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Guy Butler's *Demea*: A South African Princess against Apartheid

demea, de guy butler: una princesa sudafricana contra el apartheid

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Abstract

While the relation between classical mythology and postcolonialism may appear as an inconsistency, many postcolonial writers identify postcolonial issues in the literary reception of the classics, and look back to classical mythology and their own precolonial myths to gain a better understanding of their present. In the intersection of myth criticism and postcolonialism, this article discusses Guy Butler's *Demea*, a postcolonial drama written in the 1960s but, due to political reasons, not published or performed until 1990. Butler's play blends the classical myth of Medea with South African precolonial mythology, to raise awareness of the apartheid political situation, along with gender and racial issues.

Keywords: Postcolonial drama, myth criticism, *Medea*, *Demea*, Guy Butler, apartheid.

Resumen

Pese a que la relación entre la mitología clásica y el poscolonialismo pudiera parecer contradictoria, muchos escritores postcoloniales lidian con temas postcoloniales en la recepción de los clásicos y acuden a los mitos clásicos y a sus propios mitos precoloniales para comprender mejor su presente. En la intersección de la mitocrítica y el poscolonialismo, este artículo analiza la obra *Demea* de Guy Butler, un drama postcolonial escrito en

los años 60 del siglo pasado, pero que por razones políticas no pudo ser publicado ni representado hasta 1990. La obra de Butler fusiona el mito clásico de la Medea de Eurípides con mitología precolonial sudafricana, para denunciar la política del apartheid así como la discriminación racial y de género.

Palabras clave: drama poscolonial, mitocrítica, *Medea*, *Demea*, Guy Butler, apartheid.

1. Introduction

In recent times, postcolonial literary studies have explored the intersection between classical literature and the postcolonial world, thereby opening new creative ways to challenge the colonial discourse, a concern widely studied in some works, such as that of Barbara Goff or Lorna Hardwick. This approach provides innovative techniques to explore and identify postcolonial concerns in the literary reception of the classics and ultimately, to offer support to those who, to a different extent and manner, suffered the consequences of colonisation. The blend of local and classical myths may help convey the postcolonial writers' messages and somehow recover some of their own folklore and precolonial identity. Many examples of postcolonial drama use the Euripidean *Medea* as a fascinating classical myth that represents the subjugated subaltern. For instance, Medea fights extreme forms of patriarchal domination in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* (2001) and alcoholism and gender violence in Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea* (2007), which focuses on the situation of Australia's indigenous peoples. In these postcolonial texts, the story of Medea's filicide blends with local myth; these postcolonial rewritings enable the playwrights to question different colonial structures and attempt to recover their own cultures and traditions through the reworking of the classical story. Medea embodies the female other who subverts all traditional views of passivity. She exemplifies agency and gathers both racial and gender concerns; she is doubly colonised but wins over the colonial male, mostly represented by Jason, a practical and ambitious man. This is one of the main reasons why she still captivates the imagination of contemporary playwrights, especially postcolonial dramatists who appropriate Medea's figure and her story for what appears to be their common concern: the fight against oppression and injustice.

Among these postcolonial dramas, Guy Butler's *Demea*, written in the 1960s yet not published or performed until 1990, stands out as a politically driven work to fight racism in Apartheid South Africa. Yet, Butler (1918-2001) does it from a different position since he is not a postcolonial African subject, but a WESSA (White-English-speaking South African), a fact that first captured my attention. Considering that a WESSA postcolonial dramatist could contribute to a different perception of apartheid, this paper conducts an in-depth reading of Guy Butler's *Demea* to show how a white settler succeeds in creating an allegorical play that portrays the racial conflict in South Africa, in both local and classical terms, to attempt an outline of possible solutions.

Research on postcolonial drama has been somewhat neglected in favour of poetry or narrative, and particularly *Demea* has been largely overlooked in comparison to other South African dramas—for instance, it does not feature in *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary South African Theatre* (2015), or in Loren Kruger's two major books *The Drama of South Africa* (1999) or *A Century of South African Theatre* (2019). Therefore this paper also aims to make new contributions to postcolonial theatrical approaches and to shed some light on Butler's drama, an author who was better known as a poet and advocate of English South African culture.

The classical and the precolonial worlds may appear to be two cultures and traditions that are absolutely strange to each other, yet the reading of *Demea* proves that traditions and myths replicate themselves throughout the centuries because human traits remain the same, regardless of age, ethnicity or the environment. To illustrate apartheid situation, Butler "turned Medea into a political allegory of the South African situation as [he] saw it at the height of the Verwoerdian mania" (preface). As Wertheim puts it, *Demea* functions on "several levels of meaning: it looks back to Euripides' elemental Jason and Medea tragedy, it presents the beginnings and the hardening of South African racialist thinking in the later 1820's, it refers clearly to the institution of apartheid at the time of its actual staging in 1990 and it heralds the end of apartheid and the beginning of new social freedom in South Africa" (336). In addition, as I argue, the play offers a deep understanding of the hybrid position of a determined woman—as seen in both, Medea and Demea—who fights against a xenophobic and patriarchal environment and escapes unpunished, with the help of mythical figures that stand for justice. In the case of the Euripidean Medea, with the help of her barbarian gods, in the case of Demea, with the help of her mythical tribes.

2. The background of apartheid

Demea is set in South Africa in the beginning of the nineteenth century, a time when the first settlers, the Afrikaners— descendants of Dutch colonisers—were fighting against the British for the territory. As a matter of fact, both imperial powers colonised South Africa in different periods: the Dutch roughly from 1652 to 1806 and the British from 1806 to 1910. Previously, Portuguese explorers had arrived and explored the country in their alternative route to the silk road.

The Dutch colonists or Afrikaners, traditionally farmers and Calvinists, started out on what is known as the Great Trek, their actual diaspora. As Roger Beck explains, around 15,000 Afrikaners—men, women and children—travelled to the interior of southern Africa in the 1830s. They sought to escape from the British rule and in several groups, crossed the Orange River, seeking their own homeland (68). They did it on ingeniously designed wagons that could carry an impressive weight of household goods and were organised in various treks under different leaders. The courage of these so-called pioneers has become an important element in the folk memory of Afrikaner Nationalism. However, they caused a tremendous upheaval in the interior of the country for at least half a century, confronting and annihilating many African tribes. In the early 1840s, the British, who had never recognised the Afrikaners' independence, intervened to subdue them. In 1843, the first Afrikaner Republic came to an end (Beck 68). In this turmoil, the Tembus, a native African tribe to which the character Demea belongs, also fought against the Afrikaners, seeking independence and the protection of their own land.

As explained by Butler, "I decided for various reasons to invent a trek run on Verwoerdian principles, and to place it in the late 1820s" (preface), though he wrote it in the 1960s, at the height of apartheid. *Demea* is set in the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it clearly refers to the apartheid system, a regime of racial segregation that lasted from 1948 to 1991. It was enforced through legislation by the National Party government—like the anti-miscegenation laws, particularly the Immorality Act (1927, amended in 1950 and again later)—under which Afrikaner minority rule was maintained and the rights of the majority black inhabitants were curtailed. This legislation classified inhabitants into four racial groups: "black," "white," "coloured" (mix-raced) and "Indian," with Indian including Chinese and Malay. From 1960 to 1983, more than three and a half million non-white

South Africans, marginalised by the laws and by the white society, displaced from their homes and forced into segregated neighbourhoods in one of the largest mass removals in modern history (Beck 126). As noted by Cohen "fear of black South Africans was given 'form, mythology, and religious mystery' by the Afrikaners' Great Trek narrative" (548) and black violence was the inevitable result against such a deconstruction of reality.

The coloured people—following South African terminology—had to face not only their subaltern condition but also psychological identity issues. They were socially more relegated than other racial groups, including the blacks, who were considered purer, and for this reason, had the right to a place in apartheid society, which sought a total racial separation. Somehow simplifying the complex net of original South African tribes, Steven Myers explains that the black majority in South Africa consists of more than ten major tribal groups (which helps explain the country's eleven official languages), of which the Zulu, Xhosa, Sesotho and Tswana are the largest ones (652). Myers adds that currently, racial prejudice against the coloured people is not totally eradicated because "today, as they did under apartheid, this group occupies an uncomfortable middle ground, actively participating in the life of the nation, but with little or no influence over the direction of that life" (652). Thus, the categories of whites, blacks and coloureds, although vestiges of the apartheid era, still shape South African society and its economic, social, and cultural restructuring today, having left "a legacy of obstacles yet to be surmounted in order to allow a new sense of identity to emerge" (651).

It was not until 2 February 1990 that President Frederik Willem De Klerk unexpectedly announced the disbanding of the African National Congress and the release of Nelson Mandela, opening a period of transition to democracy. The 1994 elections and the introduction of a democratic state in South Africa opened up new possibilities for the country's drama. As emphasised by Gilbert and Tompkins, for at least "the two or three decades leading up to Nelson Mandela's 1990 release from prison, a vast majority of the country's plays were structured by a binary opposition of apartheid and "freedom"' (295).

Demea is a remarkable example of a South African play opposing apartheid. Butler wrote the play in the 1960s but could not produce it until the 1990s, due to obvious political pressures, as explained by the author himself: "as the play calls for a multiracial cast it could not be produced until the laws against which it is a protest began to loosen their hold in our theatre"

(vi). Christopher Thurman, one of Guy Butler's biographers, explains that the dramatist was a politician who fought apartheid legislation, and privately, a performer of different literary roles: professor, poet, playwright, biographer, and historian with a deep knowledge of Shakespearian and Greek tragedy (ii).

Butler is said to have promoted indigenous literature with great passion fostering its inclusion in educational syllabi and bookshops (Thurman 348), but at the same time, he was a firm supporter of the great English texts and the classics, not only because the canonical English works "were fundamental to Butler's heritage and sense of identity, but also because literature is a trans-national as much as a national phenomenon" (351). In his blend of art and politics Butler thought and rethought the racial conflict in South Africa in both local and classical terms, gathering aesthetics and contemporary conflicts. Such interplay "makes Butler a key figure in assessments of literature-under-apartheid" (349).

Albeit prolific in all genres, Butler's abundant dramatic output remains linked to history. *Demea* is a powerful work entrenched in his deep knowledge of Greek tragedy as well as in his involvement with the history of the Eastern Cape. He revisits *Medea* to denounce and raise awareness of his socio-political situation, picturing the devastating effects of colonialism. The dramatist creates a Black princess Demea, in love with Jonas, an English trader who fought the Napoleonic Wars. Jonas abandons her to marry the white daughter of Kroon, a Boer Trek leader and herald of racism. Demea and Jonas' children are coloured people, the most rejected human beings under the apartheid system; living proofs of the forbidden sexual intercourse between the white and black, both of whom were compelled to keep their purity and to be apart. The children's destiny is doomed by a regime that despises mixed-race persons and, therefore, are to be segregated and marginalised.

3. Reading the play: the blend of Medea and Demea

Demea is a black Tembu princess. The Tembu tribe, also spelled Thembu, comprises the Xhosa-speaking people who inhabit the northern boundaries of the Mzimvubu River in Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. In the mid-nineteenth century, they were defeated militarily by the whites' armies and forced to move to Gcalekaland; those who cooperated with the whites were called "Emigrant Thembu," those who did not were labelled "True Thembu" (Olson 556). It is not by chance that the late Nelson Mandela, a symbol against

apartheid, is one of the most famous and iconic Tembu members. Hence, Demea embodies the original South African black people whose land was invaded and who were deprived of their culture and traditions. Paradoxically, she also stands for the other, a stranger among the Western colonisers and somehow also amid the blacks. From the very beginning, she is at odds with both cultures—the indigenous and the imperialist. She is an orphan educated at a Western Mission Station but still in contact with her tribe, governed by her uncle. Before meeting Jonas, she lived in between two worlds, not at ease in either of them. Obviously, the protagonist is drawn from the character of the classic *Medea*, with whom she has many traits in common. In particular, they are both outsiders, strong-willed women, aristocrats in their own lands, reputed for their medical and even supernatural skills, very intelligent and manipulative. Both are also to be feared, rejected, and banned.

The play opens with a *parodos* or entrance song of the chorus, in imitation of the Greek classical tragedies, which serves to contextualise the play in time and space and simultaneously to comment on the social and political events. Two black men and a coloured one—the elderly (1820s), the mature (1950s) and the young (1990s), who symbolise the past, the present and the future—open the play, stating respectively, "something has happened [...] is happening [and] has got to happen" (Butler 1).[1] In the opening scene, there stands a stone that will acquire further significance; the play, with its circular structure, closes using the same setting. It winds up with the political winner seated on that rock, a symbolic throne.

The chorus allows two types of voices to emerge: the individual voice, which offers different views of socio-political issues, and the collective voice, which emphasises the idea of the mythical rainbow, namely that South Africa could "act harmoniously in choral unity" (Wertheim 341). In this unity, the chorus repeats the nurse's well-known opening speech in classical *Medea*: "How I wish the Argo's sails had never swept through the dark blue Clashing Rocks into the land of the Colchians" (ll.1-2), conveniently adapted to the South African story: "I wish his wagon had never outspanned at the mission" (41).

Jonas and Demea's love story is introduced by Fitz, the children's tutor (mirroring *Medea*'s pedagogue), a well-educated alcoholic Englishman who looks back to tell, in a long flashback, the circumstances of this encounter. Jonas visited the mission where Demea stayed as an orphan and was asked to take the rebellious girl back to her tribe. On their way back, they fell in love with each other; Jonas surrendered to her beauty, and Demea enchanted by

his European charm that opened a new world for her. Later, echoing Jason's charm in Euripides' version, she says: "'Your fine words promised me the world of which I had seen a little at the Mission Station: a new way between men and women, a way of the head and the heart that made my tribes seem dumb and blind'" (54).

The tutor thus keeps the unity of action, time, and place typical of Greek tragedies. His speech is also a clear example of intertextuality, inserting meaningful literary references, such as the Bible and *Ivanhoe*, in a clear allusion to nationalist fights. Both colonisers' factions, the British and the Boers, are respectively embodied by Jonas, the English trader (paralleling Jason in the original play), and Kroon, the Dutch descendant (mirroring Creon, King of Corinth). Kroon is a radical thinker, an intellectual, who demagogically and fanatically defends the separation of races. Jonas is an adventurer who, instead of the Golden Fleece, has the mission of procuring some cattle from the Tembus. Demea helps him out, causing the death of her own brother and thus displaying her strong personality and firm determination to not be stopped by anything or anyone. The fortitude, pride and overwhelming personality of Euripides' heroine are faithfully reproduced in Butler's version.

The first scene also serves as an introduction to the focal conflict—Jonas' betrayal. As in the original, this play starts in *medias res*: Jonas the British soldier, a hero in the Napoleonic Wars fought in Spain, has already decided to leave Demea—after twelve years and two sons—to marry Kroon's blonde daughter. His ambition is to succeed Kroon as the ruler of South Africa. Demea and Jonas, wedded in a tribal rite, have two coloured sons—specifically *Griquas*—George and Charles who, unlike Medea's sons, have a voice and express their opinions.

Jonas does not initially share apartheid principles, as signified by the multiracial trek that he is running. Heide Breede claims that Butler depicts two colonial ideologies, the "imaginary trek, led by Jonas, mirrors the Greek Archaic colonial ideology in much the same way that Kroon's trek (a historically accurate trek, composed of Voortrekkers) exemplifies European colonialism" (1). The latter was focused on power and the embodiment of apartheid ideology, while Jonas' trek is composed of multiracial people, representing a possible future to South Africa. However, as if anticipating somehow what happened in the transition between the Archaic period (700-480 B.C) and the Greek Classical Age (480- 323 B.C), racism emerges in Jonas' trek. As Edith Hall elaborates, although the presence of a Hellenic self-consciousness can be traced as far back as the archaic period, it was

the fifth century that saw the development of the barbarian stereotype as opposed to the civilised Greek (54). In the Classical Age, Euripides pictured this opposition in his *Medea* (431 B.C.), who fled from Colchis following Jason to Corinth, Greece. Medea will be rejected as a barbarian by the xenophobic Greeks and postcolonial remakings of the mythical heroine, like *Demea*, exploit the dramatic potential of Medea's barbaric origins.

Despite Jonas' initial love for Demea and his multiracial trek, his ambition prevails over any other concern. Jonas' betrayal can be read at two levels: certainly as a betrayal of love but more specifically, similar to oath breaker Jason's, as a betrayal of basic moral principles, more specifically still, as an English South African accepting the "Afrikaans" ideology of apartheid for the sake of economic expediency and advancement.

The racial question arises from the first time in Jonas' trek at the end of scene II. A Dutch couple, the Van Niekerks, has been expelled from Kroon's trek because they have given birth to a black son, presumably due to their ancestry. To avoid contact with black people, they do not even want to keep their child; instead, they ask Jonas to shelter him in the trek. However, Jonas has already decided to dissolve his trek and dismisses them. The following discussion between Demea and Jonas takes place:

> JONAS. I can honestly say I have no colour feeling myself, but after fifteen years I have given up. One man can't fight the prejudices of a continent. They are the toughest things this land produces, tougher than aloes and desert shrubs, deep rooted and covered in thorns. I'm a practical man, who faces facts. Respect facts, don't attempt the impossible.
>
> DEMEA. You are surrendering before the battle has begun. Listen all. Cobus, are you listening? We get hurt easily, frightened easily, because we think we are a few, but there are thousands of others like you, from here all the way to the Cape. And there are more like Jonas and me. We need to stand together, to give each other courage; that is all. Think, Jonas: a big trek, a trek with two hundred wagons, you in command; a trek for the sake of this child, for our children; all children. (25)

The antagonism between Jonas' trek, a vision of multiracial Africa, and Kroon's trek, a racist and Aryan-like Africa soon fades away. Kroon is the epitome of a demagogue who persuades Jonas with power. Butler sharpens

his pen to show how easily one can construct apparently sensible arguments that gradually indoctrinate Jonas' pragmatic mind. In their first discussion, Jonas argues, "the black people must be converted from their pagan ways and become Westerners" (11), to which Kroon quickly replies, "no, let them be Christians, but not Westerners. That would only lead to mixing of black and white" (11).

Through Kroon's character and specifically, the speech reproduced below, Butler illustrates two historical episodes: on one hand, the Boers' historical Great Trek, which headed to the north of the country, seeking their own place, and causing bloodshed and disrupting thousands of natives' lives (Campbell 22), and on the other hand, the rise of apartheid, which occurred more than a century later. Kroon, with clear Nazi traits, says to Jonas:

> I tell you Captain, if the British continue with their policy and listen to nobody but the missionaries, I shall sell my farm, this beautiful farm and trek to the north, and with me will go all I can find who share my vision: a state for white people only, who will not be spoilt or bastardise as we are being now. And what would become of the coloureds, the Griquas—these many white mistakes of a hundred and fifty years, there will be a separate land for them too. (11)

For Kroon, black and coloured people are obviously "the others." He calls them "undisciplined savages" or "bastards" (28). For example, he says, "'[w]hose shameless woman walk with their breasts bare?'" (30). In another instance, Kroon addresses Demea, telling her that they are the chosen ones: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (30). He reasons that God created different races to set them apart, to which Demea ironically replies, "And white is God's favourite colour?" (32). As Wertheim puts it, "[i]n Kroon, Butler has drawn a stunning portrait of Afrikaner thinking in which fears of alterity, xenophobia, the belief that whites are the chosen race, and the assertion that apartheid is divinely inspired are all of a piece. As in Medea, the colonizer's superiority depends on depicting the other as savage, barbaric, immoral and pagan" (343). Likewise, the Euripidean Medea is a barbarian Colchian, a "transgressive' woman [whose] overbearing nature cannot be fully understood without reference to her barbarian provenance" (Hall 203).

The issue of hybridity is clearly exemplified by the *Griquas*—the coloured people. In colonial discourse, hybridity was first a term of abuse applied to those who were not of a "pure race," but due to a clear anti-racist evolution of human thought and specifically, Homi Bhabha's development of the concept,

hybridity is now perceived as a positive concept, as an ability to negotiate the difference, to negotiate one's subjectivity. Bhabha even mentions the coloured South African subject as a clear example of this positive in-betweenness, of the difference "within:"

> This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge, which like the coloured South African subject represents a hybridity, a difference "within," a subject that inhabits the rim of an "in-between" reality. And the inscription of this borderline existence inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive "image" at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world. (*The Location* 13)

Bhabha argues that the social management of the difference for the minority is a complex ongoing negotiation that should allow cultural hybridities to emerge in those moments when society and the world are open to historical transformation. He thinks that the power of these minorities must rely "on the 'rethought' of tradition rather than on the persistence of tradition" ("Signs Taken" 2). Demea's agency, in her double status of an outsider and a woman, fractures the old traditions, and in all these scenarios, achieves an alternation in the conventional hierarchies.

After betrayal, when Kroon tells Demea the news that not only will she be abandoned by Jonas, but due to new racial separation rules, her sons will also be segregated from her, she is first infuriated. However, in a quick theatrical transition, she appears absolutely devastated, resorting to an imagery of torture and agony, as when she whispers, "as a girl at the Mission Station, I saw a picture in a book. A group of Christian men, believing their act was the will of heaven, were tearing a man apart with ropes and nails [...] they told me that Christians no longer did such things. They lied" (33).

Her overwhelming wretchedness moves Kroon. The reader/audience is also sympathetic of Demea's suffering. Despite her genuine grief, she is also manipulative; similar to her classical predecessor, she wants to gain some extra time from Kroon. Demea adulates his manly audacity, saying coquettishly, "what are twelve hours granted to two boys, to a man who is remaking Africa" (37), and using her seductive charms, she recalls how men like Jonas could only touch her with lust, not with love, prompting Kroon, "touch me then; prove I am wrong" (32). This machination works its magic on Kroon, who starts to tremble, accepting in fear and under her spell, the deferral of

Demea's departure and that of her sons. Although this will eventually lead Kroon to his death, for the time being, he thinks that he is under control, asserting, "all the chiefs have signed the treaties [...] even old Agaan, the most intelligent [...] tomorrow everyone will gather round our laager to celebrate the birth of our new world" (36). However, without delay, Demea is plotting her revenge, devising it step-by-step while reflectively repeating word for word Kroon's instructions for their departure.

Drums play a very important role throughout the play. As pointed out, African theatre is characterised by the use of dance, rhythms, and drumming; these performative tools, together with costumes and tribal rituals, are used throughout the tragedy. Drums in *Demea* are essential to planning her revenge. While she is with Kroon, the stage directions indicate that "*a high-pitched drum starts beating in the distance. Demea raises her head to listen*" (36); then again, "*another drum, deep slow, starts beating [; later,] a third drum starts beating rapidly, in erratic bursts. Demea rises to her feet. The third drum stops*" (36). Kroon can recognise the first two drumming tribes (the Baharutsi and the Batlakari) but not the third, which he cannot even hear. There, he says, only live "a handful of bush men" (37), who shall be influential in Demea's success. She has indeed heard the drums, and her plans are taking shape in her head; she will use this drumming tribe to suit her purposes, these unknown mythological tribes will help her out.

The conflict between Demea and Jonas soon explodes. She quarrels with him, echoing exactly the same bitterness expressed by the classical Medea, accusing him of lack of manliness and likewise reproaching him for his ingratitude: "It was I who made you rich and powerful. I. And what is my reward?" (54). Subsequently, providence intervenes to assist her. Paralleling Euripides' episode about Aegean (the visit of the King of Athens who provides her exit plan), Demea receives a visit from Agaan, a black chief who desperately craves a son and seeks Demea's medical skills. In exchange, she immediately asks for shelter in his kingdom. This episode is relevant for reasons related to childbearing. On one hand, it evokes the mythical imagery of the reproductive demons. This legend from Mediterranean culture portrays a type of haunting demons, generally dead women who died childless, probably the origin of the myth surrounding Medea (Johnston 45). On the other hand, Agaan (resembling Aegean in the classic) is sterile and bound to die childless, as shown in the following dialogue. His visit might be the trigger of Demea's appalling decision to murder her own children:

> AGAAN. Not to have sons is bad. The end of a family is a track that runs dead in the sand.
> DEMEA. Some families should never have been begun.
> AGAAN. To die childless, Demea, with no living son or daughter to keep one alive beyond the grave; it is dying a second time.
> DEMEA. So to take a strong revenge upon a man, you would kill his children first; make him die a double death? (58)

Butler does not identify or label the African myths and folklore that he intermingles with the ancient Medea. However, every African tribe has its own body of myths, stories and legends. Oral history and women and children constitute a crucial part of it. John Mbiti lists some of the multiple sayings and proverbs that underline the importance of motherhood in African culture:

> The childless woman goes through deep sorrows in African society. So it is said, for example: "The woman who has children does not desert her home." This means that bearing children gives the woman the security and joy of a family, of being taken care of in her old age, of being respected by the husband and the wider society. Consequently, people say: "A barren wife never gives thanks"—nothing else is as valuable as children. If a woman has everything else, except children, she would have no cause or joy to give thanks. (70)

Although the only apparent reason for Demea's infanticide is to take revenge on Jonas, in fact, when exploring the ultimate motive behind her acts of murder, the decisive cause, the symbolic one, is related to a just cause. As Kekis remarks, she kills them "because she does not want them to suffer like her, living on the brink of the white world" (41). She does not want them to live without an "acceptable" identity, being neither black nor white; she wants to spare them from the humiliation of racial prejudice. Her infanticide therefore becomes a radical act of love, not of revenge. Likewise Medea kills her children to save them from a crueller death in the hands of her enemies. As Medea reasons in a given instance, "I have determined to do the deed at once,/ to kill my children and leave this land,/ and not to falter or give my children/ over to let a hand more hostile murder them" (Euripides 1236-39). As an example that humankind story is replicated, Medea and Demea approach to infanticide evokes Magda Goebbels's murder of her six children after Hitler's defeat in WWII seeking to save them from retaliation.

Demea wants to spare her children from racist attacks such as being treated as animals, specifically as dogs. She would try to save them, as shown in the following warning to Jonas: "'Without us, without his trek, what hope is there for them? I can see them already: Charlie will be like Kleinboy, George like Cobus; not men mongrels! If you had any love in you, you would shoot them first!'" (52).

The canine references are constant, as illustrated by the chorus, composed of the coloured servants of Jonas' trek: "Are you a dog? Get up." "I am a dog myself. Two mongrels: you whine, I bite" (52). Wertheim concludes, "Kroon's philosophy destroys a notion of harmonious civilisation and realizes an energy that will metamorphose human beings into animals—more specifically into howling scrapping dogs" (344). When Demea sends her children to death, she says, "My sons! Why am I killing you? It is to save your flesh from being torn as mine is now. You will not turn into dogs" (80). Unlike the hypotext, Demea does not kill her children directly but leads them to certain death by sending them to Jonas and his new bride's wedding celebration with barrels full of sand instead of gunpowder, thus incurring Kroon's wrath and plunging them into the massacre. She has arranged with Agaan and other tribes to sabotage the wedding, resulting in massive deaths and chaos that end up with the whites' winning power. Despite her determination, Demea's farewell to Jonas is meaningful. She says, "The game is over, Jonas; won and lost" (73). For Demea means her own defeat; in all versions of *Medea*, the heroine suffers and inflicts suffering on others, but most importantly. her victory is always a defeat as she takes the lives that she gave, the dearest lives to her.

Jonas does not die but survives as a puppet without a will of his own, to be flogged and humiliated by Demea—the new authority seated on the rock throne—in a closing circular ending. In the final scene, she cries, "We have won! They thought to shape their world their way but I have shaped it mine! Now then my clothes!" (74). As the stage directions indicate, "*Throughout the following speech she is visually changed*" (74). Emphasising the symbolic oppression of the clothing, she then says: "'Help me out of these slave's clothes! Come my skins! Ha, the faint smell of woodsmoke clings to them still. My beads: Kantoni, I made these when I was sixteen, when the only whites I had seen were the gentle Missionary and his quiet wife'" (74).

This change of clothes is linked with one of the most relevant postcolonial issues treated in the play, the loss of identity. Demea's genuine self had been fading away during the twelve years when she was living with Jonas. This

altered identity is symbolically shown through the change of costumes and ornaments: "She came out of the Mission House in her tribal dress, to show she had finished with them. But the closer we got to her uncle's kraal, the less she wore her tribal dress, and the more the white woman's dress" (13).

The imitation of the whites' garments also illustrates the postcolonial concepts of ambivalence and mimicry developed by Bhabha. As he argues, the coloniser's authority renders the colonial presence ambivalent and in so doing, transforms the colonial space into an agonistic place: "despite the 'imitation' and 'mimicry' with which colonised peoples cope with the imperial presence, the relationship becomes one of constant, if implicit, contestation and opposition" ("Signs Taken" 35). In other words, ambivalence enables uncertainty and thus a form of subversion, which allows such opposition to emerge. As Bhabha remarks, the discourse on colonialism always pulls in two opposite directions. For the coloniser, the colonised are both fascinating and frightening; the feelings towards them are full of contradictions—fear and admiration or contempt and desire. This applies inversely to the colonised; they hate but admire and try to emulate the coloniser. These notions are clearly illustrated in the following dialogue between Agaan and Demea:

> AGAAN. They are not wholly evil. I have seen what the missionaries have done round Kuruman; turned the desert from brown to green; set up a school; and people our doctors had left to die are alive and happy. If I had sons, they should go there to be taught.
> DEMEA. I should curse you Agaan, but I can only laugh. You have caught the same disease as I did: you have glimpsed a wonder of gentleness and care and respect for people shining, like grass after a storm, behind their cantering horses and blazing guns. How can I blame you? But believe me, that wonder is a lie [...]. You are already their slave, because of their guns and their gentleness. Do what I say and free yourself. Remember your oath. (61)

Moral values, and more specifically, oaths and commitments, are crucial to understanding any of *Medea*'s rewritings, especially *Demea*. Medea and Demea, the first a descendant of the gods, the second a proud princess, elicit the audience's sympathy for reasons that are found in their elevated moral standards. In fact, Jason and Jonas are oath breakers who, according to Greek mythology, deserve to die childless (Luschnig 32). Actually, the core

reason for the audience's identification with both Demea and Medea, despite their terrible crimes, is that they are idealists who steadfastly comply with their own ethics. In marked contrast, Jonas (similar to Jason) is a practical man, whose pragmatism corrupts and transforms him into a man without principles, a puppet, as illustrated in the final scene: "'you are right, a puppet, half of whose strings were in Kroon's big fist, the rest in yours. Suddenly all strings are cut. I have collapsed into myself, just alive enough to know my own disgrace: true to nothing'" (84).

Racial prejudice is the pivot of the whole drama. Marginalisation is exercised not only by the white settlers but also many times, by the locals themselves, showing how productively the colonial discourse can manipulate the masses. This is made obvious in the following episode concerning Demea's sons. Their racial awareness is already so deeply rooted that when the time has come to depart, they go with the *Griquas*, rather than with their own mother, because of her blackness. Demea says, "Are you so ashamed of your mother and her people?" Charles replies, "It is not our fault that we are like this." George says, "I'm not white, and I don't want to be black." Demea retorts, "And what am I? Nothing to white father or brown sons, because I'm black. Helpless. Nothing. Black" (69). Even the two children have rivalries. Charles boasts of his fairer complexion, which enrages George. The *Griqua* servant Cobus also notices the class distinction: "Your son Charles will be high-class there, because his hair is straight; but not George" (54).

This play serves to denounce this outrageous South African historical period to a 'rainbow' audience who must listen attentively to a chorus of black people who are wearing tribal dresses, *toyi-toyi-ing* [Southern tribal dance] and performing other traditional African dance movements, while singing these meaningful words:

> AIA. I want a land where a girl does not dread.
> That her labour pains will bring her to shame
> A babe with the wrong sort of hair on his head.
> CAROLLUS. I want a land where no father abandons his child
> Because his great forgotten grandfather
> Was a mahogany slave.
> COBUS. We want, we will fight for a land
> Where thickness of lips and colour of skin
> Are not the same as original sin. (27)

4. Conclusion

Demea is a play about politics and racism, against apartheid. The appropriation of the classical figure of Medea in the 1960s, at the height of apartheid, is very brave, even more so considering that Butler was a white scholar who struggled to recover South African culture. The play encourages a criticism that makes visible an appalling colonial situation in which the settlers consider the original South African people, or even more so, the people they engendered with them, almost like animals. The play addresses identity concerns, the ambivalence of feelings between coloniser and colonised, and challenges the hegemonic, unfair white power. Considering themselves "the chosen" by God, the whites felt authorised to commit one of the most awful atrocities of modern times—banning and rejecting the righteous occupants, "the others," just because of their physical appearance, while conquering their lands and robbing them of their resources.

Demea builds an allegory of apartheid, together with the obnoxious liaison between the Afrikaners and the British, who are portrayed after quarrelling over a land that they acquired only under the unfair laws of physical coercion and war. Butler makes use of Euripides' conventions for an interplay between the classics and a highly upsetting society that emerged from a colonial situation, where the colonisers' ever-present sense of superiority repressed and despised the indigenous people, in this case, reaching the extreme of a radical separation of races. *Demea* symbolises the agency of the "female other" who, located in her motherland, South Africa, has also been hybridised, raised in a white mission, yet she will gradually recover her Tembu black identity to free her people from oppression. The killing of her coloured children adds a dramatic gesture to the tragedy but does not undermine her heroic acts. She wants to spare them from humiliation. As she says, she wins and loses but achieves her justice.

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Notes

1. Further references to the play will include the page number only.