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Violence tragique et guerres antiques au miroir du théâtre et du cinéma (XVII^e^-XXI^e^ siècles)

sous la direction de
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KLEIST'S *PENTHESILEA:* A WARRIOR CAUGHT UP BY TRAGEDY

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Résumé : Dans sa *Penthésilée*, Kleist transpose la guerrière éponyme, ancrée dans la tradition épique, sur la scène théâtrale et réécrit son destin en puisant dans les tragédies d'Euripide et de Sophocle. Le modèle des *Bacchantes* est bien connu : il permet de faire de Penthésilée la victime d'une folie envoyée par les dieux qui lui fait tuer son bien-aimé Achille, selon un déroulement qui calque le meurtre de Penthée par sa mère Agavé, mais encore faut-il comprendre que Kleist se fait plus plus tragique et plus dionysiaque qu'Euripide lui-même, en faisant expérimenter à Penthésilée le rite de l'ômophagie au moment clé où elle dévore la chair crue d'Achille, geste jamais explicite chez les bacchantes du substrat euripidéen. Quant à la fin de l'héroïne, c'est sur le modèle de celle de l'Ajax sophocléen qu'elle se construit : le guerrier épique archétypal, condamné au suicide dans le monde tragique, se révèle un modèle parfait pour la Penthésilée kleistienne, que l'amour jette dans une crise identitaire similaire, culminant dans le retour à soi après la scène de folie ; mais là encore c'est sur le mode du dépassement que tout se joue, puisque Penthésilée va mourir sans arme véritable d'un poignard métaphoriquement formé par ses propres sentiments. Kleist parvient ainsi à rendre sensible la violence extrême grâce au jeu de reprise qui lui fait outrepasser ses modèles et repousser les limites de la représentation.

Mots-clés : Kleist, *Penthésilée*, tragédie, Euripide, *Bacchantes*, *Ajax*, Sophocle, violence, anthropophagie, ômophagie, crise de folie, identité, suicide.

Abstract: *In his Penthesilea, Kleist translates the eponymic warrior, rooted in the epic tradition, to theatrical stage, and rewrites her destiny by drawing elements from Euripides' and Sophocles' tragedies. The* Bacchae*'s pattern is well known : it allows to make Penthesilea the victim of a madness sent by the gods, which makes her kill her beloved Achilles, in the same way that Agave kills her own son Pentheus, but it must be underlined that Kleist becomes more tragic and more dionysiac than Euripides himself by making Penthesilea experiment the* ômophagia*'s ritual at the very moment when she devours Achilles' raw flesh, a gesture that is never explicit in the* Bacchae*. As to the heroin's end, it is built on the model of Sophoclean Ajax: the archetypal epic warrior, condemned to suicide in the tragic world, reveals itself to be a perfect model for the Kleistian Penthesilea, who is thrown by love in a similar identity crisis that culminates in the return to*

consciousness after the madness scene ; but here too, it is based on the pattern of excess, because Penthesilea is going to die without a real weapon, by using a metaphorical dagger made of her own feelings. Kleist achieves thus to make extreme violence clear to our eyes thanks to a type of references that goes over his models and places further the boundaries of representation.

Keywords: *Kleist,* Penthesilea, *tragedy, Euripides,* Bacchae, Ajax, *Sophocle, violence, anthropophagy,* ômophagia, *madness crisis, identity, suicide.*

Kleist's *Penthesilea* is an interesting counterpoint to the theme of war on stage, precisely because of its paradoxical treatment of it: even if its argument is the Trojan war, its characters two of the most archetypal warriors, Achilles 'the best of the Achaeans', and Penthesilea, queen of the warlike people of the Amazons, even if, in this play, war should be everywhere, it is nowhere to be really found.

Another approach, better connected to literary genres, could also contend that this epic subject is in fact becoming a tragic one, thanks to the stage effect and to the choices made by Kleist himself in his rewritings of former tragedies. The reference to Euripides' *Bacchae* is obvious, with an insane Penthesilea killing Achilles in the same manner and with the same details as Agave kills Pentheus, but it seems that Penthesilea could be compared not only to Agave, but also to the other characters that experiment a crisis of madness in surviving Greek tragedy, i.e. to Euripidean Hercules and mostly to his model, the Sophoclean Ajax, both in the eponymous plays, these examples completing each other to reconstruct an entire pattern, closely related to the question of personal identity, and more precisely of their affirmation or negation of identity[1].

AN EPIC IDENTITY UNDERMINED BY LOVE

An Epic Character

In Antiquity, Penthesilea is a well-known character, whose fame has increased with the post-Iliad epics, even if she is not mentioned in the *Iliad*[2], and we find traces of her in more recent texts, which are always citations of or allusions to epic material.

[1] On the analogies between the case of the Kleistian Penthesilea and the general patterns of tragic madness and identity, see my chapter « Soi-même en héros », in Lucie Thévenet, *Le Personnage, du mythe au théâtre*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2009, more precisely « La folie divine comme révélateur identitaire » p. 183-210, and « « Le héros d'avant – Ajax et Héraklès » p. 211-227.

[2] She is present in the iconography during the 6-5th c. BC, mostly on vases: for example the Exekias' amphora from the British Museum (London B210), black-figure style, from Athens, found in Vulci 540-530 BC, with names on it to identify the characters; or the Munich cup (Munich 2688), red-figure style, Vulci, 470-460 BC, by the so-called Penthesilea painter, but with no names on it.

The most ancient reference is to be found in an abstract of Proclus' *Chresthomathy* by Photius, some kind of literature handbook[3], mentioning a lost epic, the *Ethiopid* by Arctinos from Miletus (7th century BC), one of these epics telling what happens after the *Iliad*, which comprises the whole ending of the Trojan war. The *Ethiopid* begins with the arrival of Memnon, surrounded by an Ethiopian army, and draws the main lines of the story of Penthesilea, apart from her portrait as a blazing warrior queen: she is killed during a battle by the most famous of the Achaeans, Achilles, and at the very moment of her expiring, he falls in love with her.

Almost ten centuries later, Quintus Smyrnaeus told the same story in his *Posthomerica*, a surviving text. The first of the fourteen books recounts the arrival of Penthesilea surrounded by twelve warriors, as she joins the Trojans and promises to kill Achilles. At the end of the ultimate fight between them, Achilles removes her helmet and, struck by her beauty, regrets not having made her his wife. This is love at first and last sight[4]; if love reaches the battlefield and the warriors, it is impossible love, and it can only last a second, unlike the duels and battles.

In other spheres, we can also read a beautiful portrait in the *Eneid* (I, l. 490-493), in fact a painting that Aeneas is looking at in the temple of Juno in Carthago, in which Penthesilea is the archetype of the female warrior, which will be developed in Later Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Mentioned afterwards by Dante, and seen in Hell by the poet and Virgil with another female warrior, Camille from the *Eneid*, one of her 'avatars', her figure will continue to haunt epic texts behind the face of Clorinda in Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

What about Kleist ?

We must skip a few centuries and read the version of the story offered by Kleist, which is really unusual and striking in comparison with the former versions. First of all, Kleist reintroduces the moment of the duel between the two warriors, but he reverses the roles of the main tradition and has Penthesilea kill Achilles. It seems that he has found this variation of the myth in the dictionary of mythology mostly used at the time in Germany, the *Gründliches mythologisches Lexicon* by Benjamin Hederich[5], which is in fact similar to the ancient compilations such as the *Chrestomathia*, or the *Bibliotheca*. In the end of the « Penthesilea » article, the author mentions the alternative killing of Achilles by

[3] This version is also mentioned in the summary of Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 5, 1: « εἶθ' ὕστερον θνήσκει ὑπὸ Ἀχιλλέως, ὅστις μετὰ θάνατον ἐρασθεὶς τῆς Ἀμαζόνος κτείνει Θερσίτην λοιδοροῦντα αὐτόν. – afterwards, she dies from the hand of Achilles, who, fallen in love with her after her death, kills Thersites who laughed at him. »

[4] Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica*, I, l. 654-674.

[5] First edition in 1724, likely read in Leipzig reedition of 1770 (and now available online: http://woerterbuchnetz.de/Hederich/), according to various editions of the play: Helmut Sembdner, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, Carl Hansen Verlag, München, 1961, p. 933, refers to Hederich's *Lexicon* in the 1770's edition, articles « Amazonen », « Penthesilea », « Pentheus », and to the *Bacchae* and the *Iliad.* See also Hans Rudolf Barth, *Heinrich von Kleist Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 2, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, Frankfurt, 1987, chapter « Quellen », p. 685-693, which mentions this *Lexicon* (« Penthesilea » and « Pentheus » articles), and Ovid (*Met.* III, l. 206-225 for the death of Actaeon) but no tragedy ; Günter Blamberger, *Heinrich von Kleist. Biographie*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2011, p. 326-328, for Hederich and *Bacchae*.

Penthesilea, and refers to a late source, Ptolemaeus Hephaestion[6]. This lost book is alluded to again by Photius in his *Bibliotheca*, which summarizes in the same way that possible end[7], giving a good example of the characteristic logic of reduplication of mythical episodes: « The sixth book (of Ptolemaeus Chennus, also known as Hephaestion) countains the following episode: Achilles, killed by Penthesilea, is resurrected on his mother Thetis' demand, and comes back in Hades after having killed Penthesilea ».

If this article and this obscure version of the myth may have given the idea of the role inversion in the duel, Kleist himself has decided to enhance the character of the Amazonian queen, and maybe therefore to develop the motif of love by transforming a univocal love at first and last sight, into a shared, reciprocal passion, which rises and develops all along the play. The moment of death is all the more pathetic for the spectators[8]. This importance given to love feelings will in fact invade the battlefield, the warriors, the context and the story itself, by placing love at the centre of the war for the Amazons, and presenting love relations as a war for this bellicose race.

A Warrior without a Camp

First of all, if the play starts like in the *Posthomerica*, with the arrival of the Amazons in the battlefield, it begins also with something extremely astonishing: the opening dialogue between Antilochus and Ulysses reveals that there is a terrible fight going on between the Amazons and the Greek army, but without any clear reason. As he says it himself: « Beim Jupiter ! Sie wissen nicht warum ? – By Jove! They do not know why? » (sc. 1, l. 5)[9]. And when Antilochus asks a few lines later: « Was wollen diese Amazonen uns ? - What do the Amazons want from us ? » (l. 12), there is no answer to be given.

In terms of theatrical technique, all these moments are narratives of what has happened in other places: scenes in the battlefield, an incredible chariot race in the steep hills, with an accident which reminds us of that of Hippolytus in Euripides' play. But Kleist uses also another technique which allows him to broaden the limited dimensions of the stage without relinquishing dramatic present and scenic time: the direct observation and narration made by a character from a hill on stage, dramatized by the system of questions asked by the non-viewing others. It offers a kind of variation on the narrative technique, like a live narrative, sometimes intensified by the use of two viewing

[6] « So erzählen auch wiederum andere, sie habe den Achilles erst selbst erleget, es sey aber solcher aufder Thetis, seiner Mutter, Bitten, wieder lebendig geworden, und habe sodann erst die Penthesilea wieder hingerichtet – Others also tell that she first killed Achilles herself, that he was brought back to life by demand of Thetis, his mother, and then executed Penthesilea in return », Hederich's *Lexicon, op. cit.*, p. 330.

[7] Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 190, 151b29-32: « Τὸ δὲ ς' βιβλίον κεφάλαια περιέχει τάδε, ὡς Ἀχιλλεὺς ὑπὸ Πενθεσιλείας ἀναιρεθείς, δεηθείσης αὐτοῦ τῆς μητρὸς Θέτιδος, ἀναβιοῖ καὶ ἀνελὼν Πενθεσίλειαν εἰς Ἅιδου πάλιν ὑποστρέφει ».

[8] This pattern was developed by Torquato Tasso, in his *Jerusalem Deliverered*, canto 12, with the passion of Tancred for Clorinda, born the moment he sees her in the battlefield, with one huge difference: Kleist presents us with a shared feeling, whereas Clorinda only has feelings for Tancred at the very moment of her death, as he baptizes her.

[9] All traductions of Kleist, Greek plays and other sources, are mine, except when mentioned otherwise.

and describing characters, who complement each other - a new kind of *teichoscopia*, which enhances the epic dimension of the play[10].

As Ulysses concludes in the same scene: « Sie muß zu Einer der Partei'n sich schlagen - She must take sides to fight » (l. 48). Of course, but not for Penthesilea, for this logic is far too rational for her, and there is another way out of the traditional dichotomy of war: fighting both camps, and becoming a third one. Kleist is thereby portraying the queen of the Amazons as an ultimate warrior, an excessive warrior who is at war with everybody, but this attitude could also be read as a gender war, a war of women against men.

Gender war and love story

This is an important track to explore in this play, since this war episode is in fact read by Kleist as a love story between Penthesilea and Achilles, the two best warriors in the battlefield. We should specify here that in the Middle Ages, Penthesilea is also in love, but with Hector, a more civilized and virtuous model of warrior and man, like in the *Roman de Troie*, by Benoît de Sainte-Maure; it offers a signifying counterpoint to the Penthesilea/Achilles couple, which unites two characters far from this moderation: the lion-hearted (θυμο-λέοντα) Achilles, whose rage opens the *Iliad*, and the *furens* Penthesilea, as Virgil called her (or *ferox*, in Propertius[11]) - both described by Kleist as mad and insane throughout the play. This feeling is shared in the same metaphorical manner: love is a fight, and fighting the loved one is a proof of love, particularly for these two hyperbolic warriors.

In fact, as Penthesilea later explains, this is really a war between genders, but its purpose is not to kill all men, but for each female warrior to defeat and capture the male warrior she will marry during the wedding celebration of the war's brides, « the brides of Mars ». Love is a conquest, Amor is a soldier, and the Amazons embody the metaphor of *militia amoris* sung by Ovid, but they also reverse the roles traditionally assigned to genders: the female is now the conqueror, and the male the conquered one.

Love as Defeat and Loss of Identity

What is striking to someone interested in the questions of self enunciation is that the various confrontations with Achilles, and with love in general, lead Penthesilea to solemn affirmations of her identity as a queen and warrior, as if she were conscious of a deep danger for herself, and this will be a crucial element in the subsequent episode of madness.

First, Penthesilea falls in love at the very moment she sees Achilles: her face turning entirely red during an interview, she suddenly interrupts Ulysses with a formal affirmation of her identity as a warrior, as he himself relates:

[10] Cf. the chapter about *narratio* and hypotyposis by Gabriele Bradstetter, *Interpretationen Kleists Dramen*, Reclam, Stuttgard, 1997, p. 78-95.
[11] Vergilius, *Eneid*, I, 491; Propertius, III, 11, l. 14-17.

sie sei
Penthesilea, kehrt sie sich zu mir,
Der Amazonen Königin, und werde
Aus Köchern mir die Antwort übersenden !

she is
Penthesilea, she said turning towards me,
the queen of Amazons, and it is
from her quiver that she will send me an answer ! (sc. 1, l. 99-102)

This type of declaration is one of the main tracks to be followed throughout the play to explore the question of the heroine's identity, and the gap between her heroic-epic and tragic dimensions.

The situation gets more complex scene 14 when, after a duel during which Penthesilea has fallen from her horse in scene 8, Achilles gets rid of his armour and weapons, and presents himself deceitfully as the defeated one. The long scene 15 is a beautiful love duet between Penthesilea, who thinks she has conquered Achilles as the Amazon tradition requires, and the willing prisoner. And then, when she is persuaded she is the victorious, and he, her prisoner and captive, she gives then another solemn and significant proclamation of her identity:

Ich bin die Königin der Amazonen,
Er nennt sich Marserzeugt, mein Völkerstamm,
Otrere war die große Mütte mir,
Und mich begrüßt das Volk : Penthesilea

I am the queen of the Amazons,
they call themselves born from Mars, my people,
Otrere was my famous mother,
and this people greet me with that name: Penthesilea. (sc. 15, l. 1824-1827)

« Penthesilea », repeats and confirms Achilles, but this pause is interrupted by the course of the war, and the troops of both parts are now coming closer, with the revelation of the truth: *she* is the loser, a revelation that must deeply attack this identity she has claimed for herself.

We can measure the emotion that overwhelms her by quoting her former declarations about Achilles in scene 5, when she claimed: « Ich will zu meiner Füße Staub ihn sehen - I want to see him in the dust at my feet », because he has disturbed her pride as a warrior. Then, she continues to mention her identity, but now in the interrogative form, in a sort of self-exhortation, as she asks:

Ist das die Siegerinn, die schreckliche,
Der Amazonen stolze Königin,
Die seines Busens erzne Rüstung mir,
Wenn sich mein Fuß ihm naht, zurückespiegelt?

Is it the victor, the terrible,
the proud queen of the Amazons,

that the mirror of his brazen armour,
when my foot approaches him, reflects back to me ? (sc. 5, l. 642-645)

« Mich, *mich* die Überwundene, Besiegte ? - (...) Me, me, the conquered one? the defeated one? » she continues to ask (l. 650), before concluding that she must « overcome him, or live no more – ihn (...) überwinden, oder leben nicht ! » (l. 655). In these lines, she really questions her own identity when in love, as if the feelings were attacking it, changing it, with the risk of destroying it, in the same way as the Euripidean Herakles in the eponymous play feels that his heroic identity is threatened and literally negated if he does not go to rescue his children captured by Eurystheus: « οὐκ ἄρ' Ἡρακλῆς / ὁ καλλίνικος ὡς πάροιθε λέξομαι – I will not be called Herakles / the one with beautiful victories, as previously » (l. 581-582).

Afterwards, Achilles challenges Penthesilea to another duel to offer her the victory she needs to accept their union; he goes almost unarmed, and confident with the fact that she will not harm him, just as in their former confrontations; Penthesilea, believing that she has been lured and that « Der mich zu schwach weiß, sich mit ihm zu messen, / Der ruft zum Kampf mich, Prothoe, ins Feld ? - The one who knows I'm too weak to measure myself against him, calls me to struggle in the battlefield, Prothoe? » (sc. 20, l. 2384-2385), is overcome by a fighting rage, a real crisis of madness. She goes after him fiercely, chases him, and bites him to death, devouring him with her dogs. The inversion thus takes place at all levels: Penthesilea kills Achilles instead of the opposite in the most common myth; the strange real fight of love turns into a fight to real death.

THE TRAGIC LOSS OF EPIC IDENTITY

Tragic Madness

What has happened? What can explain such a reversal? At the level of literary genre, we can say that at this point of the play, Penthesilea is caught up by tragedy, and more precisely by tragic figures, by the characters who have made the experience of madness on stage before her in Greek tragedies. In fact, a comparative reading of the madness of Euripides' Agave and Herakles, and of Sophocles' Ajax may explain her attitude, as puzzling as it seems for the spectators and for the other characters, when she is called « diese rätselhafte Sphinx – this mysterious sphinx » at the beginning of the play by Antilochus (sc. 1, l. 207).

Penthesilea has already been called mad since the beginning of the play, but her madness reaches its climax here, and she really experiences a « Verstandes Sonnenfinsternis – an eclipse of reason », as Prothoe says (l. 2902). The different phases are exactly the same as for Agave in the *Bacchae*, as many scholars have noted[12],

[12] Apart from the notes in the text editions quoted above note 5, see also Günter Blamberger, *Heinrich von Kleist. Biographie*, p. 328-329; Doris Claudia Borelbach, *Mythos-Rezeption in Heinrich von Kleists Dramen*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 1996, chapter II, « Penthesilea », p. 53-110 in general, and p. 74-95 about *Bacchae* and Dionysos more specifically, but without close references to the text of Euripides' play: the link to Dionysos seems to be the main subject; she quotes Bernhardt Böschenstein, « *Die Bakchen* des Euripides in der Umgestaltung Hölderlins und Kleists », in Stanley A. Corngold (ed.), *Aspekte der Goethezeit*,

sometimes explaining that after having read the « Penthesilea » article in Hederich's *Lexicon*, he continued on the same column, and read the « Pentheus » one[13]. Kleist refers to certain details with an accurate precision, and the *Bacchae* can truly be called an hypotext of *Penthesilea*, as Jean-Marie Valentin does[14]: the narrative of Achilles' hunting and how he takes refuge on top of a pine-tree is a quotation from the second narrative in *Bacchae*; the moment of self-presentation of the victim, who tries to be recognized by his hunter is exactly similar; and so are the steps of the long scene of Agave's recovery, with a strange and frightening euphoric phase, before the lucid horror.

But a close comparison of the two plays shows that Kleist has chosen to radicalise the Euripidean framework and the dionysiac context much more than appears at first reading.

More Tragic and more Dionysiac than Euripides

Euripides had reached a sort of tragic climax with the *sparagmos* of Pentheus, the ritual dismemberment – usually one of animals but here of a human body – a climax which is also one of tragedy as a genre, at the end of its great period of production, which now tears dead body into pieces and experiences its own end. Kleist goes further, by focusing on another dionysiac rite, only alluded to in the *Bacchae* – the *ômophagia*, the act of eating

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Göttingen, 1977; see also Jochen Schmidt, *Heinrich von Kleist. Studien zu seiner poetischen Verfahrensweise*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1974, p. 236-239, in his chapter « Entscheidende Wirkung des Euripides auf die *Penthesilea*. Kleist und Euripides », p. 234-241; *Heinrich von Kleist. Die Dramen und Erzählungen in ihrer Epoche*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 2003, p. 111-113.
Another important reference is the Euripidean *Hippolytus*, for the general pattern, the context of the hunt, and the link to the goddess Artemis, according to Jochen Schmidt, *Studien*, p. 235-236; these points concern both main characters, and we could add that the motif of the dislocated body of the young and beautiful hero echoes the death and character of Achilles. The influence of the Euripidean play is also to be found through Seneca's *Phaedra*, as Helen Slaney reminds us, in « Schlegel, Shelley and the 'Death'of Seneca », *Brill's Companion to Roman Tragedy*, edited by George W. M. Harrison, Leiden/Boston, 2015, p. 311-329: as she says p. 319: Achilles, like Hippolytus, is an « ideal of masculine beauty, pursued by a powerful queen driven mad by an inner conflict between desire and duty », and the atmosphere of Kleist's play is even more Senecan than Euripidean.

[13] Herman Salinger, in his article « Heinrich von Kleist's *Penthesilea:* Amazon or Bluestoking », *Comparative Drama*, vol. 1, n° 1 (spring 1967), p. 49-55, specifies p. 53-54 that in the edition of 1770, the article on Penthesilea goes from column 1939 to half of column 1940, and that we find on the other half of 1940 the article about Pentheus, and the end on the next page on column 1941; he refers to 'Quellen' notes on the edition by Helmut Sembdner, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, I, p. 933, where the indication of the columns is nowhere to be found, but is included in the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag edition, *Heinrich von Kleist. Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 2, by Hans Rudolf Barth, p. 688-689, even if not analyzed.

[14] Jean-Marie Valentin, « Ὀρειβασία, σπαραγμός, ὠμοφαγία. Kleist, *Penthésilée* et le retour du dionysiaque euripidien » (*sic*), *Études germaniques*, janvier-mars 2012, n° 1, p. 7-42: « Il reste que *Penthésilée* s'édifie, dans ses scènes les plus cruelles et les plus denses, sur un véritable hypotexte, les *Bacchantes*. Parler simplement de rencontre comme on l'a souvent fait, est de peu de profit. L'idée de « remodelage » introduite par W. Müller-Seidel (dans l'ignorance de la filiation philologique) traduit mieux en revanche la réalité », p. 24 - 'hypotext' as defined by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1982, p. 11-12; in note, he calls « Umformung » the notion of 'remodelage', which is present as a verb (« um sie umzuformen ») in W. Müller-Seidel's text, at the end of p. 145, but on a broader subject than only Euripides (Walter Müller-Seidel, « *Penthesilea* im Kontext der deutschen Klassik », in Walter Hinderer, *Kleists Dramen. Neue Interpretation*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1981, p. 144-171.

raw meat. Indeed, there is only allusion to it in the *Bacchae*, in the epod of the beautiful *parodos*, an hymn to bacchic joy, with the famous line 139: « ἀγρεύων / αἷμα τραγοκτόνον, ὠμοφάγον χάριν – *hunting / the blood of the killed goat, joy of* ômophagia – *of eating raw meat*! ». But the allusion here is to animal flesh.

In fact, the first narrative of the third episode is more subtle when the messenger describes the Theban bacchants on the Citheron, and the ritual *oreibasia*, the wild run to the mountain, during which they tear into pieces cows and bulls. The only possible allusion to *ômophagia* is the moment of rest after the run during which:

> Πάλιν δ' ἐχώρουν ὅθεν ἐκίνησαν πόδα
> κρήνας ἐπ' αὐτὰς ἃς ἀνῆκ' αὐταῖς θεός,
> νίψαντο δ' αἷμα, σταγόνα δ' ἐκ παρηίδων
> γλώσσῃ δράκοντες ἐξεφαίδρυνον χροός.
>
> They came back to the place from where they had moved their feet,
> to the same sources as the god had brought them to,
> they washed the blood, and what dripped from their cheeks,
> the snakes licked it to make their skin bright. (l. 765-768)

Blood drips on cheeks, but there is nothing more precise in Euripides' words[15].

Certain scholars also see in the quick mention of the abduction of children[16] another possible allusion, not to animal *ômophagia*, but to human. Would Euripides in the same narrative, at the beginning of the play, already exceed those implied limits? Animal *ômophagia* is clearly underlined in the play, what of the human one? Jean-Marie Valentin asserts that « la dévoration de l'homme n'y a en revanche pas lieu – devoring man however does not occur »[17], but could such devoration really happen? He quotes the horrified reaction of the chorus to Agave's invitation to share the feast banquet (l. 1096); this reference mostly shows that human manducation is felt as repulsive, and could not have occurred[18].

Euripides has drawn a parallel between animal and human victims in the hands of the bacchants and it may have been a track to follow further, from hands to teeth. If the ritual *sparagmos* can shift from animal to human, what of *ômophagia*? It must be the same, and a bacchant must be able to devour raw human flesh, and not only that of animal. Again we must stress that this movement is almost hidden in Euripides' text, but this is no longer the case in Kleist' play.

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[15] Contrary to J.-M. Valentin's affirmation that *ômophagia* is « largement présente dans le premier récit du messager - widespread in the first messenger's narrative », *art. cit.*, p. 28.

[16] *Bacchae*, l. 754: « ἥρπαζον μὲν ἐκ δόμων τέκνα – they snatched children from the houses ». In his commentary of this line (*Bacchae*, Oxford, 1960), E. R. Dodds mentions vases with scenes of baby-stealing ; about the British Museum pyxis by the Meidias painter (E 775), he concludes « perhaps she is going to eat him, as the daughters of Mynias in their madness ate the child Hippasos ».

[17] J.-M. Valentin, *art. cit.*, p. 28.

[18] According to Monique Halm-Tisserand, « Le *sparagmos*, un rite de magie fécondante », *Kernos*, 17, 2004, p. 119-142, the *ômophagia* is not a ritual reality, and she shows that the most important part of bacchic rituals was in fact to throw the animals' disembered parts, a ritual gesture in order to fertilize and regenerate the earth.

Euripides invites us to imagine a human *ômophagy*, a form of *homo-phagy* as specific anthrophagy, which must now be divided into cooked meat and raw meat anthropophagy. This is an extreme case, from the anthropological point of view, and even if in the most terrible Greek myths, Tantalus, Atreus, Philomela and Procne have served human meat as part of their revenge, it was cooked, not raw. An example of the victim's devoration out of pure and bestial determination, is nowhere to be found, even in Seneca. Kleist, for his part, depicts with his Penthesilea the portrait of an extreme bacchant, an adept of dionysiac madness that pushes back the boundaries much further than does Agave, and Euripides behind her.

Penthesilea is led not only to kill Achilles but also to bite and devour him like a dog. And we must reinvestigate here another mythical figure, that of Actaeon, the very cousin of Pentheus, a real hunter who dies torn to pieces by his dogs after having been turned into a stag by the hunteress-goddess Artemis, a goddess he has accidentally seen bathing[19]. His death is alluded to by Cadmos in the first episode as a warning to Pentheus[20], but which death is the most horrible, to be torn to pieces by one's own mother and aunts, or to be devoured by one's own dogs? Once again, Kleist goes further in his rewriting, by combining the two examples, and carrying them further: hunting dogs and bacchant hunteress are now united into a single executioner, who tastes the flesh of his victim, like a new kind of much more savage Artemis.

Loss of the Heroic Self

What can happen after such a crime? Kleist does not end his play just after, but he cannot follow further the example of Euripides after the long and moving scene of Agave's recovery, because the *Bacchae* does not really have a proper end: the last part of the play is mutilated, and even if it were not, Pentheus' death is seen as sufficient punishment for Agave, and the problem of self identity after the crime is not explained in details by Euripides. In fact, he has already dealt with it in his *Herakles*, which is on this point a close rewriting of Sophocles' *Ajax*[21], and this is precisely the logic we can find in the end of Kleist's *Penthesilea*, and a more accurate one due to the heroic and warrior identity of these two characters, much closer to the Amazonian queen at the Trojan siege than to the Theban princess Agave. In fact, Penthesilea is closer to a Sophoclean character as described by B.M.W. Knox in *The Heroic Temper*, than to a Euripidean one: they are all central characters, with a dominant presence in the economy of the play, and a firm determination not to betray the ideal vision of their own nature[22].

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[19] The Actaeon-myth is quoted as a significant source in the Ovidian version, by Hans Rudolf Barth, in the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag edition, p. 689; Jochen Schmidt, *Studien*, p. 238; Doris Claudia Borelbach, *Mythos-Rezeption*, p. 79, and p. 83, among others; the reference is obvious.

[20] *Bacchae*, l. 337-340.

[21] On the comparison between the two plays, see also in particular Jacqueline de Romilly, « Le refus du suicide dans l'*Héraklès* d'Euripide », *Archaiognosia*, 1, 1980, p. 1-10 (also published in *Tragédies grecques au fil des ans*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1995, p. 159-169), and Shirley A. Barlow, « Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Herakles* », *Ramus*, 10, 1981, p. 111-128.

[22] Bernard M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper. Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964, and also the application of these patterns to Euripides' Medea in « The Medea of Euripides », *Yale Classical Studies*, 25, 1977, p. 193-225.

Herakles and Ajax are both emblematic heroes, facing an dishonorable act they have committed during a temporary madness sent by the gods, killing children and wife for the first, and failing to kill the Achaean leaders and slaughtering animals instead for the second. As for Agave, his madness is followed by a moment of recovery, a return to sanity which is a return to self-consciousness[23], the next step being the actual recognition of the close relative or animal substitute, now dead, in a peculiar kind of recognition scene: the identification that operates now is that of a dead body. But the consequences of this step are really different for the men and warrior, even if one is a father, than for the woman and mother: the full understanding of the actions done unconsciously lead the men heroes to a deep identity crisis, a non-recognition of self, expressed in phrases like « it's not me who did this – *I* did not do it », as if the moment of non-recognition was duplicating and reversing itself.

The eclipse of consciousness paradoxically triggers an retrospective awareness, as if the consciousness was moving from one moment in time to another, and this temporal movement leads to a temporal reading of personal identity, now divided into two parts: a before and an after, a figure of the past, even recent, and a figure of the present, which is in fact a sort of negation of the first one, a figure that will no longer be the self in the present, a figure that can be called « the hero as he was before ». As Ajax complains to the streams of the Scamander river:

> οὐκέτ' ἄνδρα μὴ τόνδ' ἴδητ', ἔπος
> ἐξερέω μέγ', οἷον οὔ τινα Τροία
> στρατοῦ δέρχθη χθονὸς μολόντ' ἀπὸ
> Ἑλλανίδος· τανῦν δ' ἄτιμος
> ὧδε πρόκειται.
>
> *You will no longer see this man I am,*
> *such a hero that Troy – if I may use big words –*
> *has never seen his equal coming with the army from the Greek*
> *land. For now, dishonoured,*
> *he lies down this way, as dead. (l. 419-427)*

The first words he uttered on stage were an address to the chorus, a form of self-portrait in interrogative form, a portrait of himself as a hero, which is now being questioned, before it is negated (l. 364-366). The heroic self is now a past one, and will never be present again. The previous heroic identity becomes irrelevant in the present, after its dishonourable actions, and it seems that the self itself is now lost.

More Tragic and less Epic than Sophocles

This is where a comparative reading makes it possible to reconstruct Penthesilea's itinerary, further than Agave's track. Ajax is a warrior, at the Trojan war, and he commits suicide because he cannot live with the burden of a totally unheroic act: having failed in

[23] In French the expression « revenir *à soi* » (« coming back to oneself ») is quite significant for « to come round ».

killing his enemies, and having made himself a fool by slaughtering animals instead[24]. He is also an epic warrior, who does not find his place in the new world of tragedy, « a hero whose epic song has become impossible »[25], and his sword can be seen as the symbol of his rigidity, of an impossible adaptation to new values and to the new genre of tragedy[26].

Penthesilea, also a warrior in the Trojan war, is facing with similar contradictions, but her problem is no longer an attempt against her heroic and warrior self, as it could have been in the beginning before falling in love, as when she claims she cannot be an Amazon Queen if she is defeated by a man. Her problem is now that of a lover: she has killed her betrothed, and outrageously mutilated his body as only an animal can have done, two actions that are separated in her own words at the stage of recovery. There is in this part of the play a duplication of recognition, because Penthesilea separates the act of killing, which she herself admits she could have done, from the act of mutilation, which even for her remains unthinkable, and therefore damaging (sc. 24).

The animalization of characters is constant in epic poetry, and so it is in Kleist' writing, where it is not only a manner of making the story epic, but also a driving force for action: Achilles is a prey hunted by Penthesilea, but as mentioned before, the huntress has become part of the pack of the dogs, and devours her prey like Actaeon's dogs devour their master. And we could also read an echo to the animals killed by Ajax, when Achilles is seen as an animal prey, and reverse the reading to see Penthesilea becoming an animal when biting Achilles, a substitution that leads her to the worst of actions, and to death. The animal reference is in the two plays a symbol of the deep meaning of the action, and its fateful consequences.

After this terrible act, and after having recognized that *she* has done it, she abdicates her identity as queen and warrior: first, just before she emerges from the mist of unconsciousness, she drops her bow, a gesture which rouses fear amongst her companions, and just after the recognition, she says:

> *– Ich will dir sagen, Prothoe,*
> *Ich sage vom Gesetz der Fraun mich los,*
> *Und folge diesem Jüngling hier.*
>
> I am telling you, Prothoe,
> I say that I am abandoning the law of women
> and following that young man here. (sc. 24, l. 3011-3013)

[24] With the famous theme of the enemies' laughter, see Dominique Arnould, *Le rire et les larmes dans la littérature grecque*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1990, in the chapter « Γελῶσι δ'ἐχθροί dans la tragédie », p. 36-42; Carles Miralles, « Le rire chez Sophocle », p. 407-424, in *Le rire des Grecs. Anthropologie du rire en Grèce ancienne*, M.-L. Desclos (ed.), Editions Jérôme Millon, Grenoble, 2000.

[25] See David Bouvier, *Le sceptre et la lyre. L'*Iliade *ou les héros de la mémoire,* Editions Jérôme Millon, Grenoble, 2002, chapter « La tragédie ou la poésie privée de sa fonction épique », p. 128, and also on the making of the Sophoclean Ajax figure after various epic sources, François Jouan, « *Ajax*, d'Homère à Sophocle », *L'Information littéraire*, 2, 1987, p. 67-73.

[26] Charles Segal, « Visual Symbolism and Visual Effect in Sophocles », *Classical World*, 74, 1981, p. 125-142 (published in French as « Symbolisme visuel et effets visuels chez Sophocle », *La Musique du sphinx*, Paris, La Découverte, 1987, p. 79-106).

Then, when Prothoe wants to take her dagger, she gives it willingly and her arrows with it: she abandons her weapons; a few lines later, she is dead, « *Sie fällt und stirbt - she falls down and dies* », as the stage direction concludes.

If in tragedy suicide is generally reserved for women[27], one must not forget that the essence of Penthesilea is that of a warrior and therefore a male essence, and her gesture is therefore closer to Ajax' or to Herakles' willing-death. And in the same situation, Agave, a woman, does not kill herself, because she is not experimenting the same loss of identity.

Nevertheless, Penthesilea's death is a strange one. Whereas Ajax symbolically employs Hector's famous sword, the young woman has already abandoned her dagger, as previously mentioned, and Kleist goes here further than any ancient writer would have gone: he stages a weaponless suicide, making us understand that an Amazon without her bow and dagger, who says that she has abandoned the law of women, is already dead.

In the text, there is indeed a weapon, but a metaphorical one, for she says that she is going deep into her breast, as into a mine, and digging for a destructive feeling, cold as a mineral. She purifies it in the fire of misery, to make it strong as steel, she waters it with the corrosive poison of remorse, she places it on the anvil of hope, and sharpens it, to make it into a dagger, and with this dagger she reaches her heart (sc. 24, l. 3025-3034). In this play, metaphors become true: love is a war, a lover can devour his loved-one, a confusion between words can lead to death[28], and one can die of a feeling, sharp as a knife in the heart[29], one can commit suicide using one's mind as a weapon.

CONCLUSION

Kleist thus experiments the power of words, and elaborates a play in tension between epic and tragic, where both genres are taken to their extremes.

Epic is the main framework: Kleist stages two hyperbolic warriors, the « best of the Achaeans » and the leading queen of a warlike nation, but chooses to reverse their roles and to develop the love episode between them, transforming the battlefield of enemies into a battlefield of lovers, at the level of sexual gender, men against women, the Amazons chasing both Trojans and Achaeans. Nevertheless, Kleist does not avoid epic poetry, thanks to the narratives and *teichoscopiae* describing war, but also, more subtly, thanks to the epic animal metaphors applied to characters, tragically brought to the level of reality and made true with Achilles' terrible death.

Then the rules of theatre and tragedy catch up with the characters in the play: Achilles dies like a new Pentheus, with a body not torn to pieces, which has been considered as the climax of the tragic genre, but mutilated by human and animal teeth, a manner of dying that never occurs in Greek tragedy, which extends the boundaries of the genre. Penthesilea, his murderer, and a new Agave, dies in fact as a new Ajax, but after getting rid of her emblematic weapons, and without a real weapon, whereas Ajax committed

[27] Antigone, Phaidra, Dejanira, Eurydice, Jocasta... see Nicole Loraux, *Façons tragiques de tuer une femme*, Hachette, Paris, 1985.

[28] The famous confusion between "Küsse" and "Bisse".

[29] The heroin reminds here of another famous female character in German drama: Hugo von Hofmannstahl's Elektra who, one century later, dances herself to death after the revenge she was keeping herself alive is achieved.

suicide epically, with his famous sword. Just as Ajax understands the full meaning of his name when he laments and shouts an "*Aiai*" close to *Aias* (*Ajax*, l. 430-431), just as Tiresias unsuccessfully wishes that Pentheus does not bring *penthos* – πένθος, the mourning, the grief hidden in its name, on his family (*Bacchae*, l. 367), similarly Penthesilea must fulfill the deep meaning of her name also linked to *penthos*, and die tragically like the other Greek characters before her.

If Kleist' plays have been seen as reactions against the idealised vision of Ancient Greece which had been conveyed by Schlegel, Goethe and Schiller[30], with Sophocles as a supreme classical dramatist against a too dionysiac Euripides, the example of Penthesilea shows that there is in fact a subtle combination of Greek tragic sources, and a great misreading of Sophocles' plays by German philhellenism, which Kleist has contributed to amend[31].

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[30] We are schematizing, following Walter Müller-Seidel, « *Penthesilea* im Kontext der deutschen Klassik », p. 144-145; Jochen Schmidt, *Die Dramen und Erzählungen in ihrer Epoche*, p. 107-110; Doris Claudia Borelbach, *Mythos-Rezeption*, « das Skandalon der *Penthesilea* », p. 95-110; Helen Slaney, « Schlegel, Shelley and the 'Death' of Seneca », p. 312-318.

[31] Another example is the correspondence between Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Kleist's *Robert Guiscard*, with among others the terrible motif of the plague, which is neither pure nor classical.

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