THE FUNCTION OF MYTH IN RITUAL, IN TRAGEDY, AND IN JOVAN HRISTIĆ'S PLAY CLEAN HANDS

A Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

Jovan Hristić is a contemporary Yugoslav playwright, most of whose plays are based on Classical Greek myths and tragedies. He belongs to a group of modern playwrights who have revived the tradition of adapting ancient plays and myths for a contemporary audience. The tradition first started with the French Neo-Classicists and was reintroduced once again by the Romanticists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Modern adaptations of Classical myths in drama began in the early twentieth century and flourished throughout Europe during and after the Second World War, especially at the height of the so-called Theater of the Absurd in the fifties and sixties. It is important to note that each of the above periods was characterized by paramount social, political, and aesthetic changes. The theater of each period attempted to embody in its form and content these universal changes, and the myth became the object which was to serve this purpose. Although most characteristic for these periods, myths in literature have been known throughout the history of world literature.

The question most often asked when approaching literary texts based on myths is, what is so characteristic

about the myth which can serve as a basis, or primary text, in a text which is to be perceived by a modern nonmythological consciousness? When our attention is focused specifically on Ancient Greek myths, we wonder whether there is any change in the function of the myth in modern drama from the one it had in Classical Greek tragedy.

There is extensive literature in modern literary criticism dealing with the function of the myth in literary texts. Most of the material treating this subject tends to focus only on one particular aspect of this function. Although systematic, such an approach limits one's understanding of the various functions of the myth in a literary text. The myth is regarded by some critics as already worked-upon material which has only a "content" function in a modern literary work. They regard the original material as something dead and static because it has lost all relevance for a contemporary audience. The modern author, they say, in his reworking of the myth gives contemporary relevancy to it. Most critics agree, however, that the myth and the Classical tragedy are easily adaptable and can be comprehended by a modern audience because they always deal with the general and not with the particular. It is this essence of the myth and the tragedy which makes the audience aware of the universal import of the material in the play.

A particularly obvious problem in the study of myths in literature is the assumption made by the author concerning

the reader's acquaintance with some previous texts (the myth and its literary transformation in the tragedy). Hristić's play is of particular interest because it posits yet another assumption: the audience should be acquainted with the philosophy of existentialism, because there are so many references made to this philosophy, especially to Sartre's Dirty Hands, which itself is an exercise in literary Existentialism. If the audience is unaware of the origin of the material, a literary work of this type can easily limit the degree of its interpretation.

When the text of a modern play deals with an Ancient Greek myth or tragedy (and the ritual implied in the tragedy), the "past" of the play is both the myth and its literary transformation into a tragedy. The spectator is aware that the story comes from a certain myth and that it was used by another author in the Ancient period. In Hristić's play the origin is both the myth of Oedipus and the tragedy by Sophocles based on the same myth. These are only textual relationships. The attitudes of the spectators are just as important. A modern audience viewing such a play goes through a double process of cognition: it perceives that the present text differs somewhat from the original text, and its own attitude, or interpretation of the text, differs from that of the ritual participant or the spectator of the Classical Greek tragedy. In such plays, therefore, we have

juxtaposition not only of text levels, but of attitudes toward texts as well.

This study of the Oedipus myth will focus on the various aspects in the development of the myth from the ritual to its adaptation in Hristić's play Clean Hands. In my study of this play I was faced with the problem of identifying the primary function of the myth in the play. I began by postulating that the meaning of the play is a result of the relationship among Hristić's text and the various other texts which have this myth as their primary material. It became obvious to me that it would be impractical for this study to trace the development of every text which is based on the myth of Oedipus. My next assumption was that the myth in Hristić's play is one example of its functional transformation. Taking this idea of functionality as a starting point, I was able to limit my scope to a study of the myth's functional transformations only. I proceeded to analyze the function of the myth from its earliest possible form--the ritual. The next phase of the myth's transformation studied is in the Ancient Greek tragedy, where it is transformed into an aesthetic object while keeping the basic form of the ritual. In Hristić's play the myth is still in the form of an aesthetic object, but without the presence of the ritual form.

The various studies of the development of myths are too numerous to mention here, and they are not all relevant

to my study of Hristić's play. I will therefore limit my approach to the study of the myth only to those aspects which will contribute to a more exact interpretation of Hristić's play. I hope that my study will also contribute to the general study of the function of myths in other literary works.

CHAPTER I

FROM RITUAL TO DRAMA

Ritual as a Religious Act

In the period after the Second World War there were extensive discussions by playwrights, play directors, and critics concerning the function of the theater in contemporary society. It was observed that from the time of the revival of the theater by the French Neo-Classical tradition, its main function was to entertain. This function, of course, placed a limit on the types of theatrical performances, because both the playwright and the director had to recognize the fact that unless the performance entertained the spectators, it was considered "bad" theater. Consequently, all elements of theater--story, language, action, and set--were dominated by this prerequisite. The experimental Avant-Garde theater of the post-Second World War years began to search for new forms and texts with the intention of liberating itself from these confines; its first direction was toward a return to the religious, ritual form of the Classical Greek tradition. The goal of the playwrights became that of finding a form for the theater where the content would be of universal importance and where the

language of dance and music would not be subordinated to the prerequisite of entertainment.

We do not need to elaborate on the various causes for the need of new forms for the theater. Our main concern in this part of the discussion will be to describe some of the properties of ritual, especially those which have given birth to the theater as a form of art. It is hoped that such a description will give us some idea as to why so many modern Avant-Garde playwrights accord so much attention to ritual.

First, we must construct a workable definition of ritual, both from the structural and from the functional aspect. It must be kept in mind, however, that such a definition need not include aspects which are not relevant to a discussion of the function of ritual in the theater. Perhaps we can begin by postulating that a ritual is a systematic actualization of rites in which members of a community participate. "Systematic actualization" in this definition encompasses two notions: form and time. These are notions which differentiate ritual from a verbal repetition of a past event. For the ritual-participating consciousness, the events which took place in the past--most often in the "beginning"--were systematic; each event took place in a certain temporal order, and some events were caused by other events. The actualization of a past event, therefore, has to follow the same temporal sequence as when it first happened. The notion of "passage of time" in a ritual is

only a reference to a time span between ritualistic events, not between the first, "real" event and the event of the ritual. In the Christian rituals, for example, Christ was born, crucified, and resurrected only once in real time, but in ritualistic time the Nativity, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection happen every year as if they were happening for the first time. At Christmas, in the Eastern Orthodox denomination people repeat the phrase "Hristos se rodi" or its equivalent in other languages, meaning "Christ is born"--now, today, and not two thousand years ago. One can find parallels of this usage in many of the world religions. Participation in a ritual, therefore, requires not only believing in the original event, but also believing in being part of the original event. Both the Christian and the Ancient Greek Dionysian rituals represent a participation in a yearly cycle of Birth, Passion, Death, and Regeneration (resurrection). Each ritualistic event is a repetition of this first cycle.

The rituals which gave birth to tragedy as a literary genre were those in which the Greek god Dionysus was worshipped. There are many myths about his life. The basic one tells of how Zeus had fallen in love with Semele, a mortal. One day she asked him to appear to her in all his might, just as he did to his wife Hera. He came to her with all his lightning, and that killed her at once. Zeus was able to save his and Semele's unborn child, Dionysus, by

pinning him to his thigh until Dionysus was ready to be born. Later on, in the myths of the Orphic tradition, Dionysus was kidnapped by the Titans, from whom he tried to escape by taking various animal shapes. "While he was in the shape of a bull, the Titans tore him to pieces and ate his raw flesh. Zeus killed the Titans, and of the ashes that remained men were created. Dionysus' head was saved by Athena and his dismembered fragments were miraculously joined together; Dionysus was resurrected."[1]

Dionysian rituals in early Greek culture were repetitions and commemorations of these events which happened in the "beginning." The yearly sacrificial offering is the repetition of the first sacrifice. The sacrificial animal is most often a bull or a goat, which are the forms in which Dionysus appeared most often. The manner in which the songs were sung during the ritual procession remains obscure. The songs were called dithyrambs; it is believed that they depicted the death of the god Dionysus in the form in which he died and his triumphant rebirth. The procession consisted of a chorus and a leader, who seemed to be possessed by some madness and divine frenzy. As the sacrificial animal was led to the place of sacrifice, crowds formed on the street to watch. The procession eventually reached the sacrificial ground; the animal was sacrificed and dismembered, and its flesh was eaten by the participants.

The structure of the Dionysian myth as it was performed in the Ancient Greek ritual can serve, according to the anthropologist Gilbert Murray, as the basis for all Greek myths. And since the tragedy is an adaptation of the mythical material and the ritualistic structure, it can also fall within this structure. Its constituent elements can be analyzed on the same level that one would analyze the elements of the ritual. The thesis of many anthropologists is that there is in any group of myths in a given society a structure which orders the necessary elements of a given myth in a given culture. Once this structure is extracted from one group of myths, all other myths of that culture can be analyzed in relation to it.

The separation of the participants from the observers (crowds) in the Greek ritual is perhaps the first instance of a theatrical performance, but not in the sense that we know theater today. When the crowd observes the event it is able to identify with the story of Dionysus because it perceives its own existence as being the same as that of the god. The next step in the theatricalization of the rituals begins when the spectators' identification with the god starts to diminish and their attitude toward the ritual changes. In the following discussion we will discuss the relationship between the ritual participant and the observer from the structuralist point of view.

The Subject-Object Relationship in a Ritual

We shall begin with the proposition that an event can be a ritual when a mind adopts a particular attitude toward that event. The question here is, what kind of a relationship is established between the mind (perceiver) and the event perceived once this attitude is adopted? Once we have answered this question, we can proceed to establish the differences in attitudes toward a ritual between the ritual-participant and the ritual-perceiver.

One of the first aestheticians and literary critics to give consideration to the attitude of the perceiver as a necessary element in the study of literature was the Czech critic Jan Mukarovsky. His theory is that an object may have any of the following four functions: practical, cognizant, magico-religious, and aesthetic. He does not state specifically whether the object must be something concrete. For practical purposes we shall assume that the object of perception can be anything which the mind can perceive, including abstractions.

Mukarovsky's idea is that man adopts various attitudes toward reality (objects), depending on the goal toward which the attitude is directed. "He adopts one attitude toward reality, for example, when he is acting practically, another when he conceives it theoretically or scientifically, another when he apprehends it religiously."[2] In other words, the function of the object is not intrinsic, but is defined by

the attitude of the subject who perceives it, and it becomes specific only when the concrete task is fulfilled. The end of the task signals the end of the attitude of the subject and the function of the object, for, at another given moment, the function of the object may change, depending on the changing attitude of the subject toward the object. The "value" of the object is determined by the degree of its fulfillment of the designated function ascribed to it by the attitude of the subject. If the subject adopts a practical attitude toward a hammer, the "value" of the hammer is determined by the degree of its fulfillment of that practical function. Similarly, the "value" of the formula H_2O is determined by the degree of its ability to convert reality (water) into a theoretical sign.

Mukarovsky defines the magico-religious attitude as follows:

> Every reality which enters the range of the magico-religious attitude becomes a sign of a specific kind, and it does so immediately upon entry. The theoretical attitude, of course, is also characterized by the fact that it converts reality into a sign, namely a concept; here, however, we confront precisely a conversion which is not self-evident in nature, but which requires a cognitive effort. In the magico-religious attitude, realities are not converted into signs but are simply signs intrinsically. This is why they are capable of functioning as what they represent (an amulet and the like). They are sign-symbols . . . With the magico-religious sign, as we saw, consideration was directed not to the sign itself but to what stood behind it, to what it represented--a mysterious force of a deity.[3]

Further, Mukarovsky adds an example in a footnote:

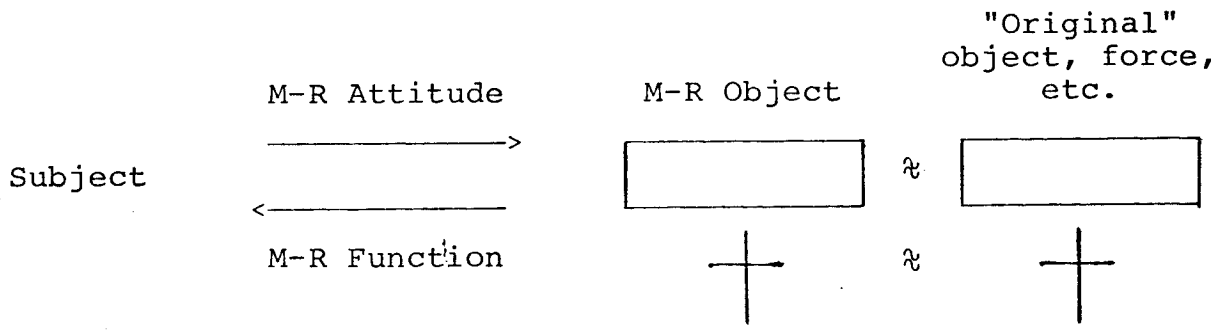
> The doctrine of transubstantiation is characteristic of this attitude and of the nature of the magico-religious sign. The properties of the bread and wine remain, but the essence changes: The bread and the wine become in their essence Christ's body and soul.[4]

Since Mukarovsky's main concern in this part of his article is to define the aesthetic function in relation to the other functions, he devotes very little space to the magico-religious function and attitude. The above remarks should suffice as a starting point for our discussion of the subject-object relationship in ritual.

It was noted earlier that any ritual must have a participant, but a subject (one who perceives the ritual) may or may not be needed. The subject is outside of the function. The subject adopts an attitude toward the object, but only the object can perform the function of communicating something outside itself. Now, in the ritual, if there can be such a situation as total participation, the entire cosmos <u>becomes</u> in essence a magico-religious object. And once there is total participation, there cannot be a subject who can initiate an attitude toward totality as a magico-religious object. Only an outside observer, and therefore a nonparticipant, can initiate a magico-religious function in a subject-object relationship. The ritual-observer is always aware of the attitude he has adopted toward the ritual. The ritual-participant on the other hand becomes, in essence, something or someone other than himself and therefore he can no longer communicate with the role he has

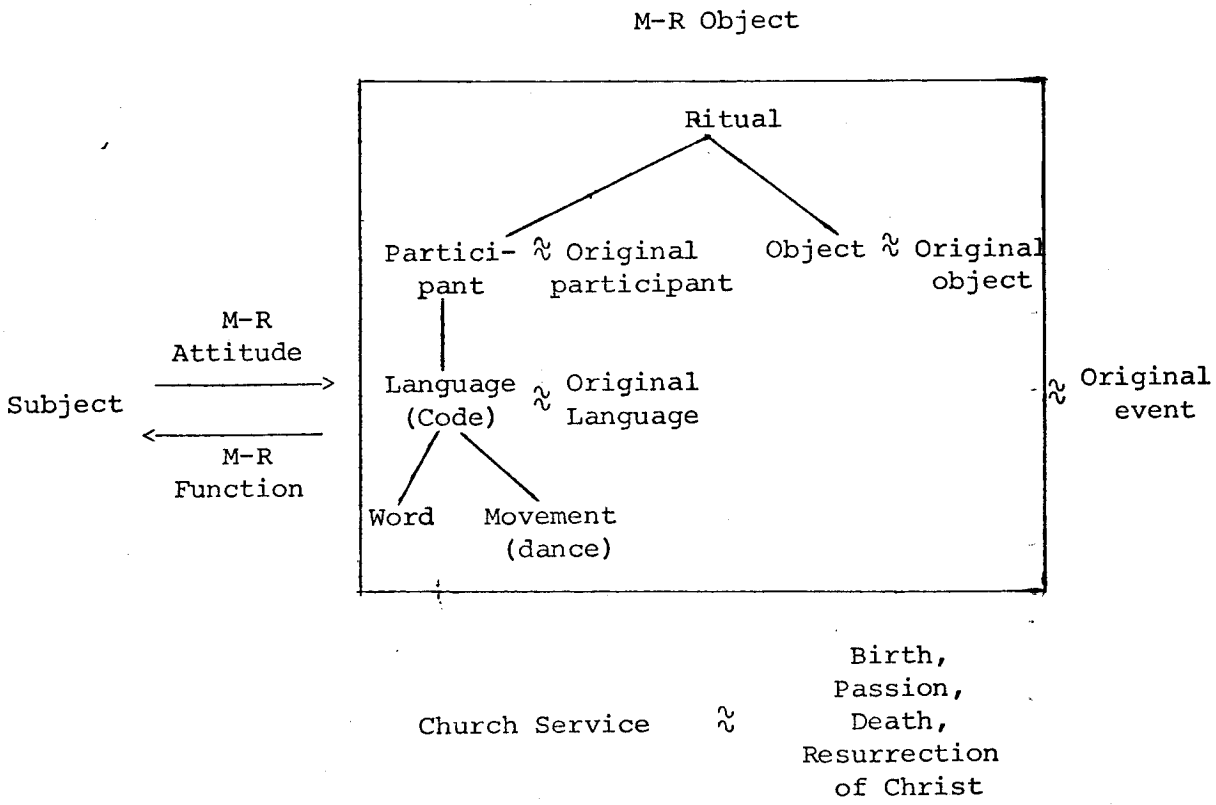
assumed. The moment he enters the semantic field of ritual, the self of the ritual-participant is completely transformed into the assumed role. The diagram below illustrates these relationships:

Magico-Religious Relationship



Here we have taken the cross as an example of a magico-religious object. When a subject assumes the magico-religious attitude toward a cross in a church, that cross in its essence <u>becomes</u> the Cross upon which Christ was crucified. The sign ≈ indicates similarity not only in shape, but in essence as well. The diagram shows that contact between the subject and the "original" object can be established only when the magico-religious object functions as the medium.

The following diagram illustrates the relationship between the subject (observer) and the ritual as a magico-religious object:



The subject here is outside of the ritual and assumes an attitude toward it. The participant is part of the magico-religious object toward which an attitude is assumed. It is difficult to distinguish the subject from the participant in some modern church rituals. When a subject enters a church during services, he may become a participant in the ritual immediately upon entry, or he may only assume a certain attitude toward it. There are designated places in the church, however, where an entry requires participation. The altar is one such place.

In his theories of function and attitude, Mukarovski observes that the affinity between the magico-religious and

the aesthetic functions is so close, that sometimes it is impossible to distinguish one from the other: "Indeed, it even happens that the two functions compete and that the aesthetic function attempts to substitute for the religious function. Hence the extreme reaction, such as Savonarola's, against art in the church."[5]

If our assumption that the Ancient Greek theater was a development from religious rituals--namely, the Dionysian--is true, we should be able to trace this development by studying the changes in the subject-object relationship as the ritual was being transformed from a magico-religious object to an aesthetic object. In the next section we shall follow this development using as an example the myths of Dionysus and Oedipus.

Ritual as an Art Form

It is clear that ritual as a religious object became an aesthetic object when its magico-religious function started to fade into the background and the aesthetic function came into the foreground. The complexity of changes in social, religious, and aesthetic norms is so enormous that it is impossible to pinpoint all the causes for this change in the perception of ritual. Perhaps the beginning of the change was the loss of touch with the religious aspect of a ritual by both the participant and the observer. As the crowd watched the Dionysian ritual procession, it was the word, the object, and the dance as such which generated

interest, not the power which stood behind them. Similarly, the participants began to emphasize more the intrinsic nature of these elements and less their magico-religious power. We must make it clear, however, that this change took place over a long period of time.

One can also observe a parallel development in the change of the function of ritual in the Christian religion. Medieval religious theater has its roots in the rituals celebrating the life of Christ. The Polish theater critic Jan Kott in his study of the development of modern drama from Christian ritual has made these observations:

> The passing from sacrum to profanum begins with a change of signs and times. The deep symbolism--archetypal and structural, protean and positional--changes to literal and representational signs. Sacral time actualizes into earthly time. In the ceremonies involved in the liturgy of the Holy Week in the eighth and ninth centuries, Hardison points out theatrical qualities in the ritual which preceded the emergence of the first Passion Dialogue. . . . All that is needed for drama to be born is a question and reply:
>
> > Quem queritis sepulcro, o Christicolae?
> > Ihesum Nazareneum crucifixum, o celicolae.
> > Non est hic, surrexit sicut ipse dixit; ite
> > nunciato quia surrexit.
>
> From the union of ceremony and trope, the first resurrection play, Visitatio Sepulchri, was born; it set the general pattern and form of medieval religious theatre. The celebrants not only have their given parts but, through them, are dramatis personae. The clerics in white surplices who sing the verse "Quem queritis . . ." are angels guarding the tomb; the three clerics who replay are the three Marys.[6]

In later plays new episodes were added, and Christ's resurrection was no longer the mystery represented in the church

ritual. "The mystery ended with Christ appearing to pilgrims on the road to Emmaus and to Mary Magdalene in the garden. The empty tomb ceased to be a sufficient sign; for the first time the God-man who had risen from the tomb appeared on the stage, represented by an actor."[7]

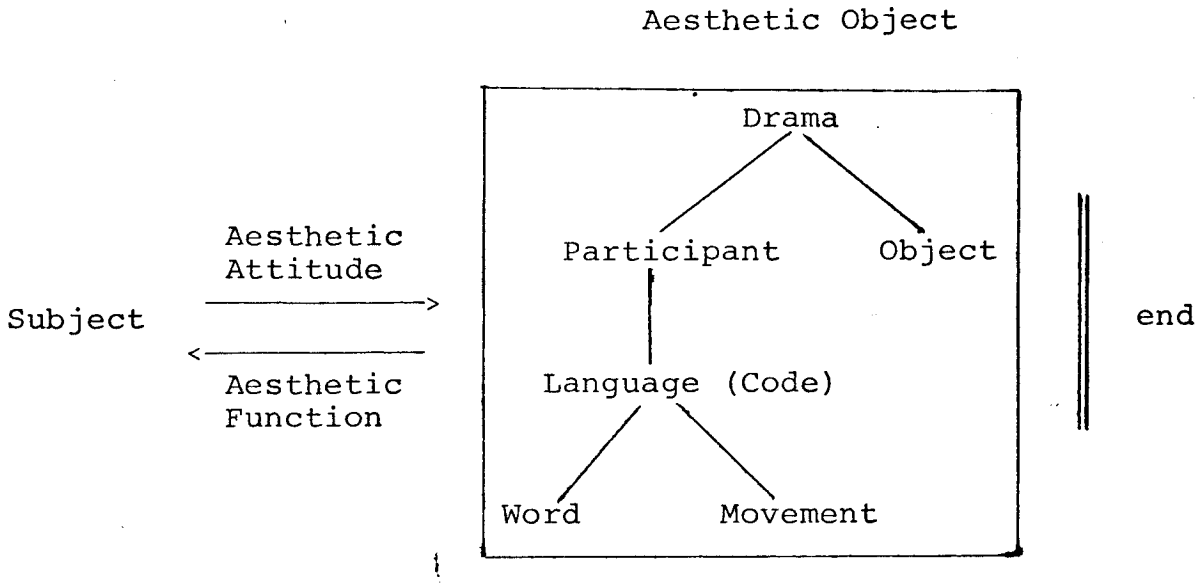
Similarly, when the Ancient Greek play came into existence new episodes were added in the life of Dionysus. In the later development of the Greek theater the myth of Dionysus was replaced in the plays by myths of other gods and of historical figures. The oral tradition became the main source for the content of the plays. In time, the persona of the author gained importance in choosing the material for the plays. Once the theater was liberated from the confines of presenting only the sacred, the author had the freedom to incorporate in his plays contemporary social and political changes and sentiments. "The poet could achieve with his audience an immediate contact of terror and delight because both shared the same habits of belief. When these habits are no longer current, the corresponding mythology goes dead and spurious."[8] Both the playwright and his audience recognized the new sentiments in the society and that is how they were able to relate to each other.

The myth's transformation into a literary text opened the possibility of rearranging, adding, and subtracting elements from the original myth by the author to suit his own interpretation. As the Greek mythical mind was getting

progressively demythologized, so was the apprehension of the myth's mystery. The myth was no longer seen as a "true" past event; rather, it became a symbol which could be interpreted by the codes of the rationalistic view of existence. Its significance changed, therefore, from the sacred to the symbolic. On this subject the Russian aestheticians Ju. Lotman and B. Uspenskij wrote:

> The significance of mythological texts for a culture of a nonmythological type is confirmed, in part by the persistence of efforts to translate them into cultural language of a nonmythological type . . . in the field of art . . . it results in metaphorical constructions . . . In a number of cases a mythological text, translated into the category of nonmythological consciousness, is perceived as symbolic. A symbol of this type can be interpreted as the result of reading a myth from the standpoint of later semiotic consciousness.[9]

The most obvious distinction between the ritualistic and the theatrical performance of the myth is in the difference of the relationship between the perceiver and the thing perceived. In the previous discussion we indicated that the role of the participant in the ritual is to "communicate" the acts of a sacred being (Christ, Dionysus, etc.) through transformation. All objects taking part in the ritual are also transformations of sacred objects. In the theater, on the other hand, objects and participants have the aesthetic function, and therefore they may, but do not need to, represent anything beside themselves. This relationship is illustrated in the following diagram.



Here we see that the elements of drama are the same as those of ritual. The only thing that changes is their function. In our diagram of the ritual we indicated the "thing" to which reference is made with the sign ≈. In the theatrical performance reference need not be made to anything beyond the role played. We also mentioned earlier that the nature of the word, the movement, and the object in the ritual must necessarily reflect the nature of the same elements in the original event. Similarly, the structure and the relationship of these elements must reflect those of the original. In the aesthetic function, the very structure and the very relationship are the "thing" communicated. In the Christian rituals the cross is an object which communicates to the participant the original Cross; as an aesthetic object, the cross itself is the object communicated. The perceiver is no longer interested in the power beyond the cross. The

cross becomes an object to be enjoyed in itself and attention is focused on its shape, color, material, etc.

With the change of attitude toward ritual from the magico-religious to the aesthetic there was a parallel and simultaneous change in the architecture of the physical grounds where performances were taking place. The ritual ground was no longer practical for the performance of plays; the altar was replaced by a more elaborate structure where more actors could be accommodated. For the first time there was a space specifically designated for the nonparticipants (spectators). The affinity between the theatrical space and the altar did not change for a long time.

For years scholars have tried to reconstruct the earliest architectural form of the Greek stage and the movement of actors and chorus in the performance, but their findings are largely conjectures because very little remains upon which to base a reconstruction. We can guess that, once the function of the ritual changed, there was a need to expand the ground where the plays were presented and to build some structure where actors could be stationed:

> The actor-chorus division created the need for somewhere where the actors could change their costumes and retire between scenes. Originally this need was filled by a simple hut or tent erected at the edge of the orchestra. In time this primitive booth was replaced by a larger and more complicated structure of wood . . . Eventually this temporary structure was replaced in turn by a permanent stone building . . . In the same period the auditorium was similarly transformed. Originally spectators looked down on the orchestra from the bare hillside. Then tiers of wooden benches were built, later replaced by stone.[10]

It is known that in the middle of the circular orchestra where the chorus danced was the altar of Dionysus, associated with the religious side of the theater festival. This probably originated from the altar where offerings were made to Dionysus in the ritual. In the middle of the first row of seats was one which was very elaborate and it was reserved for the priest of Dionysus. The three acting levels of the Greek stage also reflect some elements of the ritual (see page 58 below). In the ritual, the leader was almost always separated from the chorus. In the earliest forms of the Greek stage there were likewise two separate acting levels. Later, when the scene-building was added, there was a third level on top of this building, where the gods appeared or where their statues were placed. The three acting levels in some ways reflect the cosmogeny of the Greek religion: gods were on top, kings in the middle, and man on the bottom. In Euripides' Bacchae Dionysus enters from the orchestra level, and when in the last act it is revealed that he is a god, he stands on the third level observing the action and Pentheus' dismembered body. In Sophocles' Oedipus the King Oedipus enters the stage from the top; he is the king and in control of things. At the end of the play he leaves the stage from the bottom level, his body dismembered (eyes plucked out). When the second and third actor were added in the Greek tragedy, their movement on the stage levels was limited by the roles they were playing, both dramatic and cosmological.

It is important for us to understand the significance of the structure of the early Greek stage because it represented in a shell the cosmological structure. The movement of the mythical hero on the stage during a performance, as well as in cosmological time, is from the top to the bottom. Perhaps this movement signifies the descending of the god to the level of man where he becomes a god-man and rises back to the top. This movement of the god-man in the Greek and Christian religions is characterized by some type of suffering, called Pathea. In the next chapter we shall examine the Pathea of the tragic hero in Greek myths and we shall parallel that with the Pathea of Hristić's hero.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAGIC RHYTHM OF ACTION

Pathea of the Year-Daemon

In his article "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek tragedy," Gilbert Murray defines the basic element of the fate of Dionysus in the myth as being the same as that of the Year-Daemon:

> Thus we may conclude that the fate of Dionysus, in Herodotus' time as well as later, was a Sparagmos: doubtless he had, like the other Year-Daemons, a special enemy, was torn to pieces, scattered over the fields, lost, sought for, discovered and recognized, just as Osires was. This forms the normal pattern for the Year-Daemon; the other representations of their being go through similar experiences, but Dionysus, the most typical of them, has the most typical and complete cycle of pathea.[11]

From his examination of different myths which seem to underlie the various "Eniautos" celebrations, Murray finds the following elements, which are repeated in one form or another:[12]

1. An Agon or Contest, the Year against its enemy, Light against Darkness, Summer against Winter
2. A Pathos of the Year-Daemon, generally a ritual or sacrificial death, in which Adonis or Attis is slain by the tabu animal; the Pharmakos stoned; Osires, Dionysus, Pentheus, Orpheus, Hippolytus torn to pieces

3. A Messenger, who announces the death; this leads to

4. A Threnos or Lamentation

5. and 6. An Anagnorisis or discovery or recognition of the slain and mutilated Daemon, followed by his resurrection or Apotheosis or in some sense, his Epiphany in Glory. It naturally goes with Peripeteia or extreme change of feeling from grief to joy.

In the latter part of his article Murray takes some well-known plays and examines the nature and the sequences of these elements. He suggests that although the content has strayed somewhat from the Dionysian ritual, the forms of tragedy retain clear traces of the original mystery of the Death and Rebirth of Dionysus. Both Murray and Kott show that Euripides' Bacchae exhibits these traces most obviously. In this play, Dionysus comes to Thebes, the city of his mother, with a retinue of frenzied women. He is arrested by Pentheus, who is his cousin and the king of Thebes, because he has driven the women of the city into frenzy. When asked who he is, Dionysus answers, the son of the god Zeus. The women have gone to the mountain Cithaeron, and they devour every animal in sight. Dionysus takes Pentheus there to show him what the women are doing. Pentheus climbs onto a tree and watches. The frenzied women see him and, mistaking him for an animal, start to tear him to pieces. One of the women is his mother, who, in her frenzy, cannot recognize him. In Murray's system, this frenzied activity would be

labeled the Agon; the devouring of Pentheus, the Pathos. This action was happening backstage. A Messenger arrives to announce to the chorus the Death of Pentheus, which is followed by Lamentation or Threnos. His dismembered body is brought on stage, his mother holding the head and finally recognizing its identity. This is the Anagnorisis. Dionysus watches all these events from the top of the stage. His final words refer to the general nature of Year-Daemon: things happen that way because that is how it has been since the "beginning."

The sixth point, Peripeteia, an extreme change of feeling from grief to joy at the end, is not usually found in the extant tragedies. It is known, however, that after the sacrifice of the animal in the ritual, there was some type of celebration characterized by extreme joy. Historians also tell us that during the Dionysian festivals plays were written in tetralogies. Three tragedies were followed by a Satyr play, which was usually very festive and joyful. This, claims Murray, is an indication that at one time tragedies did end with a Peripateia just as in the ritual. Elements of Peripateia are still present in later tragedies, usually somewhere in the middle of the text. In Sophocles' Oedipus the King, it is the moment when Oedipus is told by the shepherd that his father (stepfather) died of natural causes. The news causes an extreme feeling range from grief to joy, because now Oedipus knows that he cannot become the killer

of his father, contrary to what he was told by the oracle. This feeling of joy lasts for only a moment, until the same shepherd tells him that the dead man was not his real father.

The difference between this type of Peripeteia and the one found in the ritual is that in the ritual the Peripeteia is always connected with the Anagnorisis and the Theophany, the appearance of the mutilated god. In the tradition of tragedy, the Peripateia at the end of the play is primarily symbolic. It happens after the recognition by the hero of his fate and of the true nature of the Universe. In Sophocles' play it occurs at the time when Oedipus, realizing his guilt, runs into the palace to blind himself:

> Oedipus: Oh, oh! All brought to pass--all true. Thou light, may I now look my last on thee--I who have been found accursed in birth, accursed in wedlock, accursed in the shedding of blood.[13]

The Peripateia at the end of the play is both physical and metaphorical. Oedipus's blinding of himself indicates a change from light into darkness. These two images are associated metaphorically in the play with knowledge and ignorance. In the beginning, Oedipus associates light with knowledge and darkness with ignorance; that is why he is so exultant about Teirasias's blindness: "Night, endless night hath thee in her keeping, so that thou canst never hurt me, or any man who sees the sun."[14] But it is precisely Teiresias's blindness which endows him with the ability to "see" things which Oedipus cannot. Oedipus recognizes his own ignorance only at the end of the play.

In the next section will be demonstrated how Sophocles and Jovan Hristić make use of the elements of the Pathea of the Year-Daemon in their plays. The significance of these elements should not be extended, however, beyond the basis or deep structure. For the genre of tragedy they serve as "functions" which change the action of the play. They form an abstract model which is actualized only in the written text of the play.

Pathea of Oedipus in Sophocles and Hristić

It is not known which version of the myth Sophocles used in his play because there are not many extant versions for comparison. In all of them, however, Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother.

The myth of Oedipus is part of the greater myth of the House of Thebes. It starts with Cadmus, who, in search of his sister Europa, goes to the Delphic oracle to find out where she is. There he is told by Apollo to stop his search and to found a city. However, he must first kill a dragon which guards a spring and keeps killing Cadmus's companions when they go to get water from it. After he kills the dragon, Athena appears to him and tells him to sow the earth with the dragon's teeth; he does and from the teeth armed men spring up. They turn upon each other, fighting until all but five are killed. Cadmus induces the survivors to become his helpers. He marries Harmonia and has four daughters and a

son, all of whom suffer a terrible fate. Semele, one of the daughters, falls in love with Zeus and bears his child Dionysus. She perishes when Zeus, upon her demand, unveils his glory with his lightning. Iono is the second daughter, whose husband is struck with madness and kills his own son, Melicertes. Agave, the third daughter, is driven mad by Dionysus and kills her son. Actaeon is the son of Antonoe, the fourth daughter. Once, he chances upon the favorite bathing place of Artemis, and the goddess lets fall her garments, standing in her naked beauty. She becomes offended with Actaeon and changes him into a stag; he is chased and killed by his own hounds.

Laius is third in descent from Cadmus. He marries Jocasta and is told by the oracle that they will have a son who will kill the father and marry the mother. When the son is born, Laius, fearful of the oracle, gives the baby to a shepherd with orders to tie his feet and leave him on the mountain Cithaeron. Instead, the shepherd gives the child to another shepherd, who in turn gives him to his king, who raises him as his own son. When Oedipus grows up he is told by the oracle that he will kill his father and marry his mother. To escape this terrible fate, he leaves the city never to return there again. In his travels he meets a stranger, who happens to be his real father, Laius; they have an argument and Oedipus kills him. When he comes to the gates of Thebes, the city of his birth, he is met by a Sphinx

who is preying upon the city because no one can solve her riddle. Oedipus solves the riddle, saves the city, marries Jocasta, his mother, and becomes the new king of Thebes. He has four children by her. Several years later the city suffers under a plague because Laius's murderer has not yet been punished. Oedipus undertakes the mission of discovering the killer and discovers that he himself is that killer. He blinds himself and leaves the city. Later, Athena forgives him his crime.

The action in the myth has no real beginning or end. The life of Oedipus is only one part of its continuation. Oedipus's children are plagued by the same fate as their father and his ancestors. Eteocles, Oedipus's son, kills his brother Polynices in their fight for the throne of Thebes. Antigone, Oedipus's daughter, kills herself to escape punishment by Creon, her uncle, for burying Polynices. Burying a criminal was against the law of the state, but not burying a dead brother was against the law of the family.

The action in Sophocles' and Hristić's plays takes less than one day. In Sophocles' play it is framed by the beginning of the search and the discovery of the killer. In Hristić's play it is framed by Oedipus's search for a sheep dog. Both Sophocles and Hristić start their plays at the end of the story, though the end in Hristić's play is quite different from the end in Sophocles'. The end of the story in Sophocles' play is the last day of Oedipus's rule in

Thebes. In Hristić's play, the end is the day of Oedipus's coronation as the new king of Thebes. The variation of mythical material included in each play is a result of the differences in the rhythm of the action. In Sophocles, the rhythm is tragic. The three unities (time, place, and action) in the Classical Greek tradition allowed only one day for the development of the action. By showing on stage only the last, crucial episode in Oedipus's life, Sophocles reveals the tragic action of the protagonist. The past action is narrated by other characters. The action of the past is in the form of flight. Laius runs away from the child by sending him to die. Oedipus runs away from his adopted parents. The form of the present action is "going back into the past." This quest for the past is an individualized form of the tragic quest resulting from the dramatic interaction between Oedipus and the other characters. The quest always leads to a discovery, but the object discovered at the end of the play appears in a different light from what it was in the beginning. In his discovery of Laius's killer, Oedipus also discovers his identity and the reality of his past, and it is the latter discovery that gives the action its tragic outcome. The cycle of Pathea is completed with Oedipus's flight from Thebes. The cycle of Oedipus's Pathea is analogous to the cycle of the Year-Daemon described by Murray in his article.

The rhythm of the action in Hristić's play is Existentialist, and it therefore requires analogous actions by the individual characters. Hristić provides such actions in his play by "negating" the action of the Greek myth. Characters and events are complete opposites of those established in the Greek myth. Hristić's hero is a simple shepherd who is searching for a dog in Thebes; in that sense he stands opposite Sophocles' noble hero.

The play starts with a conversation between the Sphinx and a Theban boy. We learn that she has just killed a man and his flock of sheep because he could not solve the riddle. A chorus of Thebans appears and informs the Sphinx that Laius has been expelled from the city as a punishment for his crime; they want to know whether she will stop her killings. The chorus leaves and Oedipus appears and asks directions to Thebes. The Sphinx confronts him with the riddle: what walks on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening. Oedipus thinks that the riddle is only a game and decides to play along. He tells the Sphinx that on his way to Thebes he met an old man who desired his own death and wanted Oedipus to kill him. The Sphinx tells him that, should he solve the riddle, he must admit, if asked, that he did kill the old man, even though he did not do it. Oedipus solves the riddle and the Sphinx dies. Teiresias, the prophet, and Jocasta, Laius's wife, arrive at the scene and thank Oedipus for saving them from the Sphinx. Teiresias

asks him whether he met an old man on the road; Oedipus tells him that he did and that he killed him.

Act two takes place in Thebes where preparations are being made for the ritual sacrifices and the coronation of the new king, Oedipus. Jocasta falls in love with him and wants him to be her husband. Oedipus is puzzled and cannot accept because, he says, he is only a simple shepherd who has lived all his life on a mountain and is unfamiliar with the laws of the state and matrimony. When the sacrifices are offered, the gods refuse them because the new king has not yet been crowned. Oedipus refuses to be crowned, insisting that his life has been too simple and he is therefore too inexperienced to rule a state. At this time he admits to Teiresias that he did not kill the old man on the road.

Act three opens with Ion, the poet, composing a song about Oedipus and his "heroic" deeds. Teiresias arrives and asks Oedipus to decide before the sun sets whether he will take the crown or not. The dead body of Laius is brought and Oedipus is asked to admit that he killed him. When he refuses, Teiresias tells him that it was fated that he should kill Laius and marry Jocasta; therefore, he should go along with it. The only way for an accursed king to be replaced by another king, says Teiresias, is for the new king to be the murderer of the former. Oedipus wants to keep his hands clean and refuses to admit to the murder. At the end of the play Teiresias admits to Oedipus that he knew all along that

Oedipus was not the murderer; Teiresias himself had ordered Laius to be killed. The people of Thebes refuse to accept Oedipus as their new king because he is too young and they do not know much about his past. Teiresias tells the people that they should accept Oedipus because he is guilty of nothing, his hands are clean. At the end we are not told of Oedipus's final decision.

When we compare the plots of the two plays, the first thing we notice, of course, is the variation in the beginning of the plays. The action in Sophocles' play starts with a reversal: there is a change from joy to grief because Thebes has been struck by a plague and a drought. This is perceived as a disturbance of the normal order of things, and it must be corrected soon if life is to go on. Since the disturbance is on the state level, it is the duty of the king, Oedipus, to undertake the mission of correcting it. A similar reversal is evident in Euripides' Bacchae, where order is disturbed by Dionysus. The mission of correcting that disorder is undertaken by Pentheus. In both plays the heroes are ignorant of the true identity of the culprit. Oedipus does not know that he himself is the culprit and Pentheus does not realize that the culprit is Dionysus, the son of the god Zeus.

The action in Hristić's play starts with a pseudo-Agon, which is also the first negation by Hristić of the action in the Greek myth. In the Greek myth the Agon is

between the Sphinx and the noble hero Oedipus. Hristić's hero is stripped of any nobility because of his background as a shepherd, and therefore it seems that he should be no contest for the Sphinx. But it is precisely his simplicity which enables him to solve the riddle. The Sphinx tells the Theban boy of the nature of the man who shall solve the riddle:

> Sfinga: Osećam da će još danas doći. On će biti lep u svojoj nevinosti i nevin u svome neznanju. Zar je samo nevinima i onima koji ne znaju ništa dato da odgovore na sva pitanja? Zašto samo oni žive u svetu gotovih odgovora, ne znajući čak ni pravo pitanje?[15]

When Oedipus solves the riddle and the Sphinx dies, he is surprised to hear that no one had been able to give the answer to such a simple question:

> Edip: Pitanje. To je najprostije pitanje na svetu. Vi mora da ste prilično glup narod. Zar niko od vas nije mogao da odgovori?[16]

The incident with the Sphinx in Sophocles' play is mentioned only in passing in the first Agon between Oedipus and Teiresias, where Oedipus is accused of being the slayer of Laius:

> Oedipus: Come now, tell me, where hast thou proved thyself a seer? Why, when the Watcher [Sphinx] was here who wove dark song, didst thou say nothing that could free this folk? Yet the riddle, at least, was not for the first comer to read; there was need of a seer's skill; and none such thou wast found to have either by help of birds, or as known from any god: no, I came, I, Oedipus, the ignorant, and made her mute, when I had seized the answer by my wit, untaught of birds.[17]

It is this pride of intellect that hurls Sophocles' Oedipus deeper into his Pathos:

> Chorus: But if any man walks haughtily in deed or word, with no fear of Justice, no reverence for the images of gods, may an evil doom seize him for his ill-starred pride.[18]

In contrast, it is the pride of ignorance and simplicity that brings Hristić's Oedipus deeper into his own Pathos.

The confrontation with the Sphinx in Sophocles' play is the last obstacle before Oedipus fulfills the predictions of the oracle, namely, that he should kill his father and marry his mother. The same event in Hristić's play is the beginning of the misunderstandings between Oedipus and the people of Thebes, caused, according to Oedipus, by mistaken identity:

> Tiresija: . . . Prosvetli nas veličinom i neograničenošću svoga dela, o ti najmudriji i najsmeliji!
> Edip: To je jako lepo to što vi govorite, ali ja bih vas molio da mi objasnite o čemu je reč. Da li ste vi sigurni da sam ja zaista taj kome vaše reči treba da budu upućene?[19]

In the Greek myth Oedipus enters the city of Thebes as the victorious savior, proud and ready to take the job of being the new king. In Hristić's play, in contrast, after the death of the Sphinx, Oedipus is ready to run when approached by Teiresias and Jocasta.

The second negation of the Greek myth by Hristić is that in his play Oedipus does not kill his father. We are told of this "non-event" by Oedipus himself during his confrontation with the Sphinx:

> Edip: Od jutros mi se dogadjaju sve neke čudne stvari. Prvo sam sreo jednog starca koji me je molio da ga ubijem. Nikada još nisam video čoveka koji je

> toliko želeo da umre . . . on je klekao pred mene i molio me da ga ubijem. Plakao je i molio me . . . Govorio mi je kako je grešnik i kako mora da ispašta svoj greh. Dugo me je ispitivao ko sam, šta sam, ko su mi otac i majka, šta radim, gde živim, i takve stvari. Hteo je po svaku cenu da ga baš ja ubijem . . . Nisam mogao da shvatim zašto da ubijem čoveka koji mi nije ništa uradio. Uostalom, kako bi mogao da bude grešnik čovek koji je sa mnom tako lepo razgovarao o cenama ovaca i o psima? Mislim da se on prilično razumevao u pse.[20]

Here is how Oedipus describes the same event to Jocasta in Sophocles' play:

> When in my journey I was near to those three roads, there met me a herald, and a man seated in a carriage drawn by colts, as thou hast described; and he who was in front, and the old man himself, were for thrusting me rudely from the path. Then, in anger, I struck him who pushed me aside--the driver; and the old man, seeing it watched the moment when I was passing, and from the carriage, brought his goad with two teeth down full upon my head. Yet was he paid with interest; by one swift blow from the staff in this hand he was rolled out of the carriage, on his back; and I slew every man of them.[21]

In Sophocles' play Oedipus's two Agons are the slaying of Laius and the solving of the riddle. The first is physical, the second intellectual. Because he wins both Agons, he is reassured that he will have the capability of finding Laius's slayer. He does not realize, however, that his strength and intellect lead him only into greater Pathos and to the final dismemberment. The discovery of Laius's killer at the end of the play is also Oedipus's Anagnorisis of the mystery of life and his own true nature. The cycle of Pathea is completed with Oedipus blinding himself.

The similarity between the plot of the Greek myth and Hristić's own interpretation of it ends with Oedipus's

entrance into Thebes in act two. What follows is an Agon between Oedipus and Teiresias in which Oedipus is asked to accept guilt for a crime he did not commit. The purpose of this Agon is not to present a struggle between good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, truth and falsehood--as it is in Sophocles' play--but is in effect an analysis of the meaning of guilt and innocence in the Existential perspective. In their Agon, Oedipus identifies with his idea of "clean hands" and Teiresias with the idea of "choice being the only determining factor in establishing either guilt or innocence." For Teiresias, clean hands can be just as guilty as dirty hands. At times this Agon descends from the level of philosophy to the level of the practical. Oedipus's practical aim becomes to escape from Thebes, while Teiresias tries to keep him there until he is ready to make his final "choice," to accept or not to accept guilt.

The Existential aspect of this Agon is considered in more detail in the next chapter. At this point I merely wish to point out that Oedipus and Teiresias show in their Agon the "spiritual" content of the play, which Hristić presents directly in the Existentialist mode of action. This action is contrasted with the tragic action in Sophocles' play by negation of that same action. In order to negate the action of the myth, Hristić follows rules of inclusion-exclusion which are determined as a result of his choosing the Existentialist rhythm of action. Since there cannot be

a "tragic" hero according to the Existentialist viewpoint, the mythical hero in Hristić's play is made to reject the idea of fate and of the gods determining man's existence.

From the few examples in our analysis of the Pathea of Oedipus in Sophocles and in Hristić, we can observe that the elements of the ritual discussed in the first section of chapter one appear to correspond to the parts of the plot in the two plays. The elements of the ritual and the elements in Sophocles' play are similar because both are imitating tragic action. The elements in Hristić's play are different from both the others because they are an "imitation" of the action in the Existentialist mode. The plot, the characters, and the language of each play, therefore, are actualizations of their respective rhythm of action.

CHAPTER III

HRISTIĆ'S CLEAN HANDS: STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Structural Prefigurations

Writing on the structuring of mythical material in modern novels, John White explains the function of such material:

> A myth introduced by a modern novelist into his work can prefigure and hence anticipate the plot in a number of ways. Although an awareness of sources is declining, the ideal reader can still be expected to be familiar with most prefiguration beforehand, just as the novelist himself was when he wrote the work.
>
> Substantial references to the myth are invariably presented to us before the main part of the work. The usual development of motifs in this type of fiction consists of the initial establishment of a highly ambiguous prefiguration, activating in its turn an extensive set of expectations about the course the plot is likely to take, and therefore the gradual offering of additional pieces of less ambiguous information until the pattern emerges. As a result of this technique, the reader's expectations about what can possibly happen later in the work, if the prefiguration is further adhered to, gradually diminishes in number as the work progresses.[22]

In both Sophocles' and Hristić's plays the prefigurative element is the myth of Oedipus. The scheme of the myth serves as the background against which the scheme of the artistic texts is paralleled. The parallel between the myth and Sophocles' play indicates an identification of characters, plot, and ritualistic structure. This type of artistic system Jurij Lotman calls the aesthetic of identity: "It is

based on the total identification of depicted phenomena of life with model-cliches that are known beforehand to the audience and operate according to a system of 'rules.'"[23] The aesthetic of identity is achieved by a process of aesthetic "mopping." All nonessential elements (those which do not conform to the scheme of the Year-Daemon) are mopped out of the story. This phenomenon is true especially of Medieval literature and folklore. The aesthetic value of such works is judged by the degree of observance of rules inherent in the particular scheme:

> The rules governing word choice and the construction of plot combinations that are known in advance, and loci communi (whole pieces of frozen text) all form a very special artistic system. Most importantly, the audience is armed not only with a set of possibilities, but a set of impossibilities standing in paired opposition to the first set on each level of the artistic construction. If the author were to choose a situation that was "impossible" from the viewpoint of the code rules within a given system of artistic perception, the structure expected by the audience would be destroyed, and as a result they would regard the work as inferior and the author as unskilled and ignorant, or even blasphemer of sinful audacity.[24]

The system employed by Hristić in his play works in reverse from the system described above. Once the prefigurative element of the myth is introduced, the author's purpose becomes to destroy every aspect of that element. In the process of doing so, Hristić establishes his own rules, which stand in opposition to the rules suggested in the prefigured element. This type of system Lotman calls the aesthetic of opposition: "The author sets his own resolution,

which he believes to be the truer one, in opposition to methods of modeling reality that are familiar to the reader."[25] While the myth in the tragedy follows the scheme of the Dionysian ritual, the scheme in Hristić's play is realized in the process of the literary creation. In Clean Hands, Hristić translates the myth into a language of the nonmythological type and oragnizes it in accordance with a nonmythological principle. This Existentialist principle allows the author to introduce conflicts in the play which are not necessarily between characters only, but between ideas as well. Mythical language in the play is replaced by symbolic language.

The Existentialist principle is first prefigured in the title of the play. By altering the title of one of Jean-Paul Sartre's plays, Dirty Hands, Hristić gives an extra-textual piece of information necessary for the interpretation of the events in the play. It is almost as if he wants to tell his audience how to interpret the Greek myth in his play.

The first reference to the Oedipus myth in Hristić's play is in the list of characters. This reference sets up a certain expectancy as to what is going to happen, the course which the events are expected to follow. This expectancy is not only a prefiguration of the plot, but one of attitude as well. Hristić makes an assumption concerning the audience's familiarity with the origin of the material in his play. He makes the assumption that the audience is familiar not only

with the myth, but, more importantly, with the myth's ritual origin. If the spectator is familiar with both of these, he juxtaposes his own attitude toward the ritual with that of the Ancient Greek ritual-participant. The expectancy of the ritual-participant is that events should follow the structure of the Pathea of the tragic hero, and his attitude toward the ritual is magico-religious. The attitude of the spectator toward Hristić's play is aesthetic.

The above two references provide the reader with a story and a code which is to be used in decoding the messages of the story. The significance of the code will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of the thesis. Here, we want to establish the significance of the story variation. We shall begin by stating that the information communicated to the spectator is a result of the paralleling of two realities: 1) that of the myth as it was perceived by the mythological consciousness, and 2) the reality with which the spectator is familiar but which does not correspond to the myth. In our discussion of Sophocles' Oedipus the King we indicated that only the plot of the myth is changed, while the story remains the same. In Hristić's play there is also a change in the story. The introduction of each "unfamiliar" event in the play--each one that is not a part of the story of the myth--poses a challenge to the spectator as to what can happen next. In Sophocles' play, the spectator is always ahead of the author; whereas in Hristić's

play, the spectator thinks he is ahead of the author, but it is the author who is always ahead.

Both Clean Hands and Oedipus the King begin with a reversal which leads to suffering: the people of Thebes are being punished. This punishment is a part of the cycle of Pathea of the Year-Daemon discussed in chapter two. In Clean Hands the direct cause of the suffering is the Sphinx, who is killing people because they cannot solve her riddle. In Oedipus the King the suffering is caused by the gods, who want Laius's killer punished. Chronologically, the plot of Clean Hands precedes that of Oedipus the King in relation to the myth. But structurally, the function of both reversals is identical if we keep in mind the cyclical nature of myths and rituals. The plots of both plays lead toward the correction of the disturbance so that an equilibrium can be reached.

In Clean Hands, the characters introduced first are the Sphinx and a Theban boy. From the comical nature of their conversation, one would expect that the plot of the play would continue in the same mood, which would lead to a parody of the Greek myth. This is exactly the device used by Aristophanes in his parodies of Greek tragedies. From the first scene, the conversation departs from the noble character that it had in the tragedy. The conversation is of a type which could never have been included in the myth:

Sfinga: . . . Dečače, koliko je dva i dva?
Dečak: . . . Četiri.
Sfinga: . . . Reci mi, koliko je dva i dva?

Dečak: Četiri, rekao sam ti već.
Sfinga: To nije dovoljno. Ali onaj koji treba da dodje znaće manje i od tebe. Koliko je tri puta tri?
Dečak: Pa četiri, rekao sam ti!
Sfinga: Tri puta tri?
Dečak: A, da. Devet. Zar ne znaš? Uh, kakva si! (Skakuće)[26]

This playful interaction is contrasted by the next scene, where the chorus asks the Sphinx to spare them from additional suffering since they have banished Laius from Thebes. We remember from the myth that Laius was never banished; he was simply traveling when he was killed by Oedipus. The chorus confronts the Sphinx in the same manner and for the same purpose as it confronted Oedipus in Sophocles' play. This scene introduces some seriousness in the play; it keeps it from crossing the boundary of parody. We are also shown two attitudes toward the Sphinx, one from the point of view of the boy and the other from that of the chorus.

By this point the audience is assured that all the prefigured elements set up by the author will be destroyed; things will not happen the way they did in the myth. The spectator also has acquired some set idea about what kind of personality Oedipus was in the myth. When he appears on the stage of Hristić's play, he may be the same as in the myth or he may be different. This will depend on the degree of seriousness which the author wants to contain in the play as a whole. His character is foreshadowed somewhat by the

Sphinx in her conversation with the boy, from which we know that he will be of a simple mind.

The whole conversation between the Sphinx and Oedipus in the next scene has the purpose of setting up a "characteristic" for Oedipus. The major characteristic is that he cannot deal with the new and unfamiliar events. He does not know how to react to them. This type of characterization of Oedipus sets the mood for acts two and three, where, through his confrontations with the Thebans, he discovers the true meaning of existence.

Of all the prefigured elements in the play, the one which adheres the least to the myth is Oedipus's behavior. The man of courage, action, and intellect is transformed into the one of passivity and naiveté. The reason for this transformation is that Hristić presents Oedipus from the point of view of Existentialism, and, consequently, Oedipus's behavior is motivated by this theme. In the next section we shall discuss the Existential philosophy expounded in the play in order to enhance our understanding of the reason for Hristić's Oedipus being "antimythical."

The Existential Rhythm of Action

As was mentioned earlier, the key for decoding the message of Hristić's play comes from the philosophy of Existentialism. For Sophocles, the code comes from the ancient ritual. In each play, the choice of material

included is governed by the respective codes. Anything that is not motivated by the code would be superfluous and obstructive to the development of the theme. What is chosen, therefore, must fall within the laws of probability and the necessity of the theme. For Sophocles, these laws are based on the laws of the ritual, which views man's existence as tragic. In Hristić's play, the choice of material is governed by the theme of the birth of the Existential man. Hristić adopted this theme from the philosophy and plays of Sartre, who also portrayed mythical Greek heroes in the Existential mode.

What differentiates Hristić's hero from Sartre's heroes is the fact that the latter are portrayed at the moment of their "testing" of their own philosophy. Hristić's Oedipus is shown in a manner which depicts the process leading up to his realization of the inevitability of his making a choice, which is the basis of the Existentialist philosophy.

Before their recognition of the true nature of their existence, both Hristić's and Sophocles' Oedipus must be confronted with a series of events, and their reaction to these events will determine their true identity in relation to the world around them. If these events are to make the hero aware of another mode of existence, they must be of a kind he has never before experienced.

The story in the myth is different from the one in Clean Hands because the myth and the tragedy require the hero to experience events which will lead him to the tragic choice, but the events in Hristić's play are those which will lead Oedipus to the Existential choice. This is why Hristić excluded from his play the scenes of Oedipus consulting the oracle. We remember from the myth that it was at the house of his adoptive parents that Oedipus first learned from the oracle that he would kill his father and marry his mother, which made him run away. Hristić skips this story of the oracle's prediction. In his play, Oedipus is never turned over to King Polybus of Corinth after he was left on the mountain to die; here, the shepherd adopts him as his son.

The Existential choice which Teiresias wants Oedipus to make in Hristić's play is between authentic and unauthentic existence. According to Existentialist philosophy, men lead two types of existence: authentic and unauthentic. This concept should not be confused with the idealistic definition of existence which is based on moral values. Unauthentic existence is characterized by confusion when a person is faced with making a choice. In such situations the unauthentic person most often asks himself the question: "What should I do now? I'm confused!" He does not want to take the responsibility for making a choice which he may later regret:

> The unauthentic person is undecided and unsure of himself. This affects his being-in-the-world. He is not only unsure of himself, but unsure of the world he inhabits.[27]

This is exactly what happens to Oedipus in Hristić's play. His experiences in life, leading to the point when a decision is demanded of him, contribute to his confusion. Before his encounter with the Sphinx and the people of Thebes, he believed he was leading an authentic existence as a shepherd. But the authenticity of his existence can be evaluated only when a choice concerning it is made. He did not make a decision to be a shepherd.

In Clean Hands, Oedipus exhibits his unauthentic behavior mostly in acts two and three. His first confusion occurs when he is approached by Teirasias and Jocasta, who want to thank him for getting rid of the Sphinx:

> Edip: Verujte mi, ja nisam hteo da ona umre. Dogodilo se sasvim slučajno. Bio sam zbunjen. Plašio sam se.[28]

Later, in act three:

> Edip: Počinje da mi se vrti u glavi. Ja više ne vidim krajeve tog konca u koji me uplićete.[29]

The authentic person is distinguished by his recognition of his freedom to make decisions, to make his own choice, and to take responsibility for his actions:

> He has decided the structure of his own world, and is aware of the risks he has taken in so deciding. Whether this world is at peace or at odds with that of his friends and neighbours, he is ready to bear the responsibility and to defend it. If occasion demands it, he is ready to change it, and even retract it. But the last decision rests with him.[30]

The nature of the authentic personality is illustrated in another play by Hristić, Orest, and in Sartre's The Flies, both of which are based on the myth of Electra. In the myth, Orestes comes to Argos to kill his mother and his uncle, who is now his stepfather. His uncle, Aegistheus, married Orestes' mother, Clytemnestra, after both had killed his father, Agamemnon. After Orestes has killed them both, he is haunted by the Euminides (flies), from which he cannot escape. In Sartre's play, he commits the crime, accepts the guilt as his own, and therefore is unafraid of the flies:

> Orestes: . . . You see me, men of Argos, you understand that my crime is wholly mine; I claim it as my own, for all to know; it is my glory, my life's work, and you can neither punish me, nor pity me . . . Fear your dead no longer; they are my dead. And, see, your faithful flies have left you and come to me.[31]

When Orestes comes to Argos, he is a traveler who has lost his way. He is unfamiliar with the situation of the people of Argos, and he does not remember the death of his father. Once he becomes acquainted with it, he decides to use the situation for his personal aim--to affirm his authentic existence:

> . . . one sees in Orestes a conversion to authenticity, as he begins to take responsibility for his actions. Although Electra is not able to recognize the implications of the act that she urges on Orestes, he, on the contrary, realizes the full import of what he does. He does not have to run from the harpies, who repressed the anguish of recognition of responsibility. His courage lies in the full acceptance of their presence and therefore in his willingness to take responsibility for his action.[32]

In Hristić's play Orestes comes to Argos to avenge his father's death. But to do so, he must see the participants exactly as they were at the time of the murder. He realizes that the event took place so long ago that his memory of it has faded, and he sees no sense in killing the murderers. The impossibility of bringing the situation back as it once was makes vengeance useless and absurd. In contrast to the mythical Orestes, Hristić's hero is a prototype of the modern intellectual man. In the myth Orestes was responsible to the gods, but in Hristić's and Sartre's plays he is responsible only to himself.

According to Existentialist philosophy, the recognition of one's unauthentic existence takes place at a time when one is confronted with a situation where he is expected to participate in an event. This event in Hristić's play Clean Hands is the solving of the riddle by Oedipus, which triggers the Sphinx's death, which in turn triggers Oedipus's recognition of the fact that he has to make a choice: to become the new king by accepting guilt and thus to save the people of Thebes, or to keep his hands clean. But, according to Teiresias, clean hands are something one does not acquire by refusing responsibility. If Oedipus refuses to be the new king, he must be responsible for the fate of the Thebans after his departure:

> Tiresija: Ti si jedini koji može da bude kralj ovoga grada, i mi od tebe samo tražimo da izvršiš dužnost oslobodioca. Misliš li da je osloboditi jedan grad

> isto što i podići dom za posrnule devojke? Zamisli sve te kuće, ulice, trgove, koji čekaju tebe da bi počeli da žive. Zamisli te ljudi koji čekaju tebe da bi počeli da vole jedni druge. Zamisli tu slobodu koja čeka tvoju reč da bi počela da postoji. Jesi li u stanju da ostaviš sve to?[33]

Choosing one type of existence over another also means that one type will be rejected by the fact that it was not chosen. Oedipus cannot avoid making a choice. Even the failure to choose is a choice with consequences. He does not want to commit himself because he refuses to accept guilt. This, according to the Existentialists, is the nature of the unauthentic man, who would rather escape and evade such situations.

The basic conflict between Teiresias and Oedipus seems to be centered around the idea of whether man is <u>born</u> innocent or not, whether having "clean hands" is an inborn quality of man. Oedipus argues that it is:

> Sfinga: Ti misliš samo na svoju nevinost.
> Edip: Čovek se radja nevin, i treba da umre nevin. To je ono što nam daju bogovi. Grehove zaradjujemo mi sami. Otac me je učio da se klonim greha. Ako drugi greše, to ne znači da i ja treba da grešim. Ja imam čiste ruke, hteo bih da one i ostanu čiste. To je život.[34]

Teiresias, to the contrary, insists that "clean hands" is not something <u>given</u> but rather must be acquired by an act:

> Edip: Rekao sam vam da su moje ruke čiste.
> Tiresija: Tvoje ruke nisu čiste, one samo nisu imale priliku ni da se uprljaju ni da se očiste.
> Edip: Ja ih vidim čiste, i to je za mene dovoljno.
> Tiresija: Ti hoćeš da imaš nešto što tek treba da stekneš. Čovek se radja sa praznim, a ne sa čistim rukama. Čiste ruke to nije poklon, to je pravo koje se stiće.

Edip: Ja hoću da sačuvam svoje ruke onakvima kakve su one sada.

Tiresija: Pogledaj dobro to što ti visi sa ramena. Jesu li to ruke? Dve prazne zastave iza kojih ne stoji čak ni jedan čovek. Misliš da se može provesti život a da se stalno ostane sam sa svojim ovcama? Ti stalno govoriš "ne, ne, ne" i misliš da si slobodan. Hoćeš li jednom shvatiti kako se sloboda ne sastoji ni u "da" ni u "ne." Ja te zovem da podješ medju ljude, podsećam te da imaš izvesne dužnosti prema njima, a ti mi govoriš kako si slobodan. Kome treba tvoja prazna sloboda? Šta ona znači za tebe? Znači stalno mahati svojim rukama za koje kažeš da su čiste, a ne raditi ništa što bi moglo da uveri ljude u njihovu čistoću. Ti moraš da pokažeš ljudima da imaš čiste ruke, a ti im to samo govoriš, ne dozvoljavajući im ni da dodirnu te tvoje divne, čiste, blistave i nevine ruke koje tek treba da postanu ruke![35]

The same argument is echoed by Ion, the poet, in the beginning of act three:

Edip: Ali za šta sam ja kriv? Moje ruke su čiste.

Ijon: Kako je sve to apstraktno? Gore od Tiresijine filosofije. Čiste ruke, prljave ruke, kriv, nije kriv. Igra se igra do kraja, i samo onaj ko igra može da kaže da ima ruke--čiste ili prljave. Vi biste hteli da imate ruke? Čiste? Pogledajte svoje ruke, a one čiste. Ili, pogledajte svoje ruke, a ono ruku nema. Samo prazna čistota. Nema ih. Nikada ih nije ni bilo. Samo čistota. Prazna. Prazna.[36]

The argument of Existentialist philosophy is that man is born without essence. This is their basic defining feature of Existentialism: existence comes before essence. In the world of objects, they say, the essence often has to be prior to the existence:

> "Essence" has been used primarily to characterize those features of a thing that are permanently necessary to its being. If the features are absent, the thing

> cannot be. Traditionally, the notion of an essence of a thing was held to be prior in both being and importance to the particular existence of that thing. For example, the essence of a bed is outside of time. It is impervious to change, permanent, and that by which one defines a bed. In order for a carpenter to make a bed, he must have an idea of the essence of that bed. For a thing to have an essence, the essence must be in the mind of someone before the thing exists. The essence is thus "prior" to the concrete presentation of the thing.[37]

Existentialists differentiate humans from other beings by the idea that human existence precedes essence. Man exists without having a choice in the matter; thus, I did not choose to be born, but I can choose my essence:

> Man is the only being who has the intelligence to conceive of an essence. Yet for the essence of a man to be prior to his existence, man would have to pre-exist himself, which is impossible. A man can only form the idea of his essence after he exists. He pre-exists any consciousness he has of himself. When he does define himself, he alone is responsible for the essence he attributes to himself. He fashions his own image and has no permanent nature. He has only the condition that he creates. Thus, for man, existence is prior to essence.[38]

Once this freedom of choice has been recognized, the authentic man commits himself to that type of act which is in accordance with his essence. This is the idea which connects the theme of Hristić's Clean Hands with that of Sartre's Dirty Hands.

In Dirty Hands, Hugo, a member of an underground revolutionary group during World War Two, is asked by his companions to kill Hoederer. He does and is sent to prison, but by the time he is released the party has decided to rehabilitate Hoederer, saying that he was not the traitor

they formerly thought him to be. Hugo is asked to renounce his deed if he wishes to remain alive, but he refuses:

> Hugo: . . . Here is an embarrassing crime; nobody wants to claim it . . . And now you want me to dishonor myself even more and to agree that I killed him for nothing . . . If I renounced my deed he would become a nameless corpse, a throw-off of the party . . . If I openly claim my crime and declare myself Raskolnikov and am willing to pay the necessary price, then he will have the death he deserves.[39]

Hugo's true motive is the one he chooses afterward, when he is fully aware of the situation. He determines, through his own death, the meaning of the situation and the value of Hoederer's life.

In Greek tragedies, on the other hand, man was bound by a system of rights and values. His acts were not determined by his essence, but by these values. The Aristotelian hero is not allowed to have his own fully developed personality unless it was justified by his determination to execute the duties prescribed by gods.

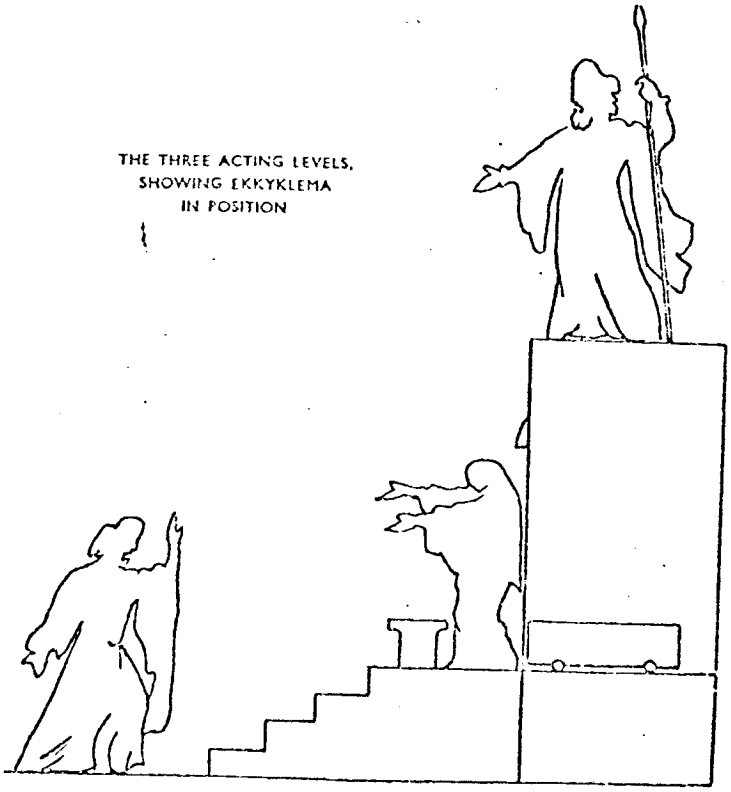
CONCLUSION

The myth of Oedipus discussed here was probably the most popular story adopted by ancient playwrights as well as by modern authors. Some playwrights, like Jovan Hristić, have chosen to adapt only certain elements of the myth by anachronistically giving them modern relevancy. In so doing, they present the mythical hero with some contemporary problem of universal nature. The mythical material is well-suited for this purpose because of its universal nature.

In using the myth as a known piece of material, the modern playwright is concerned first with questions which deal with its applicability to the form of modern theater and modern thought. In Hristić's Clean Hands, both the ritualistic form and the story of Oedipus are combined in such a way that the universality of the ritual and the myth are preserved, but they are reinterpreted by Hristić in order to be understood by a contemporary, nonmythological consciousness.

In this thesis I have traced the functional transformation of the myth of Oedipus from its earliest time to the present as represented in Hristić's play. From the discussion presented here, one can make the observation that the myth and the ritual were always associated with some common

sentiment of a given society. My contention has been that the myth's adaptation in a modern literary work imports upon that work a quality of having a universal characteristic. Hristić's negation of the Greek myth in his plays represents a negation of the attitude of the Ancient Greek society toward its mode of existence. In this sense Hristić's works can be associated with those of the Existentialists. The main difference between them, however, is that the Existentialist writers show their characters committing an act, as they do in the myth, but they take the responsibility for it; they are not judged by gods, but by their own consciousness alone. In Hristić's plays, the negation comes through the heroes' refusal to commit acts associated with those of the mythical heroes. Similar to Dostoevsky's heroes, they do not choose what has been determined, but rather determine what to choose. They represent the modern, rational man.



Reproduced from Peter D. Arnott, An Introduction to the Greek Theatre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 38.

NOTES

[1]Jan Kott, The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 196.

[2]Jan Mukarovsky, Structure, Sign, and Function (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 17-18.

[3]Ibid., p. 20.

[4]Ibid., footnote 1.

[5]Ibid., pp. 23-24.

[6]Kott, p. 212.

[7]Ibid., p. 213.

[8]George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 329.

[9]Jurij M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspenskij, "Myth--Name--Culture," in Semiotics and Structuralism, ed. Henryk Baran (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1976), pp. 13-14.

[10]Peter D. Arnott, An Introduction to the Greek Theatre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), pp. 33-34.

[11]Gilbert Murray, "An Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy," in Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion, ed. Jane Ellen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 343.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Sophocles, Oedipus the King, in Seven Famous Greek Plays, ed. Whitney J. Oaks and Eugene O'Neill, Jr. (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, 1950), p. 170.

[14]Ibid., p. 35.

[15]Jovan Hristić, Čiste ruke, in Četiri apokrifa (Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1970), p. 16. Hereafter referred to as Clean Hands.

[16]Ibid., p. 23.

[17]Sophocles, p. 135.

[18]Ibid., p. 155.

[19]Hristić, p. 30.

[20]Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[21]Sophocles, pp. 152-53.

[22]John J. White, Mythology in the Modern Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 11.

[23]Jurij Lotman, The Structure of the Artistic Text, Michigan Slavic Contributions, no. 7 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1977), p. 290.

[24]Ibid., p. 289.

[25]Ibid., p. 292.

[26]Hristić, pp. 16-17.

[27]John Wilde, The Challenge of Existentialism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 126.

[28]Hristić, p. 29.

[29]Ibid., p. 63.

[30]Wilde, p. 129.

[31]Jean-Paul Sartre, The Flies, in No Exit and Three Other Plays (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), pp. 126-27.

[32]Patricia Sanborn, Existentialism (New York: Pegasus, 1969), p. 107.

[33]Hristić, p. 63.

[34]Ibid., p. 21.

[35]Ibid., pp. 64-65.

[36]Ibid., p. 58.

[37]Sanborn, p. 19.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Jean-Paul Sartre, Dirty Hands, in No Exit and Three Other Plays (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), pp. 246-47.

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