Thematic Recurrence in Adaptation: A Study of *The Bacchae* by Euripides and *The Bacchae of Euripides* by Wole Soyinka.

By

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Abstract

Dramatic Adaptation implicates the way in which similar or related texts influence, reflect the recurrence of plot, dramatic characterisation, situations and setting from source to adapted texts with a view to achieving innovations in the adapted texts. The basic problem of this study concerns the fact that, whether thematic recurrence of a dramatic text accounts for a successful adaptation into its newer format. The dramatic work selected for examination here is; *The Bacchae of Euripides* by Wole Soyinka as an adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*. This study examines the role of thematic recurrence in influencing an effective and successful adaptation of the dramatic text studied here. The theoretical framework is anchored on Julia Kristeva's intertextuality theory. This research adopts the qualitative research design, while the methodology used is textual analysis. The findings of this research reveal the invaluable role of "thought" recurrence in dramatic adaptation. Furthermore, this study has unveiled issues of cultural, dramatic structure similarities, settings and situations between the source and the adapted text. The study recommends the re-enforcement of the cultural values propagated in the adapted text for universal purposes as contribution to knowledge among other details. It also highlights the innovation strategies of adaptation deployed in the adapted dramatic text.

Keywords: Theme, recurrence, dramatic, adaptation, examination.

Introduction

Adaptation is true to life. This study focuses thematic recurrence in dramatic adaptation. The latter is one of that significant aspects or presentation of the general idea of adaptation. One of the motivations for dramatic adaptation as a focus of study is committed to reviewing the issues around adaptation with particular reference to its structural disposition as an area of study relevant to dramatic literature. Dramatic adaptation which refers to adjusting a story to fit another medium has been the bedrock of arts for generations. Playwrights all over the world tend to transpose stories from the original sources to other platforms, for the purposes either of extension in pursuit of their preservation for posterity or innovation. However, over the years, adaptation studies has been discussed mostly from the perception of fidelity, (which is sameness to precursor text) Thus, previous works in adaptation by Nigerian literary scholars such as; Adeniyi, T.O and Zaccheaus, O, Ajumuda, O.S, Awo, M.A, Bawa, K, Abdullahi Ghadetc had only concerned themselves with comparative analysis and fidelity terms for foundation studies and understanding of West African literature, thereby failing to give the required attention to the depths of dramatic structure similarities such as the thematic recurrence that comes with such adaptation. The selected adapted play text is yet to be exposed to the afore-mentioned research depth for academic purposes. It is against this backdrop that, the basic problem of this study concerns the dearth of rigorous academic research of the selected play studied here for adaptation purposes based on the themes of the source and the adapted play. Thus, this study proves to fill that gap.

Theoretical framework.

Adaptation constitutes the driving force of contemporary culture, with stories adapted across an array of media formats. But until recently, adaptation scholars, such as; Sanders{2006, P.M} Kracauer{1931, P.96}, Andre Bazin{1930 P.32} Ashein{1942, P.103},Emile Zola, Jean Jacque Rousseau, Bresson{1950,P.87}, Barry{1995, P.18} and etc to have predominantly focused on repeated claims of "authorial influence" which is faithfulness to precursor text. But, not mindful of the fact that, no adaptation could achieve 100% faithfulness to source texts. Besides, the context of total fidelity of adapted texts to their sources completely defeats the function and significance of adaptation as an area of study. Against this backdrop, the theoretical framework adopted for this study is, Kristeva's

theory of intertextuality, which emphasises innovation of source text in recognition of recurring cultural and linguistic patterns, the emphasis of which become relevant to the advancement of contemporary societies across global cultures.

According to Kristeva, intertextuality is the concept of texts borrowing from each other's words and concepts. This could mean as much as an entire ideological concept and as little as word or phrase.For instance, in our daily research work, we borrow phrases and concepts from other works in our own. And that is intertextuality we are using, perhaps without knowing it. Though, it sounds intimidating at first, it is quite a simple concept really. Intertextuality denotes the way in which texts (any text, not just literature} gain meaning through their referencing or evocation of other texts. This term as developed by the post-structuralist Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, and since then it's been widely accepted by post-modern literary critics and theoreticians.

Methodology:
This study adopts the qualitative analysis research design on the selected adapted texts studied here. Data for this study are collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary source materials are the original source materials whose influence came from, such as the poems of Homer- The *Odyssey* and *llliads,* {The Greek tradition} Aeschelus, Heredotus, Senneca, Aesop Fablus, Hesiods poems, and others which include. *The Forest of a Thousand Demons* and Soyinka's *Myth, literature and the African world*. while, the secondary sources are the original source text and its adapted work, textbooks, journals, thesis, reports, novels, poems anthologies autobiographies, play texts, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines and internet sources.

Resonant Themes common to both plays that influences the adaptation is summarised thus: Theme is the underlying idea an author is trying to convey to an audience. A story without a plot, major ideas for the character and reader to experience, think through, and learn from, is not a story at all. From plot character, dialogue and staging, we derive a sense of meaning/ significance of a play. An abstraction of this meaning or theme is the central idea or theme. As readers, we reach for theme as way of organising our responses to a play. we work back and

front between its details of dialogue of their significance. As details of this play are noticed and connected, we discover and remember our sense of the play's theme changes. It is at this point that we realised that, there is a very good chance that, a play may include more than one theme. The point to note however about such interacting themes is that they are structurally related. A theme is usually executed and, consummated in a complete concise sentence. Thus, when we say, themes affect the adaptation of a source text to its newer format, it means that, there is a resonant thematic structure common to both dramatic texts (the source and its adapted one) which makes the adaptation successful.

***The Bacchae by* Euripides and *The Bacchae of Euripides* by Wole Soyinka**

The central theme Euripides captures in his play, *The Bacchae*; is that of;

D**anger looms when a man slips into error**: In fact, it is the error of highhandedness on the path of King Pentheus and his dictatorial disposition that brings on his annihilation. The play becomes a tragedy due to the error and by extension the hubris of King Pentheus's highhanded and dictatorial leadership style. It is in fact this tragic flaw that leads to the downfall of the character King Pentheus. His arrogance, over-confidence and repudiation of wise counsel are some of those reasons responsible for his destruction. The final tragic flaw which destroys King Pentheus inheres in his highhanded decision to stop the orgiastic pleasures of the devotees of Dionysus trapped in the ecstasy of worship. Finally, he is compelled to understand that he is unable to stem or arrest the move of Dionysus in the lives of his worshipers. However, his pursuit to stopping the possessed worshipers, costs him his life.

King Pentheus cannot maintain order and control over his kingdom through his rationality and intellect, because, he takes hasty decisions in anger. He spies on the possessed followers of Dionysus but, he cannot outwit them, because, the spirit of Dionysus looms larger than life in his followers. Against the warnings from his counsellors (including his own biological mother), Agave, King Pentheus goes ahead to dare the wrath of the deity. Little does King Pentheus know that he was being manipulated by Dionysus in his insistence to go and see and by extension acquiesce to the will of Dionysus. When he gets there, the bacchic spirit overshadows him. In the midst of dancing, he comes under the terrible attack at the hand of his own biological mother leading the Bacchants, all of them possessed

by Dionysus. He is torn apart into pieces. In this way, the play "*The Bacchae*" highlights the drawbacks of anger and pride as major themes. The playwright demonstrates how it can lead to tragic consequences. King Pentheus bypasses his limitations as he becomes mentally blind because of his hubris. For example; from the very beginning of the play, King Pentheus seems an arrogant character. He is confident enough that he is able to control the destiny of people and restrain them from worshipping Dionysus. He considers himself superior to the gods, therefore, he is against his followers. Despite warnings from advisors, he does not listen to their wise words and ultimately meets his death, hence, he is not only over confident but also arrogant character.

Furthermore, the character, Agave who is the mother of King Pentheus, also slips into an error. It would be recalled that her hubris leads her to kill her own son. She mistakes her son the King, for a wild desert animal.

So also, in *The Bacchae of Euripides* by Soyinka, which is the adapted version, the same theme resonates. Thus, like King Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae,* it is the error of highhandedness on the path of King Pentheus and his dictatorial disposition that brings on his annihilation. Just as in Euripides' *Bacchae*, the play becomes a tragedy due to the error and by extension the hubris of King Pentheus's highhanded and dictatorial leadership style. It is in fact this tragic flaw that leads to the downfall of the character King Pentheus. His arrogance, over-confidence and repudiation of wise counsel are some of those reasons responsible for his destruction. The final tragic flaw which destroys King Pentheus inheres in his highhanded decision to stop the orgiastic pleasures of the devotees of Dionysos trapped in the ecstacy of worship. Finally, he is compelled to understand that he is unable to stem or arrest the move of Dionysos in the lives of his worshippers. However, his pursuit to stopping the possesed worshipers, costs him his life.

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Another sub-theme is that of;

Daring the wrath of the Gods leads to fatal consequences:

It is evident that, Greek mythology is all about the powers of the gods. This is a significant theme in the play, *The Bacchae* by Euripides. The playwright demonstrates the unending divine powers of gods and limitation of human. Euripides also explores in this play that humans must be subservient to the gods. Thus, the play ends with a moral lesson that, humans cannot outsmart gods no matter what they do. It would be recalled that,the play, *The Bacchae* tells the story of the King who denies the supremacy of God. And so, the god seeks revenge on him and proves that, he is supreme. He punishes the ruling family with his utmost powers. The gods symbolise unending powers whereas the King is a symbol of limitations that are imposed on mortals.

From the foregone explanation above, we can see that, the playwright is the follower of the gods and tries to prove that humans cannot even think to disobey the gods. In case they do so, they are punished strictly in accordance with the wishes and wills of the gods. For example; Dionysus' manipulations of the minds and actions of people to achieve his goal of seeking revenge on the city of Thebes. Dionysus was denied worship by King Pentheus, which makes the god become furious and he made sure, the people do not forget him. In this process, Dionysus seeks revenge on the people of Thebes just because they deny him worship.

Again, Euripides demonstrates several powers of Dionysus the god at different moments. For instance, he makes his followers frenzied and loses their sense of reason. He raises a force against the King of Thebes. He also disguised himself as a human. He does so to convince Pentheus. Dionysus also controls the natural world. (E.g.) He causes earthquakes in the palace of Pentheus, the king and set himself free from prison. Thus, a critical analysis of this play reveals that, Dionysus' actions signify his abilities and the consequences of challenging and denying his divinity. Thus, the play creates an unending list of powers of the gods. Therefore, it is crystal clear that, daring the wrath of the gods could incur fatal consequences.

Similarly, even in Soyinka's adapted version called *The Bacchae of Euripides*, this same thematic refrain is observed. Thus, just like in Euripides' Greek society, it is also evident that Yoruba mythology is all about the powers of the gods. This is a significant theme in the play, *The Bacchae* of *Euripides*. The playwright demonstrates the unending divine powers of gods and limitation of human. Soyinka also explores in this play that humans must be subservient to the gods. Thus, like Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Soyinka's *Bacchae* also ends with a moral lesson that, humans cannot outsmart gods no matter what they do. It would be recalled that, the play, *The Bacchae* of *Euripides* tells the story of the King who denies the supremacy of God. And so, the god seeks revenge on him and proves that, he is supreme. In this process, he punishes the ruling family with his utmost powers. The gods symbolise unending powers whereas the King is a symbol of limitations that are imposed on mortals.

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Another sub-theme, Euripides treats and which Soyinka also features in his adapted version titled; *The Bacchae of Euripides* is that of;

The clash between civilisation and nature is bound to lead to chaos and destruction:

It is evident in the play, *The Bacchae*, Euripides illustrates a clash between the Bacchae and the people of Thebes. He creates a collision between the ordered rational world of civilization and the primal world of nature. The city of Thebes is a symbol of the civilized world. It is ordered as the society is governed by laws, rules and social norms. It has a strict hierarchy. Society mainly focuses on rationality and control. King Pentheus have influence over the people of Thebes and controls them strictly in accordance with rules and law. On the contrary, the Bacchae represent the natural or traditional world. They reject all the laws and social norms. They have no boundaries. The Bacchae do not differentiate men from

women, humans from animals and the living from dead while performing ritual ceremonies.

The play shows Dionysus as a symbol of destruction. He is the one who wants revenge on the people of Thebes. The King controls people by force but Dionysus manipulates them through his supernatural powers. It is then noteworthy that, the play, *The Bacchae* illustrates themes in the shape of showing a clash between mortal and mortal, gods and humans as well as the world of nature and the civilized world. Thus; examples could be seen in the following scenes;

At the time King Pentheus declines to worship the god, the theme of the clash between civilization and nature, leading to chaos and destruction starts. Thus, King Pentheus' world which is civilization and Dionysus's world of nature clashes in the play. The play also shows that the powers of mortals are not limitless, whereas, the gods have unending list of powers. Thus, there is a confrontation between the two in this play through a battle between them.

Similarly, in Soyinka's adapted version known as *The Bacchae of Euripides*, it is also evident in the play, that, Soyinka illustrates a clash between the Bacchae and the people of Thebes. He creates a collision between the ordered rational world of civilization and the primal world of nature. The city of Thebes is a symbol of the civilized world. It is ordered as the society is governed by laws, rules and social norms. It has a strict hierarchy. Society mainly focuses on rationality and control. King Pentheus have influence over the people of Thebes and controls them strictly in accordance with rules and law. On the contrary, the Bacchae represent the natural or traditional world. They reject all the laws and social norms. They have no boundaries. The Bacchae do not differentiate men from women, humans from animals and the living from dead while performing ritual ceremonies.

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Another sub-theme is;

Power warrants and sustains corruptive influences on man:

"It is often said that power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely". This is what Euripides in *The Bacchae* presented to us through the character of King Pentheus. He was so power drunk that, his actions as the King infringes on the rights of his subjects. Thus, enslaving, flogging to death, imprisoning, repugnant to advise and above all, dictatorial was his rule in Thebes. In short, the playwright portrays him as a personification of oppression and suppression. His very first statement in the play suggests that, he abhors freedom of worship. Thus, on learning in his trip abroad that Thebes has accepted a new god, he becomes furious and, on his return, orders that adherents of the god should be "Hunted down". Chained and caged behind bars of iron (p.256). And for invading his territory, he promises Dionysus the following punishment:

I'll initiate his balls from his thighs once we have him safely bound. I'll initiate that head away from his body… I'll bring an end to the cunning subversion (p.257).

A critical reading of the play reveals that, Euripides associates Pentheus "Very strongly with death, repression and megalomania" This could be seen from his handling of perceived offenders. Pentheus is shown throughout the play to be bloodthirsty, ruthless and too impatient with criticism (p.132). As a political over-Reacher, he appears fixated in his thinking about power, always acting the part of a lion. His personality is never at any point tempered with humanity. Infact, he is an arrogant leader to whom "power is all that matters' (p.261). He is not ready to countenance any form of opposition or rivalry. As his grand-father Cadmus tells us, his name means sorrow, and, throughout the play, he plans sorrowful endings

for those that he perceives to be radicals. He seldom makes any statement against these people without punctuating it with chain and pain infested words. Thus, Dionysus harps on this when he tells him: You Pentheus because you are a man of chain. You love chains. Have you uttered one phrase today that was not hyphenated by chains? Your breath chains, talk chains, think chains. Your world…..Your so – called / Kingly will (p.284). The above words portray King Pentheus as an epitome of oppression and bondage. In his Theban society, the masses cannot even speak freely. (E.g) For airing his view about Dionysus, Tiresias gets a severe punishment from the king. Orders his attendants to; Find the place where this prophet sits / faking revelations out of bird song. Thus, all these and others not mentioned about King Pentheus, Euripides is right by thinking that, power warrants and sustains corruptive influence on man.

Similarly, even in *The Bacchae ofEuripides* by Wole Soyinka, the same theme pre occupies the play. Thus, like Euripides, *The Bacchae*, **S**oyinka presented to us in his play through the character of King Pentheus, how was so power drunk that, his actions as the King infringes on the rights of his subjects. Thus, enslaving, flogging to death, imprisoning, repugnant to advise and above all, dictatorial was his rule in Thebes. In short, like Euripides' *The Bacchae*, the playwright portrays him as a personification of oppression and suppression. His very first statement in the play suggests that, he abhors freedom of worship. Thus, on learning in his trip abroad that Thebes has accepted a new god, he becomes furious, and on his return, orders that adherents of the god should be "Hunted down". Chained and caged behind bars of iron (p.56). And for invading his territory, he promises Dionysus the following punishment:

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Yet, another sub-theme Euripides deals with in his play, *The Bacchae* which Soyinka also treats in his adapted version known as *The Bacchae of Euripides* is that of;

***The Bacchae* by Euripides significantly establishes the class in Gender roles**:
In *The Bacchae*, Euripides presented this play as a male-dominated one. On the other hand, the Bacchic cult is dominated by females. The Bacchae are a group of women who follow Dionysus. Their rituals involve dancing, singing and revelry. The King of Thebes stops women from worshiping the god Dionysus. However, many women follow and worship the god of fertility. Thus, the play shows a clash between two genders, one is led by King Pentheus whereas, the god Dionysus leads the other one. It would be recalled that, from the beginning of the play, the character of Pentheus reveals as a masculine figure revealing "The class in Gender roles" as one of the sub-themes of "*The Bacchae*". He imposes the rule and law on people. He is resistant to the idea of the Bacchic cult but as the play unfolds, his resistance fades and ultimately, he adopts it. Pentheus becomes increasingly fascinated by the Bacchic cult and even wears women's clothing in an attempt to spy on them. This scene blurs the traditional boundaries of gender and highlights the fluidity of identity in the play. It also suggests that, gender roles are not fixed or static but are subject to change and can be redefined. Examples: The rivalry

between the male-dominated world of Thebes and the female-dominated world of the Bacchic cult. The male considers Bacchae as dangerous women who are against their norms, traditions, values and law. They seem dangerous to them. On the other hand, the Bacchae think that, the men of Thebes are against their social equivalence. The King of Thebes wants to make women obedient. He is of the view that, women must follow the commands of men. However, his belief in this philosophy fades as the play progresses. The changing roles of genders: Somewhere in the play, women dominate men whereas, there are many occasions where men try their best to overpower the madness of women. Pentheus mother kills him at the end which supports the idea of female dominance.

Similarly, even in *The Bacchae* of *Euripides* by Soyinka, the playwright presented this play as a male-dominated one. On the other hand, the Bacchic cult is dominated by females. The Bacchae are a group of women who follow Dionysos. Their rituals involve dancing, singing and revelry. The King of Thebes, like Euripides' King Pentheus, Soyinka's King Pentheus also stops women from worshiping the god Dionysos. However, many women follow and worship the god of fertility. Thus, the play shows a clash between two genders, one is led by King Pentheus whereas, the god Dionysos leads the other one. It would be recalled that, from the beginning of the play, the character of Pentheus reveals as a masculine figure revealing "The class in Gender roles" as one of the sub-themes of *The Bacchae* of *Euripides*. He imposes the rule and law on people. He is resistant to the idea of the Bacchic cult but as the play unfolds, his resistance fades and ultimately, he adopts it. Pentheus becomes increasingly fascinated by the Bacchic cult and even wears women's clothing in an attempt to spy on them. This scene blurs the traditional boundaries of gender and highlights the fluidity of identity in the play. It also suggests that, gender roles are not fixed or static but are subject to change and can be redefined. Examples: The rivalry between the male-dominated world of Thebes and the female-dominated world of the Bacchic cult. The male considers Bacchae as dangerous women who are against their norms, traditions, values and law. They seem dangerous to them. On the other hand, the Bacchae think that, the men of Thebes are against their social equivalence.

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Finally, another sub-theme Euripides in *The Bacchae* treats, and which Soyinka also deals with in his adaptation is the theme of;

Anger and madness as destructive and transformative forces in society:
It is evident that in the play *The Bacchae*, the playwright illustrates themes of anger and madness as destructive and transformative forces in society. It shows the hidden desires and repressed emotions of the characters. Firstly, the King of Thebes seems mad. He wants to prove himself a god despite the fact that he is only a mortal. He stops women from worshipping the god; Dionysus. The King wishes for overpowering the popularity of Dionysus amongst the people of Thebes. He becomes angry and mad to achieve his goals. In fact, it is one of the main reasons why he meets his death.

In addition, the god, Dionysus also proves himself a god. He wants to punish those who challenge his authority. He too becomes mad in sheer anger and avenges the King and his family. Dionysus destroys those who come in his way. He annihilates every person who denies his powers. Apart from the anger and madness of these two major characters, there are some other characters whose anger and madness is a transformative force that reveals hidden aspect of their identities. For instance; The mother of King Pentheus named, Agave is driven mad by the Bacchae frenzy and kills her own biological son in a moment of ecstatic violence. This act reveals the depths of her desire and rage and exposes the limitations of the social roles and expectations that govern her life. And then, again, the clash between the Bacchae and the civilized world of Thebes which symbolizes madness between these two forces

So also, in *The Bacchae* of *Euripides* by Soyinka, the playwright illustrates themes of anger and madness as destructive and transformative forces in society. Thus, like Euripides' *The Bacchae,* it shows the hidden desires and repressed emotions of the characters. Firstly, the King of Thebes seems angry and mad. He wants to prove

himself a god despite the fact that he is only a mortal. He stops women from worshipping the god; Dionysos. The King wishes for overpowering the popularity of Dionysos amongst the people of Thebes. He becomes mad to achieve his goals. In fact, like Euripides' *The Bacchae*, it is one of the main reasons why he meets his death.

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Conclusion:

We have come a long way in examining how thematic recurrence in dramatic texts influence the adaptation of source texts to newer formats**.** From the foregone analysis, it is foregrounded that both Euripides' *The Bacchae* and Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* reveals resonant themes that attracted or influences Soyinka's adaptation of the source text, *The Bacchae* by Euripides. That is to say, there is repetition of thought and ideas which can form literary sources necessary to bead apted by other society's playwrights for subject matter. We have found in oral narratives and works of other writer's materials that playwrights borrow and rework to address revolving thoughts and ideas in their drama texts. This adaptation is, therefore, motivated more by the urge to present repetitive thoughts and ideas which chart a way forward to meet the current realities.

Therefore, the selected plays under study address the issue of resonant themes between source texts and their newer formats. So far, the focus has been on the

invaluable role of theme repetition on adaptation in Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* within the tradition of literary drama.

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