house of prayer and prophecy.  
 Away! Graze other loves such as you! (Aeschylus 1. 13)

Under these circumstances, from the perspective of “literature as cultural ecology,” the Eumenides demonstrate the dominance of the cultural-critical metadiscourse in the sense that Apollo triumphs over the amorphous bodies of the Erinyes. However, in the end Aeschylus does not ruin the “classical” tradition, and celebrating the decorum of the situation lets the Erinyes be transformed into the Eumenides. As the following lines show, it is at this point that the reintegrative inter-discourse of Zapf’s function model comes into existence:

Again let the wine be poured  
 By the glare of the crackling pine;  
 Now great, all-seeing Zeus  
 Guards the city of Pallas;  
 Thus God and Fate are reconciled.  
 Then let every voice  
 Crown our song with a shout of joy! (Aeschylus 2.118)

Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* can be considered a play of decorum; it marks the classical age of ancient Greek tragedy in the sense that the value judgements of that period are made clear. What is more, unlike Dionysus in *The Bacchae*, Oedipus



becomes an emblem of the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy when he leaves the image of the mother behind, which forms the origin of the Oedipus complex in the Freudian sense. In that sense, the actual cathartic effect lies in the very fact that throughout the play Oedipus gains an awareness of the patriarchal order, along with the masculine world of culture; he is “cultivated” in a “proper” manner as far as the ideals of classicism is concerned. Nietzsche remarks on Oedipus:

The most sorrowful figure of the Greek stage, the unfortunate Oedipus, is conceived by Sophocles as the type of the noble man who despite his wisdom is fated error and misery, but who nevertheless through his extraordinary sufferings, ultimately exerts a magical, healing effect on all around him, which continues even after his death. (...) All laws, all natural order, yea, the moral world itself, may be destroyed through his action, but through this very action there is brought into play a higher magic circle of influences which build up a new world on the ruins of the old. (Nietzsche 29-30)

The so-called magical and healing effect of Oedipus points to the impact of catharsis, along with the regenerative dimension of the imaginative counter-discourse of the triadic function model. Furthermore, one of the most noteworthy themes *Oedipus the King* contemplates on is free will vs. fate, which recalls the Enlightenment<sup>3</sup> fascination with rationality. Sophocles attaches equal importance to the concepts of reason and spirituality through juxtaposing the characters of Oedipus and Teiresias, who enact the dichotomy of nature and culture. The eye belongs to the sphere of culture, and signifies reason; whereas the blindness of Teiresias puts forward the fact that the eye cannot be the exact instrument of true knowledge – a fact of which Oedipus is ignorant:

OEDIPUS: But there is – though not for you: to you the truth is nothing,

Since you are blind, in your ears, in your mind, and in your eyes.

TEIRESIAS: Poor fool, to cast the very curses in my teeth

The soon every Theban soul will hurl at you. (Sophocles 368-372)

In spite of the fact that Oedipus once calls Teiresias “a charlatan, whose eyes are keen to profit,” in the last part of the play Oedipus blinds himself by plunging dead Jocasta’s long gold pins into his own eyes (388). He is now aware of his shameful incest and patricide, which are the notions that evoke the imaginative counter-

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term “enlightenment” within the context of Ancient Greek Tragedy anachronistically on purpose so as to bring the theoretical essence of this article together with the concepts of reason and rationality.

discourse in that both terms are among the discontents of culture and civilisation. Nevertheless, he is blind to what he can see with his eyes, which once again demonstrates the sphere marginalising the contents of cultural-critical metadiscourse. The ending of the play, when the outgoing tide is visible, suggests a reintegrative inter-discourse along the lines of the Nietzschean interpretation: "The sharpness of wisdom turns upon the sage: wisdom is a crime against nature," and obviously man has to suffer from his crime (Nietzsche 30). This remark also highlights the inconsistency and paradox of enlightenment, as far as humanity as its source and addressee is concerned. Oedipus somehow manages to solve the riddle of his life; however, he is bound to suffer from "awareness" of his misdeed as it can be inferred from the very last speech of the chorus:

Inhabitants of Thebes our fatherland, behold  
 This Oedipus that solved the famous riddle,  
 That was the man of greatest power,  
 Upon whom there was no citizen but stares  
 In admiring envy of his great good fortune;  
 See, into what deadly waves of circumstance  
 He has come. Therefore, fixing our gaze  
 Upon life's final day, we shall call no mortal happy,  
 Until the cross the threshold of this life, free from pain. (1522-1530)

Furthermore, it is also significant that Sophocles is very optimistic in that he declares Oedipus will certainly get rest after he is relieved from his pain, which is another indication of the classical ideals as far as the development of ancient Greek tragedy is concerned.

Euripides' *The Bacchae* belongs to the modern period of ancient Greek tragedy, and can be interpreted as the emblem of a regression of literature in the sense of the dissolution of the Apollonian discourse. Nietzsche sees the death of tragedy in the works of Euripides and mourns it in a most romantic manner (36-37). Charles Segal, though he finds Nietzsche's remarks rather exaggerated, shares the opinion that the spirit of tragedy has changed with Euripides. He believes that

(...) the play, as so much in Euripides, is the voice of a countercultural, counterrational longing in which Western man has repeatedly sought an alternative to his attitude of domination and control. (...) For this reason, too, the *Bacchae* lacks a true heroic spirit, but like much of Greek tragedy permits the surfacing of themes, needs, desires that are repressed by the dominant trends of the culture. (Segal 31)

In *The Bacchae*, Dionysus, “the coming god,” has come to Thebes from the East, and he is in Europe for the first time with the purpose of redeeming his mother. When he introduces himself in the prologue, he appears on the stage with these words:

From the fields of Lydia and Phrygia, fertile in Gold, I came to the sun-beaten Persian plains, the walled towns of Bactria, harsh Media, wealthy Arabia, and the whole of that Asian sea-board where Greeks and Orientals live side by side in crowded magnificent cities; and before reaching this, the first city of Hellas I have seen, I had already, in all those regions of the East, danced my dance and established my ritual, to make my godhead manifest to mortal men. (Euripides 182)

In this playful passage, he establishes not only the dichotomies of east/west and occident/orient, but also the overt regression from the law of the father to the mother right, which also lets the reader see the discrepancies between *The Bacchae* and *The Oresteian Trilogy*. Here Dionysus appears as a force coming from the east to conquer the west, a reverse action as far as Western civilisation is concerned. In this sense, the play turns out to be ironic on the whole, which is somewhat compatible with the identity of Dionysus as well. According to Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s description,

Dionysus cannot be pinned down in any form, he plays with appearances, confuses what is illusion and what is real. But his otherness also stems from the fact that, through his epiphany, all cut-and-dried categories and clear oppositions that impart coherence to our vision of the world lose their distinctiveness and merge, fuse, changing from one thing into another. (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 398)

Since Dionysus is always in-between, in his androgynous form, he can be interpreted as the constant inhabitant of purgatory. Nevertheless, he achieves his ultimate ambition: he makes Agauë destroy Pentheus; in other words, he makes “culture” destroy itself. Pentheus’ beheading refers to the fact that he loses his brain, his faculty to think. Consequently, in the case of *The Bacchae*, Dionysus’ appearance in Thebes to avenge his being mocked appears as the emergence of the imaginative counter-discourse, and his triumph over culture forms the reintegrative inter-discourse. Euripides illustrates the “discordant” in the Zapfian sense, but the regenerative consequences of the encounter with the “coming god” are summed up in the last speech of the chorus:

Gods manifest themselves in many forms,  
Bring many matters to surprising ends;  
The things we thought would happen do not happen;

The unexpected God makes possible:

And that is what has happened here to-day. (Euripides 228)

Such a reading of the three major works of ancient Greek tragedy initially shows how catharsis is very much congruent with the cultural-ecological function of literature. As George Thomson puts it in *Aeschylus and Athens*, catharsis renews the vitality of the audience by “relieving emotional stresses due to the contradictions generated in the course of social change. And this purpose was achieved by the expression of what had been suppressed” (Thomson 382). The functional model of “literature as cultural ecology” demonstrates how the impact of catharsis upon the audience and the reader contributes to the revitalising power of literature in an ecologically defined cultural history.

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