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KOFFI KWAHULÉ'S *BINTOU* AND SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE*: THE SILENT FORM OF ADAPTATION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper considers a Côte d'Ivoirien adaptation of Greek tragedy—Koffi Kwahulé's *Bintou* (Kwahulé 2003)—in order to develop a theoretical and comparative perspective on the possibilities of tragedy today *Bintou* is considered within the context of modern theories of tragedy. Rather than assuming a continuum between ancient and modern cultures, this paper argues that there is a distinct formal process according to which modern tragedy creates its tragic spectators.

In *Bintou*, the chorus serves as the fundamental channel through which tragic ironies and misreadings interact. Bintou describes an entropic universe of words and deeds that eventually find an equilibrium in a silence that is primarily embodied by the chorus itself. In this movement toward silence, *Bintou* reflects Sophocles' *Antigone*. Both plays examine the ambiguities and forces that lie between words and deeds, as well as between the chorus and audience. While recent commentary among directors, critics and theorists has focused on the ways in which *Bintou*'s characters and plot resonate with those of *Antigone*, this paper will discuss a different mode of intertextual reverberation, addressing itself to concerns central to both Kwahulé and Sophocles' tragedies. Moving beyond the explicit reworking of content, *Bintou* echoes the preoccupation with language and the slow spiral down to silence that inhere to *Antigone*. The choruses of both tragedies serve as conduits through which ironies, stunted understandings and silence maintain commerce. By inverting the antitheses of public and private, Kwahulé dramatizes a critical stance toward this tradition. In this way he critiques slavish adherence to neat correspondence in post-colonial adaptations of European source texts, and reflects the forces of power, impoverishment and violence that bind such extraordinary figures as Antigone and Bintou.

ANTIGONE AND CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Born in 1956 in Côte d'Ivoire, Koffi Kwahulé first studied at the Institut National des Arts d'Abidjan, before moving to Paris, where he earned his Doctorat d'Études théâtrales at Paris III. Although Africa has a long and rich history of theatrical productions that adapt and challenge ancient Greek tragedies, Kwahulé's plays take a novel approach to this same material.[1] Generally set in unnamed French suburbs, never in his homeland of Côte d'Ivoire, Kwahulé's plays address territories and themes within the borderlands between the present and past, Europe and Africa, Parisian and Côte d'Ivoirien French, as well as between contemporary Parisian suburban social problems and ancient Greek tragedy.[2] Among Kwahulé's plays, *Bintou*, produced in 1997, has been most often discussed as a modern adaptation of an ancient Greek tragedy, and specifically of Sophocles' *Antigone*.[3]

Bintou dramatises the story of a teenage girl living in a violent and racially diverse French suburb. Opposed to all forms of authority, Bintou, who dreams of landing a job as a belly dancer, leads a gang of adolescents obsequiously devoted to her every whim. Her father, having lost his job, hides out in his room, ceding all authority to Bintou's uncle, Drissa, who insists on imposing his own version of patriarchal 'law.' When Bintou resists

his attempts at control, Drissa and his wife call upon the services of a woman from their never-specified African village, the 'Knife-Lady,' who will perform female genital mutilation (FGM), resulting in Bintou's death.

It is difficult to ascertain where and how Bintou fits within traditions of Côte d'Ivoirien theatre. In his extensive study of the development of Côte d'Ivoirien drama over the past eighty years, *Pour une critique du théâtre ivoirien contemporain*, Kwahulé himself offers clues as to how his own works might fit within the traditions he describes (Kwahulé 1996: 127, trans. Love). Kwahulé traces the development of modern Côte d'Ivoirien theatre through three modern periods: the Popular theatre of the 1940s and early 1960s; the historical dramas of late 1960s; and finally, the 'theatre of disillusionment,' spanning from the early 1970s to the 'now' of the book's publication date, 1996 (13–24). The first of these phases is marked by a move to provoke the conscience of the people and to establish a theatre that is directed and most often inspired by students. In the 1960s, thirty years after Côte d'Ivoire achieved independence, an "ethnographic theatre" emerged, a theatre whose primary purpose was to use realism in the service of exposing social mores. In the second phase, influenced by American writers such as LeRoi Jones and the Martiniquais Aimé Césaire, Côte d'Ivoirien theatre turned toward the country's colonial and post-colonial history through a partially compensatory 'mythologizing', in which racial categories are inverted and mocked. Finally, Kwahulé describes a third phase, from the early 1970s to today, a 'theatre of disillusionment' in which social and political satire, often inspired by Sartre's *What is Literature*, allowed Côte d'Ivoirien a new mode of self-examination. As the white colonizers gradually disappeared from the country, a disillusionment with post-colonial progress inspired an experimental theatre driven by students and urban intellectuals who expressed a pessimism toward the frustrating 'triumphs of tradition, the countryside and the old' (22–23).

Koffi Kwahulé's *Bintou* serves as a belated but apt example of the modern tragedy that Camus prescribed in an Athenian lecture he delivered in 1955 at the French Institute in Athens. Titled 'On the Future of Tragedy', the speech outlined the possibilities and challenges for an ancient tragedy adapted to the mid twentieth century. Camus, as was subsequently the case with George Steiner, advanced the thesis that tragedy arises only under particular historical circumstances, during transitions from faith to rational inquiry (Steiner 1980). As he vacillated between descriptions of a tragic art and of the epochs that make such art possible, Camus remained focused on the possibilities of 'form,' whether historical or aesthetic.[4] At one point in his lecture, he suggested that tragic art, as an aesthetic form, bridges two historical 'forms,' allowing for a kind of makeshift continuity. He believed that his tragic age, the 1950s, had not yet found its tragic expression. Camus suggested that the search for artistic form is as much a necessary act of rebellion as rebellion is a search for form.

In researching and incorporating antecedent forms—in this case, Sophocles' *Antigone*—and thus assenting to limitations, Kwahulé rebels against absolute freedom by accepting limits. But in pushing to reshape these received forms into a tragic vision rooted in history and the present, he rebels against the tyranny of both tradition and trends. The search for a modern form into which an artist insinuates history and traditional forms constitutes a Camusian rebellion in its identification, acknowledgement and expression of limits.

The play has been oft noted for its correlative relationship to ancient tragedy and for the adaptive strategies by which it refashions and thus assimilates its antecedent material into

twenty-first-century formal and contextual modes. Éditions Lansman, in its advertising copy for *Bintou* (1997), declares that, 'The [play] makes for a Greek tragedy—a tragedy that, in the heart of modernity, wants to get to the heart of the archaic, dragging us unto a whirlwind of emotions'.[5]

It is primarily the attention paid to the destructive tendencies of language that gradually shifts the relationship of the spectators to the tragedy on stage. In *Bintou*, the protagonists endure and enact violations of language and bodies. Both deteriorate until the stage is devoid of anything but haunted silence. Language, emptied of its ethical content, eventually precipitates the emptying of Bintou's blood, and thus the stage is emptied of its most articulate and defiant voice. Throughout the play, language is invested with an embodied force, a comingling of the human, animalistic, biological and linguistic that culminates in a silence that echoes the mute spectatorship with which, therefore, the onstage tragedy is finally endowed.

Critics have noted that Kwahulé adapts Sophoclean material as a way to both register and critique contemporary phenomena and notions of identity. Sylvie Chalaye, a drama critic and specialist on Francophone African writing, asked Kwahulé in an interview: 'Your plays often draw on Greek theatre, especially as regards the ancient chorus. Why?'

Kwahulé responded:

> That's truly my European side. What interests me in ancient Greek theatre is its affinities with my own Baoulé tradition. I find myself in that theatre. I also feel that I'm a trustee of that theatre. As a human being, I'm the inheritor of everything men made before me, the good as much as the evil. When one lives in the West, in Europe, in France, one has the impression that the theatre is a sort of race—knock the wall down first, write without punctuation first, do a play without an actor first... One enters this race, in fact, as part of a gadget-obsession in the theatre. What happens is that one doesn't have the time to really question ancient forms. The chorus is now an obsession in my work. (Chalaye 2004b: 39–40, trans. Love)[6]

Kwahulé, importantly, specifies, first that it is the 'forms,' not the themes, plots or characters of ancient tragedy that are important for him, and second, that his stated purpose is to 'question,' not borrow, shape or simply adapt these forms. In contrast with the post-modern tradition in which the dramaturge deconstructs inherited forms in order to critique foundationalist assumptions, Kwahulé incorporates ancient Greek formal elements as both a critic and an intermediary (a '*dépositaire*,' a 'trustee,' an agent, a dealer). He sees himself as a cultural arbiter, negotiating among Baoulé, African, French, European, localized and universalist constructions. Kwahulé has often stated his hope that his audience might interpret and question his own plays in much the same critically universalist spirit with which he read and adapted ancient Greek tragedy: 'I'm happy when my plays are produced in Côte d'Ivoire and also in front of a white audience in Germany or, why not, tomorrow, in front of Chinese who could appreciate them despite knowing nothing about Africa' (Bedarida 2000, trans. Love).

Koffi Kwahule has also stated that:

> Jazz is a communal music. The chorus in my plays is often very polyphonic, as in jazz, and takes its distance from the structure and function of the chorus in Greek tragedy, for example, where the chorus is quite dramaturgically

> circumscribed. In my plays, the entire community is the chorus. We're facing the chorus of the world, the song of the world, always. In what I write, it's the entire community that takes charge of the story, that gives its opinion. (Mouëllic 2008, trans. Love)

Critics have noted this mediating function within *Bintou* itself. Laurence Barbalosi has written that, 'The Antigone myth can also be read into the background of...*Bintou*, and undoubtedly, because, "history is confiscated and we don't have heroes, we borrow from others in order to question them ourselves'' ' .[7] In his use of the passive voice, Barbolosi suggests, helpfully, that the spectator or reader is as responsible for integrating the 'Antigone myth' into *Bintou* as Kwahulé is for making the Sophoclean heroine a presence within the play's intertextual palimpsest. If borrowed material is to serve as fodder for critique—if that is its designated purpose, as Kwahulé claims—then the spectator must somehow triangulate the interpretive dynamics of *Antigone*, *Bintou* and the choral commentary (Kwahulé 1996).

Any director of *Bintou* must remain aware of Kwahulé's concern with ancient forms and with the intertextual and cultural cross-currents that drive the play. Since its publication in 1997, *Bintou* has benefited from a number of productions in Europe and America. In November, 1997, Gabriel Garran directed the first production of *Bintou* at the Théâtre International de Langue Française in Paris. Since Garran's production, *Bintou* has been staged by Daniela Giordano in Rome (2000), off-Broadway in New York (2001), in Berlin at the Deutsches Theater, and in London at the Arcola Theatre (2002) (Chalaye 2007). Garran's performance was noted for his decision to elide the rap music, and much of the violence that Kwahulé had written into the choral passages (Unknown 1997). Despite this musical bowdlerization, Garran was clearly interested in the function and pedigree of the chorus. Garran discusses the ways that *Bintou*'s chorus both authors tragedies interior to the play and echoes ancient Greek tragic structures:

> We carved up Koffi's play in twenty parts, all of which are small films within the large film. I was intrigued by this kind of compound aspect, the nearly Trinitarian aspect of Koffi's dramatic art. You have, for example, the family tribunal, the triplet of Lycaons, the triad of adolescents, a kind of Furies, each taking a turn as tragedian, as 'TV hosts' and as Gorgons, as if they were Bintou's emanations. ('à propos de Bintou' 1997b)

The Lycaons unite to perform choral odes that reflect the placement and function of the *parados*, *stasimon* and *exodos* of the Greek stage. In the culminating scenes of Bintou, the rap music that serves as a background to the Lycaon's choral commentaries takes on an increasingly integral role in the development of the drama. The young gang members also evolve, throughout the play, from individual participants in the unfolding action to a unified collective whose speech constitutes the tragic development itself.

In both *Antigone* and *Bintou*, embodied language implies a wordlessness that will, in the end, stand as the only remaining testament to the tragedies on stage. In exploring the gradient between word and deed, utterance and silence, animal and human, and, eventually, chorus and audience, *Bintou* creates its own tragic spectators. In the final choral passages of *Bintou*, the quietude and silence transfer not only the tragic awareness, but the consciousness of palimpsest inherent to the process of modern adaptation, inspiring a simultaneously sympathetic and critical stance toward source material that is

only deceptively originary. *Bintou* stands as both instantiation and ironic counterpoint to *Antigone*.

THEN A SILENCE SUFFUSES THE STORY...

In the universes of Sophocles' Thebes and Kwahulé's French suburbs, silence hovers proleptically at the edge of a discourse that, in its superfluity and aggressive physicality, and in its synesthetic power, blinds both the protagonists and spectators to the impending deaths on stage. In both plays, word becomes flesh, compounding the violent transgression of both language and bodies until finally the theatre is left with a haunting residuum of quietude. As the dramatic ironies of the plays empty speech of ethical content, silence lingers as the only viable protagonist.

Olga Taxidou has noted the importance of the body within tragic discourse: 'Tragedy's power to distort and arouse, influence us, make us think, feel at home or feel strange, relies on the basic principles of embodiment' (Taxidou 2008: 243). In *Antigone*, it is often the 'tongue,' in both its literal and metonymic senses, which serves as the embodiment of the tragic. Creon and Antigone's tragic arch rises and falls as a function of the embodied tongue that we can trace throughout the entirety of *Antigone*. We can race a similar arch in *Bintou*, whose protagonists suffer from words embodied as violent deeds and physical menace.

In *Antigone*, the chorus first mentions the tongue that serves as the hinge on which tragedy revolves. In describing the divine intervention in the battle between Eteocles and Polyneices, the chorus refers to Zeus as he who, 'intensely hates the boast of a great tongue' (Sophocles, *Antigone* 127).[8] The tactile presence of this 'great tongue' wags proleptically and ironically to the silenced tongues that speak in the play's denouement, and to the Chorus' final apothegmatic condemnation of 'great words' (1350).

Creon, in one of the play's more heavy-handed ironies, declares that the worst ruler of all is he who refuses counsel because he has, '...out of fear fenced in his tongue' (180). He will later hear these same words from a son who has takes it upon himself to represent a citizenry whose tongues have also, 'been fenced in by fear'. Of course, Creon here applies his standard of forthrightness to himself, not to his subjects. He claims only that a wise leader should not be reticent to ask questions, and that he should 'not remain silent' (185) were he to see ruin rather than salvation looming on the city-state's horizon.

Unsurprisingly, it is Antigone who shifts the meaning of this 'tongue' from Creon, who figures it in private metonymic terms, to the discourse of the city-state itself. In her confrontation with Creon, Antigone asserts that the citizens of Thebes remain silent out of fear, not sympathy with his decree. They would, she says, protest just as vigorously, 'if fear did not cage their tongues' (505). This repeats, nearly verbatim, Creon's earlier denunciation of the commander who fails to seek counsel because he has, '...out of fear fenced in his tongue' (180). Antigone was not present for this earlier speech, yet she is uncannily perceptive in pillorying Creon's autocratic political mode. Having shifted the terms of her rebuke from the private and familial to the public and political, Antigone can now ironize Creon's absolute authority: 'Many are a king's blessings, not the least that he can do and say what he wills' (506–7).

In a single sentence, Antigone has declared her fearlessness before Creon's sovereignty while also questioning its legitimacy.

Haemon, in his confrontation with Creon, similarly demonstrates the terror and wrongness of his father's words, as well as of the political consequences they inspire. Having monitored the people's speech, deeds and accusations, Haemon is able to assert that Creon has silenced the polity: 'The common man is terrified to see your frown, or to offer words you are not happy to hear' (690–91).

Echoing Antigone's accusation, Haemon demonstrates that Cleon has achieved the same political result that he counselled against in his opening speech. Inspiring terror with his very look, Creon has 'caged' the words of the people, isolating himself from the wise guidance he established as the necessary condition for effective stewardship of the state. He now embodies in his frown the terror and the force behind the words and wordlessness that precipitate horrors. Haemon impugns the vacuity that sustains hubris, noting that: 'He who thinks that he alone has intelligence, / a tongue, a soul , and no one else...he is, when opened up, / found to be empty' (708–9). Haemon ratifies Antigone's charge, claiming as he does that the 'tongue' to which Creon once laid exclusive claim is common to family and citizenry alike. It is as if this tongue were the defining generator of Creon's fall. But before the suicides and the recognition that serve as the fulcrum of his tragedy, the chorus recounts the tale of Lycurgus, who, having been inspired to frenzy by Dionysus, '...came to know the god he madly touched with mocking tongue' (960–1). Alluding to the Bacchan mythology that serves as the palimpsest to Creon's own tragedy, the chorus once again indicts the tongue.

Teiresias, once he has born witness to Creon's benighted obstinacy, issues a similar indictment, praying that the near-fallen king, 'bear a quieter tongue in his head' (1089)... Having established that silence is the paramount criterion for wisdom, Teiresias says nothing more himself and leaves the stage.

This is the moment of Creon's reversal and recognition. Despite the 'terror' (1096) of yielding, he capitulates before the 'terror' (1091) of Teiresias' prophecy, and in doing so, relinquishes the power of his word in order to listen, submit and act. Having capitulated, Creon asks the Chorus, 'What should I do? Tell me. I will be persuaded' (1099). Creon's obsession with the word will now yield to the deed (1103). Having finally assumed the 'quiet tongue' and ready ear he advocated before understanding the terrors of necessity, Creon spends precious time articulating the price of his transformation: 'Oh it is hard thing to do, to change my heart. It is ill to struggle against necessity' (1105–6).

This lamentation serves as a transition between the phases before and after his reversal, describing rather than commanding the necessary deed. When he leaves the palace, ordering his servants to follow him, axes in hand, his words and actions, converging at last, embody an recognition whose belatedness itself precipitates the remaining events of the play. The culminating deaths of Creon's wife and son violently cage the 'great tongue,' whose curtailment, we now know, constitutes the essence of wisdom.

Words in Kwahulé's universe convey a similarly physical menace. But in *Bintou*, the power of the tangible—consistently represented by the knife that will eventually take the young girl's life—returns to threaten the world of language. At the end of the play, as Moussoba the 'Knife-Lady' performs the fatal act of Female Genital Mutilation, the steel austerity of her knife cuts through the physical, sexual and linguistic ambiguities of Bintou's displaced status, and her homelessness in the Sophoclean sense. Her blade will slice through the equivocatory morass of international and French law proscribing FGM, and

through a post-modernity in which women assume the power and rights of men. Completion will imply mutilation and loss, and, as we will discover, death.

The connection between the rupturing violence of words and deeds is established earlier in the play when Uncle Drissa responds to Bintou's contumacy with the force of bald command: Today, you will not leave. I have decided' (8). In declaring that he has 'decided,' Drissa uses the past participle of the verb '*trancher'*, which, used intransitively, can mean alternatively: to cut off, to cut away; to possess sexually; to speak directly; to cut someone off; to resolve a difficulty by making a difficult choice; or, to come to a decision. In issuing his command, Uncle Drissa encompasses a range of connotation that, unbeknownst to the protagonists present at the moment, presages the play's impending tragedies. In the course of the ensuing 'acts,' Uncle Drissa will sexually assault Bintou. He will also, horrifyingly, decide to perform FGM on Bintou, whose life is claimed by the 'cutting'. The polysemy of his command serves to proleptically articulate Bintou's fate while at the same time subsuming itself to the silence of mutual incomprehension.

Bintou responds to her uncle by repeating the word, bestowing it with near prophetic force: 'I've decided...I've decided [*J'ai tranché, j'ai tranché*]...But you haven't always been this uncompromising, Uncle Drissa. Like, for example, the last time you came into my room as I was getting ready...' If past is prologue, the reverse is often true in tragedy. The ellipse ushers in the chorus—the Lycaons—who join Bintou in a spotlight that has just 'circumscribed' her previously solitary figure. The word *tranché* operates in a middle zone between the literal and metaphoric, between the past and present and between utterance and silence. It signifies the severing of both flesh and deliberation, and thus prefigures Bintou's emptied voice and life that results from Moussoba's knife.

In an interview with Chalaye about the FGM that ends Bintou's life, Kwahulé explains that Knife-Lady's cutting itself represents a fissure between word and deed:

> It's precisely what I call the perverted tradition, which is to say, that [Moussoba] committed an act outside its context and inappropriate for the occasion. Besides, she says in the play, 'I've got two other operations waiting.' It's a mechanical thing, something she does one right after the other. In that sense, you're no longer part of the tradition. And yet, when she speaks, she justifies her act with a discourse she learned long ago, but that she no longer lives. This gap also describes a schizophrenia of power, because it's always about power, a power whose acts contradict the discourse. (Zabus 2005, trans. Love)

Creon and Drissa alike have the power to speak above and beyond the acts they intend or commit. Creon's tongue and Moussoba's knife both embody the gap produced by this 'schizophrenia of power' in which we see the disjuncture between declaration and act. Kwahulé notion of a 'perverted tradition' implies not only acts committed outside their intended context, but also acts excised from the discourse to which they should served as proper referents. Creon, Drissa and Moussoba all advert to some form of tradition which they in turn pervert by fracturing bonds of language an context. Creon advocates a responsive political authority whose suppleness he betrays repeatedly until his belated moment of recognition. Drissa calls upon the traditions of his homeland to construct an ideology of the family he undermines by first sexually assaulting and then killing Bintou. And as Kwahulé points out, Moussoba perverts the tradition of FGM by excising it from its local context and purpose, and thus desecrating the act. It would be easy to extend Kwahulé's notion of 'perverted tradition' to the act of translation or modern adaptation; but

Bintou deflects the possibility of this perversion by incorporating the violent perversions of *Antigone*. These are both plays in which language rests upon a substructure of potential violence.

THE VIOLENT METAMORPHOSIS OF LANGUAGE

Both *Bintou* and *Antigone* explore the zoomorphic potentialities of language and human understanding in order to reveal a violence underlying both word and deed that, in the end, leaves the stage empty and the voice hushed. These tragedies explore a number of no man's lands between words and deeds, often figured as a gradient between humans and animals, conflating the processes of biological metamorphosis with those of translation.

We first see this process, according to which tragic protagonists zoomorphize language itself when Teiresias, who has just arrived to warn that the king is on the brink of personal and political ruination, Teiresias describes the birds' '...screeching, gadfly-stinging and meaningless babble' (1002) that form the basis of his prophecy. The conflation of human and animal utterance (the verb *klaggeó* describes the sounds dogs make) produces a bestialized anti-language that the blind prophet reads in order to determine both the actions of the birds, and the meanings those actions denote.

In *Bintou*, the perversion of words is often assumed to have the power to pervert the human form. Aunt Rokia, drawing on the Biblical tradition of the mendacious serpent, undermines her niece by declaring that, 'Every word that crosses your lips inevitably turns into a lie. What truth are you capable of, snake' (2003: 11)?

In *Bintou*, as in *Antigone*, the gradient between humans and animals conflates the processes of biological metamorphosis with those of translation. These plays describe protagonists who blindly grope along another gradient, between truth and fabrication. In Aunt Rokia's invective, we see how two gradients intertwined, anthropomorphizing truth-tellers while at the same time zoomorphizing liars. Bintou understands her aunt's rhetorical strategy and returns the favour. When her mother asks her daughter to remain silent: 'Don't respond, Bintou. I beg you, don't respond to your uncle's wife' (11), Bintou spurns her mother's expedient attempt at appeasement: 'Mom, don't mix your voice with the hissing of serpents. Let me settle up these reptile tales with them' (11)...

Although Bintou implicitly sanctions her aunt's identification of beasts with lies, she has also deprecated the connection as a mere story and therefore an untruth unto itself. Having both endorsed and disparaged 'these snake tales,' she mires herself in the middle ground between fact and fiction. Yet it was Aunt Rokia who christened her gang the Lycaons, a name suggesting the lycanthropic middle state that Bintou both ironizes and accepts. In partially assenting to Aunt Rokia's reductive defamation, Bintou also accepts a linguistic lycanthropy, marooned between human articulateness and animalistic silence. If she assents to Aunt Rokia's nomenclature, Bintou can estrange herself in the wordlessness of the animal kingdom. Rokia believes in the power of words not only to denote human beings, but to zoomorphize them into submission.

In *Antigone*, it is the words themselves that undergo this process of metamorphosis. Even public discourse is transformed into a bestialized call. When Eurydice at first informs the chorus that she has overheard its 'words,' she also describes this hearsay utterance as an animal cry, and it is this cry that informs her of her family's ruination. Confronted with the terror of this cry, Eurydice demands a humanized rendering of its bestial unintelligibility into narrative form (1190). But the Chorus's translation of the animal cries back into the

form of a supposedly civilized language turns out to be the true horror. And it is before this horror that Eurydice recoils, subsuming herself into the silence of her suicide.

Soon, the bestial nature of these words will devolve to the meaning-making mind. Creon witnesses not the report of the event, but the event itself. We learn of his actual presence at the death of his son through the report of the messenger. The story the messenger relates, of Antigone and Haemon's deaths, embeds an interior dialogue in which Creon, on discovering his son holding Antigone's body, cries out, 'What have you done' (1228)?

In a report detailing the actions of Eurydice's family, we learn that Creon cries out against his son's deed. To Creon's question, Haemon responds in silence, merely spitting in his father's face, before drawing a sword and taking his own life. This linguistic *mise en abyme*, in which language both multiplies and negates itself, represents an encapsulated moment of crisis in which Eurydice discovers that the messenger's speech, emanating from the world of 'human unwisdom' (1243), is more savage than the animal cries which had horrified her only moments earlier.

THE SILENT SPECTATOR

Hegel, who believed the chorus represented 'onlooking consciousness,' in its attempt to negotiate the content and nature of Spirit, also claimed that the, 'spectators...find in the chorus their image and counterpoint, or rather their own thought giving itself expression' (Hegel et al. 2001: 293). Unlike Aristotle, who merely noted that the superior spectator of tragedy does not require performers who exaggerate their gestures (Aristotle 1995: 137), Hegel believed that the audience plays a role in the ethical and philosophical movements enacted on stage. Nietzsche, however, did not assign the audience such a universally special role in tragic art. He claimed that it was, 'Euripides [who] brought the spectator to the stage' (1999: 55) (1930: 103) by fashioning his tragic subjects in the form of 'actuality.' Nietzsche believed that Euripides, unlike Aeschylus and Sophocles, had turned a mirror to the 'everyday life' rather than the 'great and bold' (1999: 55). Scholarship has recognized ancient Greek tragedy's role in alerting spectators to the gaps, instabilities and mechanisms of control inherent to discourse. Recent scholarship on ancient Greek audiences centres on tragedy's ability to foster an awareness of the political and philosophical precariousness inherent to language itself. As Simon Goldhill says, 'Staging the *agon*, dramatising the corruption and failures of communication, displaying the conflicts of meaning within the public language of the city, provoke the audience towards a recognition of language's powers and dangers, fissures and obligations' (Easterling 1997: 149). And it is from these violent 'fissures' of language that a mediating silence arises in Sophocles and Kwahulé's tragic productions. Against the Euripides of Nietzsche's philosophical imagination—the Euripides who held a mirror up to the spectators—*Bintou* and *Antigone* allow their choruses to gradually subsume the spectators into the silences on stage.

Bintou inspires its audience to acknowledge and consider these internal tensions that tragic language both inheres and describes. In the same sense that the chorus ends *Antigone* with a generalized allusion to a 'great tongue'—which had, until this moment in the play, been the exclusive province of the protagonists—so does the chorus of *Bintou* develop from the particularized to the collective. Throughout the play, the chorus vacillates between both states—the individual and the general—until finally, at the end of the play, permanently transforming into a collective entity. For much of *Bintou*, though, the chorus

consists of three individuated protagonists—the members of the Lycaons—who variously comment on and participate in the action.

The Lycaons repeatedly describe and admire Bintou's thanatotic and erotic drives. One Lycaon, Blackout, tells a story about Bintou encouraging him to drive against the flow of freeway traffic. When he expresses his concern that the other drivers will collide with him, Bintou assures Blackout that, '...they hold on to their shit lives too much to take that kind of risk' (17), and asks, rhetorically, 'You think there's a more exciting way to die' (17)?

Kelkhal insists that, '[Bintou] doesn't do anything out of hate; everything she does, she does for love' (18). She is only happy, he continues, with others' 'good moves' (18), never with her own. From the Lycaons' anecdotes and descriptions of Bintou, we see that her character echoes forcefully with that of Antigone. Bintou's defiance of patriarchal authority, infatuation with death, selective loves and passionate followers all find such unmistakable correspondences with Antigone. But in this scene, the three young adolescents have not yet coalesced into a definitive chorus. It is only when Moussoba the Knife-Lady, after mutilating Bintou, signals the play's strong intertextual self-awareness that the Lycaons metamorphose into a silent collective.

After Bintou dies, the Lycaons carry her body away as an 'oriental dirge' plays in the background (45). As the family scatters, unable or unwilling to look upon the damage they have done, Moussoba offers her interpretation of Bintou's mutilation:

> You're daughter wasn't brave. Bintou agreed to share death's bed. Your daughter wasn't made for this world; she returned to her source. So the night alone is the witness to this drama. (46)

In echoing Antigone's thanatotic impulse, and her chthonic remove from the ambit of the city-state, Moussoba's peroration reveals a consciousness of genre that leverages irony and allusion in order to generate our own identity as tragic spectators. The dramatic irony implicates the audience, to which the night necessarily stands in metonymic relation. We 'alone' bear witness to Bintou's FGM, just as we 'alone' remain alert to the play's ancient pedigree. And at the very end of the play, we 'alone' listen to silence the tragic death leaves in its wake.

But before the spectators are allowed to fully comprehend the nature of this transference, the chorus returns to embody a silence of a very different sort. The penultimate stage direction reads, '[Moussoba] leaves. The family members, each in his or her corner, stare each other down. Silence' (47). The final scene of the play depicts the mourning and burgeoning retribution that follows on the heels of Bintou's death. Just as the discourse in *Antigone* has been abstracted from the sphere of the city-state, the mutilation of Bintou reduces the rich language of the chorus to hushed witness. Nicole Loraux, in her work *The Mourning Voice*, argues that Greek tragedy is an anti-political genre, and that neither the spectators in the Athenian theatre of Dionysus—a space sequestered from the city-state—nor the choruses, should be viewed as analogous to the citizenry. The discourse of tragedy constitutes that which has been excluded from the public sphere, especially the sounds of mourning (Loraux 2002). As we have seen, however, neither Bintou nor Antigone have excluded themselves from the public sphere. Bintou's triumph is that her voice rings powerfully throughout the French suburb in which she rules supreme, while Antigone voices a public protest that contradicts the private silence to which women had been consigned. Yet death eliminates Bintou and Antigone's voices from the public sphere, and so the chorus is left to utter the sounds of mourning.

Due to the shame, deaths and departures, silence remains the only sound possible. Death—the ultimate deed—has overwhelmed language. The vengeful Lycaons, refusing to speak, surround Drissa who cannot bear the silence. Having divested itself permanently of individual identities or even first-person transference, the chorus, as if they were the Erinyes themselves, stalk a frantically prolix Drissa:

> Who are you? (Silence) Since when did you get here (Silence) What did you see (Silence) Who are you (Silence)...But speak, say something! Who are you and what do you want with me? (Silence) So her mother thought this was the time...for her good...But you know Bintou, she can decide just as well never to come back, just like that...But stop following me. (Kwahulé 2003: 47)

He exits the stage, trailed by the chorus. In these final moments of the play, the chorus abjures utterance—its 'great tongue'—in order to provide the only form of discourse possible in the wake of Bintou's horrific death; which is to say, the complete absence of discourse. The chorus becomes the silence that has lingered within the gap between word and deed throughout the play, turning Drissa into a protagonist who apostrophizes an on-stage presence that is both spectre and spectator. Just as wisdom makes it own compact with wordlessness in the final choral passage of Antigone, the Lycaons' silent ambuscade provides the transitive link with which the plays spectators lay claim to the tragedy on stage.

At the end of *Antigone*, Creon leaves the play shattered by his 'hard-born destiny' (Sophocles, *Antigone* 1346), and the chorus, in response to the multiple calamities to which it has borne witness and on which it has progressively commented, sings its final speech. As opposed to the happiness principally earned from wisdom:

> Great words
> of the over-proud exact great blows
> in retribution,
> which teaches wisdom in old age
> (1350–1353)

We are as much punished as rewarded for words that supersede the bounds of reality, and thus wisdom enjoins a kind of silence rooted in either death or mute spectation. The final ode, in its blind circularity, in its depiction of a world in which wisdom transitively makes old age the necessary condition of happiness, implies an ulterior intelligence accessible only to the spectators silently listening to the 'great words' and watching the 'great blows' contained within the confines of the theatre. The dramatic irony the spectators enjoy implies not just their foreknowledge and relative omniscience, but also their silence.

This silence also inheres to the spectator of the modern adaptation, who enjoys an uncanny brand of dramatic irony, bearing mute witness between and within the two plays. It is in this sense that the spectator or reader of the modern adaptation assumes the variously silent and communicative modes of tragic spectatorship.

FACING BINTOU IN BRUSSELS

In November 2003, Rosa Gasquet, a young director from the immigrant neighborhood of Schaerbeck in Brussels, staged *Bintou* in an underground garage. Entranced by the 'choral dynamic and musical language of the play' (Chalaye 2004a), Gasquet cast her production largely with young men and women from her struggling Schaerbeck

neighborhood.[9] The production was a success, selling out through much of its run. As Chalaye reported: '...[it was] a young Bruxellois public from Schaerbeck mostly not in the habit of going to the theatre, but the original take by Rosa Gasquet, centred on rap and slam poetry, was enough to convince them to come' (Chalaye)...

The poster for the event displays a young woman's face—we presume Bintou's—whose half-silhouette darkens into a nocturnal urban skyline striped in luminescent blues and reds. Her face is split, one half lost to the darkness of the cityscape, the other lit by an unseen source. She gazes straight at us, as if to issue a challenge, or patiently inspire a response. Her sealed lips suggest a silence that is as self-possessed as ours is disquiet. Bintou could be asking her silent spectators, as did Camus', to maintain a 'force of rebellion' while not forgetting the lessons of tragedy. If true, hers was the face Camus was sought all along.

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[1] The most comprehensive discussion of African productions, translations and modern adaptations of ancient Greek tragedies can be found in Wetmore 2002. Wetmore mostly focuses on Anglophone African works such as the Nigerian playwright John Pepper Clark's *Song of a Goat*, the Nigerian Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides*, the Nigerian Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the South African Athol Fugard's *Orestes*, and the Barbadian Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *Antigone*, *Odale's Choice*. Wetmore largely ignores Francophone writers, and does not mention Kwahulé. See also the discussion by Felix Budelmann in Goff 2005.

[2] It is important to note that the suburbs of France (in French, a 'banlieu'), unlike those of England or the United States, are typically areas of low-income apartments and social housing. In America, the French suburbs would be referred to as 'the projects,' and in England as 'Housing Estates.'

[3] In her French 'dossier' on Greek tragedy, Virginie Soubrier (2005) 8–28 at 24, observes that Koffi Kwahulé's plays, 'are often inspired by the ancient Greek model ... A number of characters remind us of tragic heroes. Bintou is a contemporary Antigone–she has her insolence and the pride, her intransigence and lucidity. At the end of the play, the young girls [sic]–the chorus–which surrounds the Uncle–Bintou's murderer–embody his guilty conscience, and remind us of the Furies hounding Orestes in Aeschylus's tragedy'.

[4] In his Athenian lecture, Camus uses the word 'form' without providing a definition or gloss on his intended meaning.

[5] Translation Love.

[6] The Baolé are among the 65 different ethnic groups living in central Côte d'Ivoire, constituting roughly 23% of the population. Baolé is also a language spoken among these ethnic groups.

[7] From a study titled 'Contemporary African history and ancient Greek myths at a crossroads [Du croisement de l'histoire de l'Afrique contemporaine avec les mythes antiques grecs] in which Barbalosi quotes Kwahulé. (Barbolosi 117; Kwahulé (1996) 273).

[8] All translations of Antigone are my own using the most recent Oxford Classical Text: H. Lloyd-Jones and N. G. Wilson (eds), *Sophocles* (1990).

[9] The translation of Sylvie Chalaye's article is my own.