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# THE MAKING OF "CENERE"

– Analysis of the creative process of my  
graduation artistic performance



BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

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- Analysis of the creative process of my graduation artistic performance

In this thesis I intend to share and analyse the personal experience as theatre director of my artistic final work, describing the composing elements of the play, with a focus on the mental and practical process that brought me to combine what inspires me the most from the field of performing arts and my interest in mythology.

### KEYWORDS:

puppet theatre, performing arts, mythology, archetypes, mask theatre, physical theatre, fire.

# CONTENT

<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2 THE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3 THE STORY</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 Scene 1: The Creation of Mankind	9
3.2 Scene 2: the Revelation of Fire	10
3.3 Scene 3: The Human Society	11
3.4 Scene 4: The Theft of Fire	12
3.5 Scene 5: The Fight for Fire	14
3.6 Scene 6: The New Order	16
<b>4 THE CHARACTERS</b>	<b>17</b>
4.1 The <i>God</i>	19
4.2 The <i>Demigod</i>	20
4.3 The <i>Humans</i>	22
4.4 The <i>Fire</i>	25
<b>5 THE CREW</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6 THE STAGE ELEMENT</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>7 CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>FIGURES</b>	
Figure.1.	9
Figure.2.	10
Figure.3.	11
Figure.4.	12
Figure.5.	14
Figure.6.	15

## INTRODUCTION

Studying in the Arts Academy gave the chance to watch various shows by my school colleagues, learning to appreciate in particular those performances which put together elements from different forms of arts.

I realised that when more disciplines are involved in a performance there are consequently more channels that can deliver information in different ways so that the audience is provided with different tools to be able to follow and understand a story and, most important, feel more.

At times being an Italian studying in a Finnish theatre school has been challenging. Particularly when watching shows with dialogues, made me think how the language barrier can sometimes compromise the whole experience as a spectator, when spoken words have such a fundamental role in the theatre narration.

I then decided that when I would have had the chance to direct a theatre show myself, I would have chosen the forms of art that I find most inspiring and universal, and I would have used them to create a show without spoken words, to offer a performance that everybody, regardless of the cultural background, would have been able enjoy and interpret.

In april 2018 my artistic final performance named *Cenere* was staged in theatre, and as today I consider it to be my biggest achievement as theatre maker, because not only I had the opportunity of assembling and working with an excellent team of friends and artists, but also I finally succeeded in creating the performance I wanted to make: primitive, physical, musical and with no needs for words.

This very experience: the mental and practical process that I went through as theatre instructor and director, the workshop sessions with my actors, the rehearsals, the elaborate discussions with the band about the music composition, the fascination for symbols and mythology, the abstract concept of knowledge, the obsession for masks, and the deep interest for the body movement, represent the main source material in the drafting of this thesis.

# 1 THE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Initially my idea was to write a thesis about the concept of “knowledge as burden for mankind”, arguing that the human race has a natural propensity of always desire more, pushing itself to the very limits in an eternal attempt to prosper and dominate by accumulating information and knowledge used to create more and more complex societies.

My artistic final performance at the Arts Academy, *Cenere*, was already an attempt to explore that concept, by telling a story about society and power dynamics, showing how knowledge, effective and metaphorised, can represent a tool for self determination but also imposition of will.

Since the theme of knowledge was already the subject of my play, I thought that instead of launching myself into a long digression about such an articulated theme, to back up with abstract notions, I should have used my own artistic experience as main subject for this thesis.

As a theatre maker I came to the conclusion that analysing the phases of a theatre production, its key elements and characters, and the experience itself as director and instructor, would have been a more coherent way to conclude my work as a student of performing arts, and I couldn't think of better source material than *Cenere* itself.

This play represents to me sum of all the most important things that I desired for a long time to stage in a theatre, ranging from theoretical concepts dear to me, to actual performative forms of expression, connected by a particular red thread: the ritualistic experience.

I think of the idea of ritual as the base of the performing arts, where these are practically enactments of stories and abstract principles by the means of performative actions and tools of support, with the final goal of sharing and perpetrating information and teachings, while bringing together a community.

I consider performing arts in general as a contemporary form of secular ritual, where metaphorically speaking the spectators participate as community members, witnessing and taking part in a celebration performed by the actors, who recite roles as the shamans or priests who interceded for the gods or other metaphysical entities.

Although I don't myself affiliate with any actually religious view or intent while creating a performance, I do believe that performing arts conserves those same elements inherited from the ancient rituals of our past civilisations.

Mythology constituted the primary element around which my show was built, by providing the skeleton of the story line, the characters and the morale.

Inherently the metaphorical language of symbols, embodied in the element of fire, the use of certain colours to represent the characters, and the representation of classical archetypes, contributes in both the ideological structure of the show and on the visual level.

The main sources for the storyline come from the Ancient Greek myth of Prometheus who stole the fire from the gods<sup>1</sup> and marginally by the Biblical myth of creation and the figure of the *fallen angel* Lucifer<sup>2</sup>.

The masks and the props are the instruments through which the actors performed their characters; the "puppets" utilised as representative intermediaries between the tangible reality and the mythical narrative dimension, made of fantastic stories and metaphysical beings.

The space in the concrete form of the black box as the container of a timeless and spaceless tale, stripped of any element that could possibly suggest relations to specific stories and cultural contexts.

The music as only self standing audio element of the play: soundscape and narrating "voice" of the play.

## 2 THE STORY

As already mentioned while talking about the sources of inspiration, *Cenere* was based mostly on the Greek myth of *Prometheus who stole the fire from the gods* and partially on the Biblical myth of creation.

The play combines several elements of these two tales, focusing on the analogies between the different characters and their power dynamics inside the pyramidal system in which they exist and interact.

At the same time, as director I took some liberty adapting the stories to make merge better together certain aspects over others, and I designed my characters to stress as much as possible their ambivalent nature.

Like in the two cosmogonic myths<sup>3</sup> the starting point is a situation of balance in which superior entities decide to introduce something new to the world, something they consider their ultimate masterpiece in their image and likeness: mankind.

These entities are gods, or demigods<sup>4</sup>: the most powerful beings in the universe, with the capacity of commanding the forces of nature, the elements, ruling on everything existing, creating and destroying life at their will.

Mankind, the new form of life created by these divine beings, is a type of creature who resembles gods in their aspects, mentalities and capacities but in a smaller scale, like miniature versions.

When mankind is created, the gods allow them to conduct their lives with certain freedoms and limitations, observing how they live and interact, measuring their devotion testing them in every aspect of their existence.

For some time there is a certain status quo: mankind is obedient, lives according to the gods' will, and these are satisfied of their creation; but something breaks this balance and mankind is put in front of a choice that will change their existence, and therefore their relationship with their gods, forever.

This choice is either directly submitted to mankind or to somebody who intercedes for them as their protector or caregiver designated by the gods.

When the humans or the intermediary of the story, are put in the condition of having to decide between doing the gods' will or disobeying them, and they decide to do the latter, they break the balance established by the gods and they are subjected to punishment.

Often the punishment itself closes the story on a negative note, and sometimes it's a phase that just precedes another event that raises the chances of the punished side, re-establishing a new, usually better, balance.

Following the standards of Freytag's dramaturgical structure<sup>5</sup>, *Cenere* — like the cosmogonic myths — is developed to resemble an archetypical model of human life, providing characters who conduct their existence in an apparent equilibrium, until the turn of events bring them to a situation where they face a dilemma, and as result they find themselves in a spiralling downfall that changes their existence forever.

It has to be noted that the myth of Prometheus in its entirety does have a happy ending, but the portion of it telling the story of how he stole fire from the gods doesn't<sup>6</sup>; the Biblical myth of creation could be said to have a bittersweet ending, considering that after eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, both Adam and Eve are banished from Eden and punished in a number of ways as mortals with limits and flaws, but they do represent the beginning of mankind supposedly as we know it today, and the existence of mankind from that time being will be signed by both bad and good events.

Combining the elements that characterise the relationship between mankind, its creators, and the "burden of knowledge", *Cenere* is a metaphorical narration about the human society and its eternal struggle finding a balance between its bond with the ancestral roots, the development of a functioning and sustainable society, and the search for stability and happiness



## 2.1 Scene 1: The Creation of Mankind

The play starts with two immortal entities, The *God* and the *Demigod*, who meet to combine their powers and create the ultimate beings: by infusing the divine spark of the *God* into the earth, the *Demigod* moulds the dirt creating a new form of life in their image and resemblance: the *Humans*.

As the *Humans* awaken they meet for the first time the *Demigod*, who shows them how now that they are born they're free to roam and discover the world around them. Meanwhile the *God*, who has been away during the moment of birth, reappears arousing awe into the *Humans*.



Figure 1. (The *God* and the *Demigod* creating the *Humans*, Screenshot from the video shooting of *Cenere*, Miikkael Kukkula, 2018)

## 2.2 Scene 2: the Revelation of Fire

The *God* decides that has come the time to introduce the *Demigod* to a very important secret, unveiling a very precious and powerful tool never seen before: the *Fire*.

Presented as a large piece of cloth, the *Fire* is unfolded as if in a ritual before the *Demigod*, and shown in its grace and beauty, awakening in him<sup>7</sup> a sense of belonging and bond with the element. The *God*, who has given the chance to the *Demigod* to have a taste of the power of *Fire*, realises how his counterpart may have an even stronger and deeper connection with the element, hinting that its disclosure could actually represent a threat, so he retrieve the *Fire* and goes away.



Figure 2. (The *God* shows the *Fire* to the *Demigod*, Screenshot from the video shooting of *Cenere*, Miikkael Kukkula, 2018)

### 2.3 Scene 3: The Human Society

In the meantime the *Humans*, who earlier were wandering around the world, find the chance to meet again and interact with each other, experiencing different types of relationships and finding eventually a partner.

At first the independent couples seem satisfied as they find comfort in each other's company, but during the night, as it gets colder, they wake up and realise that would be better for them to stay together while sleeping, so eventually they all come to the same place finding a bit more comfort and warmth.



Figure 3. (The *Humans* find comfort in unity, Screenshot from the video shooting of *Cenere*, Miikkael Kukkula, 2018)

#### 2.4 Scene 4: The Theft of Fire

Meanwhile, in the dimension where the immortals live, the *God* and the *Demigod* are sleeping, until suddenly, almost as he sensed it for far away, the *Demigod* wakes up and he's able to see the *Humans*, hugging each other and struggling with the cold while sleeping. Moved by this vision, the *Demigod* sneaks where the *God* sleeps, finding him using the *Fire* as a blanket, and stealing it to be brought to the *Humans*.

Entered the world of the *Humans*, the *Demigod* tries to bring comfort to his creatures covering them with the blanket, to which the *Humans* react as if they were having a beautiful dream before waking up and discover with surprise that their creator came to them.



Figure 4. (The *Demigod* steals the *Fire* from the *God*, Screenshot from the video shooting of *Cenere*, Miikkael Kukkula, 2018)

After a first moment of reticence, the *Humans* approach the *Demigod* who has decided to show them the potential of the Fire like it first was shown to him by the *God*, who meanwhile has woken up from the slumber, discovering that not only the *Fire* wasn't there anymore, but that the *Demigod* has taken it to the Earth and brought it to the Earth. During the interaction with *Fire*, the *Humans* start showing strange behaviours, becoming increasingly addicted to the Fire, greedily stealing it from each other for self enjoyment; something that the *Demigod* wasn't expecting and that caught the attention of the *God*, who was watching from the distance waiting to see how the situation would develop.

Noticed that the *Humans* became out of control, the *God* descends on Earth casting a thunder that scares them away, and confronts the *Demigod*; taken back control of the *Fire*, the *God* proceeds demonstrating the *Demigod* that *Humans* are not to be trusted around the *Fire*, as they show clear signs of weakness and corruptibility, and strikes them with a blaze to ultimately display the true violent force of the element.

The *God* has left with the Fire, folding it back as to seal away its power, while the *Humans*, gathered in terror, are comforted by the *Demigod*; this has decided to go and try to persuade the *God* to give *Fire* back to the *Humans*, despite their lack of control and display of deviant behaviours.

The *Demigod* begs the *God* to give the *Humans* another chance with the *Fire*, to which he responds by giving the *Fire* to the *Demigod* but showing no will to interfere anymore, no matter the consequences; so after the *Humans* are given back the *Fire*, they jump towards it frantically, greedier and more covetous than before.

In front of the upsetting scene of the human competing and fighting for the possession of Fire, the *Demigod* intervenes to take it away and only when one of them is about to attack the Immortal, the *God* appears again casting a thunder and interrupting the conflict.



Figure 5. (The *Demigod* shows the *Fire* to the *Humans*, Screenshot from the video shooting of *Cenere*, Miikkael Kukkula, 2018)

### 2.5 Scene 5: The Fight for Fire

The *Demigod* and the *God* are now facing each other: the first has now the *Fire*, the second demands it back, but the *Demigod* has decided that neither the *Humans* nor the *God* should be the keepers, and so the *Immortals* start a tug of war for whom should keep the *Fire*. In the background the *Humans* observe their creators fighting, and they realise how similar they actually are to them and how even the immortals can be arrogant, voluble and flawed.

During the contest between the *Immortals*, one of the *Humans* grabs the *Fire* raising it victoriously in the air and proceeds dancing and celebrating the conquest; the *Immortals* stand incredulous at the view of the Human triumphant over them, displaying the same

capacity handling the *Fire* like previously they did. Seeing the success of one of their members, the other *Humans* one by one fight over the *Fire*, regardless of all their relationships and their unity, now rationally moved by the desire of being the one and only owner of the greatest power ever seen.

Eventually on elf the Human emerges victorious; the *Immortals*, cast away, have slowly vanished from the universe almost as their power and influence has been completely disappeared and their purpose unexpectedly fulfilled.



Figure 6. (The fight between the *God* and the *Demigod*, Screenshot from the video shooting of *Cenere*, Miikkael Kukkula, 2018)

## 2.6 Scene 6: The New Order

The Human who now owns the *Fire* tries several times to disclose its power, but fails realising that all that is left is a cloth with no power in it.

The other *Humans* slowly regain consciousness and as they stand they all realise that the *Immortals* have disappeared, leaving behind nothing but the *Fire* reduced to a mere piece of red textile.

Discomforted and lost, yet finally mature and aware of themselves, the *Humans* come together holding the remains of what first was the reason of their conflict, and now is the symbol of their unity.



Figure 7. (The Humans in the new order, Screenshot from the video shooting of *Cenere*, Miikkael Kukkula, 2018)



### 3 THE CHARACTERS

There are two main interpretations for the characters in *Cenere* that I personally like to address: one sees them as representatives of a hierarchic scale consisting in the subjects, the ruler and the rebel side; the other one sees the characters as a metaphorical representation of a family with children, where the parents have different views on how the kids should be brought up.

The first interpretation is inspired by those events of our history where those who hold the real power rule over the people, who then become subjects and victims of bigger schemes built to exploit them, until eventually somebody from the mass emerges and helps the people fighting back, improving their condition going against the ruler, even if at a high cost.

The main motif that provided inspiration was the real story of the so called “whistle blowers” who divulged secret information which revealed how some people in position of power were taking advantage of the system they contributed creating, at the expenses of the population. These individuals who risk their freedom and sometimes their lives, sacrifice themselves for a greater good and for the sake of truth, contributing in bringing more equality in every level of society.

The second interpretation is configured around the family model with parents and kids, which as a small scale society represents a system where the parents provide for their children and take care of them, while these grow up, develop as persons and learn how to be in the world while experiencing life inside their family, under the guidance of their parents.

Sometimes there are conflicts inside families, and the particular aspect that I found being represented in my play was the situation where the parents have different ideas on how to educate their children, how should they be given responsibilities, how should they learn to be autonomous and become adults.

The reason why I chose the tales of both Prometheus and the Garden of Eden as main literary sources, is that the characters of these two stories share very strong similarities when comes to their power levels in relation to each other, following a hierarchical model which is hardwired, in a form or another, in every level of our society.

What interested me the most in the those cosmogonic myths, was the relationship between the god and mankind: a type of bond which mixes a sort of parental love with respect and awe, having the created worshipping the creators with both gratitude for the gift of life and fear for their immense powers.

Inside this apparently dualistic relationship, is inserted a third element with a rather ambiguous role having the capacity of swinging the course of the events with its influence, potentially having decisive effects on the destiny of the characters.

In *Cenere* this element is embodied in a figure which we can define as the *trickster*: somebody who helps broadening and heightening the vision of the self (Booker, 2004, 309), offering an alternative perspective, though in opposition to the one of the creators.

In both the Greek myth and in the Bible, mankind worship the divine figures, respecting and fearing them like subjects, and they exists in a delicate balance where the god figures establish the order of things and the humans obeying live happily and prosper; at the same time a third party, the trickster, observes and at times interacts with one or both the creators and the created, trying to subvert the order imposed by the gods, rebalancing the levels of power or establishing a new order more congenial to the trickster.

Should be specified that though the figure of the trickster is considered a positive one, in some tales this character can have negative connotation, or even belong among the antagonists, in which case is called tempter like in the Biblical myth of creation where Satan, as the snake in the Garden of Eden, is depicted as deceiver, enemy of *God* and evil.

During the creative process I decided to preserve the same type of power level and relationship between the gods and mankind as they're represented in both the tales I was inspired by, but for the figure of the trickster I decided to shape my character of the *Demigod* mostly following the model provided by Prometheus.

Doing so I gave this character a positive or arguably a neutral connotation by taking from the figure of Satan only those features that revolve around the idea of him as a promoter of free will, so keeping the subversive intentions but without the mischievous or vengeful agenda.

### 3.1 The *God*

The *God of Cenere* is inspired mainly by the ancient Greek god Zeus, often depicted like a king and a judge of all the living beings, just and good, but also impulsive and susceptible, representing the archetypical idea of man with virtues and flaws.

Zeus was also considered the god of thunder and lightening, which would use as a weapon during conflicts and wars, and was often accompanied by his pet eagle.

In general the Greek gods were very much like the humans in terms of personalities, emotions and mentality, meaning that the only real thing that separated them from mankind was their supernatural powers and their immortality.

The function of this character is to represent authority, balance and divine power in the world, embodied in a divine entity who bears the power of creation: the spark of life.

The *God of Cenere* shares with his Greek counterpart the role of the ruler, and well aware of his power and his position he's determined to maintain the status quo, balancing between experimenting new things (like the creation of mankind) and reasserting his dominance.

This mystical energy is gathered by the *God* performing a choreography that resembles the flight of an eagle (a reference to Zeus's symbol animal), almost as if he would be transcending to another dimension to reach out for to access the power of creation.

Although the *God* provides the spark of life, he maintains towards his "children" a visible distance, showing no signs of attachments and almost displaying the intention of not wanting to interact with them unless strictly necessarily (like when he punishes them).

Metaphorically the *God* can be interpreted as a ruler either exploits or ignores the subjects, only caring about the personal interests and preserving the system as it is, or as a parent whose only worry was to give birth to their children but after their birth doesn't want to deal with them anymore, almost seeing them as a burden.

The *God*, like Zeus, acts as if he doesn't accept that humanity would develop and thrive so fast that they could put his hegemony in danger by becoming too powerful and challenge him.

Like a distant and very strict parent who doesn't accept the growth of his children, wanting to keep control on them, and arrogantly believing that they should learn to survive on their own, the *God* opposes to the *Demigod's* decision of interacting actively with the *Humans* and teaching them about the *Fire* and how to use it.

### 3.2 The *Demigod*

The character of the *Demigod* is mainly inspired by the titan from the ancient Greek mythology Prometheus, and partially by the biblical figures of the Snake of the Garden of Eden and Lucifer.

Though motivated by very different reasons and with also very different connotations, these three figures share the ideal of rebellion against the system and the supreme rule, fighting and carrying their mission against all odds, without fearing the possible consequences.

The *Demigod's* name is a calque from the Latin word *semideus*, "Half-god" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1961, 180), which defines an entity as a sort of lesser-god, or a semi-divine being.

The term is normally used in mythology to define either children of a god and a mortal or heroes rewarded in the afterlife with a higher godlike status, but I adopted it for my character finding it fitting for the role of a superior being who doesn't fully belong to the same kin of the gods, and even more relevantly, occupies a lower position in the hierarchy being himself a subject of the *God*.

Receiving the spark of life from the *God*, the *Demigod* moulds the dirt shaping a new form of life which will populate the world developing and thriving, similarly to how Prometheus was tasked and honoured by Zeus.

The *Demigod* is perceived as positive and almost maternal, displaying from the very beginning a particular attachment towards the *Humans*, and taking always the side of his "children" even while confronting the authority of his superior.

Inside the figure of the *Demigod* co-exist two different natures: one that is voted to sacrifice, ready to give everything up for those who he loves, even putting his own status and life at stake; and one that is voted to subvert the system to establish a new order based on equality, even if the price to pay is to generate chaos and spark conflicts.

Like Prometheus, the *Demigod* cares about his “children” and wants the best for them, to the point that he’s ready to disobey his superior in order to bring an improvement to the humans’ condition; like the titan who deceived Zeus at the feast and stole the fire from the gods, the *Demigod* is ready to put his own life at stakes to subvert the order of things in defence of the weaker.

As Prometheus among the gods of Olympus, the *Demigod* is presented as somebody who belongs to the elite class of the *Immortals* (or *Eternals*<sup>8</sup>), though it’s clear that his position in the hierarchy is lower; subordinated to the *God*.

Similarly to the figure of Satan, the Snake in the Garden of Eden, the *Demigod* reveals secret information to the *Humans* away from the sight of the *God*, as this would never accept his subjects to be exposed to such sensitive notions, fearing that the *Humans* would become corrupted and act against him and the pre-established order.

The role of the *Demigod* as revealer of secrets and subverter becomes more evident when we compare the theft of the red cloth (the *Fire*) with the temptation to eat the fruit from the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil (commonly acknowledged as the iconic apple, or the Prohibited Fruit).

According to the Biblical myth, the Prohibited Fruit will give Eve and Adam the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, something that *God* wishes them to never learn, and we are lead to understand that *God*’s design is perfect in his idea of keeping his humans unaware of the two concepts, thus innocent and pure.

The Snake doesn’t seem to know what could possibly be the consequences of making the couple eat the Fruit, but what it’s clear is that its intent is to corrupt the humans’ godly perfection by making them disobey their creator.

The Snake/Satan agenda seems to be directed to anger *God*, but what is fascinating is that the type of betrayal that the Snake wants the humans to actuate involves the consumption of a fruit, which should give a form of knowledge that is prohibited and forbidden to everybody but *God*.

This made me reflect on the figure of the Snake as tempter but indirectly also as revealer, and though the *Demigod*’s intent is not malicious, there’s an interesting parallelism which ultimately inspired me while designing the *Demigod*, between Prometheus disobeying Zeus by giving the fire to mankind, and the Snake inducing Eve and Adam into eating the Prohibited Fruit,

The character of the *Demigod* finds also a connection with the figure of the Fallen Angel Lucifer from the Christian-Judaic canon, who initially belongs among the ranks of *God*, but wanting to rule over his superior, chooses to rebel against him and for that is punished by being cast in the depth of hell.

The name of Lucifer which means “light-bringer” from the Latin *lux* (light) e *ferre* (to bring), is based on the ancient Greek *phosphoros* (*phos*=light and *pherein*=to bring) and was used along with Hesophoros (“dawn-bringer”) as name for the deity-planet Venus, due to its strong luminescence at dawn (Wikipedia, 2019).

The Greek Lucifer/Phosphoros was said to be son of Eos and Cephalus (Graves, 1954, 134), and like Prometheus is also often represented carrying a torch or a source of light, symbolising the fight against the darkness and, as I’ll explain more in one of the next chapters, a metaphor for the knowledge that defeats ignorance.

The *Demigod*, despite his subordination to the *God*, is for all intents the co-creator of the *Humans*; the one who bears the power of moulding the matter, transforming the substance of which the earth is made from into sentient beings.

In one metaphorical interpretation the *Demigod* can represent the rebellious part of a hypothetical society who wants to change the condition of the people, liberating them from the yoke of the oppressing rulers providing them with the means to defend themselves and fight back.

In another metaphorical interpretation, the *Demigod* can be seen as the caring parent in a family with progressive and sometimes edges idea, sometimes in conflict with the more conservative or even overprotective parent.

In a similarly related way but more figuratively, the *Demigod* can be imagined as the womb which receiving the seed from the *God* gets fecundated and generates life, as the earth from which the *Humans* where shaped, developing a maternal-like relationship with his creatures who sees as babies.

### 3.3 The *Humans*

The *Humans* of *Cenere* are a straightforward representation of the human race, and are performed by a group of four actors with very similar features.

Humanity is depicted in this play as a herd of humanoids, who born from the ground conduct a journey of evolution through self awareness, exploration of feelings, development of a community, conflict, traumas, deviation and redemption.

These *Humans* are not inspired on any specific type of person or community; they represent the masses, the entirety of the human population, embodying every possible combination of personalities, features and characteristics, with all strengths and weaknesses.

Portraying the *Humans* as a group of people with the same moves and appearance was a specific choice to emphasise their belonging to the same species and the equality among each other, underlining the distinction between them and the *Immortals*, who they perceive as superior entities and see as role models.

The *Humans* interact mostly with the *Demigod* who behaves towards them like a caring parent, while they see the *God* as somebody to be afraid of as this only gives distance and punishment to them when they act erratically.

In the world of *Cenere*, mankind experience direct contact with the divinities learning directly from them and learning, both actively and passively, from their actions, being aware of the existence in the universe and evolving towards the same direction, experiencing different stages of growth and development as individuals and as a group, until the point where they become similar to the *Immortals*.

These *Humans*, like those in the myth of Prometheus, conduct a simple existence in a tacit agreement with the *God* where his authority is never challenged; they are seen by him as a potential threat because the *God* knows that the *Humans* have a secret potential given by the divine sparkle of life infused into them.

Mankind in *Cenere* becomes a matter of dispute between the *Immortals* since the moment they came to the world because the *God* wants them to develop their society on their own, without any influence or help from him or the *Demigod*, while this last one believes that the *Humans* need the support and guidance of their creators-parents, those that brought them to life.

It seems like the *God* believes in a model of “survival of the fittest” wanting the *Humans* to learn to exist the hardest way, until only the strongest and worthy will remain, and if the *Humans* won't be able to survive, it would mean they weren't good enough and they don't deserve to stay in the world.

The *Demigod* has a completely different approach, willing to steal the precious *Fire* from the *God* to bring warmth and comfort to the *Humans* as they struggle in the cold night, knowing that the only one who can save them from their miserable existence is him.

The *Humans* are visibly the victims of the system, brought to the world by superior entities, left at the mercy of the events and at the care of a rogue *Demigod* who cannot stand seeing his creatures treated heartlessly like an experiment by a cruel ruler.

When the *Humans* become in contact with the power of the *Fire*, its energy is unbearable to them, corrupts them and bring them to a state of mind similar to addiction enhancing all the most primitive instincts of self preservation, making emerge their beastly side. This reaction they have, frightens the *God* who sees the *Humans* using fire as a threat to his existence and his power over them and the entire world, while fascinates the *Demigod* who sees in it the chance to create a new race as powerful as the *Immortals* in a world without the hegemony of the *God*.

The *Demigod* seemingly aware of the risks of giving the *Fire* to the *Humans*, as they display their worst side while handling the element, is ready to take the risk putting everything at stake to have a chance to change the equilibrium of the world by allowing a shift in power between the parties.

The *Humans* don't know and don't care about power balance but they do learn that thanks to the *Fire* they can improve their lives, although they don't realise how its power can consume and destroy them if used irresponsibly.

Eventually the *Humans*, consequently to their conquest of the *Fire*, after having experienced the lowest points of their existence through conflicts, the disruption of their community, and ultimately the loss of the *Eternals* as reference points and models (as they disappear from the world that doesn't need them anymore), become the rulers of the world and of themselves, having reach the point where their powers equals those of the *Immortals*.

The human nature is depicted in *Cenere* as we know it in our existential dimension: in a state of constant search for balance between our most instinctive and impulsive side, and our rational and empathetic side; the existence of the *Humans* is signed by the different phases of growth and development of a community of people, where the *Fire* represents the key element that brought in their lives, challenges them to learn to follow



the path of righteousness, even if this means going through pain and suffer, war and disruption, directed to a new existence where they can prosper in peace and balance.

### 3.4 The *Fire*

While talking about the three previous character I have been mentioning the *Fire* as an element of the play without addressing it in any particular way, though it must be acknowledged that even if in *Cenere* it wasn't represented by a person actor, this element constitutes a character itself, being an object and a puppet with a role in the story; a red thread that connects all the other characters and that lives through them.

The *Fire* is represented in *Cenere* with a big red squared cloth, which is first presented to the audience as a folded inert blanket and then, once animated by the *God*, reveals its true nature becoming a flame.

The *Fire* is a secret and powerful element in *Cenere*, kept jealously by the *God* who initially thinks nobody except him and the *Demigod* are worthy getting in contact with.

The *God* displays the *Fire* to the *Demigod* to both sharing its knowledge with him but also to test his loyalty and his reaction in contact with the element.

The *Demigod* response to the touch of *Fire* is impressive as he appears to be in full harmony with the element, displaying a surprising control and mastery over it; a distressing view for the *God* who sees for the first time that somebody else in his world is capable, and possibly better, at handling such a tool as the *Fire*.

The element of *Fire* is first presented as a gracious and fascinating object: a cloth that can be moved in the air creating a beautiful visual effect; and not much later it's seen being used by the *God* as a blanket during his sleep, suggesting the warm capacity of the element, and catching the attention of the *Demigod*, who sees in it the potential for improving the lives of the *Humans* struggling with cold.

As *Fire* gets stolen by the *Demigod*, we see him performing the same ritual that previously the *God* has shown him to reveal the true nature of the element, only this time the learners are the *Humans*, who show to be incredibly responsive to the *Fire*, learning about its qualities, but also easily getting corrupted by its seductive power.

At this point we realise that the *Fire* is something to be handled responsibly, that not everyone is ready to use, as its energy can drive those who bear it into insanity and loss of self control.

When the *Humans* experience contact with *Fire* they show to be easily corrupted by it: like under the effect of a drug that alters the perception of reality, the *Humans'* most beastly instincts emerge, transforming them into lustful, selfish, mean wildlings.

The *Demigod* observes upset as his creatures are deviated by the power of *Fire*, but he won't stop from making the *Humans* experience the use of the element as it becomes clear after the second time he gives the *Fire* to them, because he believes that his children must undergo this challenge in order to mature.

The *Demigod* believes that the *Humans* must experience *Fire* as in a rite of passage, coming in contact with their worst side, fight it back and learn to be stronger and in control, while the *God* doesn't approve the *Humans* to get even close to *Fire* as he fears what it can trigger in them and become a threat to the balance he established.

It's only at the end, when the *Immortals* are fighting over the control of *Fire* that we witness the final form of the *Humans*, with one of them stepping between the *God* and the *Demigod* and taking away the *Fire* from them becoming the final possessor of the element, after which the *Humans* too start fighting against each other until only one of them stands holding the *Fire*, which in the meantime has completely lost its power, reducing itself to a mere piece of textile.

At the very end the *Immortals* vanish from the world, as their power is exhausted and their purpose fulfilled, they live the world in the hands of the *Humans*, who have taken control of the *Fire* extinguishing its power and influence, becoming ultimately aware of themselves and the world around them, and in no need any more of anything else but each other.

The *Fire* was all along a metaphor for the knowledge, represented as a burning flame with the power of both destroying and building, improving and worsening, depending on maturity and intention of the bearer.

In *Cenere* the knowledge is depicted as a double-edged sword with the potential of helping creating something good and better if handled properly, but also with the potential of triggering conflicts and exploit the others.

The *God*, like his biblical counterpart with the Prohibited Fruit, denies *Fire* to the *Humans* as he knows they are not meant or just ready for that kind of knowledge which could destroy everything he created, or just transform a perfect creation into a failure.

The *Demigod* treats *Fire* like Prometheus does in his story, as a gift to his creatures to improve their lives, but more likely the figure of Lucifer he is eventually moved by the will of defeat the *God*, though in the play the purpose is equalitarian.

As previously anticipated, the theme of knowledge, or the burden of knowledge, is related to a bigger and very contemporary issue we have in our world with information.

In the world we live, information have become one of the most precious currency, collected and used by companies to make researches and improve their selling capacities by analysing trends and learning what people desire.

Information can be used for commercial purposes but not only, like in the “whistle-blowing” affairs, where state and companies’ secrets are revealed by people who investigating learn inconvenient truths that could undermine the trust and even the existence of certain institutions or groups.

This connotation of knowledge as burden can be either positive or negative because it embodies implicitly the idea of struggle bearing information which might be secret and that can challenge ethically and morally the person who has them, but also the idea that it can be an honour and a privilege as a trustworthy individual being the one who is in possession of that knowledge.

Being in possession of knowledge means also to have power, and though this may sound like a stretch, the fact that one can own certain information, use them to get something desired or achieve goals, puts this person in a position of advantage and control, which extensively in scale, brings to predominance over the others when that same knowledge can be used to climb the social hierarchies, or can allow to collect enough resources to become rich and influent in others’ lives; thus the popular aphorism “knowledge is power”<sup>9</sup>.

My intention was to portray knowledge as a tool to be treated responsibly, and though I personally believe that knowledge should be hypothetically available to everyone, I wanted to acknowledge and stress the fact that there is a risk in letting certain information being shared by the masses as they’re not always prepared to accept those information and make a responsible use of them.

## 4 THE CREW

In *Cenere* I directed a group of six actors, all students of the Arts Academy: two from the department of Theatre Instruction, and four from the Dance department.

With the actors we worked for almost three months, having a preliminary phase that lasted approximately two months, where I've held workshops sessions exploring mask theatre, physical theatre and pantomime techniques, to teach the dancers who were coming from a different disciplinary path, reviewing contents and notions with my colleagues from theatre, and to achieve a good level of chemistry between the performers.

The rehearsal period has been really intense, meeting alternate groups of two to four actors every day, and having long sessions in the weekend, all during which aside from being the director I was also accompanying with percussions' music to give tempo and rhythm during the execution of the scenes.

Other than the actors, there was a band composed of three friends of mine from outside the school: a drummer, a keyboard player and an electric guitar player.

The band composed original music in complete freedom, with only directions concerning the placement of the tracks in accordance to specific moods that I wished to be made into music, as the soundtrack was meant to be the "narrative voice" of the play. The tracks were inspired by various genres of rock, ambient and movie soundtracks: all music genres which strongly inspire and influences me and the band.

The rest of the crew included: an assistant director who helped me especially leading exercises during the rehearsals and gave me feedbacks on the scenes; a light technician that built the light and a technician to drive them during the show time; and a mask maker, student from the Fine Arts department.

The costumes were crafted by myself with the help of the costume responsible of the Arts Academy.

## 5 THE STAGE ELEMENT

With *Cenere* I wanted to portray a space-time dimension that would feel metaphysical, like an alternative plane populated by supernatural beings and prototypes of humanity as we know it.

The stage is an empty black box except for the actors and the cloth; the atmosphere is minimalistic and so is the appearance of the actors who wear masks and suits that resemble the skin colour to make them look naked and primordial.

The masks are black decorated with three different colours depending on the characters: yellow for the *God*, red for the *Demigod* and blue for the *Humans*.

The *God's* mask symbolises sunlight and lightning, celestial forces and sources of energy that allow life to exist. On the chin a yellow braided beard symbolises maturity and wisdom, accordingly to the Greek theatre tradition of males' masks; on the forehead there's a decoration that resembles a flame, symbolising that he is the original bearer of light or fire, keeper of knowledge and maximum authority in the universe.

The *Demigod's* mask symbolises the deeply rooted connection with fire, which the character discovers only after he's shown it by the *God*.

Like the *God* he also has a braided beard but red, and on top of his head two horns similar to those of a goat, to recall a more primitive essence, connected to the world of animals and nature, but also as a reference to Satan in his allegoric representation as Baphomet<sup>10</sup>, recalling the opposing image of the herd of she eps who follow *God* in the Bible imagery and the stubborn goat who doesn't follow a herd.

The *Humans'* masks symbolise their belonging to the depth of earth, to the water and the abyss, from which they are moulded and emerge being brought to life.

Blue is iconically also the colour of magic, and I wanted these character to show that they are the product of the most beautiful magic that exists: creation of life. The *Humans'* masks are purposely more dull looking with no particular features except that they look symmetrical with just slightly different patterns.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Making *Cenere* has been an amazing journey both as a theatre instructor and as a director.

With my actors in particular I explored the possibilities of performing arts from a pedagogical perspective and as theatre maker, putting into practice the knowledge and the teachings I accumulated during my studies in Turku and in the Theatre Academy of Wrocław where I developed my passion for mask theatre, dance and physical theatre.

From this experience I've learnt more about bringing together and working with a group of people with different backgrounds and expertise, leading them while teaching them different techniques, guiding them to meet my vision but letting them explore on their own and express their creativity and talents.

I've learnt more about working with a music band, understanding each other finding common channels to express our intentions and visions, making compromises between artistic choices and technical impositions, and the value of trust, freedom and independence during the artistic production which belongs more to the level of creation and sharing of art activity.

I've learnt more about working with a props maker, understanding the implications of cooperating with somebody who doesn't share the same artistic views but with whom you share the same artistic values.

I've learnt over all more of what it means to work on a theatre production, leading a group to the stage activity, dealing with technical aspects, challenging myself as a while teaching different techniques of puppetry and theatre in general, learning to respect the others' artistic dimension, giving space for the other to create and finding a common ground, exercising the problem solving skills overcoming odds and snags, and most important that in theatre you never stop learning.

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## APPENDICES

1)The myth according to the versions of Hesiod (ancient Greece, between VIII and VII century BC) and Aeschilus (ancient Greece, between VI and V century BC), narrates the story of the Titan Prometheus who going against Zeus' will, steals the fire from the gods to give it to mankind, and for that is punished. For his help during the Titanomachy (the war between titans and gods for the domain of the world) against his on kin, Prometheus is granted by Zeus the duty and Honor of creating mankind. Later, at a banquet, Zeus tests Prometheus loyalty by letting him choose how to divide the parts of an ox between the other immortals and the humans: Prometheus decides to fool the god by hiding the good parts of meat under the gross and unappealing skin to be given to humans, and the bones and the waste parts under a thick layer of fat. Zeus knew that the titan would try to defy the god in favour of his beloved humans, so he decides to teach a lesson to Prometheus by punishing men, depriving them of fire. Prometheus decides then to sneak into the workshop of Hephaestus in Mount Olympus, to steal a sparkle of fire to give back to humans. When Zeus finds out about it decides to punish the titan by chaining him to a rock and have an eagle to come every day to slash and eat Prometheus' liver, which would grow back during the night,

for a prolonged torture. The myth presents minor differences depending on the sources, and considering its ancient origin, must be taken into consideration that the story may have been subjected to modifications, interpretations and translations that altered it during the centuries. (Hesiod, *Theogony*, Translated by A. Athanassakis,, *Works and Days*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1983)

2) Here we are considering the figures of Satan and Lucifer as equally comparable as archetypes of *God's* nemesis and antagonist. The specific mention of Lucifer though, preferable to Satan, is justified by the more layered and complex significance of his figure of "fallen angel", as previously allied subject of *God*, and later rebel and disowned.

3) When talking about two myths is always intended to be the Greek one about Prometheus and the Biblical one about the creation of mankind. The adjective cosmogonic refers to the fact that these myths talk about the creation of mankind.

4) A *demigod* is a form of deity similar to a god but limited in its powers, often placed in lower levels of gods' hierarchies due to their simpler or humbler origin which is usually half divine and half human, or related to a different type (like the titans in Greek mythology).

5) Gustav Freytag (July 1816 – 30 April 1895) was a German novelist and playwright who inspired by the Greek and the Shakespearian theatre, devised a schematic structure to describe in phases the dramaturgical development of a story called "Freytag's pyramid". This theoretical construct defines five different stages: exposition (explanation of the background information of a story); rising action (a series of event build up carrying the story to the turning point); climax (the event that constitutes the turning point of the story); falling action (the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist unravels designating the winner and the loser); dénouement (the resolution of the conflict and setting on a new balance).

6) As narrated by Aeschilus in *Prometheus Unbound* (a fragment of his partially lost trilogy play *Prometheia*), Prometheus is released from his punishment by Heracles, who kills the eagle that was torturing him as reward for the help that the titan provided to the half-god during one of his quests. It is arguable if a play should be considered or not as canonic when talking about ancient mythologies, but must be acknowledged that the events narrated after the chaining to the rock happen and belong to the same narrative dimension, and the same characters act in it. Personally I believe that such source must



be considered canonic, thus legit and accountable as part of the Greek mythological narration.

7) From this point forward, these two characters will be presented for the sake of convenience as males, so will be addressed to using he, him, and his. The actors that interpreted them in *Cenere* were males, yet the two characters are supposed to be of unspecified sex, (so as the *Humans*); but because of the masculine nature of the inspiring characters of Zeus and Prometheus, I have chosen to refer to my characters as males, also to avoid linguistic confusion for the readers using the neutral forms they, them, their, theirs.

8) *Eternals* is another word that I adopted to refer to the *Immortals* (the *Demigod* and the *God*) to emphasise their metaphysical nature as divine or semi-divine entities above the rules of the mortal men, and also to underline the fact that they have always existed or they have existed for such a long time according to the humans' perception that their existence doesn't have a clear beginning, or that is as old as time.

9) Apparently the oldest known source from where this concept was found seems to be the Tanakh, the Jewish Bible, specifically in the book called *Míshlê* (משלי in Hebrew, The Book of Proverbs in English) where appears in the chapter 24, verse 5: "A wise man is strong, / Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;"; although the most known and perhaps most accredited version "scientia potent est" (literally "knowledge is power") is attributed to Francis Bacon, it actually appears in that form in the *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbs (who was working as Bacon's secretary while writing his own text) while in Bacon's *Meditationes Sacrae*, the sentence appears as "ipsa scientia potestas est" ("knowledge itself is power"). The ancient origin of this sentence, its use among the scholar community in the early modern era and its presence in contemporary pop culture suggests how the concepts it express has been fundamental for the development of mankind, how knowledge has been recognized as a tool to ensure power inside the society (Wikipedia,2018).

10) Baphomet is a pagan idol who during the centuries has been paired and overlapped to the figure of Satan or Devil. His main physical characteristics are: the head and legs of a goat, a human-like body and breasts, feathered wings and a lit torch on his forehead.