

In 1973, Nigerian-born author Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka published an adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, retaining much of the original plot and many of the themes. In some cases, however, he alters specific scenes and characters to fit his own social and religious contexts. One of the most interesting deviations from Euripides' original is Soyinka's more masculine representation of his two main characters, Dionysus and Pentheus. With close readings of several scenes, I will examine this shift in the sexuality of the protagonist and antagonist. I will show that these varying depictions relate to each author's own cultural context: Euripides in fifth-century Athens; Soyinka in post-colonial Nigeria.

In his adaptation of the play, Soyinka associates his native Yoruba deity, Ogun, with the god Dionysus, believing that they share a "twinhood." However, since Ogun is seen as a god of war and iron and as the ideal male, Soyinka alters the character of Dionysus to make him more masculine. Assimilating the nature of Ogun into the character of Dionysus has a subtle, yet significant, effect on the rest of the play. In particular, it demands a reciprocal portrayal of Pentheus as more masculine, since both characters are often seen as "doublets" of one another (Zeitlin, 1985). For example, in the transvestism scene of Euripides' *Bacchae*, Pentheus willingly dresses as a woman to infiltrate the Bacchants' *thiasos*. In Soyinka's version, however, Pentheus' transvestism takes on an entirely different character: he never realizes that he is dressing as a woman, never embraces the female role and, therefore, never relinquishes his masculinity.

This more masculine representation of Pentheus, I argue, is bound up in the differing cultural conceptions of sexuality between ancient Greece and post-colonial Nigeria. Euripides' Pentheus can be seen as a subordinate to Dionysus in a symbolic homosexual relationship. Unlike many modern conceptions, where heterosexuality is diametrically opposed to homosexuality, in ancient Greece, the active partner is contrasted with the passive partner regardless of sex. Soyinka, however, views Euripides' play through his own cultural filter and, regardless of his own personal opinion, sees Pentheus' transvestism and feminized depiction under the category of "homosexual."

In this paper, I demonstrate that the characters of both Dionysus and Pentheus are decidedly more masculine in Soyinka's *Bacchae* than in Euripides'. By explaining distinctions between the versions in terms of cultural relativity, I show that the subtle inversions of sexual references and the relative masculinity of the two lead characters can be seen as benchmarks of complex cultural differences between the worlds of Euripides and Soyinka.