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Resistance to Sexist and Classist Ideologies in Caryl Churchill and David Lan's *A Mouthful of Birds*

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Resistance to Sexist and Classist Ideologies in Caryl Churchill and David Lan's

A Mouthful of Birds

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By

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Abstract

This thesis examines female's resistance to sexist and classist ideologies in Caryl Churchill and David Lan's play *A Mouthful of Birds*. The play revolves around the seven characters: Lena, a mother, Marcia, a switchboard operator, Derek, an unemployed, Yvonne, an acupuncturist, Paul, a businessman, Dan, a vicar, and Doreen, a secretary. The actors play ensemble roles in all scenes other than their own. Dance sequences are at the center of the episodes involving the pig and his lover, the schizophrenic and her hallucinated tormentor, and the serial killer. The play's perspective on mental illness and sexuality is strongly influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, who also wrote a monograph on the life of Herculine Barbin, as well as David Lan's own anthropological work on possession and non-western religions. The play has an unusual structure; it is a series of seven independent vignettes each focusing on a different character. It mainly shows the violent nature of females to resist the patriarchal norms and values. Appearing violently to resist the oppressive male and the society, violence is the main weapon the female characters use in this play. Here, the male characters are shown with the weaker qualities whereas, the females are encouraged to resist against the sexist and classist ideologies. Therefore, the female characters come with the sense of resistance against the ideologies.

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I. *A Mouthful of Birds* and the Issues of Class and Gender Ideologies

This research explores female resistance against sexist and classist ideologies in Caryl Churchill and David Lan's play *A Mouthful of Birds*. *A Mouthful of Birds* is a 1986 play with dance by Churchill and Lan, with choreography by Ian Spink. Drawing its themes from *The Bacchae* of Euripides, it is a meditation on possession, madness, and female violence. Churchill and Lan try to show the violent act from the side of females. The writers are trying to break the stereotypical positions of the females. They are challenging the male capitalist society through the play *A Mouthful of Birds*. This play based on Euripides' *Bacchae* and concentrates on themes of possession, violence and transformation. Caryl Churchill seems more interested in the way society tries to oppress and deform women than in their nature, issues more of gender than sex. David Lan, on the other hand as a South African anthropologist with research conducted in Zimbabwe, was particularly interested in the phenomenon of possession. His earlier plays deal with imperialism, and the conflict between invading occupiers and indigenous occupied. Here, too, is the question of imperialism: who is possessed by whom, and what does one take from the possessor.

The play *A Mouthful of Birds* has an unusual structure; it is a series of seven independent vignettes each focusing on a different characters. After every scene, a moment of tragedy of Pentheus is seen, Dionysus, a dancer, watches the action invisibly, and his kiss causes each episode's central transformation. At the play's end, the characters return to give epilogues narrating how their stories continued. The story is of seven people whose lives unfold in three sections: an introduction, an undefended day, and the aftermath. Each of the characters in some ways performs 'mainstream' roles, but each shows an undercurrent of violence that is revealed during the undefended day. In the introduction, people fit prescribed roles; by the end, they become

outsiders to fit themselves more than society. The idea of an undefended day is a time when a spirit can possess the body, or indeed, an addiction, a lover, or intense desire can possess it.

The episode includes: An unhappy wife (Lena) slowly succumbs to post-natal psychosis. She experiences command hallucinations telling her to drown her baby in the bathtub and eventually does so. Her husband is very oppressive to her. A man's (Paul) marriage and career are disrupted when he falls passionately in love with a pig at a slaughterhouse his company owns. A voodoo practitioner (Marcia) newly arrived in London is haunted by an upper crust British spirit who tries to drive away her familiar Haitian spirit guide, Baron Sunday, and eventually released to a place on the ocean where she belongs and doesn't belong. Herculín Barbin (Derek), a nineteenth century hermaphrodite, narrates the story of his transformation from girl to man. This monologue lies at the center of the play and is performed first by an actor, then repeated in identical language by a male actor. A woman (Yvonne) struggles to overcome alcoholism. She is an acupuncturist by occupation. Two Jailers must restore order in their prison when a serial killer (Dan) among the inmates inexplicably changes sex and begins killing other prisoners with magic. A female office worker (Doreen) is subject to grotesque, bloody fantasies and fits to rage. She is the one for whom the play was named. She says, "It seems that my mouth is full of birds which I crunch between my teeth. Their feathers, their blood and broken bones are choking me" (53).

Based upon 'Marxist Feminism', this research claims that the female characters in the play come to the resistance to break their stereotypical positions. Every female character in the play is possessed by some unseen power but all of the female characters are trying to escape or resist from that possession. The possession is a domination done upon female by the male patriarchal society. Violence can be seen in

every resistance. The female characters violently break the sexist and classist ideologies. On the one hand, the female characters are shown violently breaking out their stereotypical positions; on the other hand, male characters are portrayed with weaker qualities. Such as Lena, a mother and an unhappy wife kills her baby to her husband Roy's banality. His violence is revealed in freeway competition, and in dominating his wife. We see Lena taking care of old people in the end, realizing her capacity to nurture or kill. Here, we see a woman in search of self, both a victim and perpetrator of violence. Lena is a mother and touches on fears of women as nurturer and destroyers. Yvonne is another female character who is an acupuncturist by occupation. She is possessed by alcohol in her undefended day. Yvonne blurs the gender hierarchy saying, "Many people are surprised to see a woman behind this counter" (51). The male character Paul is shown with the weaker qualities as he falls in love with a pig of a slaughterhouse, his company owns. Paul dances with a pig tenderly; he loves the pig passionately and loses his family and career. An upper crust British spirit possesses Marcia, a receptionist, she resists against it and eventually released. Therefore, this research asserts that female characters like Lena, Yvonne and Marcia are very important to show resistance against sexist and classist ideologies.

In the play *A Mouthful of Birds*, the female characters are shown very dominated and oppressed, in the beginning. Later, they are able to resist, as it is a tunnel for their self-discovery. The possession of the undefended day makes them dependent characters. When they resist, they act violently. Therefore, violence can be taken as the means of resistance. The female characters use violence as the weapon for resisting the patriarchy. Lena's act of killing her own infant baby is an example of violence.

Although the female characters are dependent they are shown as violent characters too. As being a female character, Lena is oppressed by her husband's banality. Lena is a mother and a housewife, she works inside the house and her husband works outside the house. Her husband Roy, as a male superior outdoor being is quiet aware of people, politics, society and culture, but Lena sets her sense of resistance in opposition to the gender and class prejudices which is founded by the male power and the bourgeoisies in the society. Lena kills her own baby only to escape from her husband banality. Her husband always dominates her and treats her as a domestic laborer. Although her act of killing a child is violence but it shows her resistance that if she can produce then she also can destroy her own production.

The research not only assumes that Roy actively constructs Lena as a mere indoor object but also presumes that this female character breaks free from the trap of the gender prejudices; while the other female character, Marcia, who is possessed by upper crust British spirit that tries to drive away her familiar Haitian spirit guide, resists and eventually released. The female characters in the play are in the search of self-discovery through the weapon of resistance against the stereotypical positions.

The non-violent nature of female and the naturally violent males are dislocated in this play *A Mouthful of Birds*. Churchill's women are allowed to be violent and use their violence for fulfilling professional lives. Men can be women, and women men. Dionysus is a facilitator for self-discovery. Although this play is based on Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Churchill, rather than extending Euripides' analysis of the difference between men and women, collapses both into one general category: men and women alike have potential for violence. Society normally represses it; when it breaks out they learn about themselves; then they have to apply their own peculiar controls, or channel it into satisfying functions. Churchill brilliantly achieves the

recognition for her characters, which Aristotle demands of great tragedy: they suffer a change of fortune (peripeteia) through their lapse into violence but thereby they learn who they are (anagnorisis).

A Mouthful of Birds is one of the most popular plays of Churchill and Lan with a choreography of Ian Spink. Since its first publication in 1986, it has received numerous critical apprehensions from the critics given to its portrayal of 'dominated' and 'weak' female characters and strong male characters with certain 'feminine' endowments in contemporary Britannia society. The work also brings to the fore the atrocities for the society perpetrated in the name of 'weak' and 'passive' behavior. The work itself is the strong contrast to contemporary narrative, which has invited many critical voices. The wide ranges of students, university scholars and many critics have tried to interpret it from different stances and perspectives.

Caryl Churchill in her book *A Mouthful of Birds: An Introduction* opines that:

A Mouthful of Birds was a show for Joint Stock, and took Euripides' *Bacchae* as a starting point. Usually with Joint Stock shows, there was gap between workshop and rehearsal when the writer wrote the play, but as we were working with dance as well as words, we worked continuously for twelve weeks. For the writers all the time still fell into sometimes of the unusual structure roughly for the first four weeks were spent by us all looking into possession, violence and other states were people felt besides themselves; than David Lan and I stayed home and wrote, coming in with sense as they were written; last few weeks were something like a normal rehearsal. Ian Spink (choreographer) worked with the company continuously making some material before any text was written, and some to fit specifically into scenes

that were written to have dance in them. One can only get a rough idea of the piece by reading it because a large part of it was dance. (I)

Here, Caryl Churchill focuses mainly on dance, as it is the central theme of the play. The play begins and ends with a dance performed by Dionysus. A dance seduces the audience into a sensual experience. There are other dances, for instance the Fruit Ballet, in which imaginary fruit is wrenched apart and consumed. We see Dan; a minister dances people to death. Dionysus 1 and Dionysus 2 clothe Pentheus, preparing him for a sacrifice, and dance a preview of his ecstatic death. Pentheus, as a priest, has his robes put on him, but in this case, he will be the sacrificial victim rather than the sacrificing priest. The pig also dances with Paul. There is another dance called 'Extreme Happiness'. The day of possession ends in ecstasy. Therefore, according to Churchill, to get the full idea about the play one should see the 'dance'.

In this connection, Marianne McDonald while focusing on dance argues:

Churchill and Lan created *A Mouthful of Birds* for the Joint Stock Theatre Group in 1986. This was a group dedicated to maintaining originality and Joint efforts of creation, besides offering an alternative to stereotypical riskless London fare. Les waters, who were one of the original directors, also directed this production in La Jolla. It incorporates dance to convey nonverbal messages.(1)

Marianne McDonald also believes that this play *A Mouthful of Birds* is resistance against the stereotype of the nonviolent female. She agrees that the play is based on Euripides' *Bacchae* but she says that there is even more interests here than in Euripides' play in how Dionysus affects women. McDonald opines:

This play is based on Euripides' *Bacchae* and concentrates on themes of possession, violence and transformations. Caryl Churchill reacts

against the stereotype of the nonviolent female and claims that ‘there is a danger of polarizing men and women into what becomes again the traditional view that men are naturally more violent and so have no reason to change.’ She seems more interested in the way society tries to oppress and deform women than in their nature, issues more of gender than sex. The parts of the women in this play seem particularly developed, and one can easily say this is typical of Churchill’s oeuvre; here we find variations of “Top Girls”. There is even more interests here than in Euripides’ play in how Dionysus affects women. (1)

McDonald argues this play based on Marxist Feminism and claims that women are not always nonviolent; they can break their stereotypical role through violent resistance.

Cameron Woodhead analyzes the play and says, “It is a difficult pleasure to watch and a challenge to perform. Vignettes explore possession, destructive magic and the irrational through contemporary characters, while the mythic weave of Euripides’ *Bacchae* – the god Dionysus and his wild maenads, who tore Pentheus limb from- haunts action” (page 52). Woodhead relates this play with *Bacchae* and focuses upon the violence done by Dionysus and Pentheus. Woodhead tries to sum up the play in this way:

The piece blooms from the darkest corners of human sexuality and violence. A women suffering post- natal depression is driven by hallucinations to kill her baby. A famous hermaphrodite transforms from girl to man. Prison wardens muse over a transsexual serial killer. A mild-mannered secretary harbors a secret rage. Anti- capitalist and other social critique seeps in: a family man falls in love with a pig, destroying

his career; a Caribbean voodoo practitioner in Britain faces off against a spectra with a stiff upper lip. (1)

Woodhead analyzes the characters' possession, violence and transformation as the Centre part of the play. He sums up the play as he characterizes every character's roles.

Libby Worth opines that, "The challenge of this section of the play is to convincingly shift Lena out of domestic routine to infanticide. The way it is achieved, I suggest, is through maintaining several registers of interaction between Lena, the spirit and Roy"(74). Here, Worth means to say that Lena is a housewife and always does her household duties but the challenging and interesting part is when she shifts from her regular household activities to infanticide. Lena does so because of the spirit, which possessed her. Lena was trapped by her domestic rules and regulations but she breaks out and takes a violent decision to kill her baby. Worth further writes:

The pressure is increased as her distraught mental state takes physical form fighting the spirit. In these moments it is interesting that Lena shows physical strength, imagination and assertiveness, signaling the power, albeit corrupt, that leads both to the horrific murder of her baby and to the awareness, she expresses in her coda to the play, "I haven't forgotten anything. I remember I enjoyed doing it. It's nice to make someone alive and it's nice to make someone dead. Either way. That power is what I like best in the world. The struggle is everyday not to use it." In this physical encounter, the combination of desire, playfulness and violence provide a sharp contrast with domestic activity, a reference to the Bacchants' escape to a place of ecstasy and destruction. (74)

Worth explores Lena's violent act as a strong resistance to her husband. For Worth, Lena's violent act is a challenge for the domestication and oppression of females. Lena's physical strength, imagination and assertiveness are more interesting thing in the play. Lena is resisting against sexist and classist ideologies as Lena says, "It's nice to make someone alive and it's nice to make someone dead" (51). We see Lena taking care of old people in the last part of the play.

Libby Worth further says, "this play is structured around each of the seven main characters' experience of what Churchill termed an 'undefended day' in which there is nothing to protect you from the forces inside and outside yourself, while woven into these episodes are fragments of the *Bacchae*" (73). Worth argues that the main theme of the play is based on an 'undefended day' termed by authors. Because of the undefended day, the characters are possessed and acted violently. On the undefended day, there is no one to protect them. Mainly female are shown to act violently only because they have broken out their stereotypical roles.

After observing all these critical responses from different critics and scholars, it has become more relevant to make research on the issue of Marxist Feminism. The then tradition was: females must do all the household activities, they must be dominated and oppressed by the males but this play breaks out this type of tradition and make female act violently for their freedom, for their self-identity. To act violently, in the play, females are shown to be possessed by an unseen power. Not only the unseen power but also the modern form of possession has been shown in the play. Not only the spirit but also alcoholism, emotions, love, desire have possessed the characters. For instance, the spirit possesses Lena, Yvonne is possessed by her alcoholic habit, Paul falls in love with a pig, and here he is possessed by his passionate love and desire.

This is a library-based research. It has used a close discursive analytical style, which draws on the critical insights and vocabularies of literary Marxist Feminist studies. As the focus of the research is a critique on the societal deliberation, this necessitates the analysis of literary studies through the lens of many critics. While drawing on different critics, the researcher has attempted to uncover female resistance in general and Lena's revolt against her oppressive husband in particular. Lena's act of killing her own baby in the play appears to be a form of resistance against class and gender discrimination.

Marxist Feminism is the basic theoretical tool for this research. "Marxist feminists are feminists who ally themselves with the philosophical and economic theories of Karl Marx, who discovered the economic laws underlying capitalism and wrote about them in his masterpiece, *Capital*" (Gilbert 22). Feminism tries to find out the root cause of women's oppression in society and a way out from that oppression. Marxist feminism is a sub-type of feminism that sees the oppression of women and seeks its resolution from Marxist point of view.

Capitalist social system is the main cause of women's oppression in society and its way out is to dismantle this capitalistic social system. Capitalism gives rise to economic inequality, dependency, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, which is the root cause of women's oppression. Marxism can be used to help us understand, "How economic forces have been manipulated by patriarchal law and customs to keep women economically, politically and socially oppressed as an underclass" (Tyson 93). Marxism, which is used to understand the feminist issues, economic, political and social, is called Marxist Feminism. Thus, one of the primary task of Marxist feminism "is to create the kinds of world in which women will experience themselves as whole persons, as integrated, rather than

fragmented or splintered, beings” (Tong 45). Gender inequality is the production of capitalism and determined by capitalistic mode of production.

We live in a, as Philip says, “class society that is also structured by gender, which means that men and women experience class in different ways” (qtd. in Bryson 258). For Marxist feminist gender oppression is class oppression and women’s subordination is seen as a form of class oppression. It believes that women’s situation in society cannot be understood in isolation from its socio-economic context as the Marxists see the alienation of labor from work, self, human beings and nature. Women are also alienated from sex, self, children and from whole surroundings. The end of alienation requires communism. Therefore, in the society the end of patriarchal domination requires communism. As the classless society emerges the class, discrimination and gender discrimination will be diminished. Because when the classless society is established all people become equal and property will be distributed equally to everybody. Then only in such society, women get their proper place and equality. In this context, K.K. Ruthven writes: “Marxism identifies capitalism (and the modes of production which support it) as a material base of a class system which is the source of all oppression, and holds that the specific subject of women will end necessarily in that general dismissal of oppression which is to follow the destruction of capitalism” (28). In capitalistic system, relationship between employer and employee is similar to the commodity and its owner. Capitalists have everything but proletariats have nothing except their labor. This is the wage for their emancipation. When proletariats come to know that they are exploited, they are not getting proper wage they try to find out where and how they are exploited. Then they revolt against the exploitation imposed upon them. The class-consciousness inspires them to revolt against every kind of injustice. They revolt freely because they have nothing to lose but

bourgeoisie have everything to lose. Then they establish classless society, which is a society of every people. In such society, women also get equal chances. Then, hierarchy less society emerges. That is the result of class-consciousness.

Nevertheless, capitalists, also represent patriarchy, exercise to create false consciousness to establish their empire. They try to hide all kinds of discriminations and injustice. Workers work very hard for the production of the factory and produce a large quantity but “none of them bore which name or any other mark of their individual contribution” (Tyson 58). So, the workers are alienated from the product. They find the work unpleasant but they are bound to do their work: “when the potential source of a workers’ humanization becomes the actual source of his or her dehumanization, the worker is bound to undergo a major psychological crisis” (Tong 44). Therefore, workers are alienated from themselves. Workers are alienated from other human being as well, because they see around them their co-workers as competitor for job and promotions as the capitalistic economic system encourages. This sense of competition for job and promotion alienate workers from their co-workers. In this system finally workers are alienated from their nature itself “because the kind of work they do and condition under which they do, it make them see nature as an obstacle to their survival” (Tong 44). Therefore, they are alienated from nature itself also because of capitalistic economic system. Therefore, the most important aspect for elimination of alienation is the eradication of capitalism that will help women also to emancipate from patriarchal domination.

Marxist Feminists find similarities between male/female in the family and bourgeoisie/proletariat in society. Husband, father or male member in a family is like bourgeoisie in society and wife in a family is like a proletariat in society. It does not mean that women are suffering only within family but family itself is initiating point

for women domination. Women are being exploited in the society because of patriarchal norms and values, which are construction of economic power position. Women are the victims of men's comfort and "man's control of women is rooted in the fact that he, not she, controls the property, the oppression of women will cease only with the dissolution of the institution of private property" (Tong 49). Women are unable to practice their freedom and desire. Their needs and feelings are condemned to be suppressed because property is in the hands of patriarchy, which believes that there is no desire of women different from men's. Therefore, women are being exploited sexually, psychologically, physically etc. The root cause of such oppression is the economic system of the society.

Concisely, Marxist Feminism, a theoretical discourse advocates for the rights of women based on gender and class equalities. Its purpose is to give an insight to liberate women from class and gender oppression. For this purpose, the theory attempts to show how women are oppressed, exploited and objectified in the patriarchal society. This doctrine redefines women's activities and goals from a female centered point of view and refuses to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority that reduces women to the domestic level, a second sex, and a submissive other.

The primary objective of this research is to show the women's resistance against the gender and class prejudices which has long been in the society. The female characters in the play are shown violent as if it was a tunnel for self-discovery. Lena as a female character resist violently against her oppressive husband by killing her child. The male as a bourgeoisie, oppressed the females as a lower class citizen, in the play. This research work tries to expose how a woman finally resists the class and gender oppression and stands up against the whole system.

This research has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents a brief introduction, including its literature review along with a discussion on the propriety and significance of topic and its hypothesis. The first chapter also discusses about the Marxist feminism, the tool applied to this research work. The second chapter deals with main issue of the research and applies the theoretical tool to prove the hypothesis. The third chapter compares and contrasts Euripides' *The Bacchae* with *A Mouthful of Birds*. It focuses on the significance of rewriting *The Bacchae* in a new way, in new context. Finally, the last chapter concludes the research on the basis of chapter two.

This research presumes that the female characters, those who are possessed by different unseen powers, try to drive away the very power and resist and eventually released. The female characters in the play are in the search of self-discovery through the weapon of resistance against the stereotypical positions.

II. Critique of Classist and Sexist Ideologies

This research tries to unveil the status of women in general; they have been treated as inferior in the patriarchal tradition and capitalistic society. Most of the female characters of *A Mouthful of Birds* have been victimized frequently in the name of patriarchal norms and capitalistic values. Patriarchy is the system of the society in which men control women's bodies and labor. Women in patriarchy do not have equality and freedom. Although the norms and values of the patriarchal society are not dead, the women are being able to resist through different means. Although the male characters try to oppress the female characters, they are able to resist upon the oppression. Using the different means of resistance, the female characters, finally, are able to resist. Although the female characters are not satisfied with, the resistance but also we can take their courage and resistance as the main issue of the text.

Lena, the female character of the play, has killed her own baby only because the spirit had told her that if she wants to be free from her oppressive husband than she must kill her own baby. To kill her own child is not the satisfaction but the resistance against her oppressive husband, which was out of toleration. Yvonne, another female character of the play, shows her violence and resistance when a patient of her fell asleep, rather than paying attention to her ministrations. Here, we can say that the rule is that always the women should have the quality of toleration, she must listen what the male expresses. However, Yvonne, here shows her violent behavior when she is saying something and the man is not listening carefully.

Feminism tries to find out the root cause of women's oppression in society and a way out from that oppression. Marxist feminism is a sub-type of feminism that sees the oppression of women and seeks its resolution from Marxist point of view. Marxism, which is used to understand the feminist issues, economic, political and social, is

called Marxist Feminism. Thus, one of the primary task of Marxist feminism “is to create the kinds of world in which women will experience themselves as whole persons, as integrated, rather than fragmented or splintered, beings” (Tong 45). Gender inequality is the production of capitalism and determined by capitalistic mode of production.

Women are mostly confined in household activities and they are not allowed to go out and work because their strength, skill, ability are taken inferior to the male infect which is not real but general assumption. Women are doing household activities without any payment. Their work plays vital role in outside work before than the males of society because they pave the way for outward activities and make base for industry. This is why Rosemarie Tong argues:

No women has to enter the productive work force, for all women are already in it, even if no recognizes the fact. Women’s work is the necessary conditions for all other labor from which, in turn surplus value is extracted. By providing current (and future) workers not only with food and clothes but also with emotional and domestic comfort, women keep the cogs of the capitalism machine running. (54)

Therefore, some Marxist feminism asks for the wage for their household activities. They say that from the production of capitalistic factory of from surplus value some amount of money should be given to women. State should pay for housework of women. Tong brings this Marxist feminist concept from MariarosaDalla Costa and Selma James, who, “proposed that the state (the government and employers) not individual men (husbands and boyfriends), pay wages to housewives because capital ultimately profits from women’s exploitation” (55).

Actually, women do not get such kind of wage nor their housework is taken as actual work. Therefore, women get neither any respect for their housework nor any wage. That is the cause of alienation of women's self. In capitalistic society, workers are like commodity and in patriarchal society; women's place is also like marketable thing. Men use women as they want and are benefited according to their will.

Except housework, women have to perform their natural works. One of them is childbearing which women's unquestionable task is. Nevertheless, in patriarchal society childcare is also women's essential work. They give birth and bring up the baby but male members do not take it vital work and if any woman does only child caring in the house she is called workless. However, the father or may be so called father takes away the child when he wants. This injustice is in patriarchal society. Angles say, "Women give birth, the mother of any child is always known.

However, the identity of the father is never certain because a woman could have been impregnated by a man other than her husband" (qtd. in Tong 49). Later this child, if male, tries to control mother.

Patriarchal society does not seek strict marital fidelity from males simply because in family males' condition is similar to the condition of capitalists in society. As workers are commodities in capitalistic economic system. Women are commodities in family because of influence of capitalistic social system. Angles says, "If wives are to be emancipated from their husband, women must first become economically independent of men" (qtd. in Tong 49). For that dismantling of capitalistic economic system is needed where exploitation of labor is working very strongly. By this reason, women are suffering from the adjective like weak, passive, emotional in patriarchal society.

Women are treated as commodity in capitalistic society. They see freedom but cannot experience it. In family, their voices do not get any place where her husbands,

boyfriends, fathers, and other male members are dictators. Their relatives, supposed nearest persons try to impose their desire upon women. Therefore, they feel alienated from nature and surroundings. Working-class women are more suppressed than the higher or bourgeoisie class women because the higher-class women treat working class women badly and working class men also try to manipulate working class women according to their will, but bourgeoisie women suffer only from the male members of their own class. Similar is the condition of black women. First, they have to face racial discrimination and then patriarchal discrimination.

Before marriage and after marriage women become the victim of sexual exploitation. Marxist feminist Catharine Mackinnon compares sex to work, capitalistic to man, worker to women, commodity to sex/ women, capitalist accumulation to male sexual desire etc. There is no place for women's sexual desire in the society. If a husband or boyfriend wants to have sexual relation then that is desire of wife/ girlfriend also. Tong brings the concept of Marx and Engels and sees "marriage as a form of prostitution, Marx and Engels implicitly accepted that the services that can be prostituted are not limited to sexual service. Child care and emotional support are also services sold by the prostitute- wife" (64). Therefore, in patriarchal society husband-wife relationship is like "pimp- prostitute" relation, which is similar to the bourgeoisie-proletariat or employer-employee relationship. Marriage relation itself is the beginning of exploitation. Men use women whenever and where they want because men can buy women easily, as a capitalist can buy a work or who does not have money because men/ capitalist are property owner. That is why; women are commodity for men, in patriarchal society, women are source of economy in the family. Men in power for their own profit, success and pleasure exploit women.

Tyson argues, “How economic forces have been manipulated by patriarchal law and custom to keep women economically, politically and socially oppressed as an underclass” (qtd. in Tong 49). Women in the patriarchal society always become the scapegoat of patriarchal laws and customs. Women are unable to practice their freedom and desire. Their need and feelings are condemned so they are suppressed because property is in the hands of patriarchy. Therefore, patriarchy is in a power in the society formulating laws and customs against women kind. Patriarchy formulates different institution such as marriage, customs and tradition and regulates in such a way that becomes means to exploit the women.

Almost all the female characters of the play have been suffering from the male domination and the patriarchy society and of course, they too tried to resist the same form of so-called male supremacy and the patriarchy society. The play is the story of seven different people, unknown to each other but their resistance seems to be the same. From the very beginning of the play, Lena is shown as very dependent and obedient character. She seems to be very loyal to her husband. She afraid to skin off the rabbit, her husband brought. She shows her love towards the rabbit which was killed by her husband. She fears to skin off that rabbit but her husband does. Here, we can analyze that male are always violent by the nature but not the women. On the other hand, the other female character, Yvonne, is shown as the butcher and acupuncturist. So, the playwrights, Churchill and Lan try to blur the sexist hierarchy in *A Mouthful of Birds*.

To become a mother is the most precious experience in every woman’s life. The mother not gives birth to the child but also takes care and gives love to live the life for her child. Every mother wants to give all her love and happiness to her child.

Children are the weakest point of every mother but sometime they can be the reason for the strength too. Nancy Chodorow explains:

Women mother. In our society, as in most societies, women not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility for infant care, spend more time with infants and children than do men, and sustain primary emotional ties with infants. When biological mothers do not parent, other women, rather than men, take their place. Though fathers and other men spend varying amounts of time with infants and children, fathers are never routinely a child's primary parent. These facts are obvious to observers of everyday life. (83)

Lena's husband works outside of the house but Lena always stays at home, prepares breakfast, lunch and dinner for her husband and takes care of her child too. She even becomes afraid to skin the rabbit. She is very loyal to her husband but her husband is oppressive to her and her child as well. He never seems taking care of the small baby. It looks like he does not care to the child. But Lena kills her lovely child to be free from her oppressive husband. Lena, as a mother, killed her own lovely child to get rid of her husband's banality.

To kill her own baby seems little violent but she uses this violence as the means or weapon to resist against the patriarchy. In the last part of the play, we come to know that Lena is happy what she had done. The following monologue spoken by Lena proves this:

Every day is a struggle but that's all right. Old people are very tiring. I am not squeamish, I used to be, could not kill a rabbit; I deal with sick and shit every day. I am not frightened of anything, I walk alone at night, throw him over my shoulder if I have to. Some of the old ladies

know me; some of them don't know anyone. You can get fond of them. You tuck them up like babies. Every day is like struggle because I have not forgotten anything. I remember I enjoyed doing it. It's nice to make someone alive and it's nice to make someone dead. Either way. That power is what I like best in the world. The struggle is every day not to use it. (51)

Lena kills her own child to free herself from an oppressive husband. His banality is one of his most oppressive tools. His violence is revealed in freeway competition, and in dominating his wife. She thinks she will escape from a spirit that says negative things about her and her husband, if only she will kill her child. She kills the child, but is not free from the spirit. It is her permanent demon. We see her taking care of old people in the end, realizing her capacity to nurture or kill. Here we have Churchill and Lan showing us a woman in search of self, both a victim and perpetrator of violence. She is a mother and touches on fears of women as nurturer and destroyers, something we might call the Medea Syndrome. This syndrome was well illustrated by Bob Wilson in his *Deafman Glance*, based on Euripides' *Medea*: a mother brings her child a glass of milk, and then kills him with a knife.

The another female character of the play Marcia, a receptionist, tries to blur the hierarchy between the upper class and lower class through the spirit which captured her. Marcia is originally from Trinidad, who becomes a medium in her undefended day. She is possessed by Sybil (aptly named after her classical predecessor), a 'spirit from the white upper- middle classes,' but also acts as the conduit for a spirit called Baron Sunday. At the end of the play, she speaks:

My boat is twenty foot long, twelve foot wide, too small to sail far out.
Longing cannot carry over water so a short way from the land is far

enough. Alone I need nothing. What I want I order with my radio. Hearing voices gives me pain but to test my strength sometimes is good. If I go ashore, they'll ask my name. I could tell them- oh, what I could tell them. Horror. What for? At sea, at night the air is silent. I listen. I hear nothing. I am full of joy. Of course, the rocks speak. That's quite different. Most days I sleep. My wish is that I'll never wake to see the sky without a star. (52)

Marcia loses her power at the end and Sybil takes over. At the end she is on a boat and hopes she'll 'never wake to see the sky without the star.' This could be a paradigm of imperialism and the outsider. The white occupier takes over and the native is suppressed; she imitates the oppressor as she did in the introduction, taking on the 'imperial' accent. Marcia is a voodoo practitioner who is newly arrived in London. She is a switchboard operator who often talks in her West Indian accent in telephone with her friends. (West Indian accent) "You there ... so my boss asked me, British spirit who tries to drive away her familiar Haitian spirit guide, Baron Sunday. Finally she is released to a place on the ocean where she belongs and does not belong. She floats and adapts. She is the outsider who finds a place, but never a static one. Here, she eventually frees herself from the upper class spirit.

The next female character Yvonne is one of the strong female characters of the play *A Mouthful of Birds*. Her occupation is very strange and strong in then capitalist society. In the capitalist society, the workers work without wages. The bourgeoisie used to capture all the production of the workers. The females are supposed to work in the field. They cannot work whatever occupation they like but they are forced to work whatever their husband or the patriarchal society want. However, the female

characters in Churchill's play are shown very bold. The critique Heidi Hartman argues in her essay "Capitalism, Patriarchy, And Job Segregation By Sex":

The division of labor by sex appears to have been universal throughout human history. In our society, the sexual division of labor is hierarchical, with men on top and women on the bottom. Anthropology and history suggest, however, that this division was not always a hierarchical one. The development and importance of a sex-ordered division of labor is the subject of this paper. It is my contention that the roots of women's present social status lie in this sex-ordered division of labor. It is my belief that not only must the hierarchical nature of the division of labor between the sexes itself must be eliminated if women are to attain equal social status with men and if women and men are to attain the full development of their human potentials. The primary questions for investigation would seem to be, then, first, how a more sexually egalitarian division became a less egalitarian one, and second, how this hierarchical division of labor became extended to wage labor in the modern period. (206- 7)

Being a female of the then patriarchal society, Yvonne has chosen her job as an acupuncturist. The ideology of the then society was, whatever the male person wants a female to do, and the female should have done that job. Female were supposed to do only the household and the fieldwork, without any wages. As Heidi Hartman says, "the sexual division of labor is hierarchical, with men on top and women on the bottom", the fact is that, women are always under the control of men, they are not free to do even the work according to their will.

Moreover, Hartman continues:

Many anthropological studies suggest that the first process, sexual stratification, occurred together with the increasing productiveness, specialization, and complexity of society: for example, through the establishment of settled agriculture, private property, or the state. It occurred as human society emerged from the primitive and became “civilized”. In this perspective capitalism is a relative latecomer, whereas patriarchy, the hierarchical relation between men and women in which men are dominant and women are subordinate, was an early arrival (206- 7).

One of the strong female characters of the play Yvonne is an acupuncturist. In the play, she is the significant character to show the resistance against the patriarchal society. She is an acupuncturist by occupation. She becomes angry when her patient fell asleep when she was talking with him. She is butcher as well. Yvonne is possessed by her addiction to alcohol. She becomes butcher and couples her need for violence with a talent for identifying body parts. In the introductory episode, we saw her violent when a patient of hers fell asleep, rather than paying attention to her ministrations. Perhaps the animal victim satisfies her drive for control, and the needle is well exchanged for a knife. She also escapes the gender stereotype saying:

Many people are surprised to see a woman behind this counter. They look round the shop. Where’s the butcher? I have a feel for the strengths of a body. All the men know it. They ask me: slit here or slit there. I close my eyes. Feel. Slit there. When I was young, I’d dream. I’d wake and forget. Now I sleep, wake, I’m here. Half of kidneys, pound of stewing. Chop chop! (51)

Caryl Churchill and David Lan try to show the weak part of the male as well. Most of the male characters in this play are shown as the weak characters. The entire male characters who are introduced in this play are possessed by some kind of unseen powers. Although the female characters are too shown as possessed as the male characters, the female characters are shown strong at last. Jennifer J. Dellner argues that:

In what first appears as the delusion of an overworked trader in pork futures, Paul, but naturally is real ---Paul becomes possessed with his love for one of the things he has always defined himself by wishing to kill: a pig that he unsuccessfully tries to save from the slaughterhouse. However, his love is destructive of first his marriage, then his career, Paul is not presented by *A Mouthful of Birds* as a Pentheus figure "subverted" only to obliteration and death by his Dionysian encounter, but rather becomes one of the two Dionysus who preside over the killing of Pentheus in the final murder of the play; Paul/Pentheus dies, but Paul/Dionysus lives to reclaim and remember the experience of his ecstasy. (1- 2)

Paul is one of the male characters in the play *A Mouthful of Birds*. He is a business man. He falls in love with a pig he is not able to save from his slaughterhouse. But when he rescue the 'corpse', he peels off its wrapper, and it raises to dance with him. This is magic realism with charming kinkiness. His marriage and career both are disrupted. At the end, Paul is shown as alcoholic and waiting for a potential love. His fable has ended with loss; he has only dreams and continual possession by his addiction. Possession in this play can be good and bad. At the end of the play, we see Paul drinking alcohol and saying:

When you stop, being in love the day is very empty. It's not just the one you loved who isn't exciting any more, nothing is exciting. Nothing is even bearable. So it wasn't till then that I left my wife and my job. I can't stand small pleasures. If there's nothing there's room for something to come. Sometimes on my third scotch I'd wonder if now...so I continued with the scotch. Days are quite long when you sit in the street but it's important not to do anything. It may not be love next time. You can't tell what it's going to be. You're lucky if once in your life. So I stay ready. (52)

The next male character, Dan, a minister, is another of the ambivalent characters. When he is arrested, the police cannot tell whether he is male or female. He dances people to death, choreographing for them their private joy. He is a serial killer using pleasure as his murder weapon. For a while, Dan is aptly Dionysus. At the end, we see him with his garden. He talks about it being green now, whereas barren before. Earlier a prison guard seems to be quoting a confession: 'My plan was that they should all be good deaths... To die of pleasure, like a young boy slipping through the mirror of a mountain stream. There are the deaths the earth needs to grow strong.' By the end, Dan's garden is growing very well. He says:

Can you believe this was all sand? The most beautiful garden I know is an oasis, high walls round it, peaches, nectarines, figs, the gardener makes sweet syrups from violets and roses. These fields don't compare. But if you see it before. I can't tell you what a day it was when I woke up and saw the first green. (51)

To show the female character strong the playwrights have shown the male characters

weak. Most of the male characters are shown dependent and weak in the comparison of female characters. Derek is one of the most ambivalent characters in the play. Derek is unemployed, so he works out; his concern with body is clear. He is possessed by Pentheus, and threatens violence against Dionysus. Herculine Barbin, a French hermaphrodite from the nineteenth century, also possesses him. He experienced a sex change. Doreen who has become Agave also dismembers him as Pantheus.

His transformation leads to daily satisfaction, the comfort of being 'in love with a lion – tamer from Kabul'. Contrary to the original pentheus, who was dismembered and died, he has been dismembered to gain a body and live. In the last scene of the play he says:

My breasts aren't big but I like them. My waist isn't small but it makes me smile. My shoulders are still strong. And my new shape is the least of it. I smell light and sweet. I come into a room, who has been here? Me. My skin used to wrap me up, now it lets the world in. Was I this all the time? I've almost forgotten the man who possessed this body. I can't remember what he used to be frightened of. I'm in love with lion-tamer from Kabul. Every day when I wake up, I'm comfortable. (52)

He is possessed by the nineteenth century French hermaphrodite named Herculine Barbin. He gives the long monologue which lies in the central part of the play. As he experienced a sex change, he is satisfied with his body. He never tried to resist for his changed sex, thus, suggesting that male are so weak and do not resist on the injustice of his body structure and satisfied with whatever he has got. Carryl Churchill, here defends the stereotypical of women and introduces the weak role of men. She has proved that until and unless women overthrow the norms and values of patriarchy and capitalism, the pathetic condition of women will remain the same. In order to get rid

of male's suppression; they have to be awakened from the long sleep of false consciousness. They should be made aware that they need to revolt against the patriarchal tradition and resist the concept of patriarchal superiority to change their status in male dominated society.

In the capitalistic patriarchal society women are treated as commodity. In family, their voices do not get any place where her husband, boyfriends, fathers and other male members are dictators. Their relatives, supposed nearest person try to impose their desire upon women. They are not supposed to develop their own interest. They have to rather follow what their fathers decide and what their husband desire. Women are exploited and oppressed by the males. They are considered as different from men. They are forced to fulfill men's purpose and expected to serve men. The feminist scholars define the term 'patriarchy' as "the rule of father, including the role of older man over younger men and of fathers over daughters, as well as husbands over wives" (284). It's the historical process formed by men and women with patriarchal family serving as a basic unit of organization. Kate Millet, in her sexual politics, argues that patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male increasing self-realization and gaining empowerment.

Considerably, resistance is a kind of struggle, weapon, reformation and energetic power to achieve the right. It dominates all the traditional values, systems and brings the enlightenment and light in the mind of women. So, it is a way of revolution to achieve the right and value of women.

Resistance refers to the revolt against the unjust and established evilness of patriarchal society. It brings the new things breaking the traditional systems for the justification of women's right. It is the term, which is similar to the revolution and helps to fight with notions, thoughts and ideas to dig out the traditional thoughts. Therefore, it

is major kind of fight with thoughts to invent the new systems. Only the hounded and bold woman can resist the whole tradition and the society. Lena, in this drama is the good example of social rebel that can resist the established patriarchal norms and values.

When there is suppression, there must be resistance. Suppression and resistance go side by side. In the society, when the powerful authorities of forces suppress others, resistance is obvious eventually. Nevertheless, resistance often emerges from others when they are suppressed. Resistance for what? Resistance for injustices and against the oppressors. While talking about female resistance, it is merely concerned with the issues of women's independence, identity, autonomy and selfhood. Female resistance to the injustice of males in the capitalistic society and to the domination of patriarchal society.

Resistance is a form of revolt, struggle, weapon, reformation or energetic power, etc., directed against any type of unjust to attend the just. It dominates all the traditional values and systems, and attempts to bring about the enlightenment and light to all. It adopts various forms as per the nature of the repression or oppression. After all, the oppression gives birth to the resistance. Most generally, resistance refers to the revolt against the unjust and established- evilness of patriarchal society.

Resistance can take place in many places in many forms, but here we are focusing upon the women's resistance that is against the gender prejudices which has long been in the society. It can bring the freedom to the women by dismantling the traditional patriarchal domination. The term 'resistance' can resemble the revolution and might assist in fighting with the ideas, thoughts to bring forth the new system- the system of women's freedom. This type of resistance can be intellectual in the sense that only women of wisdom pose themselves against it. Resistance is mainly

concerned with the reformation of the society, that is, the reformation of the patriarchal society. Hence, it is a revolution in favor of women against men.

The world was and is still under the control of men and they manipulate the women the way they like. But now when the idea of feminism is heard everywhere, women have begun to raise their voices against the male. It is only with the power of resistance that women can establish their rights in the society. We can say that resistance is a natural instinct that creeps into the mind of women when they find their position in the society critical. When they are oppressed more, they come up with the idea of resistance with a view to bring up changes in the established society and, thereby, creating the favorable female framework. Resistance does not come about per se; for it, the fatal waves of male oppression have to go to the optimum level. When resistance, indeed, turns up, it endeavors to shake and dig out the long-rooted evilness of male domination.

Obviously, women do not resist for anything. Rather they are compelled to it. The radical idea of resistance has begun in the twentieth century. The dissemination of education, knowledge and their conscious souls make them resistant. The radical outbreak of education has made them aware of the human rights that men and women are equally liable to. They become very conscious of the idea that each human being is born with equal freedom and that they are not to be deprived of it by other. This consciousness has encouraged them to revolt against any type of oppression and domination. At the same time, it is the instinct of all human beings- be it man or woman- to lead an independent life. In this context, when woman are not even able to live their own life, it is justifiable on their part to resist the patriarchal domination. In fact, women resist for the justification of their rights and want to change the unjust rule that has snatched their rights. They want the equality of rights and want to change the

unjust rule that has snatched their rights. The equality of rights and privileges between man and woman is what the resistance of women aims to realize.

The play consists of both resistance and the weak female, which is obviously the breaking of the stereotypical role of both male and female. The playwrights have chosen the violent way to resist the stereotype role of women. Almost all the female characters go through the violent way to resist the male domination. Lena, one of the most important female characters of the play has chosen the violent way to resist her oppressive husband. She decides to kill her own baby, as she was suggested by the spirit to do so. Although she is guided by the spirit, she does the thing which eventually leads her to loneliness. At last, she values the opportunity of the caretaker of old people and remembers her experience of motherhood. She is satisfied with what she has, but still she realizes what she had done with her child.

The class conflict is also shown in the play as the part of resistance. Marcia is originally from Trinidad, she is possessed by Sybil (aptly named after her classical predecessor), a 'spirit from the white upper-middle classes', but also acts as the conduit for a spirit called Baron Sunday. Here, it is shown that the white occupier takes over and the native is suppressed; she imitates the oppressor taking on the 'imperial' accent. Finally, she is released to a place on the ocean where she belongs and does not belong. She floats and adapts. She is the outsider who finds a place, but never a static one.

The play has shown the bold role of all the women but the weak role of the male characters. This play has broken the stereotypical role of women and has shown the muscular men in the weak part. Although almost all the characters are possessed by some kind of unseen power, they are shown as they are satisfied with what they have achieved. Whatever destruction takes place in the play, are the result of the

violence nature of the women, that is, their weapon through which they are able to resist the stereotypical role of the past.

III. Appropriation of Euripides' *Bacchae* and *A Mouthful of Birds*

The play *A Mouthful of Birds* by Caryl Churchill and David Lan is loosely based around the themes explored by Euripides in *The Bacchae*. Both plays share similar themes and issues, yet contain many contrasting characters and circumstances due to the modernization or appropriation of *The Bacchae* into a post-modern theatre piece for a contemporary audience with different views, morals and beliefs. The plays both concentrate on themes of violence, possession and realities of life. *The Bacchae* demonstrates this mainly through the Bacchaen women who are assumedly possessed by a power or spirit, that of the God Dionysus whom they worship. They are possessed by a madness that causes them to act violently and erratically, for example when Agave is taken over by this madness she kills her son without realizing who he is (pg. 735 of *Thea 111 collected plays Handbook*). *A Mouthful of Birds* contextualizes modern forms of possession (addiction, anxiety, memory, passion etc.) within the Euripidean paradigm of the relation between pleasure, power and violence.

Although the basic themes are similar, the execution of the plays onstage in their respective times made both productions entirely different. *The Bacchae* is often seen as a play that openly mocks women and the ease at which they embrace hysteria. Considering that in its time a caste of all male actors performed it an underlying sarcastic element of humors is presented. Thus, the play carries the theme of hysteria (mainly in women) and possession by spirits, madness and passion, yet perhaps in a slightly less serious way than *A Mouthful of Birds*. The female roles in contemporary plays have now, become equal to that of male actors. In the period leading up to and surrounding the writing and production of a *Mouthful of Birds*, there was controversy surrounding the stereotype of the non-violent female and the dominant male in society.

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, Paul is shown as the weak character, which is unable to control his emotions and personal desires- an attribute seemingly possessed by females. The Bacchae needed to conform too many traditions- such as an all-male cast, themes of religion and worship of the God's as well as customize to the allocated space of festival. Yet, the difference is that the acts of violence are seemingly random in *A Mouthful of Birds*, whereas in *The Bacchae* the victims are specifically chosen because of their action.

A Mouthful of Birds, being a post- modern piece, was basically open to manipulation of characters, script, theme, setting and overall execution. The themes in *The Bacchae* may be better understood if one realizes what they mean if appropriated to modern themes. Although it is not necessary to have knowledge of either play to enjoy or appreciate each, it would be favorable for the audience's enjoyment and understanding of the themes and events that take place, especially when considering *A Mouthful of Birds*. *The Bacchae*, however, ends with tragic events that have little or unfair fulfillment of character or issues (Agave realizing she has killed her son). Marriane McDonald suggests that Dionysus is the facilitator for self- discovery in both plays when he appears in his several different forms. She may have been opposing and challenging the stereotypes (whereas Euripides may not have had this intent) of gender within society by the fact that her female characters are mainly violent and shocking, Such as Lena who kills the baby and Yvonne who has a stereotypically odd occupation, and portraying the men with weaker qualities such as Paul who loses sensibility and falls in love with a pig and Derek who is unemployed (a stereotype of that time which was attached to females). In the period leading up to and surrounding the writing and production of *A Mouthful of Birds*, there was controversy about the roles of women within society. *A Mouthful of Birds* demonstrates how far theatre has come

in terms of freedom in production compared to the restrictions of Euripides time period. Thus, the themes are basically the same, yet carried out differently, hence why it would be interesting to have previous knowledge of both plays before viewing either. *The Bacchae* is often seen as a play that openly mocks women and the ease at which they embrace hysteria. McDonald suggests that in *The Bacchae* doors are closed on options, whereas *A Mouthful of Birds* opens the doors for opportunity.

Talking about the characters of *The Bacchae*, Dionysus, the protagonist and central axis of the play, is the god of wine, theatre and group ecstasy appears mostly in disguise as a beautiful, longhaired, wine-flushed Lydian, the stranger. His non-human forms and powers are also felt acutely throughout the play and Dionysus the god is clearly different from Dionysus in disguise, as the stranger, and yet they are the same. Still, they exist in their different form simultaneously, so while the audience and the chorus hear the divine god give the command for the earthquake, the stranger is inside the palace torturing Pentheus. Dionysus is the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele, daughter of Cadmus.

In the course of drama, we see how cruelly Dionysus treats his aunt, his cousin and his grandfather in order to exact revenge for their rejection of Semele, the mother of Dionysus, it is as if his human side counts for nothing and he is able to behave in a very inhumane manner.

Dionysus is a powerful god and his god-like qualities is prominent as he shows how he can dominate nature, summoning earthquakes, changing shapes to become a horned bull and easily breaking out of his prison confines. He is able to exert an almost hypnotic on the minds of people and has amassed a huge following in Asia with a religion that seems to drive people out of their minds; those who follow Dionysus become crazed maenads, drunk on the wine he has invented.

Similarly, Pentheus is the king of Thebes, son of Agave, grandson of Cadmus and the first cousin of Dionysus. Structurally Pentheus is Dionysus's foil, thus he is a preserver of law and order, a military man, a stern patriarch, and ultimately a doomed mortal. Pentheus is not merely a mirror or inverted double of Dionysus; he is puritanical and obstinate, but also curious and voyeuristic. We are told later in the play that Pentheus does not yet have a full beard; that puts his age at no older than his late teens. He is an impatient and impetuous young king, and he rejects the new religion and its god. Some have argued that he symbolizes rationality, but close attention to the play reveals that he is anything but rational. He rejects anything he does not understand and his greatest crime is his lack of self-knowledge. Dionysus preys easily on the boy's weaknesses, turning the young king into a scapegoat for the crimes of Thebes. However, Pentheus's excesses and crimes against the god are understandable. He is only human, and he is only a boy. For these reasons, Dionysus' revenge is brutal and excessive.

The next important character is Agave, mother of Pentheus and daughter of Cadmus. Agave is already one of the maenads (a worshipper of Dionysus participating in orgiastic rites, from the Greek maenad to be mad) at the start of the play. Even though she only enters the play at the very end, her scene is the most powerful and tragic in the play.

Cadmus is the next character of the play. He is the former king of Thebes, father of Agave and Semele, grandfather of Pentheus and Dionysus. Cadmus is the only one in his family to declare allegiance to Dionysus.

The other characters like servant, captures the stranger and brings him to Pentheus in scene II. The first messenger is one of the three anonymous witnesses in the play. The first messenger is a cowherd who spies on the maenads and comes back to

relate the incident to Pentheus. The second messenger accompanied Pentheus and Dionysus up the mountain and witnessed the death of this king. He returns to the palace to relate the event to the chorus.

Likewise, the chorus is the female bacchantes from Lydia, led by Dionysus in his human form as the stranger. Tiresias, a famous Theban seer and friend of Cadmus persuades Cadmus to worship Dionysus.

Dionysus is simultaneously an abstract force and an anthropomorphized deity. He has been traveling in Asia, teaching his mysteries to humankind, and now he has returned to Thebes to initiate the land of his birth into the new religion. He has also returned for revenge: when his mother Semele dies in a blaze of lightning, Semele's sisters said that Zeus was punishing her for saying she had been his bride. Semele's sisters called the dead woman a liar, and they denied the divinity of Semele's baby; the child, Semele's sisters assumed, must have died with Semele. However, that child was Dionysus, and he has returned now to establish himself as a god.

The action of the play begins with Dionysus's return to Thebes years later. He arrives in town disguised as the stranger, accompanied by a band of bacchantes, to punish the family for their treatment of his mother and their refusal to offer him sacrifices. During Dionysus's absence, Semele's father, Cadmus, had handed the kingdom over to his proud grandson Pentheus. It was Pentheus's decision to not allow the worship of Dionysus in Thebes. Dionysus tells the audience that when he arrived in Thebes he drove Semele's sisters mad, and they fled to Mt. Cithaeron to worship him and perform his rites on the mountainside.

As the ruler of the state and preserver of social order, Pentheus finds himself threatened by the Dionysian rites bringing the women from the city into the forest. Unconvinced of their divinely-caused insanity, he sees their drunken cavorting as an

illicit attempt to escape the mores and legal codes regulating Theben society. His response is therefore a political one, as he orders his soldiers to arrest the Lydian stranger and his maenads, whom he sees as the root of the troubles. Deviously, Dionysus allows himself to be easily arrested and taken to Pentheus with the others. In the first of three encounters, Dionysus begins the long process of trapping Pentheus and leading him to his death. The encounter begins with the powerful Pentheus thinking he has caught the delicate stranger. He orders his androgynous prisoner to be chained, bound, and tortured but soon finds it impossible to do so. When Pentheus tries to tie Dionysus he ties only a bull, when Pentheus plunges a knife into Dionysus the blade passes only through shadow. Suddenly an earthquake shakes the palace, a fire starts, and Pentheus is left weak and puzzled.

In their second exchange, Dionysus tries to persuade Pentheus to abandon his destructive path, but Pentheus does not relent. A cowherd arrives and describes his sighting of the maddened women of Cadmus. All the women were seen resting blissfully in the forest, feasting on milk, honey and wine that sprang from the ground. They played music, stalked wild animals, sang, and danced with joy. However, when they saw the cowherd, they flew into a murderous rage and chased after him. The cowherd barely escaped, but the herd of cattle was captured and torn apart by hand by maenads, including Pentheus's mother Agave.

Pentheus is left intrigued and excited by the messenger's marvelous and frightening tale. Dionysus takes note of Pentheus's interest and offers him a chance to see the maenads for himself, undetected. Pentheus, on the verge of launching a military expedition to arrest the band, suddenly cannot resist the opportunity to see the forbidden. He agrees to do all Dionysus suggests, dressing himself in a wig and long skirts. The effeminate Pentheus, stripped of his masculinity and authority, is revealed as a

vain, boastful and lecherous creature. Once in the woods, Pentheus cannot see the bacchants from the ground, and wants to mount a tree for a better vantage. Dionysus miraculously bends a tall fir tree, puts Pentheus on top, and gently straightens the tree. At once, the maenads see him, and Dionysus orders them to attack the vulnerable ruler. With rolling eyes and frenzied cries the women attack, bringing Pentheus down and dragging him to the ground. As he falls Pentheus reaches out for his mother's face and pleads with her to recognize her son. Nevertheless, Agave, driven mad by Dionysus, proceeds to rip her son to death.

At the palace, the chorus is exultant and sings the praise of Dionysus. Agave returns home with Pentheus's head in her hands. She is still deluded and boasts to all about the young lion she hunted and beheaded. Old Cadmus, who knows what has happened, sadly approached his daughter and draws her mind back to the palace, her family and finally what she is holding in her hands. Agave begins to weep. Cadmus remarks that the god has punished the family rightly but excessively. In the end, Dionysus finally appears in his true form to the city. He banishes Agave from Thebes and ordains that Cadmus and his wife will turn into snakes, destined to invade Greek lands with a horde of barbarians.

In the play *The Bacchae*, Dionysus is the protagonist. He is dominant throughout the play. He is a dual character and personality and duality stems from his unusual origins: he is the son of Zeus, king of the mythological Greek gods, but his mother was human, a mortal woman. There is a duality of gender in Dionysus; he is purportedly a male god but as 'the stranger' the character he adopts throughout most of *The Bacchae*, he displays certain feminine traits and there are references to his beauty. The first time Pentheus sees 'the stranger', he comments that his hair is very long; he also notes that he is not a manly figure, he could never be a wrestler and that he will

cut off Dionysus' delicate hair. Anne Penny, in her article *A Character analysis of Dionysus in 'The Bacchae' by Euripides* says:

As a baby, Dionysus experienced two births, one from his mother, Semele, and a second birth from the thigh of Zeus, his father, double births, one from a female, mortal mother and then a second from a male god, his father Zeus. He appears to have inherited characteristics from each parent: human frailty and superhuman abilities. (1)

Dionysus displays a savage, vengeful side to his nature. He has come to Thebes to avenge his mother's spurning by her sisters and her father. The women of Thebes are easily led to become worshippers of the god and to be transformed into maenads, running wild in ecstasy; they are performing savage feats that they could never have attempted in their normal lives. Dionysus has taken over their minds and they have become abnormal in their activities.

Pentheus is not a typical Greek antagonist. Sure, he's the guy that stands in the way of our hero and protagonist, Dionysus, making him a shoe-in for job. In a lot of ways, though, he more closely resembles a tragic hero than Dionysus does, at least according to Aristotle. For one, Pentheus has a clear hamartia. This word is most commonly translated as "tragic flaw", but is more accurately describes as an "error in judgement" or a "missing of the mark".

The king makes errors of errors by trying to defy the god Dionysus. This big old mistake results in the king being ripped limb from limb by his Bacchus-crazed mother, Agave. A messenger reports that just before Agave had her bloody way with Pentheus, he pleaded, "Have mercy on me, Mother, and because of my mistakes don't kill your son" (225).

As Pentheus admits to doing wrong, he's also exhibiting another tell-tale sign of a tragic hero: an anagnorsis. This is when a character has a recognition or realization of some kind. Not that it does him much good. The messenger tells us that immediately after Agave "dragged his arm off his shoulder," while the rest of the Maenads "shredded his limbs" and threw his skin around "like a ball" (225). Looks like in the world of Euripides it does not much matter if somebody realizes they did wrong or not. Everybody is doomed anyway.

It is pretty easy to dislike Pentheus. When Agave and the other women of Thebes run off into the mountains to dance, drink wine, and praise Dionysus, Pentheus does everything he can to squelch the revelry. We'd also like to point out, however, that Pentheus is just doing his job. What's a king supposed to do when he comes home and everybody's gone totally crazy? What kind of king would he be if he let anarchy take over his fair city? You could choose to view Pentheus as just your average ordinary king caught up in very extraordinary situation.

A Mouthful of Birds takes the themes of possession, violence and transformation from Euripides' *The Bacchae*. It shows the same theme of women violence as shown in *Bacchae*. Although *A Mouthful of Birds* takes its themes from *Bacchae*, it does not focus on a single story as in *Bacchae*. *A Mouthful of Birds* has seven different stories, including different characters, male and female. *The Bacchae* mocks the female characters whereas *A Mouthful of Birds* mocks male characters. Both plays are mainly based on possession, violence and madness. In *A Mouthful of Birds*, the female are shown violent as they need to resist the sexist and classist ideologies. In *Bacchae*, Dionysus is the protagonist and Pentheus is the antagonist. But, in *A Mouthful of Birds* all the seven characters are protagonist and they are possessed by some kind of unseen power. The protagonist of *Bacchae* is also seen in *A Mouthful of Birds*. After

every scene, in *A Mouthful of Birds*, a moment of tragedy of Pentheus is seen. When the play *A Mouthful of Birds* opens, we can see the dance of Dionysus, later he watches each action of other characters invisibly, and his kiss causes each episode's central transformation.

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, Lena, one of the female characters, is shown as violent as Agave, a female character in *Bacchae*. Both of them are possessed by some unseen power, causing madness and resulting in killing their own son. Although the scene is the same in both plays but the reason is different. Agave kills her own son because she is possessed by the God Dionysus. Lena kills her son because a spirit, which tells her to kill her own baby if she wants to be free from her oppressive husband, possesses her. The character Lena is stronger than the character Agave. Both are possessed but Lena tries to resist the patriarch by killing her own child. Agave does not have this kind of reason behind killing her own son. Agave is not resisting but Lena does.

Euripides, in his play *The Bacchae* puts efforts to mock women whereas; Caryl Churchill and David Lan show the characters as strong and mock the male characters. Anne Penny, in her article *A Character Analysis of Dionysus in The Bacchae by Euripides* writes:

The suggestion from Pentheus is that Dionysus has a distinctly feminine look and a frail, womanly body. The followers he has gathered are all women. There is later irony when Dionysus persuades Pentheus that he must dress in female clothing in order to observe the antics of the possessed women. (1)

The female, here, is the thing to be mocked. The way Dionysus says to Pentheus about clothing as if a woman is very ironical. When Pentheus has seen Dionysus for the first time, as the stranger, in a disguise form, he said that Dionysus has a distinctly

feminine look and a frail womanly body. Here, a woman and her body are taken as a 'frail'.

The Bacchae mocks the women and their body. The bacchantes are all women, as Dionysus feels easy to possess women rather than men. Therefore, Dionysus chooses all the women of Thebes, including his mother's sister Agave, to be the maenads. Dionysus possesses them and makes them obedient to worship him as a god. Dionysus wishes to punish Pentheus for not worshipping or paying him libations. He uses Pentheus' clear desire to see the ecstatic women to convince the king to dress as a female maenad to avoid detection and go to the rites:

Stranger: Ah! Would you like to see them gatherings upon the mountain?

Pentheus: Very much. Ay, and pay uncounted gold for the pleasure.

Stranger: Why have you conceived so strong a desire?

Pentheus: Though it would pain me to see them drunk with wine.

Stranger: Yet you would like to see them, pain and all. (2)

Dionysus dresses Pentheus as a woman and gives him a thyrsus and fawn skins, then leads him out of the house. A mist engulfs the king and Pentheus sees horns coming out of the god's head (Dionysus often took the form of a bull) as Dionysus leads him to the women. For a better view, Dionysus makes Pentheus climb up the top of the tree. After that, Dionysus called the bacchantes women and order them to attack him. First Pentheus mocked the feminine qualities of Dionysus; however, Pentheus himself becomes the victim of the mocked character by Dionysus, later.

In contrast to Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Churchill and Lan have shown the female characters stronger and male characters weak and frail. Lena and Yvonne are the female characters who are shown strong. In the same way, Paul and Derek are the

male characters who are shown frail and weak. Paul, unable to control his emotions, falls in love with a pig of a slaughterhouse his company owns. Yvonne is one of the female characters, who have a stereotypically odd occupation as an acupuncturist. Nevertheless, Derek, a male character is an unemployed. It is a stereotype of that time which was attached to females.

In contrast with *The Bacchae*, *A Mouthful of Birds* has strong female characters that are able to resist the stereotypical roles of the past. After Lena kills her own baby, she leaves her oppressive husband and goes to take care of old people. The following lines show that she is enjoying her life without her husband, “Every day is a struggle because I haven’t forgotten anything. I remember I enjoyed doing it. It’s nice to make someone alive and it’s nice to make someone dead. Either way. That power is what I like best in the world. The struggle is every day not to use it” (51).

The article, “A Mouthful of Birds by Caryl Churchill and David Lan”, reviewed by Marriane McDonald, Department of Theatre, explains:

Where does this production depart from Euripides’ *Bacchae*? Obviously, these are different stories. In *A Mouthful of Birds* there is also fulfillment in most of the transformations, whereas the end of the *Bacchae* is tragic. In the modern play, the main tragedy is the businessman’s, an apt Marxist aside. It is no accident that a pig is his love (pigs were sacred to Aphrodite in ancient Greece, and perhaps Churchill/Lan used the pig with this resonance in mind). There is also the element of the absurd in *A Mouthful of Birds*. One is reminded of Ionesco, perhaps Genet, and at times, we observe Becketts’ bleak humor. Pinter also comes to mind in the various ritual transformations. (1)

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, the characters go through violence as if it were a tunnel for self-discovery. We see options facilitated. Doors are opened rather than closed; Euripides' Dionysus slammed the door on Pentheus, Agave and her father Cadmus. *The Bacchae* has been simplified and used as a parable in the midst of terrifying Aesopean fables. The supernatural elements are more a feature of *Mouthful of Birds*, and there are more elements of the absurd, for example, a pig coming to life and dancing.

While comparing and contrasting Euripides' *The Bacchae* and *A Mouthful of Birds* McDonald further says:

Both of the world of *A Mouthful of Birds* and the world of *The Bacchae* seem stable at the beginning. They are undone by the visitation of Dionysus in his various forms. In *The Bacchae* specific victims were chosen. In the Churchill/ Lan play, one is immune. This is particularly clear in the case of Marcia. Did she put on his knowledge and his power before the indifferent beak could let her drop? In both plays, we have the theme of gender fluidity: Pentheus mock Dionysus for his feminine qualities, but Pentheus is transformed by Dionysus at the end of the play into the female role he mocked. (1)

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, a physical operation secures the transformation. Feminine qualities in a man are not mocked in the obvious way they were in *The Bacchae*, and the transformation is fulfilling rather than a tragedy. She further argues:

The Bacchae follows Aristotelian rules of closure; it has an end. *A Mouthful of Birds* does not end, although it has precise form; it provides a new beginning. Dionysus began and ended with a dance, which goes on for eternity; the structure is circular. The older play shows us death and reminds us of our mortality; the new one implies endless possibilities in life. It is primarily a parable about women and violence,

women and their escapes, women and self- discovery. Agave, the tragic victim becomes Agave, the sorcerer. One might say that the two plays show the two aspects of Dionysus, one in his primarily negative form (*Bacchae*) and the other in his positive (*A Mouthful of Birds*). In the former, he is more destructive than creative; in the later, he is the source of creation of mankind. In both we see the god at work. In the later, we see him dance and we join him in spirit. In a successful performance, like this one, Dan's dance is performed for us. We die unto Dionysus so that we may live.

A Mouthful of Birds shows the act of resistance through the weapon of violence. It shows that to resist the so- called ideologies in our society, resistance is must and through the weapon of violence, it can be done. Euripides, *The Bacchae* and Churchill/ Lan's *A Mouthful of Birds*, both concentrate on the themes of possession, madness and violence. However, the later one also concentrates on resistance of women to overcome the classist and sexist ideologies.

IV. Resistance against Class and Gender

The research explores how the female characters, who are frequently dominated in the society, eventually, resist the patriarchal tradition and the capitalist society. In the play, *A Mouthful of Birds*, Caryl Churchill and David Lan, try to show how the female characters in the play are in the search of self- discovery through the weapon of resistance against the stereotypical positions.

Lena, one of the seven characters, in the play, has very violent role. She kills her own child, when the spirit possesses her. She does so because she wants freedom from her oppressive husband. The spirit has said that if she kills her own baby, she will be free from her oppressive husband. His banality is one of his most oppressive tools. His violence is revealed in freeway competition, and in dominating his wife. Lena is in search of self- respect, as at the end of the play, we see her taking care of old people, being free from her oppressive husband. She does whatever she wants; she becomes whatever she wanted to be.

Marcia is another important female character in the play. She is receptionist, originally from Trinidad. She is not English woman; the white upper- middle class spirit possesses her. The white occupier takes over and the native is suppressed; she imitates the oppressor as she did before. However, finally, she is released to a place on the ocean.

Yvonne is next female character in the play, which has a important role. She is an acupuncturist by the occupation. She is possessed by her addiction to alcohol. We see her violence when a patient of hers falls asleep, rather than paying attention to her ministrations. She also escapes the gender stereotype saying, “many people are surprised to see a woman behind this counter”.

Doreen is a secretary who is known for escaping the mundane. The spirit of Agave possesses her. She is the one for whom the play was named, 'it seems that my mouth is full of birds which I crunch between my teeth. Their feathers, their blood and broken bones are choking me. I carry on my work as a secretary.' She has accepted herself, but she is restless for expression, this secretary from hell.

Showing the female characters so strong and violent, Churchill and Lan try to portray the qualities of male, as a weak one. Some male characters are portrayed as the weak and delicate one. For example, Paul, a businessman, falls in love with a pig he is not able to save from his own slaughterhouse. However, when he rescues the corpse, he peels off its wrapper, and it rises to dance with him. Paul is unable to control over his emotions, which is the weaker part of his role.

The next male character is Derek. He is an unemployed. Churchill and Lan want to break the stereotype of male and they have suggested the role to the female. Unemployed of that time is the stereotype attached to females. He experiences a sex change. His transformation leads to daily satisfaction, the comfort of being in love with a lion- tamer from Kabul. Contrary to the original Pentheus, who was dismembered and died, he has been dismembered to gain a body and live.

The play *A Mouthful of Birds* is loosely based on Euripides' *The Bacchae*, it is a meditation on possession, madness, and female violence. The play has an unusual structure; it is a series of seven independent vignettes each focusing of a different characters. Every female character in the play is possessed by some unseen power. However, all of the female characters are trying to escape to resist from that possession and eventually they resist the dominating ideologies of the society.

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