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# Knock knock ! Who's there ? Violence and repetition from Attic Tragedy to Philip Glass

Jeanne Mathieu-Lessard

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- 1 Violence lies at the root of Friedrich Nietzsche's vision of tragedy, presented in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. It is to him of course present in the plot of a given tragedy, but most importantly, it is at the centre of the creative process leading to the formation of tragedy. For James I. Porter, Nietzsche's main contribution with *The Birth* is precisely his insistence on the role of violence in Greek tragedy : "Nietzsche's peculiar contribution lay in his revealing a dimension of classical culture, especially in one of its most revered relics, that was literally hidden by its obviousness : namely, its turbulent, ritualized violence"<sup>1</sup>. This hidden but inescapable aspect of Greek tragedy goes hand in hand with the necessary presence of repetition : the repetition of violence, but also the violence of repetition itself. Nietzsche's conception of tragedy is also based on its disappearance relatively soon after its inception, and on the philosopher's hope of seeing it revived by one of his contemporaries, Wagner. In this article, I want to retrace the births and rebirths of tragedy in the interaction of the principles of violence and of repetition. I'm interested in seeing how Nietzsche's theory can be prolonged to encompass contemporary evolutions of musical tragedy.
- 2 The first part of my article will be dedicated to understanding the necessity of violence in tragedy. I will then move on to study the function of repetition in its relation to violence, following the trajectory outlined by Nietzsche, from the folk song, to the chorus, to opera, but prolonging it *after* Wagnerian opera up to a contemporary example of a "Nietzschean" tragedy : Philip Glass's "minimalistic" opera. I will argue that minimalism is based on the conflict between violence and repetition that, according to Nietzsche, can lead to the creation of pure tragedy, and will show how, in Glass's opera-ballet *Les enfants terribles / Children of the Game*, this interaction creates the sense of the tragic.

## Violence as the source of creation

- 3 Nietzsche pictures the process of tragic creation as a fusion between the artist and the primordial unity, an entity never clearly described, but associated with an “original contradiction and original pain”<sup>2</sup>, and identified as “the only ground of the world”<sup>3</sup>. The first stage of this union leads the artist, described as a Dionysiac artist, to produce a copy of the primordial unity as music and then, thanks to the influence of the Apolline dream, to transform music in a “symbolic dream-image”<sup>4</sup>. The union of the Dionysiac and the Apolline drives constitutes for Nietzsche the origin, or the central event, of tragedy.
- 4 What is crucial is that the first step leading to this creative union of the two drives, the unification with the primordial unity, involves violence in more than one way. The primordial unity itself is nothing but pain and contradiction, and therefore is the *locus* of a permanent struggle. The process of the union of a being with the unity, namely the dis-individuation of this being, also necessarily implies violence to the self. Earlier in his essay, Nietzsche posits the origin of this creative process in the Greek Dionysiac orgies, explaining that it is where “for the first time the tearing-apart of the *principium individuationis* becomes an artistic phenomenon”<sup>5</sup>. The violence necessary to the artistic creation goes hand in hand with a feeling of release and pleasure that is not a finality in itself, but that is at the centre of the process, for it is through pain that release and pleasure can be attained<sup>6</sup>.
- 5 The violence in the reconciliation of the artist with the primordial unity parallels the one that is at the core of the relation between the Dionysian and the Apolline drives, and thus at the origin of the Attic tragedy. The union of the two elements, also named “reconciliation”, is most of the time depicted as a violent struggle. Section 4 of *The Birth* gives a dramatic account of the meeting of the two drives, explaining by means of their struggle the rise of historical and artistic stages. Their conflict, born out of their “reciprocal necessity”<sup>7</sup>, is depicted with plethora of martial vocabulary (“onslaught”, “battlements”, “war-like” and “permanent military encampment of the Apolline”<sup>8</sup>). Even if the section ends with the proclamation of the “mysterious marriage” as the end of the conflict between the two drives, it appears from the rest of Nietzsche’s account that the conflict should be perceived as an ongoing struggle, or at least an ongoing exchange, rather than a permanent union.
- 6 The Attic tragedy thus becomes the site of this “ongoing union” constantly involving the opposite phenomena of individuation (Apolline) and dis-individuation (Dionysiac). Tracing the origin of tragedy as a staged performance, Nietzsche insists on the process of dis-individuation. At a collective level, this violent loss of individuality takes place thanks to the chorus.  

I believe that, when faced with the chorus of satyrs, cultured Greeks felt themselves absorbed, elevated, and extinguished in exactly the same way. This is the first effect of Dionysiac tragedy : state and society, indeed all divisions between one human being and another, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity which leads men back to the heart of nature<sup>9</sup>.
- 7 In this passage, the vocabulary of violence, at first negatively tainted, is giving way to one of power (overwhelmingness), more neutral, before shifting right after to a clearly positive one. In the sections dedicated to the chorus (mainly sections 7 and 8), indeed, the vocabulary of the struggle mostly disappears and gives place to one of enchantment and

to the positive impact of tragedy. This aspect (the “metaphysical solace”), however, can only be grasped in relation with the violence lying at the core of the world. According to Gilles Deleuze, the evolution of Nietzsche’s conception of the tragic and especially of the Dionysiac drive leads him to accentuate the affirmative quality of the Greek god, a quality that is already present in *The Birth*. As Deleuze clearly points out, this affirmation is intrinsically bound up with the violence of the god’s dismemberment :

Dionysos affirme tout ce qui apparaît, “même la plus âpre souffrance”, et apparaît dans tout ce qui est affirmé. L’affirmation multiple ou pluraliste, voilà l’essence du tragique. On le comprendra mieux, si l’on songe aux difficultés qu’il y a à faire de tout un objet d’affirmation. Il y faut l’effort et le génie du pluralisme, la puissance des métamorphoses, la laceration dionysiaque<sup>10</sup>.

- 8 In *The Birth*, the solace is both acting against the natural negative feelings, and nourished by them ; it occurs as a consequence of a violent destruction of the self, and is tolerated only thanks to the “lethargic element” present in the Dionysiac state<sup>11</sup>. While the later stages of the artistic process are given a defined explanation by Nietzsche (the Dionysiac state is followed by a state of revulsion, itself re-directed by art into representations), the reason of being of the “lethargic” moment is never clarified. I suggest that repetition has a crucial role to play here. Only by becoming “constant” can the “destruction of the phenomenal world”<sup>12</sup> be bearable, and only in “discharg[ing] itself over and over again”<sup>13</sup> in images can the Dionysian chorus point to the destruction of the phenomenal world. Structurally, the repetition in tragedy would therefore play a crucial role in rendering tolerable an otherwise insufferable violence.

## From the folk song to the Philip Glass ensemble

- 9 The necessary interaction of violence and repetition is central in Nietzsche’s retracing of the evolution of tragedy from the folk song, to the chorus, to nineteenth century opera. Nietzsche considers the folk song as the “*perpetuum vestigium*,” the perpetual trace, of the union between the Apolline and the Dionysiac<sup>14</sup>. He still insists on the primordial role of the Dionysiac in its creation. It is in a desire to express in images the “original melody” – associated with the nature of the world – that the folk song becomes “a musical mirror of the world”<sup>15</sup>. The most interesting aspect of Nietzsche’s approach is how this concept of the two drives and of their reunion is used to explain the structure of the folk song. What strikes me as the most important in the *perpetuum vestigium* might not be the idea of the “vestige”, but of a “perpetual” one, of a perpetuity understood in terms of repetitions of births. The whole passage on the formal characteristics of the folk song is worth quoting at length.

Melody gives birth to poetry, and does so over and over again, in ever new ways ; this is what the *strophic form of the folk song* is trying to tell us, a phenomenon which always astonished me until I eventually found this explanation. Anyone who examines a collection of folk songs (such as *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*) with this theory in mind will find countless examples of how the melody, as it gives birth again and again, emanates sparks of imagery which in their variety, their sudden changes, their mad, head-over-heels, forward rush, reveal an energy utterly alien to the placid flow of epic semblance<sup>16</sup>.

- 10 The structural repetition is explained by the repetition of the birth of images from music. Repetition is thus dependent on the violent act of giving birth to linguistic images. Nietzsche insists on the linguistic violence inherent to the process : “Thus in the poetry of

folk song we see language straining to its limits *to imitate music*"<sup>17</sup>. The relation between music and poetry in tragedy thus necessitates both imitation (of music by language) and repetition (of this imitation), and both these processes imply a violence done to language itself.

- 11 The process taking place in the folk song is the same that will be embodied by the chorus of satyrs. Although in his discussion of the chorus Nietzsche concentrates mostly on the union of the two drives and on the principle of dis-individuation, it is of foremost importance to stress the *perpetual*, or repeated character of this union, and the structural implications thereof. The capacity of the music that emanates from the chorus to give birth, by means of the repetition of the same musical structures, to a plurality of images on stage is what is at stake in tragedy. It is also what composers might have sought to achieve in their attempt to revive tragedy through opera. It is probably what the Nietzsche of *The Birth* thought Wagner was seeking to reproduce, and the difference between Wagner's approach and the preceding operatic style (especially the *stile rappresentativo* of early operas) led him for a time to think the German composer could truly recreate this lost ideal.<sup>18</sup> Structurally, we can certainly draw a parallel between Wagner's use of the leitmotif and the form of the folk song. What prevents Wagner from *fully* recreating the tragic ideal does not seem to be related to the musical structure of his operas, but rather to an inability to give birth to linguistic images that would "strain" language to its limits. To George Steiner, by giving precedence to the theatrical over the dramatic,<sup>19</sup> Wagner becomes a creator of melodramas rather than real tragedies: "Yet although he argued for the primacy of total musical form, Wagner was a master of language and a skilful contriver of melodrama. [...] It is this adroit but somewhat meretricious treatment of theatric form which betrayed the Wagnerian ideal"<sup>20</sup>. In Deleuze's words, it is by going back to the principle of affirmation that we can understand what is lacking in Wagner's work: "Ce que Nietzsche reproche à Wagner, c'est précisément d'avoir fait une musique dramatique, d'avoir renié le caractère affirmateur de la musique"<sup>21</sup>. Wagner's inability to strain language would be in fact closely related to his refusal to affirm music and the tragic spirit, thus creating melodramas instead of tragedies.
- 12 Following Nietzsche's logic, an opera that would reproduce the repeated births of images through the imitation of music and become a "permanent trace" would by its very structure show signs of this process. It would also, as a staged performance, have to spring from the relationship between performers and audience that gave birth to tragedy according to Nietzsche. As Porter explains, the relation with the public is essential in Nietzsche's argument: "[s]pectatorship is for this reason of the essence for Nietzsche. It is the point of departure in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the way it ends"<sup>22</sup>. What Nietzsche described as the primal form and role of the chorus is peculiarly close to what Philip Glass has been aiming at from the moment he established the Philip Glass Ensemble. In the Scott Hicks's 2007 documentary *Glass : A Portrait of Philip in Twelve Parts*, the novelty, in the context of the time, of the way "musical performance" is being conceptualized and put into practice by Philip Glass and his ensemble is clear. In a discussion with his friend, the visual artist Chuck Close, Glass explains how the performances of the ensemble in the 1970's would never take place in regular concert halls, but rather in lofts, art museums, parks, or other spaces that would not be labelled as "performance" places. More importantly, the particular way in which the space would be used deconstructed the usual spatial and sonic criteria of the regular concert. In the following passage, Glass and

another musician of the ensemble describe the setting of those performances while pictures of them are shown in the documentary :

Glass [14 :24] : I was living down close to Soho, on the corner of Bleecker and Elisabeth. I did concerts in lofts and galleries. There would be sixty, eighty, a hundred people there every Sunday.

Kurt Munkacsi : Usually the audience was sitting on the floor, lying on the floor, kind of meditating. We would sit in a circle at the centre of the art gallery. And then the audience would be around us and out in the periphery of the room in the four corners would be the PA speakers. *So, we performed in this kind of huge sound field that enveloped both us and the audience. Everybody was part of the same sonic experience.* This is why I think the experience was so intense. Of course everybody was high. The audience was high the musicians were high, everybody was high. Philip didn't do drugs but everybody else did. The audience could walk in and out. And in the early days, you know, we would usually lose, you know, 25 % of the audience, or 30 of the audience would have left. They couldn't stand they... you know, they hated it. You have to remember his music was very loud, and very repetitive, and really intense.

Chuck Close [15 :36] : Knock knock ! Who's there ? Knock knock ! Who's there ? Knock knock ! Who's there ? Knock knock ! ... Philip Glass.

Kurt Munkacsi [15 :41] : What would happen is it ended suddenly. It would just, like... it would end ! [quick laughter]

15 :50 : The audience would just sit there for... a minute or two. And then would just applaud. It's like they had a revelation. (emphasis added)

- 13 The reunion of performers and public in a space that aims at destroying the formal boundaries of the concert hall, but most of all the *sonic* boundaries that go with them, is crucial in Glass's creative process. Even in the best-designed concert hall, a clear distance is established between performers and audience, and a specific orientation is instituted (with the stage generally having only one side oriented towards the audience). In the loft environments of the Philip Glass Ensemble, not only is the distance between each individual member of the audience and each performer almost similar to the one of other audience member-performer couples, with all audience members encircling the performance, but this distance is actually almost erased with the blending of performers and attendees.
- 14 Both this spatialization of music and the specific character of this music take of course part of larger artistic and social changes, but nonetheless came as a shock to the audience. Reactions would go from simply leaving the space, as had been described in the passage, to violently reacting to it : "Some people had a fits or a reaction to it where they completely hated it !" [16 :00] This was the case, for example, in a performance in a park when a music teacher interrupted the music to bang on the keyboard and shout out to the audience that what was being played was not music. The reaction of the public (and critics) to the new form of performance, but most of all to the music itself, recalls the "terror" Dionysiac music would have given rise to in its first auditors, at the time familiar with Apolline forms of music : "The singing and expressive gestures of such enthusiasts in their two-fold mood was something new and unheard-of in the Homeric-Greek world ; Dionysiac music in particular elicited terror and horror from them"<sup>23</sup>. Just like Nietzsche emphasizes the musical element of the new form of performance, I want to emphasize how Glass's use of repeated musical elements, that goes well beyond the addition of leitmotifs to an otherwise mainly romantic musical language, makes of Glass's music, in its attempt to "stretch" the boundaries of language, a successful way of creating a new musical language. The very use of repetition in Glass's music highlights how repetition is not only a way of dealing with violence or of rendering violence livable ; it can become a

way of *creating* a meaningful violence out of non-violent elements. Contrarily to other forms of twentieth-century music such as dodecaphony (twelve-tone technique), “minimalistic” music is not based on the complete rejection of the tone-based system. By creating a system in which twelve notes are equal to one another, the dodecaphonists dismissed the previous system of tension and release that is intrinsic to the use of tonality. Glass’s way of breaking the norm is less obvious in that an isolated sentence of his music would not appear shocking to the ear used to canonical classical music. The violence and convention-breaking aspect of his music comes from the incessant repetition of musical segments that are not themselves violent or anti-conventional. It is a tension built gradually in a way that recalls the song and dance of the original tragic chorus announcing us that the tragic is to come, that we will be its witnesses, indeed that the music will bring us within its realm.

## Repetition of Violence, Repetition as Violence

- 15 What Philip Glass offers to the spectator with his music in general is a musical experience that breaks from the traditional conception of it, and especially of established “classical music”. The formal characteristics of the music itself, as well as the fact that a transformation of the relation between public and performers is at the root of Glass’s creative process, constitute a radical severing of the preceding form. What Glass offers with his *operas*, however, is slightly different. It is the Dionysiac music taking the form of drama, and can be perceived, along with the folk song and the Greek tragedy, as an embodiment of the *perpetuum vestigium*. The case of *Les enfants terribles* / *Children of the Game* will illustrate this idea. This 1996 opera-ballet is based on Jean Cocteau’s 1929 novel *Les enfants terribles*. Briefly summarized, it is the story of two siblings, Paul and Élisabeth, who create around them the imaginary play world of “la chambre” (“the room”) and are unable to transgress its borders and free themselves from its spirit. Two other main characters, Gérard and Agathe, are introduced to the room, fascinated by the two players, and assist to the “game” being played without being able to stop the destruction at work.
- 16 A chorus *per se* is not present in *Children of the Game*, but two of its components could be perceived as playing the role of the chorus. First is the narrator, who addresses the public directly in a spoken voice instead of an operatic one, and in the language of the audience, while the sung parts remain in French<sup>24</sup>. Interestingly, the narrator is both an outsider and an insider of the story being shown. He is in fact the character of Gérard, friend of the main characters Paul and Élisabeth, and therefore plays on two temporal levels : the time of narration, and the time of action, of which he also takes part as a singing and dancing character. The role of Gerard-as-narrator distinguishes itself from the characters and often assumes a role closer to one of commentator or external voice, but can nonetheless never be clearly dissociated from the role of Gerard-as-character. Another element, that is either there alone, in accompaniment to the narrator’s spoken voice, and as a support for the voices and bodies of the singing parts, shares that duplicity : the music. What makes the particularity of this work in the operatic world in general and in Glass’s oeuvre in particular is that the orchestra, or rather ensemble, consists of three grand pianos. At the same time simple (in terms of type of musical timbre), and complex (the layers of the same timbre become increasingly hard to distinguish and form a sonic complex rarely heard in piano music), this unique ensemble can be perceived as a chorus for two main reasons. In this dance-opera, created in collaboration with choreographer Susan

Marshall, the three voices of the pianos not only support the voices, but the moving bodies of the characters. The connection between the pianos and the characters is constantly made visible by the movements of the dance. In relation to Cocteau's novel, the pianos assume another role. Their blended voices and constant repetitions of short formulas make present to the mind of the spectator the ineluctability of the destruction at play; a destruction that is slowly built up by the two main characters and their repeated inabilities to stop their destructive actions. In other words, their music concretizes the powerful but formless "room" ("esprit de la chambre") that constitutes after all the main character of the story. In their different ways, both the narrator and the pianos, as choruses, "should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be a part of the whole, and should assume a share in the action"<sup>25</sup>.

- 17 More than this actualization of the role of the chorus, Glass's opera helps to understand Nietzsche's vision of tragedy in the way it dissociates itself from the tradition of opera. The distinction with the original form of opera, the *stile rappresentativo*, is particularly clear. What differs from the *stile rappresentativo* so abhorred by Nietzsche is that the "so utterly unnatural"<sup>26</sup> alternation between half-sung declamation and lyrical interjections is no longer enacted by the same apparatus, the singers, but rather by three clearly distinct elements. Whereas the spoken voice of the narrator explains and prepares the action, the singing voices of the dancers-singers enact the actions without pausing for solely "lyrical interjections", while the three pianos play expressive repetitive sections that, in the *stile rappresentativo*, would have been heard through the voices of the singers. To the inner instability of the seventeenth-century opera, Glass opposes a musical form that can become stable by means of this separation of roles and interdependence of components with one another.
- 18 Another problem identified by Nietzsche in the creation of opera is the primacy of the word with respect to the sound: "For, just as the spirit was so much nobler than the body, the word was supposedly nobler than the accompanying system of harmony"<sup>27</sup>. By separating the spoken words from the sung and enacted expressions of the dancers-singers, and by leaving an important space for the music as *character* (the chorus of pianos enacting "l'esprit de la chambre") *Les enfants terribles* makes it possible to circumvent this problem and to give back to music its primary role in tragedy. Rather than an "idyllic" language of origin,<sup>28</sup> Glass's musical language is one that constantly deals with the inherent destruction, expressed at all levels, but especially by the chorus of pianos, by means of an extensive use of musical repetition. By giving a musical voice to the destructive "esprit de la chambre" and using it as the fundament of his work, Glass exploits the violent impulse that is central to the creation of tragedy. This form of operatic language, rather than preferring the idyll to the pain, *affirms* pain and violence and transforms them into an artistic ideal: "L'affirmation multiple ou pluraliste, voilà l'essence du tragique"<sup>29</sup>.

## Conclusion

- 19 Philip Glass's minimalistic opera *Les enfants terribles/Children of the Game* embodies and pursues Nietzsche's conception of tragedy, and can take part more than any Wagnerian enterprise in a "re-birth" of tragedy. His music also possesses what George Steiner identified as the key component of the tragic language. Indeed, what Steiner says of Georg Büchner's language in *Woyzeck* could very well be said of Glass's musical language

in *Les enfants terribles* : “Drama<sup>30</sup> is language under such high pressure of feeling that the words carry a necessary and immediate connotation of gesture. It is in mounting this pressure that Büchner excels. He shaped a style more graphic than any since *Lear* and saw, as had Shakespeare, that in the extremity of suffering, the mind seeks to loosen the bonds of rational syntax”<sup>31</sup>. “Minimalism” as constructed by Glass is therefore violence imprinted on the language of classical music. Contrary to twelve-tone music or other early-twentieth century enterprises of destruction of the tone-based musical system of the West, however, what has shocked auditors in hearing Glass’s music is not an overt violence, but rather a subtle, yet intrusive and pervasive violence based on the very principle of the repetition of *per se* not violent or shocking elements. Under the oppression of the “esprit de la chambre”, Glass’s *Children of the game* have “loosen[ed] the bonds” of musical syntax : knock knock... knock knock... knock knock... knock knock... knock knock...

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## NOTES

1. Porter, James I. “Nietzsche and Tragedy.” *A Companion to Tragedy*. Ed. Rebecca Bushnell. Malden, MA : Blackwell, 2005.” 69-70.
2. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs. Trans. Ronald Speirs. Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 2012. 36.
3. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 26. For Porter, this “curious entity” would be “seemingly invented ad hoc as a grotesque calque on the (already bizarre) Schopenhauerian Will”. Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy” 73.
4. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 30.
5. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 20-21.
6. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 21.

7. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 26.
8. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 27-28.
9. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 39.
10. Deleuze, Gilles. "Le tragique." in *Nietzsche et la philosophie*. Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1973. 19.
11. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 40.
12. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 42.
13. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 44. Emphasis added.
14. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 33.
15. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 33.
16. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 33-34.
17. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 34.
18. As Raymond Geuss underlined in his introduction to *The Birth*, the relation between Wagner and the recreation of the "lost ideal" of the Greek tragedy as theorized by Nietzsche must also be read the other way around: "To put it bluntly, Nietzsche found tragedy especially interesting for as long as he thought it a form of the self-evidently most important and inherently significant cultural phenomenon there was – music – and he thought tragedy was essentially music to a large extent because Wagner said so. Wagner, in turn, said so because this was his way of asserting the superiority of his own music-drama as music over the purely instrumental music of Beethoven and others. To make the construction work, Nietzsche needed the highly implausible thesis that the highest form of music must transform itself into sung words if it is to remain humanly tolerable." Raymond Geuss. "Introduction". *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 2012. xxix. Geuss's remark on the implausibility of the thesis does not signify that the thesis has no value in understanding the process at the origin of tragedy, especially in what pertains to the relation between repetition and violence.
19. "Where the theatrical is allowed complete rule over the dramatic, we get melodrama." Steiner, George. *The Death of Tragedy*. London : Faber and Faber, 1978. 164.
20. Steiner. *The Death of Tragedy*. 287.
21. Deleuze. "Le tragique". 20.
22. Porter, "Nietzsche and Tragedy" 79.
23. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 21.
24. The narration and the sung parts are in the same language when the opera is played in a French-speaking city, but the narration contrasts with the other voices in any other case. The recording I am familiar with has an English narration.
25. Aristotle, "On the Art of Poetry." Trans. with an introduction by T.S. Dorsch. Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1975. 57.
26. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 90.
27. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 91.
28. "Recitative was thought to be the rediscovered language of those original humans [i.e. artistic and good], and opera to be the rediscovered land of that idyllic or heroic good being who follows a natural artistic drive in all his actions ..." Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* 90.
29. Deleuze. "Le tragique". 19.
30. Steiner sometimes interchangeably uses the terms "drama" and "tragedy." *Woyzeck* is elsewhere clearly characterized as a tragedy.
31. Steiner. *The Death of Tragedy*. 275.

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## ABSTRACTS

Friedrich Nietzsche's vision of tragedy springs from the interaction of the Apolline and the Dionysiac drives that unite in tragedy in a violent and renewed exchange. The violence of their union is such that it can only become bearable through its repetition. The role of repetition as a "repetition of violence" is thus at the root of the tragic. Yet, repetition does not only play a role in taming the tragic violence, but can itself become the source of violence. This article explores the two complementary roles of repetition in its relation to tragic violence, and wants to prolong Nietzsche's inquiry around a possible rebirth of tragedy in modernity. Moving past Wagnerian opera, I argue that a musical form that embodies Nietzsche's ideal is so-called "minimalist" opera. Philip Glass's opera-ballet *Les enfants terribles / Children of the Game* (1996) serves as a case study to understand the interplay of violence and repetition in the creation of tragedy.

La conception de la tragédie de Friedrich Nietzsche se développe à partir de l'interaction des forces apollinienne et dionysiaque qui s'unissent dans la tragédie dans un échange violent et renouvelé. La violence de leur union est telle qu'elle ne peut être tolérée que par sa répétition. Le rôle de la répétition comme « répétition d'une violence » est donc au cœur du tragique. Pourtant, la répétition ne joue pas seulement un rôle d'apaisement de la violence, mais peut aussi devenir une source même de violence. Cet article explore ces deux rôles complémentaires de la répétition dans sa relation à la violence tragique, et souhaite prolonger le questionnement de Nietzsche sur une possible renaissance de la tragédie dans la modernité. En me plaçant au-delà de l'opéra wagnérien, je propose l'idée qu'une forme musicale qui incarne l'idéal nietzschéen est l'opéra « minimaliste ». L'opéra-ballet de Philip Glass *Les enfants terribles / Children of the Game* (1996) me sert d'exemple pour comprendre la relation de la violence et de la répétition à la source de la création de la tragédie.

## AUTHOR

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Jeanne Mathieu-Lessard a complété une maîtrise en études littéraires à l'Université Laval en 2011, avec un mémoire sur l'oscillation spatiale dans le diptyque *Want*, de l'auteur-compositeur-interprète montréalais Rufus Wainwright. Elle est présentement doctorante au Centre for Comparative Literature de l'Université de Toronto. Ses recherches portent sur la relation entre l'humour et l'emprisonnement dans la fiction du vingtième siècle de langues française, italienne et anglaise (notamment chez Romain Gary, Luigi Pirandello, Wyndham Lewis, Giovannino Guareschi et Vladimir Nabokov). Elle est détentrice d'une bourse doctorale Joseph-Armand Bombardier du Conseil de Recherches en Sciences Humaines du Canada. Co-fondatrice de la revue littéraire *Chameaux*, elle fait présentement partie de l'équipe de la revue *Transverse* de l'Université de Toronto.