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"Myth and Power Structures in Sartre's *Les Mouches* and *La Putain respectueuse*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss3/8>>

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Abstract: In her paper "Myth and Power Structures in Sartre's *Les Mouches* and *La Putain respectueuse*," Martha Evans Smith analyses Sartre's plays with regard to the relationship of the individual with the collective, the purportedly self-determinate part of an apparently universalizing whole. Seeming to illustrate an enactment of freedom and an absence thereof, the disparate outcomes of the hierarchies in the plays impose a success/failure paradigm on the concomitant reading of the two plays. Evans Smith argues that these issues in the plays read with regard to structures of classical mythology and racism in the US-American South demonstrate the close relationship of discourse to dominance in the subjectification of the individual. In Evans Smith's analysis, Sartre's texts demonstrate the nature of tyranny, the personal independence that challenges it, and the opportunity for regime change as a result of rebellion.

Martha EVANS SMITH**Myth and Power Structures in Sartre's *Les Mouches* and *La Putain respectueuse***

The power structures at issue in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Mouches* and *La Putain respectueuse* engage with the relationship of the individual to the collective, the purportedly self-determinate part to the apparently universalising whole. Seeming to illustrate an enactment of freedom and an absence thereof, the disparate outcomes of the hierarchies at issue in each -- Orestes's overthrow of Jupiter and Lizzie's surrender to the Senator's will -- impose a success/failure paradigm on the concomitant reading of the two plays. Moreover, the situation of these relationships within the clearly recognisable structures of classical mythology and racism in the US-American South demonstrates the close relationship of discourse to dominance in the subjectification of the individual. The purchase of mythology, the dominant discourse of archetypal truths, inspires an invariably subjugating fetishization of the notion of the ideal. Summarising Joseph Campbell, Robert Segal writes, "Myth functions, first, to reveal the existence of a severed, deeper reality; second, as a vehicle for actually encountering that reality; third, as a model for others" (131). Indeed, in that layers of myth mirror political power structures in Sartre's *Les Mouches* and *La Putain respectueuse*, the movement through myth traditions in one play and the failure to do so in the other posits myth-making as a dominant discourse and advocates the concept of evolution in regime change and the progression of power.

Sartre's revision of classical myth in *Les Mouches* on the one hand, and troubling representation of racism in the US-American South in *La Putain respectueuse* on the other, highlight the nature and progression of power structures as the focus of his plays. In *Les Mouches*, Sartre's close adherence to the Aeschylean myth draws specific attention to the point on which he embarks. William Hamilton suggests that the canonical Orestes myth shows us that "to overcome the death of the father in our lives ... the mother must be abolished and we must give our devotion to the *polis*, to the city, politics, and our neighbour" (qtd. in Miller 26-27). While these ideas are certainly at issue in Sartre's version of the myth, his addition of the character of Jupiter brings power relationships and the notion of totalitarian regimes to the forefront of the play's concerns. Indeed, Jupiter "is the king of the gods and of the universe and, as such, the supreme master of everything including those men who sheepishly submit to his decrees, live by his laws, abide by his commands" (Debusscher 311). The insertion of this figure of absolute power into the action of the play has unmistakable purpose. In particular, Sartre's addition to the story of not just any god but the god of laws and social order, the most powerful god in Roman mythology, points to power dynamics and totalitarian regimes as key concerns of the play. Similarly, the aspect of racism in the US on which Sartre focuses in *La Putain respectueuse* denotes a discourse of dominance as the main focus of the play. In "Sartre, White America, and the Black Problem," Renate Peters criticises Sartre's handling of racism in his works, including *La Putain respectueuse*, writing that Sartre's "writings on racism in America ... reveal his failure to grasp the complexities of race prejudice" (21). Reading *La Putain respectueuse* in conjunction with *Les Mouches*, however, places more importance on the myth of white superiority and true US-Americanness than on racism or Black people as such. The play does not seek to engage with "the complexities of race prejudice"; rather, it is concerned with the complexities of power involved in installing and maintaining the myth of "white American supremacists" (29). This myth makes clear that it is not the repression of black people by whites at work in *La Putain respectueuse*, that it is, instead, the repression of whites by other whites. Indeed, in this play about race, the least important figure in the play is the Negro, as it is concerned with the maintenance of the myth of white superiority and true Americanness that perpetuates the system of power at work in the US-American South. Sartre's demonstration of myth as an implement of power is evident in the aspects of each tradition he highlights. In his canonical work on myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss writes, "Whatever our ignorance of the language and culture of the people where it originated, a myth is still felt as a myth

by any reader throughout the world. Its substance [lies] in the *story* which it tells" (52). Indeed, the layering of myth in these two plays tells the story of the complex interrelationship of the subject and power and advocates constant progression toward the change of regime.

The political superstructure in each play, a god's dominance over man in one, and the context of racial superiority that governs the US-American ideal in the other, relies upon unity within a group to maintain the integrity of its authority. It is the threat to this unity, the conflict and separation embodied by each of Orestes and Lizzie that prompts the action of the plays. The power structure in *Les Mouches* has Jupiter, a single figure at the top, who maintains unity in the group over whom he reigns to preserve his absolute authority. Gilbert Debusscher writes that in the play Jupiter "is the master of men only in so far as they do not know that he created them free, and only as long as they decide not to use this freedom" (312). In this way, the installation of a myth that posits humanity's unconditional subordination to the gods is necessary to the perpetuation of Jupiter's rule. In discussing the maintenance of his power, Jupiter (represented by Zeus in the English translation) says "For a hundred thousand years I have been dancing a slow, dark ritual dance before men's eyes. Their eyes are so intent on me that they forget to look into themselves" (*The Flies* 101) ("Depuis cent mille ans je danse devant les hommes. Une lente et sombre danse. Il faut qu'ils me regardent: tant qu'ils ont les yeux fixés sur moi, ils oublient de regarder en eux-mêmes" [*Les Mouches* 78]). His authority is maintained by controlling the vision of his subjects, by having a single focus upon which their sights are fixed. Says Aegistheus, the instrument of Jupiter's power, "A free man in a city acts like a plague-spot. He will infect my whole kingdom and bring my work to nothing" (102) ("Un homme libre dans une ville, c'est comme une brebis galeuse dans un troupeau" [*Les Mouches* 79]), thereby illustrating the extent to which Orestes's independence threatens to undermine the unity of the totalising myth and destabilise the fixed focus of the Argives upon which Jupiter's authority depends. In *La Putain respectueuse*, rather than a single figure, it is a group of people, an entire race that reigns supreme; therefore, it is unity at the top that ensures subservience at the bottom. In discussing the events on the train, Fred alludes to the unity the Senator's eventual subjection of Lizzie protects. He says, "There is no truth; there's only whites and blacks, that's all. Seventeen thousand white men, twenty thousand niggers. This isn't New York; we can't fool around down here" (256) ("Il n'y a pas de vérité: il y a des blancs et des noirs, c'est tout. Dix-sept mille blancs, vingt mille noirs. Nous ne sommes pas à New-York, ici" [272]). With his use of the plural "nous," Fred indicates to Lizzie that she is part of the dominant group. Furthermore, he insists not only that her complicity in maintaining its unity is crucial, but also that complicity in maintaining the white/black power structure overrides all else, including truth, one of Lizzie's personal values. The existence of her divergent viewpoint threatens to undermine the strength of the dominant group to which, simply by virtue of her skin colour, she herself belongs. In the cases of both Lizzie and Orestes, while one occupies a position at the bottom and the other at the top, their independence of action and belief threatens to undermine the power structures that define their respective worlds.

The change in Orestes's and Lizzie's subjecthood over the course of the plays demonstrates the extent to which the myth structures they enter subvert this individuality that threatens to topple the loci of power in their respective societies. In his "The Subject and Power," Michel Foucault writes: "There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (212; emphasis in the original). Both Orestes and Lizzie begin the plays enacting the latter definition of the term: Orestes starts out an inquisitive intellectual and Lizzie is a self-determinate woman with very clear ideas of right and wrong. However, throughout the course of the plays, both characters lose track of the latter definition in gradual attrition to the former, thus illustrating the subjugating nature of mythology and the effacement of the individual in totalitarian structures of power. In that they are both new arrivals to till-then unfamiliar lands, the two characters find that their personalities, their own personal subjectivity, set them clearly at odds with their

surroundings. Orestes "has come back to the city of Argos with the secret hope to belong, to be a man among men. But an insuperable barrier separates him from his former countrymen, abjectly submitted to remorse and plagued by swarms of black stinking flies" (Debusscher 308). Indeed, rather than being welcomed back to the place of his birth, Orestes is shunned and derided for coming at all. Not only do the Argives shy away from Orestes upon his arrival, Clytemnestra says to him, "Leave this place. I feel that you are going to bring disaster on us ... So go, I beg you. By all you hold most sacred, for your mother's sake, I beg you, go" (*The Flies* 71) ("Va-t'en. Je suis sûre que tu vas nous porter malheur. Tu ne peux pas nous en vouloir, nous ne t'avons rien fait. Va-t'en. Je t'en supplie par ta mère, va-t'en" [*Les Mouches* 39]). Indeed, the barrier that separates Orestes from the Argives is the power relationship at work in Argos that his individuality contradicts; it is Jupiter's hold over the body of Argives, unified in their grief-induced subordination, and the myth structure that governs them all. While it is the Argives who underline Orestes's difference from them, Lizzie has a very clear sense of her own lack of unity with the US-American South. Coming by herself from the north, "Lizzie wants to be adopted, she wants to belong at all cost, even if it means signing the death warrant of the black man. Being adopted as a daughter by the city means finding a home, being part of the group, part of the family she never had" (Peters 36). However, her first encounter with Southern society puts her in a situation that challenges her personal values, thus illustrating her divergence from the dominant mode. When faced with the dominant ideology that is so contrary to her own, she sobs, "I'm not reasonable, and I don't want your five hundred dollars. I just don't want to bear false witness. I want to go back to New York. I want to get out of here! I want to get out of here!" (*The Respectful Prostitute* 257) ("Je ne suis pas raisonnable. Je ne veux pas de tes cinq cents dollars, je ne veux pas faire faux témoignage! Je veux retourner à New-York, je veux m'en aller! Je veux m'en aller!" [*La Putain respectueuse* 274]). Like Orestes, the solution posed for her startling contrast to the norm in the society in which she has found herself is departure; however, unlike Orestes, whose retreat will ensure the maintenance of the power structure in Argos by protecting the unity of the bottom, Lizzie's escape threatens the integrity of the top, because the outcome of the trial depends on her testimony. In both cases, the travellers are, as Foucault states, tied to their own identities, their own self-knowledge and their sense of the extent to which that selfhood separates them from the rest of society. As this subjectivity leaves both of them at odds with their environment, their continued residence in each place requires a fundamental change.

This changeover from one definition of "subject" to the other is literally dramatised in the character of Orestes. As the dominant force in his society is the classical myth structure in which a combination of fate and divine intervention governs the actions of all men, it is to this structure that Orestes finally submits. When Electra speaks of what she thought her brother would look like, she describes a stock type, a larger-than-life hero figure of mythological proportions, and is pleasantly surprised to find that, at first, Orestes does not fit that mold. Indeed, while he is contemplating taking his sister and leaving Argos peacefully, he maintains his personal, individual nature. However, when he makes the decision to reach out to Jupiter for guidance and interprets the "blaze of light round that precious, sacred stone of theirs" (*The Flies* 90) ("la lumière qui fuse autour de la pierre sacrée" [*Les Mouches* 63]) as a sign, he opens himself up to subjugation by the power dynamic the god's presence in the myth structure implies. Foucault writes: "If interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 151-52). In this sense, Orestes is developing his humanity by abandoning one set of rules, those that accompany the archetypal quest for selfhood that brought him to Argos in the first place, for another, the rules of classical mythology that will enable him to enact his revenge on Aegistheus, carry out his fate, and ultimately prompt a shift in the progression of power. Indeed, while Orestes insists that what he receives in the "raining miracles" (*The Flies* 91) ("[pluie] des miracles"

[*Les Mouches* 62]) of Jupiter's response to his prayer is knowledge of his own freedom, the actions he takes after this point actually pull him into the predetermined unfolding of the myth and remove any lingering individuality or personal character. The moment he decides to stay in Argos and participate in the life of the society, he transforms into Electra's myth-image, instantly becoming the man the classical myth structure requires him to be: "Oh, how you've changed! Your eyes have lost their glow; they're dull and smoldering. I'm sorry for that, Philebus; you were so gentle. But now you're talking like the Orestes of my dreams" (91) ("Comme tu as changé: tes yeux ne brillent plus, ils sont ternes et sombres. Hélas! Tu étais si doux, Philèbe. Et voila que tu me parles comme l'autre me parlait en songe" [65]). By rejecting the advice of his former mentor, his tutor, and calling instead on guidance from the gods, Orestes effectively abandons the self-knowledge that ties him to his own identity and subjects himself to an archetypal revenge and salvation script that implicates him in a system of dependence and control.

While Orestes's (d)evolution is written on his body, Lizzie's wavering will demonstrates the changing nature of her subjecthood. As long as her discussion with the Senator remains concerned with the literal truth or falsehood of events, matters about which her conscience and identity are clear, Lizzie remains steadfast in the maintenance of the value structure that defines her self-concept. However, like Orestes, hinting at her sense of belonging, she begins to change the nature of her subjectivity by seeking guidance from the Senator. Prompted by her inquiry as to whether his sister would be pleased with her if she signed the statement, the Senator replies, "She will love you, from a distance, as her very own child ... If you sign, the whole town will adopt you. The whole town. All the mothers in it" (*The Respectful Prostitute* 264) ("Elle vous aimera de loin comme sa fille ... Si tu signes, toute la ville t'adopte. Toute la ville. Toutes les mères de la ville" [*La Putain respectueuse* 283]). While her signing of the document is only the first hint of the subordination to which she eventually succumbs, Lizzie's attraction and gradual attrition to the myth of belonging to a superior and unified group changes the nature of her subjectivity and implicates her in the system of the maintenance of power.

The numerous layers of myth-making in *Les Mouches* illustrate the extent to which communication used as a tool for subjectification comes even to subjectify the dominant force in a relationship of power. When the domination of the Argives is first explained, it appears that Aegistheus is the authoritative force behind the myth-making that holds his people in its thrall. Discussing his rule with Clytemnestra, Aegistheus says, "For fifteen years I have been upholding the remorse of a whole city, and my arms are aching with the strain. For fifteen years I have been dressing a part, playing the scaremonger, and the black of my robes has seeped through to my soul" (*The Flies* 96) ("Voici quinze ans que je tiens en l'air, a bout de bras, le remords de tout un peuple. Voici quinze ans que je m'habille comme un épouvantail: tous ces vêtements noirs ont fini par déteindre sur mon âme" [*Les Mouches* 71]), thus indicating the extent to which he has authored the myth of repentance and remorse that has subjugated his people. However, immediately afterwards he alludes to the presence of Agamemnon, prompting Clytemnestra to ask, "Have you forgotten it was you yourself who invented that fable to impress your people?" (96) ("Est-ce que vous avez oublié que vous-même vous inventâtes ces fables pour le peuple?" [71]). Aegistheus's accidental adoption of the truth he himself created indicates the power inherent in this mode of communication. Indeed, his myth-making not only dominates his subjects, it dominates him. Aegistheus's narrative of scare-mongering and remorse, however, is only the surface layer of myth-making in *Les Mouches*. The fact that the figure of Jupiter is a significant locus of control only when he is in character as a god, not as a man, underlines the extent to which the power of myth comes to subjugate even those who install it. Indeed, Jupiter shapes people's behaviour only when he appears in the guise of the divine; in human form, he cannot convince anyone to do anything. Appearing as a man at the outset of the play, Jupiter tells Orestes "Go your way, my lad, go your way. The repose of cities and men's souls hangs on a thread; tamper with it and you bring disaster ... A disaster which will recoil on you" (57) ("Bon voyage,

jeune homme, bon voyage; l'ordre d'une cite et l'ordre des âmes sont instables: si vous y touchez, vous provoquerez une catastrophe ... Une terrible catastrophe qui retombera sur vous" [21]). Despite his eerie admonition, Orestes pays him no heed. Conversely, when Orestes appeals to him as to a god in prayer, "[Light flashes out around the stone]" (89) ("La lumière fuse autour de la Pierre" [62]) when Jupiter communicates with him. Confronted with this display, Orestes pays attention, thus illustrating the extent to which Jupiter's embodiment of the myth of his own divine power is crucial to maintaining his absolute authority. Similarly, not only does Aegistheus only recognise Jupiter when he appears in the guise of the divine, "[Flashes of lightning, a peal of thunder. Zeus assumes an awe-inspiring air] Now do you recognise me?" (97) ("[Tonnerre, éclairs, Jupiter prend l'air terrible] Et comme ça?" [73]), the final encounter between god and king indicates that without the trappings of the myth that installs Jupiter's power, his effect on the wills of men is relatively null. When Aegistheus resists his order to have Orestes and Electra arrested, Jupiter goes to great lengths to subordinate the king: "That's right, show your mettle! Resist! Resist! Ah, how I cherish souls like yours! Your eyes flash, you clench your fists, you fling refusal in the teeth of Zeus. None the less, my little rebel, my restive little horse, no sooner had I warned you than your heart said yes. Of course you'll obey. Do you think I leave Olympus without good reason? I wished to warn you of this crime because it is my will to avert it" (98) ("Courage! Résiste! Résiste! Ah! Que je suis friand d'âmes comme la tienne. Tes yeux lancent des éclair, tu serres les poings et tu jette ton refus a la face de Jupiter. Mais cependant, petite tête, petit cheval, mauvais petit cheval, il y a beau temps que ton cœur m'a dit oui. Allons, tu obéiras. Crois-tu que je quitte l'Olympe sans motif? J'ai voulu t'avertir de ce crime, parce qu'il me plait de l'empêcher" [74]). He takes a self-righteous, authoritative air, even attempting to convince Aegistheus that he is simply unaware that he has already decided to submit to his will. But despite Jupiter's admonitions, his goading, his insults, the god in human form cannot convince the king to act in time.

This tension within the figure of Jupiter illustrates the power that mythological discourse itself holds over its participants, regardless of where they are situated on the hierarchy of domination and control. Debusscher writes: "Sartre's Aegistheus is but a servant, a slave of the gods; he may have some authority over his fellow countrymen but ultimately the real power is in the hands of the gods" (313). However, Sartre's obvious preoccupation with the myth structure in *Les Mouches* illustrates that Jupiter himself is subject to the tradition that sprang him forth, thus prompting a revisioning of Debusscher's comment to reflect the layers of power at work in the play: inasmuch as Sartre's Aegistheus is a slave to the gods, "[Jupiter] is but a servant, a slave of [myth]; he may have some authority over [kings and] countrymen but ultimately the real power is in the [myth]" (313). Jupiter's awesome might when he appears in the guise of a classical god compared with his relative benignity when he takes the form of man indicates that, despite his divine nature, his power depends upon his successful performance of his mythological role. The layers of myth at work in *Les Mouches* mirror the complexities in the structuring and maintenance of power and illustrate the extent to which discourses of domination subjugate even the figure at the top of the totalitarian regime.

While myth-making in *La Putain respectueuse* is neither as layered nor as complex as it is in *Les Mouches*, it is every bit as powerful as a mode of discourse to achieve domination. The myth structure relied upon in the Senator's discourse is that of true Americanness, of a unified, superior group that embodies the truth of the US-American spirit. Writes Peters, "Sartre's America was mythical. He presented the myth of an almost exclusively white America and perpetuated the myth of an entirely free America -- a country whose citizens were integrated into the community and in harmony with their collective being" (23). Indeed, despite Fred's mention of the disparity in numbers between whites and blacks, the fact that the America the play physically demonstrates has only a single black character installs the myth of a predominantly white US-America. Just as Aegistheus is the direct purveyor of myth to the people of Argos, Fred, an agent of the Senator, is the first to attempt to exert power over Lizzie through communication. Like Aegistheus's speeches to the people of Argos, Fred's

discourse with Lizzie attempts to install the notion of absolute truth. Regarding the incident on the train, he says, "The two of them came over to your seat. Then after a while they jumped on you. You called for help and some white people came. One of the niggers flashed his razor, and a white man shot him. The other nigger got away" (*The Respectful Prostitute* 255) ("Ils sont montés à deux dans ton compartiment. Au bout d'un moment, ils se sont jetés sur toi. Tu as appelé à l'aide et des blancs sont venus. Un des négres a tiré son rasoir et un blanc l'a abattu d'un coup de revolver. L'autre négre s'est sauvé!" [*La Putain respectueuse* 270]). Until Lizzie challenges his version, Fred does not ask her to describe her version of events or even to validate his own; he accepts the version of events that maintains the myth of white superiority and attempts to install it as fact. However, in that his hearsay version of events contrasts so sharply with Lizzie's actual experience, it is easy for her to isolate and insist upon the truth: "I'll tell them what I saw" (255) ("Je dirai ce que j'ai vue" [271]). The Senator, on the other hand, functions more in the manner of Jupiter: he weaves a myth-script so involved and distracting and appealing that it renders actual fact irrelevant, thus illustrating the subjugating nature of the myth structure at work in the play.

The Senator creates two characters to communicate his myth to Lizzie: his sister, the quintessential US-American mother and Uncle Sam, both proverbial US-American values personified. Building on the myth of unity that Fred created and Lizzie's hinted-at urge to belong, the Senator creates a double myth by scripting the character of his sister in Lizzie's own words: "I can read your mind, my child. Do you want me to tell you what's going on in your head? [Imitating Lizzie] If I signed, the Senator would go to her and say: 'Lizzie MacKay is a good girl, and she's the one who's giving your son back to you.' And she would smile through her tears. She would say: 'Lizzie MacKay? I shall not forget that name'. And I who have no family, relegated by cruel fate to social banishment, I would know that a dear little old lady was thinking of me in her great house; that an American mother had taken me to her heart" (*The Respectful Prostitute* 262) ("Je vois clair en vous, mon enfant. Voulez-vous que je dise ce qu'il y a dans votre tête? [Imitant Lizzie] 'Si je signais, le Sénateur irait la trouver chez elle, il lui dirait: Lizzie Mac Kay est une bonne fille; c'est elle qui te rend ton fils.' Et elle sourirait à travers ses larmes, elle dirait: 'Lizzie MacKay? Je n'oublierai pas ce nom-là.' Et moi qui suis sans famille, que le destin a reléguée au ban de la Société, il y aurait une petite vieille toute simple qui penserait à moi dans sa grande maison, il y aurait une mère américaine qui m'adopterait dans son cœur" [*La Putain respectueuse* 279-80]). Not only does the Senator create the figure of his sister, he, like Jupiter did to Aegistheus, creates a Lizzie who has purchased the myth being spun before her; however, while Jupiter made his argument in simple words in the guise of a man, the Senator's ultimate success stems not only from his use of the mythic mode to wield his argument, but also from the mythic quality of his own character as a paragon of the values of the dominant mode of white US-American superiority. Even more successfully, the Senator takes on the voice of Uncle Sam, using his arguments, creating his image of who America is to influence Lizzie's decision. He pulls Lizzie into a scene of imagining so convincing that she loses track of what is really going on. Speaking for Uncle Sam, the Senator says: "Lizzie, you have reached a point where you must choose between two of my boys. One of them must go. What can you do in a case like this? Well, you keep the better man. Well, then, let us try to see which is the better one" (263) ("Lizzie, tu en es arrivée à ceci qu'il te faut choisir entre deux de mes fils. Il faut que l'un ou l'autre disparaisse. Que fait-on dans des cas pareils? On garde le meilleur. Eh bien, cherchons quel est le meilleur. Veux-tu?" [282]). The Senator is not only playing up Lizzie's self-importance by insisting that she has a crucial decision to make, he is asserting her consequence in America itself by creating for her an audience with Uncle Sam. Moreover, in installing this myth, in underlining the notion of the US-American ideal, the myth of the truly US-American man, the Senator has changed the nature of Lizzie's decision. Peters writes, "According to the senator, blacks do not lead the life of men, serious men, since they are not rooted in American soil. They cannot claim tradition, culture, history, or ancestry; their origin is questionable, as they lack the weight and legitimacy of white America" (33). As a result of this mythic disparity, where Lizzie's

initial decision was concerned with which version of events is true, the Senator's personification of the myth makes the new decision about who has more value as a person. In this way, the Senator uses the creation, development and exertion of myth to achieve the ends of his script of domination by overriding Lizzie's ideals, making them irrelevant to the matter at hand.

Like Jupiter, so, too, is the Senator himself an example of the extent to which the myth that he himself maintains suffuses his own existence. In convincing Lizzie to sign, he asks, "Do you suppose a whole town could be mistaken? A whole town, with its ministers and its priests, its doctors, its lawyers, its artists, its mayor and his aides, with all its charities? Do you think that could happen?" (265) ("Est-ce que tu crois qu'une ville tout entière peut se tromper? Une ville tout entière, avec ses pasteurs et ses curés, avec ses médecins, ses avocats et ses artistes, avec son maire et ses adjoints et ses associations de bienfaisance. Est-ce que tu le crois?" [284]). Through this list, the Senator indicates the pervasiveness of this myth of the US-American ideal. While this is Lizzie's first exposure to it, the myth of white American superiority is one that suffuses the consciousness of the US-American South in the world of the play; indeed, it is what guides, legitimates, and indeed permits the Senator's own actions. Peters argues that "Sartre shows the white Southerners' belief that their whiteness is a sign of superiority. They believe that they are the only true Americans, the descendants of the oldest families of the country, and they consider themselves to be the intellectual, political, and military elite" (31). To the same extent that it perpetuates this myth, the Senator's power depends on it. Just as it comes to govern Lizzie's actions, the myth structure he employs governs the Senator's own, thus evidencing the universal might of myth in the subjection of individuals, in the wielding of power, and in the maintenance of political regimes. By dialoguing in myth paradigms, Sartre illustrates that nothing we ever do is fully our own; we interact within ancient yet prevailing universal structures of thought, identification, and belief. And in the last few pages of *Les Mouches* after Orestes has fulfilled his classical myth destiny and appears to be changing the order of things by liberating his people from the oppression of their remorse, he is in fact merely moving into the next mythological process, the repentance/absolution/salvation paradigm of the Christian myth structure: here again, Foucault's thought is relevant: "It has often been said that Christianity brought into being a code of ethics fundamentally different from that of the ancient world. Less emphasis is usually placed on the fact that it proposed and spread new power relations through the ancient world" ("Subject and Power" 214). Thus, in that Orestes is actually marking the movement from one myth structure to another, he is not, contrary to his own belief, liberating the Argives; he is merely imposing upon them a new form of subjectivity by prompting a change in regime.

A common misreading of the end of the play is that "The decision to act leads Orestes to freedom: instead of remaining in Argos, he leaves the city, for he has conquered a new citizenship, that of MAN, because he has grown conscious of his own freedom" (Debusscher 309; emphasis in original). However, while he has perhaps achieved more agency than he had before and become more conscious of the personal power Jupiter and Aegistheus sought to hide from the Argives for so long, he has in effect merely shifted from one tradition to the next, abandoning the role of the mythic hero in favour of that of the Christian messiah. It is at this point, this transition from one myth structure to another, that the two plays diverge. In ignoring the pleas of his sister, claiming responsibility for murdering the king and queen, and assuming the throne of Argos, Orestes becomes this political power. Conversely, by ignoring the interests of the Negro, Lizzie succumbs to this power, rather than becoming it. Both Orestes and Lizzie are tied up in thoughts of salvation, but Orestes's desire to save his populace and Lizzie's decision to save herself respectively symbolise progression and stagnancy in systems of power. Throughout *La Putain respectueuse*, it appears that, much like the Argives, Lizzie is acting out a personal drama of punishment and remorse, characterised by the bracelet she wears on her wrist. She inscribes the bracelet with a certain mythical quality, as though it is an instrument that, like an oracle in a classical myth, decides her fate. When first faced with the choice between Thomas and the Negro, Lizzie exclaims, "So there we are! Here's me in it up to my neck -- just for a change. [To her

bracelet] God damn you, can't you pick on anyone else? [She throws the bracelet on the floor]" (257) ("Et voilà. Je suis dans la crotte jusqu'au cou; pour changer. (A son bracelet) Saleté, pourriture, tu n'en fais jamais d'autres! Elle le jette par terre" [273]). Her sarcasm implies that she is often in trouble and that she is somehow fated to experience such situations by circumstances beyond her control. Furthermore, when the police arrive with the Senator a few minutes later, she says, "I knew it had to happen. [She exhibits the bracelet] It's this thing's fault. [She kisses it and puts it back on her arm] I guess I'd better keep it on me" (258) ("Ça devrait arriver. [Elle montre le bracelet] C'est à cause de lui. [Elle se baisse et le remet à son bras] Il vaut encore mieux que je le garde" [274]). While wearing the bracelet brings Lizzie trouble, removing it, apparently, only makes matters worse. This relationship with the mythic governs Lizzie's inability to join Orestes in acting out the salvation myth. While she is displeased with the situation her place in the myth structure implies, she firmly believes that extrication from that structure will condemn, not save, her. Furthermore, contrary to Orestes's move through systems of power, Lizzie's relationship with her bracelet comes to symbolise stasis in non-developing traditions as opposed to progression through systems of power structures. Lizzie seals her fate and halts the progression of power through her secession from the salvation myth that, as we saw in *Les Mouches*, is the natural next step in the evolution of mythological tradition and, indeed, political systems. Again, when faced with adversity, Lizzie blames her bracelet, crying, "It's all your fault! You pig of a snake! [She tears it from her arm, throws it on the floor, and tramples on it.] Trash!" (270) ("[Un temps, a son bracelet] Cochon de serpent! [Elle le jette par terre et le piétine] Saloperie!" [290]). The snake shape of the bracelet recalls the pre-Christian myth of temptation and original sin, the result of which was the creation of a hierarchy of power, the effects of which she blames on the bracelet.

Lizzie signals her desire for salvation, her yearning for transition in the myth structure that governs her: "For twenty-five years I have had to take their crap about old mothers with white hair, about war heroes, about Uncle Sam. But now I've caught on ... I'll open the door and say to them: 'He's inside. He's here, but he's done nothing: I was forced to sign a false statement. I swear by Christ that he did nothing'" (*The Respectful Prostitute* 270) ("Voilà vingt-cinq ans qu'ils me roulent avec leurs vieilles mères aux cheveux blancs et les héros de la guerre et la nation américaine. Mais j'ai compris. Ils ne m'auront pas jusqu'au bout. J'ouvrirai la porte et je leur dirai: 'Il est là. Il est là mais il n'a rien fait ; on m'a soutire un faux témoignage. Je jure sur le bon Dieu qu'il n'a rien fait" [*La Putain respectueuse* 291]). In this speech, Lizzie asserts her intention to assume responsibility for her actions, as did Orestes, and work toward the salvation of the person at the absolute bottom of the play's spectrum of power, the Negro. Furthermore, this assertion, along with the words "by Christ" ("sur le bon Dieu"), follows her throwing down of the bracelet, thereby situating her at the cusp of a regime change, a movement in myth structures. However, when the time comes for Lizzie to make her sacrifice, to perform penance for her crime against the Negro and, in that signing the statement contradicted her own values, against herself, she falls short of the shift and reclaims her familiar myth, thereby reinstalling the same system of power. On her way to answer the door, "She crosses herself, picks up the bracelet, and goes to open the door" (271) ("Elle se signe, ramasse le bracelet et va ouvrir" [292]). In other words, she takes a step towards the salvation myth but, in picking up the bracelet and chatting up the lynch mob at her door instead of confessing to them, she marks her inability to change and her surrender to the power structure that has governed her throughout. Her initial disgust with and rejection of the bracelet appear to indicate Lizzie's preparedness and willingness to move into the next mythic process and, as Orestes did, kick-start a change in regime; however, unlike her classical counterpart, Lizzie is unable to navigate this progression, thereby installing a state of stasis in the myth of white American superiority and the political structure that myth implies.

Fred's reappearance shortly thereafter confirms the stasis of the myth structure and relationship of power in that not only does he weave the familiar myth of white American superiority, he does so

with an important development. At the beginning of the play Fred was just a regular man who, like Jupiter in his human form, could not convince Lizzie of anything; however, after Lizzie's inaction reinstalls the myth that maintains the superiority of his dominant group, he suddenly takes on the mythic qualities of the Senator. In convincing her to disarm, after recounting a long history of the place of he and his family in US-American history, Fred asks, "Can you dare to shoot all of America?" (*The Respectful Prostitute* 275) ("Oseras-tu tirer sur toute l'Amérique?" [*La Putain respectueuse* 297]). Whereas in earlier conversations Fred could only communicate the myth of white US-American superiority, he now, like the Senator before him, embodies it. It is as though in not rising up against this subjugating regime, in not seeking out a new mythic structure, even if it is only to inscribe a new mode of power, Lizzie has in fact allowed the current dominant mode to become more powerful both as a myth and as a political regime. In that neither Orestes nor Lizzie were ultimately able to escape subjugating forces of power constructs in their societies, their grappling with their respective salvation myths can ultimately be deemed unsuccessful. In this way, while perhaps neither Orestes nor Lizzie was successful, only Lizzie can be deemed to have really failed. While, despite his intentions, Orestes did not liberate the Argives from a system of power, he did successfully maintain what Nietzsche deems to be the natural procession from domination to domination. Lizzie, on the other hand, halted this process. With no delusions about having arrived at a point of "universal reciprocity," it is not that Lizzie has not found an alternative to the violence installed in a system of rules; rather, she has succumbed to them, a fact that is further underlined by her submission to Fred at the end of the play.

In conclusion, the layers of myth in *Les Mouches* and *La Putain respectueuse* mirror the complexities of the relationship of subject and power and the movement of myth structures within the two plays mirrors the progression of power from one system of dominance to the next. The concomitant reading of the two plays demonstrates the nature of tyranny, the personal independence that challenges it, and the opportunity for regime change as a result of rebellion. Sartre himself points out that "American society has produced its myths and its ideology; a new American consciousness will have to arise from these myths and this ideology in order to counteract them" (Sartre qtd. in Peters 38). In that the structural parallels in the two plays draw significant focus to the extent to which Lizzie falls short of Orestes's mark, the failure on Lizzie's part to seek salvation and move into the next dominant mode seems to be a comment by the author that gave her form. Perhaps in the face of the numerous regime changes in Europe at the time of the writing of this play, the comparably static political structure in the United States seemed despotic and stale. In any case, given the tones of the plays' endings, *Les Mouches*'s charged optimism and *La Putain respectueuse*'s resigned despair, it is clear that the alignment of political regimes with myth structures in the two plays advocates the concept of evolution in the progression of power.

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