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## Οὐδε γέρων Ἄστραϊος ἀναίνετο: The Dancing God and the Mind of Zeus in Nonnos' Dionysiaca

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Οὐδε γέρον Ἄστραῖος ἀναίνεται

The Dancing God and the Mind of Zeus in Nonnos' *Dionysiaca*  
Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Doron Simcha Tauber

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2017

For James, my Hymenaios

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You have all made my life vastly better for having known you and learned from you. I cannot fully express my gratitude for Bard College and the minds it hosts.

# Οὐδε γέρων Ασπραῖος ἀναίνεται: The Dancing God and the Mind of Zeus:

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## Introduction

Welcome, reader, to the wonderful world of Nonnos of Panopolis. I bet you haven't read him. He is an exceedingly late antique author of incomparable fineness whose greatest work, the *Dionysiaca*, a flamboyant epic in 48 books, deserves to be regarded among the great extant works of antique epic literature. To say a brief word on the state of current Nonnian scholarship, my claim is rather bold. However, I believe I have the tide of critical history on my side, as well as a valid program for understanding the structure and motifs of the *Dionysiaca*; that program takes the plan of Zeus, which Nonnos reveals through authorial hints and prophecy, as the central motive force of the poem's action and constitutive of the boundaries of Nonnos' world, and takes his plan to be the cultivation of a son, Dionysos, for the relief of mankind from strife in the form of transformative disassociation through wine and dance.<sup>1</sup>

Not the least do I feel such a tide because of the recent publication of an engaging collection of essays on Nonnos, mostly on the *Dionysiaca*, in 2014 from De Gruyter whose authors, spearheaded by Konstantinos Spanoudakis, argue for coherence and serious scholarly value in Nonnos. As well, there have been in the past 3 decades a greater volume of scholars than ever who have argued for the poem's relevance, structure, and poignancy in recent years. Unfortunately, much of the scholarship is inaccessible to me, it being written largely in French, German, and Italian, so my knowledge of the state of scholarship is incomplete,<sup>2</sup> but enough of it has been available or summarized in English for

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Newbold, in a footnote to page 38 of his article 'Chaos theory in Nonnos' *Dionysiaca*, remarks on the resemblance between Nonnos' and William James' writing evident in Frederick Ruff's *The Creation of Chaos: William James and the Stylistic Making of a Disorderly World*. He cites Ruff's argument that the style of "meanderings, zigzags and circles" works "to generate a creative chaos, a productive turmoil." I will be arguing that Nonnos substitutes a similar chaos for the destructive turmoil of Homeric epic. Dionysos is a god who grows to possess tremendous violent power, but he will exercise it to avenge wrongs, mortal and divine, rather than inflict capricious pain. His gift, wine, will not erase the potential strife inherent to mortal life, but it will offer a means of dealing with it, and act as a cure to cares. Dance also grants access to intoxicated revelry, and Dionysos' dancing band will seize repeated mystic victory.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Levi Robert Lind mentions, dismissively, a 1930 work entitled *Astrologie und Universalgeschichte* by a scholar named Viktor Stegemann, which argues for astrologically-based unity in the *Dionysiaca*, but alas, I haven't the German to

me to gauge the Nonnian atmosphere over time. For now, suffice it to say that Nonnos has traditionally found himself scavenged for parts rather than enjoyed for his creation in its fullness. I hope to challenge his traditional treatment and do some credit to his marvelous creation, perhaps as well to contribute by my efforts to the ongoing understanding and appreciation of the poem.

There is, apparently, work extant that argues for coherence in the *Dionysiaca*. Levi Robert Lind is aware of a work by a German scholar Viktor Stegemann that argues, on an astrological and prophetic basis, for a hidden structure to the poem. Ronald F. Newbold mentions, in a footnote to page 38 of his 1999 article “Chaos theory in Nonnos’ *Dionysiaca*,” that “The case for coherence and structure in the *Dionysiaca* is put by F. Vian, ‘Dionysus in the Indian War: A Contribution to a Study of the Structure of the *Dionysiaca*’ ... and T. Duc, ‘La question de la cohérence dans la Dionysiaques de Nonnos de Panopolis,’” but I was unable to access either. As an undergraduate with little skill with languages, I am not capable of fully availing myself of extant scholarship, and my work suffers accordingly. I have fewer giants on whose shoulders I can stand, and the greater part of my argumentative effort will be spent on introducing unfamiliar readers to a highly complex work in which they are likely to have no background. I argue, then, largely on my own, though I will have the work of scholars available to me on certain sections of the poem, and they provide much in the way of inspiration and impetus to argument, when they write critically. Writers in the vein of Stegemann and the more recent Vian seem to be making strides, however, as the *Dionysiaca* begins to be taken even more seriously.

These writers, though, have not managed to convince all of their readers. Jane L. Lightfoot, for instance, writes, in her 1998 article “The Bonds of Cypris: Nonnus’ Aura,” which begins, “Nonnus has a lot to answer for,” that “Although a certain rehabilitation of Nonnus has begun in recent years, marked by the ongoing Budé commentary under Vian's direction, few other than the professionally

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learn his theories. Also, just this past year, Brill put out a Companion to Nonnos. I was not able to gain full access to it, but it seems to have done a good job of compiling Nonnian scholarship to present.



committed are generally attracted to this late antique monstrosity of a poem.” She cites a student, H. Trevor Roper, who writes regretfully of having read Nonnos and being so dissatisfied that he left the field of classics and became a historian, “It was in my second year at Oxford, when I was reading the inexpressibly tedious Greek epic poem of Nonnus, that I decided to change my subject from classics to history. By now, I said to myself, I had read all classical literature worth reading. Why scrape the bottom of the barrel? Nonnus, it seemed to me, was very near the bottom.”<sup>3</sup> It is fortunate for me that authors have been so displeased with Nonnos as to expend great effort writing on him, because criticism sends me back time and again to the text to wring it for meaning to fill the gaps critics attribute to it. Each time, I find order where Nonnos is accused of rambling and purpose where he is accused of carelessness. I am confident in Nonnos, and I hope to make his case well as I make your acquaintance.

I fell in love with Nonnos about two years ago. I was in a class with Professor Mullen on Indo-European epic poetry, and one day, during a casual discussion after class, he mentioned the existence of the poem. I was intrigued, as I have always had a special interest in Dionysos among the gods, but Professor Mullen could tell me little more about it, so I purchased the three-volume Loeb edition, the only available full English translation. The general and mythological introductions confused me, because they both seemed to counsel that I set the book right back where I found it and read no further. I couldn’t believe that the people responsible for creating this edition could have failed to find anyone with a good word to say about the poem, even to translate it! Nonetheless, I read on. I was thrilled by the multitude of footnotes explaining Nonnos’ frequent obscurity and esotericism. His names, tropes, and allusions are varied and often unique in literature. I quickly became convinced that there is indeed a forest for these trees. I loved the experience of reading Nonnos, of being pulled from

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<sup>3</sup>Roper 1981

one extreme to another, of often losing track of the speaker and the setting. It became as though the world itself of Nonnos were speaking out from all around, and time and place had been collapsed into an eddying flux. I lost sight of concern for plot, because the plot seemed clear from the introduction and Nonnos' opening claims. The experience of reading seems to be primarily about the minutiae. Nonnos is exciting because he walks us down a maze of paths that curve in on and over one another, always showing glimpses of the light at the end, but delighting with creative variety along the way. To read Nonnos is to enter another world, and I was thankful for the poem's great length because I never wanted the experience to end. One must approach the poem with an openness to relishing detail in order to appreciate the full, intricate beauty of Nonnos' tapestry.

Nonnos' epic concerns the god Dionysos, and Nonnos sets out to give us as complete a story of this god as he can, beginning even before the god was a twinkle in his father Zeus' eye and carrying through to the god's apotheosis. The poem is unique not only for its great length (20,426 lines to the *Iliad's* 15,693 and the *Odyssey's* 12,110) but also for its extremely late date. Scholars typically date Nonnos to the late fourth or middle fifth century CE<sup>4</sup> and Agathias Scholasticus, who wrote under the sixth century emperor Justinian I, seems to confirm their conclusion when he calls Nonnos a recent author.<sup>5</sup> Of course, the poem is also unique, and I appreciate it most, for its grandiloquent richness and explosive energy, which have alternately horrified and thrilled readers of the *Dionysiaca*. Nonnos' text abounds with mythology like a florid jungle of scenes, allusions, and recollections. Nonnos wrenches his reader through time and space with a jarring force that has so offended the sensibilities of most scholarship before 1970 that the only widely-available translation into English (the 1940 Loeb Classical Library edition) includes a mythological introduction, by H. J. Rose, which

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<sup>4</sup> Lind 1934

<sup>5</sup> Agathias Scholasticus, *Hist.* 4.23

seems to take as its sole aim discrediting Nonnos as a serious author.<sup>6</sup> I will take the position that, in fact, Nonnos is as skilled a poet as any since Homer, and that his poem is a work of spectacular and estimable value.

I recently had opportunity to begin reading a novel by Jewish, and later Israeli, author named Shmuel Yosef (Shai) Agnon titled *To This Day*. I had not before encountered this author, but when I read the first sentences of the introduction by Hillel Halkin, I immediately recognized a spiritual brotherhood between Agnon and Nonnos. The similarity between the two authors, especially present in this novel, is striking, because this is, according to Halkin, the shortest of Agnon's novels, and Halkin notes that "critics have tended either to ignore it to dismiss it as an episodically meandering work that ends with a trite attempt at closure." These are precisely the features upon which critics have predicated their dismissal of the *Dionysiaca*. Two works which seem to place themselves at opposite ends of a spectrum of literary choices have in fact taken the same principle of nuance, which has evaded the appreciation of readers all these years, as central to their project. It is difficult not to hear Nonnian resonance in Halkin's remark that "Agnon, always a literary trickster who delights in fooling his readers, has this time fooled the critics too," as well as his further remark that "Not only is *To This Day* as carefully conceived and tightly written (to say nothing of entertaining) of any of his novels, it yields to none in its brilliance and depth. If it appears to meander, this is because the loops in its course deflect our attention from the course itself; if its conclusion strikes us as trite, we have fallen into the trap Agnon set for us." I don't believe I've ever seen a clearer description of the beauty of Nonnos' principle of *poikilia*. A short novel as well as a 48-book epic can produce the same conscious effect. I believe that Halkin must have felt much as I do as he wrote those opening words to his introduction. It is easy to join the majority of voices who dismiss the *Dionysiaca*, who accuse

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<sup>6</sup> I must apologize if ever I appear to have been infected by Nonnos' fervor and my writing approaches the florid myself.

Nonnos of baroque self-indulgence and intemperance, call his Dionysos unlikable and his digressions distracting. It takes a brave critic, however, to affirm value where it is not obvious. I hope to inspire more critics like Halkin to see the hidden structure in the *Dionysiaca*.

Nonnos crafts and employs his scenes with precise skill. He flits through his work both in open poetic voice and in the jeweled scenes of prophecy that glitter throughout the work with a wink and the smile of a fox. His Dionysos is a figure who grows up in a world of living myth to claim godhead. He experiences tumult of action and emotion and comes out a more mature being for it, capable of bringing great gifts to mankind, of defending his claim to divinity, and of enacting the terrifying justice of the gods. Nonnos' work suggests a new ethos for a new world, one to surpass the capricious strife of Homer's heroes with the revelrous joy of intoxication and the spiritual release offered by the metamorphosis of mind-alteration. The Dionysiac thiasos transforms the world around it, and both reader and subject find themselves lost between drunken or mad illusion and genuine hyperreality. No longer, on Nonnos' watch, will trumpets call to war, but like Dvořák's, to the dance.

Nonnos hailed from the city of Panopolis, now known as Akhmim, in Upper Egypt, near the well-known White Monastery near Sohag, and in a milieu of Christianization. Besides the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnos has left us extant a *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*, another epic in dactylic hexameter, though it is closer in length to *Beowulf* than to the Homeric epics (3750 lines to *Beowulf*'s 3182). Konstantinos Spanoudakis in the recent *Nonnos of Panopolis in Context* argues that the *Paraphrase* is the work of a mind appearing equally committed to Christianity as the *Dionysiaca* appears the work of a mind committed to paganism. I do not feel equipped at my level of scholarship to wade into the debate of the date or sequence of Nonnos' religious affiliations, but I would like to treat Nonnos as a serious writer with genuine convictions, so I will refrain from attributing any hidden motives to his choice to write the pagan *Dionysiaca* or the Christian *Paraphrase*. I have read arguments by scholars on the Christian

elements present in the *Dionysiaca* and I have read arguments on the Dionysian elements present in the *Paraphrase*, and I have read Jitse H. F. Dijkstra's account of Vian's argument in his article "The Religious Background of Nonnus"<sup>7</sup> that Nonnos was a Christian who wrote in a cultural milieu where Christianity and paganism coexisted, as they did in the emperor Constantine's mind until his full Christianization. I will assume that he was, for one part of his life, a genuine pagan who took as his artistic mission the invention of a new form of epic that would transcend the genre as he had inherited it, and for another part, he was a genuine Christian who attempted to do justice to a religious text by creating a hexameter paraphrase. The *Paraphrase* is not my immediate concern, and I will almost exclusively be discussing the *Dionysiaca*. He seems to me quite sincere in his conviction that a new Dionysian spirit ought to seize the public sense of life<sup>8</sup> and displace concern with war and political conquest.

Nonnos' *Dionysiaca* is designed as a revolutionary work in the epic genre, to evoke the eponymous god's dancing energy. He has encoded a deep, pervasive structure in the poem that at once critiques the values implicit in Homeric epic and suggests that life is better lived in harmony with the rhythms of the apparently-chaotic forces in nature. Apparent chaos in Nonnos is bounded by patterns of anticipation, jarring macabre, and comically absurd resolution. At the heart of the work, in Book 25, is an evocation of the shield given to Akhilleus by Hephaistos in Book 18 of the *Iliad*. The description comes in a central book that comes one beyond the Homeric length, and after an episode passing over the first 6 years of Dionysos' Indian expedition, describing Dionysos' deeds and proclaiming them as surpassing Homeric greatness. Indeed, the episode contains an allegory that

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<sup>7</sup> In 'Brill's Companion to Nonnus of Panopolis.'

<sup>8</sup> The phrase "sense of life" seems to have come into use primarily by the use of author and philosopher Ayn Rand. In her 1969 book 'The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature,' she defines the term as follows: "A sense of life is a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence. It sets the nature of a man's emotional responses and the essence of his character." I find the concept quite useful.

prophesies the entire course of the war. His entire work, though, is full of oracles,<sup>9</sup> official and subtle. It traces Dionysos' adolescence and his attainment of young adulthood and Nonnos will use oracles to point the way. Along the way, Zeus will nudge him toward responsibility, and provide a relatively safe space in which to grow, Zeus having learned the lesson of his first son Zagreus, who was cut up almost immediately by Titans at Hera's command. By the poem's close, Dionysos will be accustomed to acting as a real god, and will have soothed the anger (or at least the ability for anger to be effectively expressed) of the forces that resisted him, chief among whom is Hera. He will ascend to Olympos a god of mad dancing and terrifying energy, but he will regulate his power and provide comfort to those who seek it and retribution to those who offend the gods. He will not be a capricious force, but a store of utilitarian energy.

The poem breaks down into three sections. In the first, Nonnos declares his intent to write a poem in the style of *poikilia*, and he invokes Proteus to deem him a worthy dance partner, whose many forms allow him to keep his knowledge, for the most part, concealed. After this, we hear of the excursions of Zeus, with overlapping stories of the abductions of a couple of women and a cosmic and comic battle in the sky of Zeus and Typhon. Zeus is unmanned by his lust and the natural order threatened before Cadmos can use his wits to conquer Gaia's champion by means of exploiting his self-indulgent vanity. The catastrophist tones are overt. Unpredictable and world-ending strife characterize the pre-Bacchic world. We receive a lamentation from Zeus for the world's lack of joy in Dionysos' wine, and soon after Dionysos is born and persecuted by Hera, pushed from home to home and forced to hone his skills of transformation. After a transient childhood, he is instructed that he must lead a campaign against the Indians. He leads his first victory and introduces the second portion

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<sup>9</sup> Lightfoot 2014. It is strange that Lightfoot chose to participate in Spanoudakis' project, since she was the scholar who bemoaned Nonnos' rehabilitation and called it a "monstrosity." Perhaps in the decade and a half since her article on Aura she's had time to come around to Nonnian value. She, along with Lind, seem to represent an interesting trend of scholars hostile to Nonnos generating valuable scholarship on his value. She has written here clearly on the role of oracles in the *Dionysiaca* to indicate the ineluctability of fate, and he wrote some valuable scholarship on Nonnos' date and context.

of the poem by transforming a lake into wine and whisking away the arms of the sleeping men, like an Odysseus making a Polyphemos of each of the Indian host. Indeed, they will later make use of lusty giants.

In the second part of the poem, we have a Trojan War in miniature, made light by frequent digression and jeweled mythological background-telling. Nonnos skips the first 6 years of the Indian campaign, for purposes of similar expedience to those of Homer in the *Iliad*. There are various scenes on land and at sea, where the Dionysian forces are often threatened with crushing defeat at Hera's hands, but he always manages to comically pull out. This is largely due to his being a divine and chosen son of Zeus.

In the third portion of the poem, Dionysos has triumphed over the Indians and goes about returning triumphantly with his troops to Hellas, spars with Hera, rescues and loses Ariadne, and punishes a second unjust nymph with sexual violence. The scene is disturbing, but the violence is deserved, rather than the random violence of the Homeric gods, giving as they will from Zeus' urns. The joy of victory comes at the expense of great pain and terror, but the pain is ritualized through drink. Dionysos offers the first real alternative to Homeric strife: wine and ecstatic dance. Nonnos turns suffering into a joke. Rather than Christian salvation, Dionysos offers the chance of enjoyment on earth. Dionysos resolves violence into intelligible cycles. The poem concludes with Dionysos' quick ascent into heaven, having completed his divine education, and he leaves his son Iacchos in his place to lead the revels in his stead. The production of Iacchos is the final step in Dionysos' quest for full divinity. He has proven himself enough of a god to produce another. Now he can behave like Zeus, and leave his mark on the world, rather than being a mark left by Zeus. Zeus has completed his task of cultivating a worthy heir, and Dionysos finally succeeds in bringing the relief of his wine to mankind.

## Chapter 1: Setting the Stage: Generation, Uncertainty, and Terror in the Pre-Dionysian World

*Ἀλλὰ βίον μερόπων ἑτερότροπος εἶχεν ἀνίη / ἀρχόμενον καμάτοιο καὶ οὐ λήγοντα μερίμνης.  
But every form of grief now occupied the life of men, which starts with toil and whose cares will never abate.*

(Nonn. *Dion.* 7.7-8)

### False Appearances and Zeus' Affairs

#### 1. Prophecy of Protean Bacchos

Nonnos opens his epic boldly. Besides setting out lightning as the subject of the tale, as rage is the subject of the *Iliad*, Nonnos gives a quick summary of his unique narrative of Dionysos' engendering, and connects the birth of Dionysos with the earlier birth of Athena. But Nonnos does not simply liken the two events. Instead, he remarks that Zeus "well remembered another birth" (εὖ εἰδὼς τόκον ἄλλον) (1.8). Nonnos, we will see, does not include details spuriously. Why, then, does Zeus "remember" his earlier birth of Athena? I suggest that Nonnos is even now hinting at the prophecy that will come to pass through the course of the poem. Zeus remembers the aftermath of Athena's birth; because Nonnos has no problem with contradictions coexisting in a single narrative, he can allow us to recall the result given in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, which is the devastation wrought by Typhon. Nonnos will provide his own story of Typhon, though he will use his to different effect, specifically to reveal the flaws in the world as it had been and to spur Zeus to pursue the creation of Dionysos to spare mankind the sort of periodic suffering that characterizes their pre-Dionysian life. By recalling Athena's birth, Nonnos prophesies the coming of another great unmothered god, but qualifies excitement by foreshadowing the great upheaval that will necessarily come before Zeus can begin to heal the world. For now, though, Nonnos will let us enjoy expectation



of the joys to come, and hints at exactly the sort of innovation Dionysos' birth will bring to the world by deeming Proteus a fitting partner for the Dionysian dance Nonnos now begins.

This epic is to be a noisy one.<sup>10</sup> We shall find that Nonnos delights in teasing each of the senses, but he begins with the crashing sound of cymbals (1.11). As in a Greek tragedy, before presenting us with action, Nonnos summons a choral dance to the fore. He characterizes that dance by wild energy, and especially the principle of *poikilia* (1.15), which will explain his love of variety in storytelling. His *poikilia* will extend beyond his inclusion of as many myths as he can remember, to allowance of the existence of different possible coexisting narratives, as well as multiple contradictory elements of a scene existing simultaneously without issue. The tension between the existence of multiple contradictory elements in a narrative creates in the reader, however, a desire for some resolution, some way of knowing what *really* is. Nonnos provides that resolution in the process of metamorphosis. We can imagine figures in Dionysos' world capable of entering a sort of quantum state, where their form at any one point is liable to collapse into a cacophony of liquid forms pouring themselves into one mold after another.<sup>11</sup> The archetypal character of this type is Proteus, the old man of the sea.

With a smooth transition from the aural resonance of cymbals and the varied twanging of a lyre to the lyric dance and Proteus, Nonnos unites the senses in experience of Dionysian revels. In the same way as Nonnos' lyre produces a variety of sound, so the choral dance can produce a variety of forms, especially under the influence of Proteus. Nonnos then begins to describe the many forms Proteus might take, and relates them to events in the upcoming narrative. By carefully describing the relevance of each form Nonnos contemplates Proteus taking, he cautions us not to overlook anything

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<sup>10</sup> Newbold 2003, 1999. p. 41. "The Dionysiaca is also a noisy work, full of shrieking, screaming, crashing, roaring and banging, as well as more orderly music, song and speech."

<sup>11</sup> Paschalis 2014.

in his poetical structure, not the inclusion of a given story or even a single detail in what may seem to be a scene of profuse chaos. He knows that his epic may appear, at times, “mazy” (πολύελικτος), to use one of Nonnos’ own words, but each turn serves a subtle purpose in the construction of Nonnos’ joyful epic. As in the tradition of biblical analysis known as omniscience, Nonnos’ epic is an inexhaustible source of meaning, and every scene can be wrung for a wealth of implications about the piece as a whole. That Nonnos has connected the experience of hearing and seeing is just the beginning of his immersion of the reader in sensory variety. He will continue to blur sensory lines until the entire world seems to be alive with potential action, and his characters will learn to thrive by accepting the new nature of the world and resigning themselves to its unpredictable tides.

Nonnos catalogues the various potential forms Proteus might take (1.16-33) in an orderly succession based on a connection between a given form and an anticipated Dionysian narrative. The scene’s contents are imitated from Menelaos’ capture of Proteus in *Od.* 4.435-460,<sup>12</sup> but Nonnos repurposes them for his own ends. Specifically, he reads Dionysian significance into Homer, thus coöpting the older epic and making it a vehicle for the expression of his own prophecy. First, Nonnos suggests the form of a serpent, which he would celebrate in memory of Dionysos’ triumph over the Indian giants, who have serpents for hair. Next, the lion, which allows Nonnos to insert a subtle hint at Dionysos’ triumph over Hera (by obliging her to breastfeed him) by recalling his first breastfeeding, by Rhea, who has lions for her attribute. Next, the leopard, who he says “springs high into the air with stormy leap by foot” (θελλήεντι μετάρσιος ἄλματι ταρσῶν / ... αἰξῆ) (1.22-23), thus allowing Nonnos, by invention of a creative image, to connect the leopard with Zeus, and make this allusion work doubly. The leopard is “stormy” of paw like Zeus, probably because his darting motion is like the bolt of lightning, and Nonnos therefore mentions Dionysos, the son of Zeus, who leads teams of leopards

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<sup>12</sup> Plass 1969.

against Indian elephants. Leopards thus become animals of Cronidean<sup>13</sup> inspiration, and they will seem even matches for elephants that will vastly outsize them. Next, Nonnos suggests a boar's form, and recalls the boars that the nymph Aura used to hunt, before her disastrous Dionysian nuptials in the last book of the poem. Through allusion to Aura, Nonnos also allows himself a hint to the final Dionysos, Iacchos, who will remain in the world to lead the thiasos after Dionysos has undergone his apotheosis. With this passage, Nonnos can at once foretell Dionysos' coming sexual ineluctability, thus likeness to Zeus in license and an uneasy reminder of the potential for violence, and the final impact that he will leave on the lives of mankind in the form of a revelrous procession and the spiritual benefits of the Eleusinian mysteries.

After reaching the apex of animal metamorphoses, Nonnos moves on to the inanimate and plant. Upon suggesting the form of "mimic water" (μιμηλὸν ὕδωρ) (1.28), Nonnos recalls a scene that is altogether embarrassing for Dionysos. Its inclusion here, an allusion to Dionysos' fleeing to the bottom of the sea from the Arabian king Lycurgos, is strange, and Nonnos' choice must be, as always, deliberate. It seems that he's chosen to include this allusion in order to emphasize the necessity for Dionysos to grow up over the course of the poem. He will attain apotheosis, dominate the Indians, and engender his own heir, but not before experiencing setback after setback, and forging nonetheless ahead as a more responsible god. Finally, Nonnos suggests the form of a plant (φυτόν) (1.31), and gives final voice to Dionysos' vegetative productivity. The plant to which he likens the form is, of course, the vine, and Nonnos takes the opportunity to mention Icaros, the Athenian to whom Dionysos will introduce winemaking. The inclusion of Icaros seems to carry a particular significance because of all those to whom Dionysos teaches cultivation of the vine, Icaros is the only to die for it, killed by men who did not understand the gift he brought them. Nonnos thus emphasizes for us the

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<sup>13</sup> That is, of Zeus, who is the god of the stormcloud. Nonnos is fond of using various names, and Cronides for Zeus is one of his favorites.

perilous power of wine. It can enchant and enliven, or it can destroy. The pre-Dionysian world is characterized by peril as well, and when conflict between gods affects mortals, there is often no escape from lethal danger. Dionysos will bring the chance for some limited relief from the torment of divine caprice. Icaros is a warning about what may befall those who indulge in the drink of Dionysos, but it is also a promise that one can live and die for joy, rather than for empty honors.

Nonnos closes the opening episode with a cacophony of sensory experience in gathering the accoutrements of Dionysian worship (1.34-44). He begins with the visual, and asks to be brought the fennel staff and a dappled fawnskin in place of a typical chiton. Upon naming the fawnskin, Nonnos shifts sensory focus, and likens the perfume of the skin to Maronian wine. He seems, and Rouse seems to agree, to be alluding to a line in Book 9 of the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus and his men have just landed on the island of the Cyclopes and Odysseus remarks on his “goatskin of dark sweet wine” (αἴγεον ἄσινον μέλανος οἴνοιο / ἠδέος) (*Od.* 9.196-197) from his friend Maron. Nonnos dispenses with the “fetid seal-skin” (φωκῶν βαρὺ δέσμα) (1.38) that Homer and Eidothea<sup>14</sup> (Εἰδοθέη καὶ Ὀμήρω) (1.37) have set aside for Menelaos in favor of the perfumed *νεβριδα* of Bacchic worship. He isn’t shy about naming Homer directly and openly referencing a well-known scene in a Homeric epic. Here he is clearly referencing the “four seal-skins” (τέσσαρα φωκῶν ... δέσματ’) (*Od.* 4.436) Eidothea advised Menelaos to set out as a trap for Proteus. The joke is amusing if one imagines the time that separates Homer and Nonnos, some 12 centuries, after which we can be sure those seal-skins would exude a rather rank smell. Not only can Nonnos make a conventional rhetorical comparison of the characteristic skins of Homeric and Nonnian epic, but he can play with mythic time to comic effect when it suits his needs.

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<sup>14</sup> Eidothea is Proteus’ daughter, who takes pity on Menelaos and advises him to capture her father for information about Odysseus and his own future.

After he's supported, by use of illustrative sensory invective,<sup>15</sup> his rhetorical supremacy over the world of Homer's epics, Nonnos moves back to celebrating the aural celebration of Dionysos (1.39-44). He separates acceptable Dionysian instruments (drums and tambourines) and respectfully leaves the god in peace, citing Apollo's punishment of Marsyas<sup>16</sup> as reason enough to respect him. Nonnos, after all, is writing a new epic of joy and dancing in place of strife. It would be inappropriate for him to pit gods against one another when the object of his celebratory poem has not yet achieved stable godhood. Nonnos ends here, on a conciliatory note, and proceeds to the story of Europa.

## 2. Europa's nautical jument

For my telling of this episode, in which Zeus transforms himself into a paddling jument, or beast of burden (in this case a great bull), and abducts the Phoenician princess Europa to deposit her on Crete, I take great inspiration from Robert Schmiel's 1998 article on the scene as exemplary of Nonnos' compositional skill. In that article, Schmiel focuses on Nonnos' employment of words denoting roundness and mimicry or falsehood,<sup>17</sup> which abound in this episode in particular, and which construct the experience of charming otherworldliness. Ronald F. Newbold writes extensively on the same words as they arise through the text, and mentions a couple that arise in this scene. He views the images of rolling, coiling, curving, reflection, deception, and confusion alternately through the lens of chaos theory<sup>18</sup> and sadomasochism.<sup>19</sup> The tropes, I concur with the two, express Nonnos' fascination

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<sup>15</sup> Miguélez-Cavero 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Marsyas is one of the figures of myth who challenged a god for supremacy in some area, like Arachne, who challenged Athena's skill at weaving and was transformed into a spider. Athena created the pipes and threw them away, Marsyas happened upon them and in vain delight, challenged Apollo to a competition. Apollo won and flayed him alive.

<sup>17</sup> Schmiel 1998. pp. 394-395

<sup>18</sup> Newbold 1999. pp. 40-44

<sup>19</sup> Newbold 1984. pp. 90-92

with energy that builds on itself and of a world predicated on sudden and radical transformation. That energy is sometimes terrifying, and my thesis is that in this poem Nonnos lays out a process by which Zeus guides that energy, in the form of Dionysos,<sup>20</sup> to maturity, so that it can be, more often than not, a boon rather than a bane to human life. The scene of Europa in particular will set the stage for Zeus' realization that such a world-shakeup is necessary. Right now, we inhabit the totally pre-Dionysian world, where Zeus pursues girl after girl in capricious lust with ad hoc resolutions, be they benign or lethal. Europa will be one of the lucky ones, but the world she inhabits will soon after suffer tenfold.

Nonnos composes passages that at once have the gripping force of skillful ekphrasis, but upon closer inspection reveal mind-boggling paradoxes whose visual translations effect amazed laughter. Here, as in passages to come which usually center on female abduction, Nonnos weaves the reader into the scene as a voyeuristic observer, thereby emphasizing the visual immediacy of his words and the jarring exposure of abduction. That is to say, we watch the young woman torn from her domestic comfort and deposited, trembling, on the back of a bull, exposed to the view of gods, strange sailors, and excitable poets, rather than on land and in the home she knows.

Nonnos gives us a view of her being viewed by sea deities as soon as the bull descends into the water. Europa receives no privacy, and “Seabluehair<sup>21</sup> was astounded at seeing the skew-the-dew voyage” (πλόον εἰλιπόδην ἐπεθάμβεε κυανοχαίτης) while Triton<sup>22</sup> “hearing a low a fraud from Zeus lowed” (ἠπεροπῆα Διὸς μυκηθμὸν ἀκούων) and Nereus<sup>23</sup> “being riled and mixing wonder with fear pointed out the girl to Doris” (ἀειρομένην δὲ γυναῖκα / θαῦμα φόβῳ κεράσας ἐπεδείκνυε Δωρίδι

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<sup>20</sup> As Dionysos is an actual character we will watch grow and act, exercising choice in situations that are new and unpredictable to him, he has the hope of exercising good choice. If Nonnos were simply describing a force of nature, or vegetative power per se, there could be no hope for conscious evolution, just possible taming by a world-orderer. With Dionysos, we will watch Zeus guide Dionysos toward responsible godhead.

<sup>21</sup> That is, Poseidon.

<sup>22</sup> Triton is the herald of the sea, son of Poseidon and Amphitrite

<sup>23</sup> Nereus is the father of the Nereids and Doris is one of his daughters.

Νηρεύς) (1.60-64). In these few lines, Nonnos compounds the visual effect of his narrative by calculated progression. First, Poseidon simply sees the pair and Nonnos uses the sense of the adjective εἰλιπόδην, which implies what Rouse calls in a footnote to the line calls “the waddling gait of cattle” and therefore earth-boundedness, as Schmiel puts it, “[emphasize] the unreality of the whole scene.”<sup>24</sup> Second, Nonnos inserts one of his favorite ideas and labels the mooing of the counterfeit cow a “fraud.” Last, Nereus points Europa out to his daughter, making Europa fully public, and his mix of wonder and fear foretells the danger that will come from Zeus’ philandering. Nonnos will use the mix of emotion elsewhere to express tension when a character must resolve themselves to the course of fate, but here Nereus expresses the ambivalence we feel as readers, between anticipation of the girl’s deflowering and the comic energy of Zeus’ surreal voyage. To complete the voyeuristic effect, Nonnos even provides a spectator for the scene in the form of an Achaian sailor (1.90-124) flabbergasted by the sight of Europa riding the bull (but not so flabbergasted as to be left without a fittingly ornate speech). The scene both introduces us to Nonnos’ lusty Zeus and to some of Nonnos’ key motifs. It also, if we look at the scene from Europa’s perspective, gives us insight into the position of mortals in this world. They are liable to be snatched up and taken to unfamiliar places, and all the while their words are robbed of any force. Mortals are pawns of capricious gods, and as Akhilleus consoles Priam in Book 24 of Homer’s *Iliad*, Zeus gives more good fortune in life to some than to others, but to none does he give all good.

Europa’s tremendous exasperation at her abduction would, under normal circumstances, evoke heartfelt sympathy, and in fact her short speech from Zeus’ bull-back does tug at the heartstrings. She implores the coasts themselves to tell her father of her abduction, the breezes to take

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<sup>24</sup> Schmiel 1998. p. 396

some ringlets of hers to her mother, and Boreas to lift her away on his wings as he took Oreithyia<sup>25</sup> (1.130-134). She catches herself on her last invocation, remembering that Boreas would not bring salvation, but simply another suitor, now air-faring, in addition to the water-farer. In fact, Boreas himself “billowed up all [Europa’s] churning robe lovesick” (γαμίη δεδονημένον αὔρη / φᾶρος ὄλον κόλπωσε δυσίμερος) (1.69-70), so would make a poor savior. Sadly for her, as Schmiel points out, her “naivety defeats our sympathy and turns the scene into melodrama if not comedy,”<sup>26</sup> and her cries for help ring out in their futility. Nonnos denies Europa the chance for any fruitful pleas to be heard, and immediately transitions to Cadmos’ story, which he’ll interrupt to tell of Typhon’s first assault. Europa will have to wait until line 344, by which point her voice will be silenced, and Zeus will ravish her in a handful of lines (344-351) after which she’ll give birth and be safely re-homed in a handful more lines (351-361).<sup>27</sup> For good measure, Zeus also gives his bull-form an apotheosis of its own and establishes it among the constellations.

This scene presages the sexual displacement that Zeus will inflict (directly or through the machinations of time as the threads of fate run their course) on women, as well as occasional men, in the *Dionysiaca*, but also the resolution that Zeus’ abstruse plans will offer in the forthcoming Dionysian world. As well, it provides a fabulous opening scene for my purposes by exhibiting Nonnos’ playfulness, his compositional skill, and his encoded prophetic indications. Levi Robert Lind, however, is not pleased with the passage, and cites it as evidence of Nonnos’ lack of poetic skill and coherence. He complains that the abrupt transitions between episodes give the work “a most disjointed and rambling effect” as he is “continually blurring the outlines of episodes that might have been handled

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<sup>25</sup> Oreithyia was a daughter of Erechtheus, traditionally abducted by Boreas after a failed attempt to woo her, as Ovid writes late in Book 6 of his *Metamorphoses*. She was later deified by the Athenians and became a cold mountain wind as companion to Boreas, as Herodotus mentions in Book 7 of his *Inquiries*.

<sup>26</sup> Schmiel 1998. p. 400

<sup>27</sup> Zeus gives her as wife to Asterion, king of Crete, and no more is said on the matter.



artistically by a better poet.”<sup>28</sup> I argue, contrariwise, that Nonnos blurs the outlines of episodes to imbue them with an energy that turns on a dime rather than proceeding cleanly and that, in Nonnos’ writing, order arises within each episode and with a definite view to the coherence of the whole work. Far from Lind’s claim that it is a weakness of Nonnos’ writing that “a long soliloquy by a Greek sailor ... is thrust into the narrative at a place where Homer would have tightened all connections and emphasized the original incident by allowing no digression,” I posit that Nonnos endeavors to release the reader from a Homeric world and induct him into the spiritual relief that comes from digression. Nonnos wishes for us to recognize that there is power in the churning rush of action. Even Lind senses the motive power of Nonnos’ style and remarks that “the general effect of the *Dionysiaca* is somewhat like that of a huge snowball.”<sup>29</sup> Nonnos thereby mirrors the accruing of divine insight and mythical variety<sup>30</sup> that will construct the Dionysos we see at the end of the poem in his style as he charges ahead. Schmiel does a far better job than I could of examining the structure of the Greek in the passage,<sup>31</sup> and he finds thoughtful intricacy in the composition where Lind dismissed Nonnos’ craft.

The episode is the first of actual action in the poem, and it follows directly on the heels of Nonnos’ prolonged invocation. Schmiel notes that Nonnos takes this opportunity to set out what will be a recurrent image in the poem, especially connected to Zeus and progeny: the bull-horns. For good measure he also reminds us, after his opening invocation of the metamorphosing Proteus, of reproduction, changing, and false appearances. In the first line of the narrative, Nonnos calls Zeus “high-horned” (ὕψικερως) (1.46) as he “mimicked an erotic bellow from his bastard gullet” (ἴμερόεν μύκημα νόθῳ μιμήσατο λαίμῳ) (1.47). Schmiel remarks that Nonnos would be thrilled to learn of the

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<sup>28</sup> Lind 1938. p. 58

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> The variety of myths Dionysos will stack up that will comprise his life experiences.

<sup>31</sup> Schmiel 1998. pp. 398-399

contemporary slang meaning of “horny,”<sup>32</sup> and perhaps it is partially to Nonnos’ continuous and suggestive uses of the image that we owe the evolution of the word. Zeus is quite seriously a horny god who will make his mark by employment of his promiscuity.

In contrast to later scenes, Zeus has not here caught sight of a tempting maiden who inspires desire in him; instead, he feels a sexual urge and roars a demand into the world. Amusingly, Eros gets the memo, so to speak, and “little Eros tossed up [Europa]” (βαῖδς Ἔρωσ κοῦφιζε) (1.50). The toss is an actual toss in space, and Zeus “offers the round ridge of his neck” (κυρτὸν ὑποστορέσας λοφίην) (51) to “lift up Europa” (Εὐρώην ἀνάειρε) (53), “bending aslant” (δόχμιος ὀκλάζων) (52) “stretching back slackened” (μεγαλασμένα νῶτα τιταίνων) (52) for “the mounting maiden” (ἐπιβήτορι κοῦρη) (51). Schmiel notes the humorous reversal here, as “mounter” (ἐπιβήτωρ) implies maleness in the rider.<sup>33</sup> Here is Zeus, master of the universe, bending submissively to catch a Sidonian princess with dainty agility in the form of a seconds-ago roaring bull. The scene is amusing, even if just for us. For Europa, her selection and tossing by Eros must have seemed to come from nowhere, and she is given no verbal indication of her fate. She is completely helpless, but she nonetheless participates in a ridiculous acrobatic feat reminiscent of Minoan sport.

The actual water-faring of Zeus in bull-form is completely surreal. To begin, Nonnos gives us one of his most illustrative phrases of the scene: Zeus “furrowed the treadable sea with floating hoof noiseless” (πλωτὸς ὄνουξ ἐχάραξε βατρῆς ἀλὸς ἄψοφον) (1.54). Schmiel picks up on Nonnos’ penchant for verbs of cutting, scoring, and penetration and connects it to an inclination toward the sadomasochistic.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, romance and sex will almost always involve violence in Nonnos, or at least confusion and fear. Sometimes the violence will come in the course of the sexual act, as when the

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<sup>32</sup> Schmiel 1998. p. 395

<sup>33</sup> Schmiel 1998. p. 396.

<sup>34</sup> Schmiel 1998. p. 395

Indian giant Morrheus attempts to rape the mainad Chalcomede and she is saved by a snake which leaps from her bosom. Robert F. Newbold connects the scene to a “fear of sex” present in the *Dionysiaca*, which manifests here as a genital fear of phallic women.<sup>35</sup> I find his reading of the particular fears at play in the minds of would-be assaulters who find themselves greeted by a phallic striking defender compelling, but I suggest that the blurring of distinctions between male and female is part of Nonnos’ effort to place his characters in a veritable world of flux. He removes from his characters the comfort of presuming stability in their world and substitutes for them a world of perilous deception. Meanwhile, he creates for readers a world of amusing contradiction. Nonnos has reversed the gendered roles between Zeus as mount and Europa as mounter to effect a confusion that seems, especially to modern eyes that tend to look well on female empowerment, to contain a subversion flavored by levity. Men will find that they cannot get away with violating women, because Dionysos has suffused uncertainty over the world, and apparently vulnerable women can turn the sexual tables and overman the men.

Not for long does the inversion of gender roles last, however, and in the water, Europa is once again “quaking with terror” (*δειματι παλλομένη*) (1.56) although she remains strangely “unshaken and unwetted” (*ἀστεμφής ἀδιαντος*) (1.57). Both of these phrases come at the head of successive lines. Nonnos means us to note the contradiction of the quaking girl at once unflinching and floating above the water on the back of a bull. The scene is like a dream. As she goes, she “held his horn a rudder” (*πηδάλιον κέρας ἔσχε*) (1.68), and I think I needn’t further explicate that phrase for its erotic implications to be rendered plain, but in case the reader missed the suggestion, or simply because Nonnos loves to redouble, he ends the line by remarking that “Desire was the captain” (*Ἴμερος ἔπλετο ναύτης*) (1.68) of the taurine vessel. As soon as it seems that Europa may have regained some sexual

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<sup>35</sup> Newbold 1998

power, Nonnos renders that power moot because even as she is physically appealing to Zeus, it is the deified Desire that moves Zeus, rather than her herself. Her agency is thus doubly dismissed, even though Nonnos will call her “captain and cargo” (φόρτος ἔην καὶ ναυτίλος) (1.90). He makes clear that the true pilot is not Europa but Zeus’ desire. Her descriptions read as naïve self-delusion rather than genuine empowerment, and thus become a sexual game for Zeus’ benefit.

Nonnos is not afraid to place the gods in typically embarrassing situations. His Zeus, it seems, has a sense of humor and isn’t afraid to be the butt of a few jokes. His easygoing attitude is qualified somewhat, though, by the fact that he cannot really ever lose, because things will always eventually work out to his advantage, although tension may arise from one time to another. Zeus enjoys the ride of watching events unfold. Here, he subjects himself to Eros’ goad and allows himself to be “lashed with Aphrodite’s girdle” (ἐπεμάστιε κεστῶ) (1.80) and “shepherded by Cypris’ crook” (Κυπριδῆ ποιμαίνει καλαύροπι) (1.82). The sight is so embarrassing that “the cheek of Pallas unmothered purpled at her shame” (αἰδομένη δὲ / παρθενίην πόρφυρε παρηίδα Παλλᾶς ἀμήτωρ) (1.83-84), but Zeus pays no mind. Zeus, in fact, does nothing at all but swim for the rest of the episode. He will only act once Nonnos returns to Europa’s narrative after Cadmos’ and Typhon’s introductions. He is still, though, able to command fear from Europa and to amuse his observers. He is quite obviously not taking the matter very seriously, which, while reflecting Zeus’ position of power in the heavens, also foreshadows the consequences that the world will suffer for Zeus’ levity.

Schmiel analyzes the Achaian sailor’s soliloquy with an eye to Nonnos’ comic intentions. The sailor’s observations build on the contradictions in the scene, as he asks rhetorically whether Zeus has now created “navigable land” (πλωτήν ... χθόνα) (1.95) or whether “the farmer’s cart shall score a watery furrow through the sea” (διὰ πόντου / ὕρδος ἀλιβρέκτοιο χαράσσεται ὀλκὸς ἀμάξης) (1.95-96). We as the readers know that the contradictions will stand and need not be addressed, but the sailor

will attempt to reconcile what he sees with what he knows can exist in the world. Nonnos takes joyful advantage of the malleability of language. Since he can create stories without worrying about translating the verbal into the physical, he is free to spin contradictions for his characters to deal with, and he delights in their helpless incredulity. Like Zeus in Nonnos' world, Nonnos' will is absolute, and comprises the bounds of his universe. If Nonnos tells us that a bull soars lightly treading over water and cuts an enduring furrow in yielding water, then it is so, and the working-out of Nonnos' wild ideas takes a humorous path, as his characters try to make sense of the world around them. The sailor will try to reconcile his knowledge of bovine characteristics with his vision by positing a new creature, and assuring himself that "this sea-bull has a form not at all like that of a land-bull" (οὐ βοῖ ἡεροσαίῳ τύπον εἶνελον εἰνάλιος βοῦς / ἔλλαχεν) (1.100-101), and that the world is as it always has been: Nereus has nothing to do with cattle, the merman Glaucos has nothing to do with gardening, the sea produces seaweed rather than land vegetation and there is no furrow in the water but a ship's grain and wake (1.110-117). He's wrong, however; Nonnos' world is beyond human conception.

The sailor's incredulity leads him to ask a series of questions that, by the plainness of the answer that comes to our mind upon reading them, carry sardonic humor. He asks the bull how it can ravish a woman. The answer is that this bull is Zeus, and he'll always find a way to gratify himself sexually. He asks whether bulls go mad and ravish women. The answer is yes, not only in this case, but also in the case of Pasiphaë. He asks, still trying to keep the terrene to the terrene and the marine to the marine,<sup>36</sup> whether in fact Poseidon took the form of a bull to ravish this girl. The answer is no, this bull is Zeus, and he needn't obey the expected order of things. But, Nonnos reminds us, a marine bull is not an unknown creature in existing myth, like the race of horned river-gods Poseidon imitated to woo Tyro. Nonnos' images may be fabulous, but Hellenic myth abounds with similarly mind-

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<sup>36</sup> Schmiel 1998. p. 397

bending improbabilities, so Nonnos, rather than wholly departing from his preceding tradition, instead takes it to newfound heights. If some myth will force the acceptance of conflicting fact, Nonnos will collapse any certainty about consistent structure in the world, and teach mortals how to live in a world like that.

As though hearing another mortal voice and crying out to the only hope of help she had left, Europa takes the close of the sailor's speech to bemoan her fate, even after Nonnos tells us that "the girl prophesied her bovine nuptials" (βοέους δὲ γάμους μαντεύσατο κοῦρη) (1.126) and there remained no true hope at all. Her cries for help to the water and to the coasts, to the breeze and to Boreas himself go unheeded, and Zeus goes on ferrying her. Nonnos' transition here to dealing with the story of Cadmos works double duty; on the one hand, Nonnos shows us his pent-up energy by darting from one scene to the next, seeming to cut Europa off in his excitement. On the other, Europa's effective speech is over. With the last of her words came the stroke of fate through Nonnos' pen, and to narrate any more of her experience would unnecessarily draw out a less exciting scene of muted Europa riding and Zeus simply plowing ahead. Nonnos crafted a scene to show Europa's exposure to the world, the sparkling unreality of her sea-voyage, and the death of agency on her lips. Lind can disparage Nonnos' poetic skill in this scene and others, but I believe Nonnos holds his own and, in fact, reveals a real purpose to his choices.

In the next section, the consequences of Zeus' amorous escapades come crashing down to earth, quite literally, in the form of Typhon's assault. Typhon's entrance marks a real shift in the *Dionysiaca's* tone, and the action begins to become quite seriously sinister. Up till now, although Europa was terrified and Nonnos used violent imagery to describe Eros' inspiration of Zeus, but the result was light in tone. With Typhon we will see real terror in the world, and it seems to arrive out of nowhere. Devastation unlike any within the terrene realm awaits the roar of the many-headed monster,

and Nonnos appears to capture a fear of cosmic catastrophe that surpasses the worst strife of war: instead, he will give us total conflagration, and the dismal lamentation of a helpless world under assault. In this world, there is no shelter from tragedy, and worldly goods can be enjoyed only so long as the gods refrain from sending the whole thing to hell.

### **Distraction, Inversion, Strife**

Nonnos aims to jar his reader at times. This tendency of his has inspired ire in many morally and stylistically upright readers over the centuries, but critics miss Nonnos' careful intent and thoroughly planned effects when they dismiss him for superficial aesthetic novelties. His intent is to create a new *type* of epic at the end of pagan epic's days that dispenses with glorifying conflict and instead takes up the quest for joy in a perilous world. He endeavors to surpass the achievements of classical and archaic antiquity, though access the power that they saw pulsating through everyday life. He'll channel that power into a regretful Zeus who offers the opportunity for humanity to lighten its load somewhat. Nonnos jars in order to distract from the terror of war, as Dionysos uniquely can. The effect of his style of distraction masks the pervasive underlying structure of the poem on casual reading, but by looking closely at the implications of specific narrative choices, the structure becomes legible. That structure has the quality of disorderly order of a rolling snowball, to recall Lind's accidental praise, which charges ever more strongly forward by turning back on itself, animating its inert surroundings by gathering them around itself. His *poikilia* animates an epic where war is made a joke, a joke that rejects the need for unmitigated horror. Nonnos sees hope in cycles, which is why astronomical movement is such a common motif in the poem. The stars are said again and again to perform habitual motions within their established and eternal boundaries, and indeed as the poem goes on, more associates of Dionysos will find themselves established among the stars and thereby find a reliable, stable position, freed forever from caprice. The battle of Typhon is so disturbing because of the violence Typhon does against the shocked and at first helpless stars, but his violence is in vain, as within two books he will be dispatched and they will return to their rolling habit.

Lind, in his 1938 article, criticizes Nonnos for turning on a dime in Book 1 from the rape of Europa to the battle with Typhon and back to Cadmos "where Homer would have tightened all



connections and emphasized the original incident by allowing no digression,” and that as “the battle with Typhoeus flows over into Book 2, and Europa is completely lost to sight”,<sup>37</sup> but I think these qualities are present precisely for the sake of their departure from Homeric focus. Focus and solemnity are not conducive to the kind of dancing energy Nonnos thinks best; where Homer invites close attention and study, as to a period of a few days near the end of the Trojan War and primarily concerning one quality in one soldier, Nonnos invites us to drink in the whole of Dionysos’ struggle, to watch him move from the first tipping steps of infancy to victorious apotheosis, often failing, but turning again against each challenge by utilizing his capacity to dart and metamorphose.

We move quickly from the rape of Europa to the rise of Typhon in order to evoke the surprise of Zeus; as he is taken unawares<sup>38</sup> while preoccupied, so we as readers are preoccupied by stories of his lust while the beast is rearing. In a Homeric epic, this lack of foresight would presage real pain, as carelessness severed the threads of all Odysseus’ troop but himself, but in Nonnos, the day is not lost, although Typhon throws the heavens into disorder, because he can’t really rule Olympos anyway. It ends up not to matter too much that Zeus has been distracted, because even with possession of Zeus’ thunderbolt Typhon is unable to do more than to scare, and he can be dispatched with the assistance of a human, Cadmos. Nonnos shows us the champion of Gaia, defeated once for defending Hera’s bridal integrity in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, now defeated again by the trickery of a mere mortal. Zeus picks Cadmos to help because, conveniently, Cadmos happens to be around, having been pursuing Zeus in search for Europa, at her father’s behest. Conveniently, Cadmos forgets his task in order to assume his metamorphosed role of piping shepherd and deceive Typhon so that Zeus can take back his weapons. He is a real team player, and Zeus will reward him in upcoming books. As we’ll see, Zeus has plans for the line of Cadmos.

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<sup>37</sup> Lind 1938. p. 58

<sup>38</sup> Or, as unawares as Zeus may be taken when all the action in the world is a result of his plan.

Lind complains about the episode's spilling over two books, but in looking for neatness, he misses Nonnos' point. The fight with Typhon is remarkable. It characterizes what is possible in a world where Dionysos is not yet present. Nonnos does not want us to imagine anything neat, but he especially resists neatness in a world where a surreally hideous monster can emerge from the ground to tear constellations out of the sky. The comedy of the Typhon episode assures us victory will come for the forces of productive order over destructive chaos, but the world will suffer tremendously in the meanwhile. Each episode of Nonnos' epic will possess its own rolling energy and demand that the reader give himself up to it in order to partake of the action. Here, the reader loses himself in the desperate terror of celestial beings under assault. The reader does feel caught up, and sometimes lost, in the eddying flow, but the experience isn't helpless or unenjoyable. Instead, one feels surrounded by an undulating brocade of glittering liquid gemstones. Nonnos thereby keeps us from moving steadily and clearly forward, as Homer would like us to, and forces us to snake along a meandering path, experiencing his stories like an unrelenting deluge but seeing a unique and purposeful light caught by each. Lind, in his impatience, misses Nonnos' elegant displacement.

### **1. A battle in the sky and sea**

The poem opens with Zeus' amorous escapades, which serve both to illuminate his philandering character (thus his relationship to Hera) and to usher in the cosmic cataclysm of Typhon's assault. It also establishes a pattern that Zeus will buck in conceiving Dionysos: Zeus desires and takes a woman to bed, before his eye is caught by another and he moves on, leaving the women out of

place.<sup>39</sup> In this case, he turns from Europa and “Hurried to bed Pluto and beget Tantalos ... and deposited and covered his heavenly battle gear with his lightning in the deepest nook of a cave” (γὰρ ἐς εὐνήν / Πλουτοῦς Ζεὺς Κρονίδης πεφορημένος, ὄφρα φυτεύῃ / Τάνταλον ... αἰθέρος ἔντεα θῆκε μυχῷ κεικαλυμμένα πέτρης / καὶ στεροπὴν ἔκρυψεν) (1.145-149). The bolts turn out, however, not to be too well hidden, as Typhon is able to seek them out with ease. He arises “at a nod from his mother Earth” (νεύματι μητρὸς Ἀρούρης) to “purloin Zeus’ snowy tools” (ὄπλα Διὸς νιφόεντα ... ἔκλεψε) (1.154-155). As Hesiod’s account in the *Theogony* (825 ff.) Typhon makes a hidey-hole of his own and stashes the gear there. After he’s stowed away the loot, he “stretched high the crop of his hands into heaven” (ἠλιβάτων ἐτίτανεν ἐς αἰθέρα λήια χειρῶν) (1.164) to assault the heavens, specifically celestial objects and constellations, who resist valiantly but with little success (1.229-257). He will fall prey to the same trick that won him the lightning when Cadmos enchants him with a song, so from the outset he clearly has no chance of surpassing Zeus. He plays the role of a gruesome antagonist, but he cannot be taken seriously.

Typhon is, as Miguélez-Cavero calls him, “a walking zoo made of serpents, leopards, lions, bulls, boars, dogs and bears (1.158-62, 2.42-52) combined with numerous arms (164-5, 185, 203-16, 297) and heads (1.421, 425-6),” and his grotesque appearance is part of his despicability in contrast to Zeus.<sup>40</sup> Miguélez-Cavero posits that Nonnos’ description comes out of a late antique rhetorical tradition of mocking physical defect in order to affirm the virtue of the subject of praise. Nonnos makes his Typhon an utterly unsympathetic character, of physical repulsiveness, “short-sighted and lacking intelligence, capable only of producing chaos and disaster, while gullible and easily deceived.”<sup>41</sup> He is not, Nonnos is clear, a fitting successor to Zeus. Besides his repulsive physical appearance, he

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<sup>39</sup> Braden 1974. p. 856

<sup>40</sup> Miguélez-Cavero 2010

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

lacks any virtues of the mind that could justify his universal rule. Nonnos is apprehensive of gods born too powerful to wield their power responsibly. These are gods like little Zagreus, who climbs onto Zeus' throne with his thunderbolts moments after birth (6.165-168). As well, when Semele is given apotheosis, she immediately becomes haughty and boastful toward Hera and brings on her anger (9.206-242). Typhon is a particularly despicable specimen of the immature divinity, and Nonnos will take pleasure in seeing him brought down.

Typhon's assault is terrible, tearing chunks from the earth and storming about in the sea, terrifying the members of the Zodiac as well as the lay animals of the land and sea. He is attempting to literally restructure heaven. In his first assault, he strangles and drags constellations around (1.163 ff.), and Nonnos even tells us that "he dragged off the Dawn" (εἴρυσεν ἠριγένειαν) (1.171) so that "timeless and half-finished, horsedriving Season rested her team" (ἄχρονος ἡμιτέλεστος ἐλώφειεν ἱππότις Ὠρη) (1.172) and "rising together the Moon glowed with the Sun by day" (ἡματιη δὲ / ἡελίω σελάγιζε συναντέλλουσα Σελήνη) (1.174-175). His surreal language is, as always, exciting as it is terrifying to imagine. To witness this sort of cosmic cataclysm would be, truly, psychologically world-shattering, and Nonnos can tap into scenes like these with ease. This world is genuinely terrifying to imagine being a part of oneself. It is worth noting that Typhon is only capable of inflicting this damage because Nonnos' world is so alive. Constellations really *are* what they represent, and their constituent stars form a physical, if ethereal, body. As such, Typhon can truly "snatch the Parrhasian Bear's mane" (πιέζων / ... λοφίην ... Ἄρκτου / Παρρασίης) (1.166-168) and "tear twin fishes from the sky down to the sea" (διδύμους ἐπὶ πόντον ἀπ' αἰθέρος Ἰχθύας ἔλκων) (1.180). In our modern, mostly secular<sup>42</sup> minds, the idea of the stars of a constellation acting as a single entity (or of a "constellation" having

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<sup>42</sup> By this I mean that few of us hold genuinely mystical views about metaphysical reality. Our gods are fuzzy and indeterminate, and we trust in the discoveries of scientists to hold day to day. Highly complex theoretical mathematics provides the intellectual fuel for the now-ubiquitous car GPS, although few consider the fact in depth. We generally trust that the world is intelligible, and that innovations arise from new discoveries, rather than mystical cosmic innovations.

any real-world connection among its parts) or of the planets being wrenched off their courses strikes us as absurd, but in Nonnos, every part of the world can be imagined conscious. If objects appear inanimate, that is simply because they are following the ineluctable will of Zeus. Typhon can stake a claim to Zeus' orderer status and substitute his own courses for celestial bodies' wonted ones.

As if Typhon's manual assault weren't bad enough, he begins to launch serpentine projectiles at the sky. Like a monstrous Spider-man,<sup>43</sup> Typhon "spread wide the company of his arms ... shooting out a twisting troop of vipers" (πετάσας δὲ πολυπερὲς ἔθνος ἀγοστῶν ... αἰθύσσων ὄφιων σκολιὸν στρατόν) (1.185-7). Here Nonnos uses σκολιός of his snakes, which implies tangling, twisting motion. Nonnos will often use language denoting circularity, circuits, and coils, as well as those denoting mimicry and self-generation, which themselves connote circular motion. A mimic turns a thing back on itself by doubling it, as a mirror creates a back-and-forth relationship between a real reflected object and its image in reflection. Each exists because of the nature of the other, and form a self-sustaining relationship. Self-generation brings a thing back to its beginning without outside influence, thus forming a circular course of constantly renewing energy. Nonnos uses hints like these to remind us to keep an eye out for deception or reversal in coming lines. Nonnos typically uses his favorite coil-themed words to emphasize the fabulous contradictions and energy of self-generation that Dionysos' revels bring, but since he here uses it of the monster Typhon, we can gather that the energy produced will work out to his detriment. In fact, it shall.

In a few lines, Nonnos will hint at that fact by use of a purposeful anachronism: one of Typhon's snakes will "twine another garland round Ariadne's crown" (καὶ στεφάνῳ στέφος ἄλλο περιπλέξας Ἀριάδνης) (1.201). Ariadne won't enter the poem until Book 47, and Zeus hasn't even conceived the future Dionysos who will give Ariadne a place among the stars, yet this line triplicates

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<sup>43</sup> Spider-man is an American comic book hero who is capable of shooting jets of spider silk webbing from his palms.

the circularity Nonnos hinted at at the open of his ophidian assault. Nonnos uses two variants of the word for garland or crown, *στέφανος* and *στέφος*, and unites them by an act of circular weaving in the verb *περιπλέκω*, in reference to a Dionysian constellation which should not have yet come to be. This crown is itself an oracle, and it predicts Dionysos' impediment but eventual triumph. Nonnos seems here to assume that a reader will read his work repeatedly, because a reader cannot glean all of Nonnos' implications here without having read Nonnos' story of Ariadne. Perseus, to defend Argos against accepting Dionysos at Hera's behest, will transform her to stone (47.665-666), but Dionysos will prevail over him and he will prevail over her transformation by transforming her once again, this time into a constellation. In this scene, Typhon will seem to have the upper hand for a time, but his efforts will soon become comically futile, as the inescapable will of Zeus becomes plain.

The viper that twines around Ariadne's crown is the last snake whose path Nonnos describes for us, and he returns to battery. In another remarkable upturning of cosmic regularity, Typhon tears Poseidon's chariot out of the sea and launches it into the heavens, smashing it against Helios' car (1.206-212), then launches innocent bulls at the moon, amusing himself by the visual pun (1.213-215).<sup>44</sup> Nonnos also seems to augment the visual pun with a pun on *μεμυκότα* in line 214 and *μίμημα* in line 215. The moon, however, does not simply undergo Typhon's assault, but resists. Nonnos tells us that "Titan Mene<sup>45</sup> was not cowed by the attack" (*οὐδὲ κορυσσομένῳ Τιτηνιάς εἴκαθε Μήνη*) (1.219), and she valiantly rages against Typhon, which inspires the constellations to fight back as well. They take up arms and attack with their attribute. Orion battles Typhon's heads with a sword and his Dog barks out hot steam toward them (1.234-239). Ophiuchos<sup>46</sup> has his own serpents, and "launches his dappled twisting bolt" (*στικτὸν ἀκοντιζῶν σκολιὸν βέλος*) (1.247). Again, Nonnos uses *σκολιός* of the

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<sup>44</sup> Selene, the Moon, is bull-horned herself, so the bulls he tosses are moons in miniature.

<sup>45</sup> This is another name for Selene

<sup>46</sup> Ophiuchos is a constellation of the Zodiac, the serpent-bearer.

snaky missile. The rest of the Zodiac follows suit, and finally Nonnos tells us “glittering Lyra prophesied Zeus’ victory” (Φόρμιγξ ἀστερόεσσα Διὸς μαντεύσατο νικῆν) (1.257). Interestingly, for the name of the constellation of the lyre, Nonnos chooses the word φόρμιγξ, which refers to one of the oldest Greek instruments. And it is paired with both Zeus and one of Nonnos’ key words, μαντεύομαι (“to prophesy”). Clearly, this line is a point of punctuation. Nonnos will confirm the suspicion, and move on to Typhon’s final moment of apparent success, his assault on the sea, which results in a quick and comical deluge.

Typhon, Nonnos tells us, leaves fighting on land and batting at the heavens to assault the waters (1.258-293). He “seizing the peak of Corycios shook it” (Κωρυκίου δὲ κάρηνα λαβὼν ἐτίναξε) (1.258) and “shot rugged missiles at the file of waves” (κραναοῖς βελέεσσιν ὀιστεύων στίχας ἄλμης) (1.261). As he steps into the sea, his gigantic size fill the depths so that “his naked loins were seen unwetted over the water” (φαίνετο γυμνωθεῖσα δι’ ὕδατος ἄβροχος ὀσφύς) (1.264). He sends his serpents to attack the water, but they can do little damage, because all of the animals have fled. The seals and dolphins find hiding spots in the deep, and the octopus employs a most Dionysian defense. Nonnos tells us “the wily octopus, weaving the entwined train of his twisting coils, fixt himself on his wonted rock and made his limbs to appear like a pattern on it” (σκολιαῖς ἐλίκεσσι περίπλοκον ὄλκον ὑφαίνων / πούλυπος αἰολόμητις ἐθήμονι πήγνυτο πέτρῃ, / καὶ μελέων ἴνδαλμα χαραδραῖη πέλε μορφῆ) (1.278-280). Again Nonnos returns to σκολιός for the octopus’ trailing tentacles, and ups the circular ante by following it up with ἔλιξ. The octopus succeeds in hiding himself by changing his form. In other words, he escapes the peril of capricious divine violence by employment of a form of metamorphosis. Here is another creature of the deep to pair with Proteus, as Proteus pairs with Dionysos. It lacks the magical transformative power that Proteus has, in the same way the we lack the magical revelrous power that Dionysos has, so it employs the sort it has access to, which in the

octopus' case is nothing to sneeze at. Humans, alas, will need to await Dionysos' birth to gain a like advantage.

Typhon, being “more massive than the land” (μειζονα γαιης) (1.275), begins to displace enough water to flood the world, and Nonnos tells us “the waters climbed and visited Olympos with steep seas” (πυργώθη δὲ θάλασσα καὶ ὠμίλησεν Ὀλύμπῳ / ἤλιβάτοις πελάγεσσιν) (1.284-285). The image is absurd, of course, and rather than terrify or destroy, it presents a sublime opportunity for the native wildlife; given the felicity of a water higher than it had reached before, “an unwetted bird washed itself” ἄβροχος ὄρνις ἐλούσατο (1.286). The assault on the sea ends with Typhon firing a final cliffside he's torn up at Olympos. His next attempt, which is on the very foundation of Zeus' power, his control of the lightning bolt, will be the final straw, and Zeus will end the drama with ease.

## 2. Typhon's stumble and Zeus' virile unmanning

Typhon's effort turns comic as soon as he attempts to utilize the thunderbolt. He expects to continue his assault unchallenged, as he has been until now. But until now, he has simply been battering everything within reach. The thunderbolt requires skill. Selene and constellations have attempted to fight back against his battery, but they have done little to slow him, and Zeus has been absent entirely. This is his big moment. Typhon, who Nonnos calls here “ersatz Zeus” (Ζεὺς νόθος), “equipped himself with the fire-barbed thunderbolt” (ὄπλισε χεῖρα πυριγλώχινι κεραιῶν) (1.295), but immediately, something is off. Even with two hundred hands, “Typhon labored with difficulty at the weight” (ἐμόγησε Τυφωεύς / βριθοσύνη) where “Zeus lightly lifted it with one” (μηὶ κούφιζε Κρονίων) (1.297-298). Typhon has gone too far, but he's too dim-witted to realize. As Miguélez-Cavero puts it,



Typhon “[has stolen] the thunderbolts because Zeus is distracted with Pluto and following his mother’s instructions, not having devised a strategy himself.”<sup>47</sup> He will attempt to cobble together a coherent world-plan later on to justify his attempt on Zeus’ throne, but it will be rather crude. Typhon’s new *kosmos* consists mainly of inverting the current order and taking booty for himself. That will not satisfy Nonnos’ conscious world, and it will deal Typhon a comical downfall. Nature itself senses an untrained master in him and shies away: Typhon is “cloudless” (ἀννεφέλου) (1.299), and we know that Zeus is the cloud-gatherer, νεφεληγερέτα (1.390). Zeus will remain the only legitimate authority over nature once this episode has concluded, and Typhon’s attempted coup will plant a seed in Zeus’ mind. That seed will grow into a plan to restructure the world to give humans a means of dealing with the pains of life.

The comedy of the sequence arises primarily from Typhon’s impotence, which translates easily from the martial to the sexual; he has stolen Zeus’ primary, weapon, and should<sup>48</sup> succeed in unmanning him from afar, but when he attempts the actual deed, he unmans himself (1.306). Typhon will find that Zeus, on the other hand, is not actually totally unmanned without his gear, although Hera will mock him as though he were (1.324-343). For now, though, Typhon must wait. Zeus is still occupied impregnating Europa as he rages. He attempts to cast the bolts, but they “sent out a muted strain echoing gently without a clap” (βροντῆ κωφὸν ἔπεμπεν ἀδουπήτου μέλος ἤχοῦς / ἠρέμα βομβήσασα) (1.300-301). As if the emasculation of the moment weren’t enough, Nonnos lingers on it. He mentions that “his lightning dimmed” (ἀστεροπὴ δ’ ἤχλυσε) and was “like smoke shot through ... with a soft flame” (εἴκελον αἴθοπι καπνῶ ... λεπταλέον πῦρ) (1.303-304). He is clearly having fun with the phallic implications of the thunderbolt, and specifically Typhon’s inability to produce of them

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<sup>47</sup> Miguélez-Cavero 2010, p. 26

<sup>48</sup> In Typhon’s shallow mind, that is.

more than a limp glow.<sup>49</sup> As if the triplication of Typhon's impotence weren't enough, Nonnos even states it plainly: "the bolts unmanned him" (ἔθηλύνοντο κεραινοὶ) (1.306). In fact, Nonnos doesn't lie to us, and Typhon will be destroyed without leaving a mark on the world, through cosmic reorganization or engendering progeny. With a short fable on the opportunistic rebellion of strong-willed creatures under inexperienced hands (1.310-320), Nonnos leaves Typhon there, with his pants down, and moves to the next scene.

Having been mystically treading the water for some time, Zeus sets Europa down on the Cretan shore (1.321-322). Europa is, of course, still dry at the end of the journey, though thoroughly displaced. Hera spies her husband stricken with passion for the girl, and become enraged. She will perform a public speech to shame her husband, and Nonnos will give him no say in the matter. Zeus, without his thunderbolt, seems to become a mundane philanderer, mocked by his clear-eyed wife. More than a mundane philanderer, he is still a bull, and she takes his form as the topic for her invective. She addresses her speech to Apollo, who is absent. She rhetorically chastises Zeus for imprudence in choosing a bull's form, and warns Apollo to guide him away lest he fall under some yoke. Nonnos will take any opportunity to show off his mythological knowledge, but the format of rhetoric suits him perfectly. Miguélez-Cavero argues compellingly for the late antique interest in rhetoric, and Schmiel argues compellingly for rhetorical features' employment by Nonnos.<sup>50</sup> Hera's speech shows off her own cleverness. She is not an unworthy wife of Zeus, but he is not a husband who can remain faithful, no matter to whom. Hera need not necessarily be an unsympathetic character, but the unrestrained spite and violence with which she pursues grudges precludes the possibility of a pro-Hera reading. She is always entertaining, but rarely can one feel on her side.

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<sup>49</sup> Of course, the lightning bolt in this poem necessarily bears phallic connotations, as the agent of Semele's impregnation and the subject of Nonnos' opening lines specifically in that context.

<sup>50</sup> Schmiel. 1998. pp. 397-399, 403-404

Hera begins with the mundane, and sarcastically worries that a farmer may put him to the plow, which seems the most insulting to the most powerful god. She next names Selene, as she drives cattle, then Io, as she could have borne him “a baby bull horned like his father” (ταῦρον ὄμοκραίρω) (1.336). Here, the modern connotations of “horny” would likely thrill Nonnos greatly. Last, she warns Zeus to be on the lookout for Hermes, lest he spirit him away and trade him again to Apollo for a lyre, as he did in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, before she dispenses with false care and openly laments that Argos no longer lives to guard and prod Zeus “in a sorrowful pasture” (δύσβατον εἰς νομόν) (1.342). One detail of that short allusion is atypical for Nonnos. He makes chronology definite in mythological reality: Argos is already dead, slain by Hermes in the course of rescuing Io from Hera’s clutches at Zeus’ request.<sup>51</sup> This specification serves to highlight the effect of Zeus’ power as world-orderer, as well as to give insight into Dionysos’ future. The note is one instance of a concept that Ronald Newbold phrases beautifully in his 1984 article. He writes, of Nonnos’ method for making sense of the multitude of myth available during composition:

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*The salience of the whipping theme, like the other themes which will be discussed below, is not explained by the content of the mythology inherited by Nonnus. The mythology, particularly as it concerned Dionysus, features madness, confusion, blurring of boundaries, sudden shifts, authority and rebellion, sobriety and drunkenness, ecstasy and orgy, exhibitionism and voyeurism, infantile theories of sexuality and childbirth, as well as conflicts between mother and child, illusion and reality, reason and emotion. But Nonnus does not simply repeat scholarly versions of myths. He infuses them with much personal fantasy, upsets traditional mythological chronologies, and is quite original in the frequency and frenzy of the flagellant fantasies he introduces.*

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Nonnos, as the writer of a work like the *Dionysiaca*, has to choose which versions of a given story get included. His solution to the agony of selection is to fill in the spaces left between differing versions

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<sup>51</sup> Pseudo-Apollodorus gives a brief summary of the story in *Library* 2.1.3, and Ovid a much fuller and more entertaining account in 1.609-720

with his own sense for mythological innovation. His Zeus does the same with regard to the threads of fate that underlie his *kosmos*. He gives definite bounds to episodes of myth by his very preference, and when he personally participates in a myth, he collapses the many possible narrative options out of their state of uncertainty into one more or less stable fact. Of course, it would be a mistake to call anything in Nonnos “stable,” because the eddying currents that Dionysos catches mean the world is always subject to change, but it is change within a legible framework of general peace. Dionysos is not yet the kind of god whose experience has the authority to concretize myth, so Ariadne’s crown can be present in the sky even now if Nonnos would like it to be so, but the crown is a promise that one day Dionysos will be, and he will possess the power to grant apotheosis and divinely sanctioned concreteness.

Despite Hera’s obloquy, when Nonnos twirls the dramatic curtain, and returns us to Europa on the Cretan beach, it seems Zeus has heard nothing of Hera’s mocking speech, nor of Typhon’s ongoing, but now less threatening, rebellion. This is not the case, however. “It is not possible to cozen or to elude the mind of Zeus” (οὐκ ἔστι Διὸς κλέψαι νόον οὐδὲ παρελθεῖν), as Hesiod reminds us in line 613 of his *Theogony*, and as many dramaturges, from Aeschylus to Euripides affirm, “Zeus the allseeing” (Ζεὺς ὁ πανόπτας) (Aesch. *Eum.* 1045) always “finds a means of doing unpredictable things” (τῶν δ’ ἀδοκῆτων πόρον ἠΰρε) (Eur. *Bac.* 1391). Zeus occupies an extraordinarily privileged position in his world. He has mental access to all of the goings-on in the universe, and sets the agenda for all action moving forward by setting his mind in motion. Perhaps I may confidently say that Zeus occupies such a privileged position with regard to his peers, to say nothing of mere mortals, that every story that unfolds around him is the equivalent of a game to him. He alone exercises a totally free will, but he enjoys watching as the rest of the creatures under his dominion fill out the details of his imposed outline. This brief scene is a perfect example. Zeus makes quick work of Europa, who has waited so long to receive definite word on her fate. Rather than indulge her with speech, he “quits the bull-form

and runs round and round the virgin girl” (λιπὼν ταυρώπιδα μορφῆν / εἵκελος ἠιθέω περιδέδρομεν ἄζυγα κούρην) (1.344-345) while undressing and caressing her, before he “plucked the fruit of Love barely ripe” (ὄμφακα Κυπριδίων ἐδρέψατο καρπὸν Ἐρώτων) and “swelled her belly with twin progeny” (διδύμη σφριγώσσα γονῆ κυμαίνετο γαστήρ) (1.351-352).<sup>52</sup> Zeus, however, has no interest in remaining for the birth and has no stock in the children she will bear. Zeus can father many children without worrying about the consequences if one is born powerful enough to overthrow him because his children receive divine or mortal fates based on his intention at the time of impregnation. He gives Europa a stable place when he “passes over his pregnant bride with divine parturition to Asterion” (ζαθέης ὠδῖνος ἐὶν ἐγκύμονα νύμφην / κάλλιπεν Ἀστεριῶνι) (1.353-354), king of Crete. For good measure, he creates a new constellation, Taurus, to commemorate his conquest in bull form. Besides simply marking this episode as notable, the creation of the constellation also predicts Zeus’ lasting victory and domination, as Nonnos indicates in the last line of the scene, “so he was fixed fast in heaven” (ὥς ὁ μὲν ἐστήρικτο κατ’ οὐρανόν) (1.362). It is a comical image, of Zeus exerting his divine power to establish himself in the celestial order, but Nonnos uses it to signal Zeus’ coming triumph.

### 3. A mortal trickster saves the day

Zeus flies from Crete to seek the aid of a mortal, Cadmos, with whom he “devised a many-turning plot, weaving for Typhon the net of ill-spinning Fate” (ζυγήν δὲ πολύτροπον ἦρτυε βουλήν / ῥαψάμενος Τυφῶνι δυσηλακάτου λῖνα Μοίρης) (1.366-367) to regain his thunderbolts. The inclusion of

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<sup>52</sup> In other stories, including Pseudo-Apollodorus, Europa gives birth to three sons, but here Nonnos keeps the myth in its state of uncertainty. Zeus has chosen a path for Europa, but he’s already moved on, so he isn’t invested enough to give the story concrete boundaries. Nonnos doesn’t even name her sons.

a human, a musician, in the divine cataclysm is also comic, as even the gods can find themselves in a bind. Here, Zeus has a second problem: in addition to his lightning, Typhon also seems to have somehow gained possession of Zeus' sinews, which Cadmos must regain (1.493-494, 1.510-512). In a footnote to each mention of the sinews, Rose remarks on its seemingly random inclusion. He speculates that Nonnos did not understand the story he includes. I disagree, and see a plain role the introduction of the sinews plays. Nonnos wants to hold off on the final confrontation between Typhon and Zeus to build tension and to have time to include his digressions. Of course, Zeus could end a rebellion in an instant if he so chose, but he'd rather have the fun of the Cadmeian deception. While Typhon is making his ordered assault on Zeus' world order, Zeus is kept away from involvement by his focus on Europa. He finishes with Europa when he's ready to get involved in Typhon's narrative, but he's not yet ready to enter battle himself, so he devises another excuse for himself to put his mortal helper through the wringer. It doesn't matter whether there actually exists a full story Nonnos could have given us about Zeus' loss of his sinews because Zeus writes his world's narrative. As far as we're concerned, Zeus may have removed his own sinews and deposited them in Typhon's cave at the moment Nonnos mentions them. The loss could be no more than an act of rhetoric, but coming from Zeus, rhetoric is reality.

Cadmos aids Zeus by weaving a counterfeit lay for Typhon. Zeus and Pan had teamed up to dress Cadmos as a convincing shepherd with rustic pipes (1.368-376) and Zeus persuades him to take on the mission. He promises Cadmos "twofold gifts worthy of his labor" (ἄξια μόχθων / ... διπλόα δῶρα) (1.395-396), that he will make Cadmos "savior of the harmony of the world order and husband of Harmonia" (ρύτῆρα / ἁρμονίης κόσμοιο καὶ Ἄρμονίης παρακοίτην) (1.396-397) if Cadmos can give Typhon "madness from a mindenchanting song like the longing Zeus felt for Europa's bridal" (ἐχέτω φρενοθελγέος οἴστρον ἀοιδῆς / ὅσσον ἐγὼ πόθον ἔσχου ἐς Εὐρώπης ὑμεναίους). Zeus clearly wants to

see a mere mortal, though one whose family he has chosen for future promotion, create a distraction for and thereby best as terrifying an adversary as Typhon. That Cadmos' distraction will be as effective on Typhon as Europa's was on Zeus is a further dig at Typhon. Europa, to be sure, was an estimable beauty and well worth Zeus' infatuation, but Cadmos is not even a natural musician. Typhon is simply so dim that he can be charmed by the unpracticed fingers of a novice. Cadmos plays and, in fact, seduces Typhon with the beauty of his music (1.415-416). Comically enough, this terrible monster is a music fan.

In gratitude for Cadmos' beautiful song, Typhon offers him any gift he could ask, and promises to give him an apotheosis once he's in power, as well as his choice of goddesses for wife, including the virgins Athena and Artemis along with Leto, Charis, and Aprodite (1.439-480). Clearly, Typhon has no intention of maintaining any of Zeus' divine order upon taking control of Olympos, and plans to subordinate all of the goddesses, but especially Hera, to his whim. He is the dim-witted villain with high aspirations and no real plan. Nonnos is also a vigorous defender of chastity, especially that of his bacchantes, except when enacting punishment on those who affront the gods, like the nymphs Nicaia and Aura, so we can count on him to bring down a monster with such plans.

When Cadmos realizes how enamored Typhon is of his song, he craftily invents an excuse to have Typhon hand Zeus' sinews over (1.486-512). He suggests, rather than his syrinx, that Typhon listen to him play "a victory ode on sevenstring *kithara*" (ἑπτατόνου κιθάρας ἐπινίκιον ὕμνον) (1.488), and complains that Zeus jealously burnt up his own lyre's strings when he bested Apollo at playing. Of course, the reader knows that such a story is absurd; the gods are never so mild. But Typhon's dullness makes him a successful target for deception, totally unlike Zeus, and Typhon hands over the sinews. Cadmos takes the same sort of hiding space as Zeus and Typhon both did, and "covered them up in a hollow in a rock" (κατέκρυψε κοιλάδι πέτρῃ) (1.515). He then started to pipe "the daintiest

song of all” (λαρότερον μέλος) (1.519) for Typhon, who is under the impression that the song heralds his own triumph over Zeus and domination of the world-order. His song seemed like it honestly hymned “the rout of the immortals ... but he was hymning Zeus’ soon-coming victory, singing Typhon’s fate sitting neighbor to Typhon” (ἀθανάτων ἄτε φύζαν ... / ... Διὸς ἐσσομένην ἐμελίζετο γείτονα νικην / ἔζομένω Τυφῶνι μόρον Τυφῶνος ἀείδων) (1.522-24). Typhon is, thoroughly, a joke. This moment of oblivious self-mockery on his behalf is almost too absurd to imagine, but evidently Typhon truly is dim enough to sit through a song about his own demise and fail to notice. Not only does he fail to notice, but he, “being so enchanted by the song, gave his whole heart to Cadmos” (Κάδμω / θελγομένην μελέεσσιν ὄλην φρένα δῶκε) (1.533-534). Typhon seems here rather pathetic, and not at all on the path to conquering Zeus. He has already given Cadmos Zeus’ sinews and his own heart, all for only jokes at his expense. Zeus is not a prankster with much mercy.

As Cadmos entertains the beast, Zeus absconds with his lightning bolts, and “hid Cadmos in a cloud by an unseen rock” (νέφος ἔσκεπε Κάδμον ἀθηήτω παρὰ πέτρῃ) (2.6). Typhon takes no notice, however, of the theft, as he is single-mindedly focused on Cadmos’ music. Only when Cadmos himself slips away and “the melodious reed fell silent” (εὐκλάδοιο δόναξ σίγησε) (2.21) does Typhon break out of musically-charmed docility and return to his earlier capricious bellicosity. His defeat grows ever closer, but he does not appear any less dangerous in his fury at Cadmos’ humiliating deceit.

#### 4. Assault on the land

In a rage at discovering Cadmos and Zeus’ battle-gear, Typhon begins an assault on the land in general, on beasts, men, and rivers (2.27-93). His form of assault differs from those he used earlier.



Now, instead of tearing up pieces of earth and lobbing them at whatever he can hit, he begins to feast on wildlife, including wild bears, lions, serpents, and birds, of whom he enjoyed the eagle most, it being the bird of Zeus, and the domesticated ox. For drink, he swallows rivers to their beds, and leaves a surreal scene of “a naiad casting one foot in front of the other along the bottom of the thirsty stream bed” who “found her knees becoming stuck in muddy bonds” (ἀμιλλητῆρι δὲ ταρσῶ / κούρης παλλομένης παρὰ διψάδα πέζαν ἐνάβλων / σφιγγετο πηλώεντι πεπηγότα γούνατα δεσμῶ) (2.57-259). Typhon may not be able to cause much damage with Zeus’ weapons, but lest Cadmos’ trick suggest otherwise, he is still a leviathan monster with myriad heads of various beasts and a short temper. The final conflict’s resolution may already be clear, but Nonnos always cautions us to remember the unknown perils that can present themselves on the route to that resolution. Nuance arises in the details, and here, the details are horrifying for the lay farmers, shepherds, and their flocks.

After a direct and murderous assault on whatever living creatures Typhon could snatch up, he returns to his favored habit of tearing up the earth around him. In this round, however, he’s motivated by a mad anger at his deception, and he will seriously endeavor to take Zeus’ power and create his own world order. His assault is generative, to an extent, rather than simply destructive. Where before he simply hurled rocks toward enemies, hoping to strike them, this time he’ll launch his missiles toward a more productive end. Typhon is still occupied with “clefting” (σχίζομένης) (2.69), but “the missiles falling to earth rooted themselves as the footings of new self-built islands” (ἀπὸ χθονίων δὲ βελέμων / αὐτοπαγῆ ῥιζοῦτο νεηγενέων σφυρὰ νήσων) (2.75-76). Nonnos’ use of an αὐτο- compound is remarkable, because they are usually reserved for the energy that characterizes Dionysos and to which Zeus has access. Typhon has, until this point, been engaged exclusively in destruction. With the island-building experiment, Typhon begins to act in a Nonnian fashion, and Nonnos will thus give him the

benefit of the doubt, and one *αὐτο-* compound. The habit, however, is not long-lived, and Typhon soon returns to devastating foliage to no real end.

Gods lament in the aftermath for their sacred plants that came under Typhon's attack (2.81-93) and Hamadryads who've lost their trees stumble aimlessly like shell-shocked refugees, wishing for death to free them from the peril of exposure to the world (2.98-108). It is a harrowing scene, as these vulnerable creatures are forced out into the world like snails out of their shells and contemplate the possibility of sexual assault from some lusty god. That these nymphs would prefer death to unprotected engagement with the world is indicative of just of what sort are the threats they face. Sexual fear is rational among these women because there exists no barrier to protect them from capricious sexual violence.<sup>53</sup> Zeus is only interested in pursuing women, and he hasn't left their protective trees alone out of concern for their wellbeing, but because they are a part of his world order. Each tree is sacred to one divinity or another, and Zeus does not enjoy battling among the gods. He will use it to achieve certain ends in subtle ways, but he does not overturn order for the sake of overturning order. He is, if mostly pitiless, an ally of order, and without wine, order usually means relative safety in stagnation.

In Zeus' world after Typhon's assault, two Hamadryads, Pine and Laurel, can find no place of reliable safety, and consider metamorphosis into various creatures and objects that might allow them to escape uninvited male sexual attention (2.124-162), before rejecting each in turn. First they consider the form of birds, like the sisters Philomela and Procne, who were transformed into birds in order to escape violence from Tereus, spouse to Procne and rapist with a penchant for mutilation to Philomela. Laurel rejects the option because, as Tereus was also metamorphosed into a bird, even in the sky they may never be free, "lest Tereus chase on angry wing like Typhon" (*μη̄ με διώξει / καὶ Τηρεὺς περὸς*

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<sup>53</sup> Newbold 1998.

κεχολωμένος, οἷα Τυφωεύς) (2.139). Recalling Typhon’s assault on land, heavens, and sea, she dispenses with them all and begs to hide deep in the earth, but she recalls that Typhon’s snaky feet extend even deep underground. Next, she considers becoming a spring, but dispenses with that option as well, since she, a virgin, would need mingle with springs metamorphosed from non-virgins. She finally wishes to be another tree, but she is unwilling to be a tree besides the laurel, or a stone like Niobe, but she fears the bad fortune attached to her name. In the end, there is no resolution, and Nonnos moves on to set up the final combat between Zeus and Typhon. This is not a safe world, and it cannot be made safe without an innovation on a fundamental level and universal scale. It is just this innovation that Nonnos will supply.

## 5. Advantage regained

### i. Typhon’s challenge

Just before we re-enter battle, Nonnos paints a nighttime scene of the mustered, camped forces of Zeus’ world order, and a visit by Nike in Leto’s form (2.170-243). Nike does not deliver a stock prediction of victory, but a rather harsh lecture cautioning Zeus not to let Typhon’s rebellion go too far. She instructs him to safeguard Athena’s virginity by actively joining the fight, to “gather round the stormcloud again, Zeus Rainbringer” (νεφέλας συνάγειρε τὸ δεῦτερον, ὕετιε Ζεῦ) (2.213), and to save the integrity of the *kosmos*. Typhon “shakes the foundations of the word order with his hands” (τινάσσεται ἔδρανα κόσμου / χερσὶ) (1.214-215), she tells him, and has scattered the gods in fear, which is causing the “indissoluble bonds of cosmic harmony to unravel” (ἀρμονίης δ’ ἀλύτου λύτο πεισματα) (2.222). She urges Zeus to take up the mantle that made him deserving of cosmic

domination in the wake of the Titanomachy; although a Titan herself, she “does not want Titans to rule Olympos” (οὐκ ἐθέλω Τιτῆνας ἰδεῖν κρατέοντας Ὀλύμπου) (2.230) except for Zeus and his children, because they have set themselves apart from the older breed of Titans. Zeus has a superior claim to universal rule to the Titans’ because, this speech implies, he will behave in the interests of preserving “the bonds of cosmic harmony,” which includes respecting the chastity of chaste gods, so in order to show that Zeus is in fact not a god like Typhon, Nike demands that he stop watching while events play out and seriously address the problem. Nike finishes cajoling Zeus and “Sleep whirled his shadowy wing and laid all of breathing nature to rest” (σκιοειδὲς ἐὼν πτερόν Ὕπνος ἐλίξας / εὔνασεν ἀμπνείουσαν ὄλην φύσιν) (2.237-238), but Zeus alone is left awake to contemplate Nike’s words.

Apparently, Zeus takes Nike’s speech to heart, and first thing in the morning, Zeus is present to hear and counter Typhon’s boasting claims. Typhon stakes a claim to a new cosmic order that he will bring into being by trampling the status of the Olympians and the order that Zeus has given to the world. In fact, Typhon’s opening remark is “My hands, crush the house of Zeus, shake the foundations of the world order, shatter the divine self-coiling bar of Olympos, and dragging down the heavenly pillar make Atlas quake and flee” (Χεῖρες ἐμαί, Διὸς οἶνον ἀράξατε, πυθμένα κόσμου / σεισατε σὺν μακάρεσσι, καὶ αὐτοέλικτον Ὀλύμπου / κόψατε θεῖον ὄχηα, καὶ αἰθερῆς ἐπὶ γαίῃ / κίονος ἐλκομένης φυγέτω δεδονημένος Ἄτλας) (2.258-261). His plan seems fairly straightforward, if unimaginative. That Typhon uses the word αὐτοέλικτος in his speech suggests that Nonnos is very conscious of what sort of energy characterizes Zeus’ thinking, and positions Typhon to be its explicit opposite. Typhon’s goal is not to construct a livable world, but to “mix air with earth, water with fire, sea with Olympos” (ἦέρι μίξατε γαῖαν, ὕδωρ πυρὶ, πόντον Ὀλύμπῳ) (2.272) and to cause as much destruction to the Olympians he resents. He represents the threat disorganizing chaos poses to a world order. Disorganizing chaos actively undermines systems rather than allowing them to form and

multiply spontaneously. Rather than employing generative chaos to form varied systems that reflect Nonnos' *poikilia*, Typhon seeks to reduce the world to undifferentiated rubble.

Here we see Typhon's catastrophist position laid bare; he disputes Zeus' rightful authority over world-ordering, on the basis that Zeus is a sky-god and the Olympians fit his mold, and are thus alien to the chthonic realm, which he seeks to make supreme by reducing all the world's substance to a mass of mud. His battle against Zeus is a battle in the sky, but his goal is Xenophanean mixture, an inundation of the world in confused mud. He seeks to bring all of the natural world under his power, including the winds and the Blessed Ones, who will cede their position of power and become toiling slaves to the child of Earth rather than exercising their particular power freely. As bitterly recalling his first failure with the thunderbolt, Typhon claims that he "will forge another younger and mightier image of lightning, with larger fire and countless flashes" (ἀντιτύπους δὲ / κρείσσονας ὀψιγόνους πολυφρεγγεῖ μείζονι πυρσῶ / ἄστροπὰς ἐτέρας χαλκεύσομαι) (2.344-346). This too strikes a comic note, as he tries to mimic and improve upon Zeus' sky-weapon, as if it were the bolts themselves and not his ineptitude that caused his lightning to fizzle. He vows to "build another heaven on high, broader and more excellent, the eighth, and furnish it with sparkling stars" (εὐρύτερον δὲ / ὄγδοον οὐρανὸν ἄλλον ὑπέριτερον ὑψόθι τεύξω / ἄστρασι φαιδροτέροισι κεκασμένον) (2.347-8) and to "produce another race of young many-necked gods" (πολυπερὲς ἄλλο φυτεύσω / ἄϊμα νέων μακάρων πολυαύχενον) (2.351-352). Typhon is fond of a motif of overcoming the Olympians, but his plan for afterward is not entirely clear. He seems to be trying to plan a wholesale revolution of the *kosmos* beyond one of Zeus' deluges; under Typhon, an entirely new type of world will come to be, but unlike the world under Dionysos, it will not be a world worth inhabiting.

The comedy in this episode is cast against terror. If not for Typhon's fumbling ineptitude, a total cataclysm might seize the world, and life become impossible for humans. A Typhon actually

capable of wielding Zeus' thunderbolt would be a real threat to Zeus and his order. As yet, the world is shaken up and lacerated, but it remains uniform. Typhon will fight on Olympian turf, although he is of the earth himself. Typhon's inability to carry out his plans is clear from early on; even with Zeus distracted and his weapons seized, he can do little but frighten constellations, who themselves fight back against him. His battle is futile, but its futility does not inoculate the world against his violence.

ii. **Κρονίδης δ' ἐγέλασεν ἀκούων**

In the actual battle between the two, the comedy plays out through Typhon's ineffectual violence and Zeus' ease of dispensing with it. In response to almost a hundred uninterrupted lines of Typhon's boasting, Zeus "laughed aloud" (ἐγέλασεν ἀκούων) (2.356). Once Zeus has actively joined the battle, there is very little left to do. Typhon may delude himself, but Zeus is fully aware that all of Typhon's threats of a new world order are bluster and Typhon lacks anything approaching the divine strength to overpower him. Zeus' practical joke seems to be, upon reflection, an incredibly cruel one. Zeus could have dispatched Typhon within moments of his arrival, but instead, this all-seeing god let the monster run rampant for hundreds of lines while he preoccupied himself with Europa and observing rather than fighting Typhon. In that time, mortals, beasts, flora, and even celestial bodies received terrifying injuries. Gods fled the world and Typhon left the landscape cleft, torn, scorched, and waterlogged, all while Zeus waited. It was an entertaining show for him, because true danger cannot touch him, but for those who rely on the maintenance of his world order, it was cataclysm. Zeus' single laugh seals Typhon's fate, because despite Typhon's assault, Zeus can animate the very world-constituent threads of fate which obey his will. Zeus will reveal how unevenly matched Typhon is with him, but he will still drag the combat out (2.364-563), seemingly just to taunt him.

Zeus begins to hammer Typhon only once he's gathered his company with him and made himself look the part of supreme deity. He “fixed up Rout with the lightning and strengthened Terror with the thunderbolt and terrified Typhon” (ἀστεροπῆ δὲ / στήσε Φόβον, καὶ Δεῖμον ἐπεστήριξε κεραυνῶ / δεῖμα φέρων Τυφῶνι) (2.416-418) and launches a devastatingly effective campaign of heavenly missiles, “sometimes he equipped himself with a lightning-flash, sometimes with a thunderbolt, another time he attacked with thunder, another time, freezing a rainy downpour to pour out bastard rocky hail in a torrent of missiles” (πῆ μὲν στεροῆσι κορύσσετο, πῆ δὲ κεραυνῶ, / ἄλλοτε δὲ βροντῆσιν ἐπέχραεν, ἄλλοτε δ' ὄμβρων / πηγνυμένης προχέων πετρούμενα νῶτα χαλάζης / ὄμβρηροῖς βελέεσσι) (2.424-427). Typhon has no defense against Zeus' assaults. He tries to cast water on him to extinguish his lightning, but “through the water the ethereal fire sparked furiously and the thirsty water seethed and smoked, and the liquid essence dried in the red-hot mass” (δι' ὕδατος αἰθερίη φλόξ / λαβροτέρω σπινθῆρι, καὶ ἔζεσε διψιον ὕδωρ / αἰθαλόεν, διερῆ δὲ δύσις τερσαίνεται μύδρω) (2.445-447). Typhon has no hope against Zeus' tools. As well, he has the four winds buffeting him from all sides with blistering hot and frigid air, and Zeus' hailstorm is knocking pieces off of him. As Zeus sends attack after attack, Typhon begins literally falling apart. When Zeus sent “sharp-pointed pillars of water that smashed thick upon Typhon's head, frozen javelins shore his hands off as by a knife” (Γιγαντείοισι δὲ πυκνοὶ / κίονες ὕδατόεντες ἐπερρῆγγυντο καρῆνοις / ὄξυβελεῖς, παλάμαι δὲ Τυφώος, οἷα μαχαίρη, / ἠερίω τέμνοντο χαλαζήεντι βελέμνω) (2.427-430). The image is jarring, and makes it clear that Typhon is not long for the earth. Zeus will continue to toy with him, in a near neighbor passage.

Typhon simply does not know when he is beaten. Even after the impressive display of weather warfare in 416-430, Typhon still thinks he can compete with Zeus by casting water at his thunderbolts. After Zeus thwarts him there, he resorts once again to tearing up boulders and hurling them at Zeus.

Unlike the constellations, however, Zeus will not be the least bit harmed by these missiles, and will dispense with them with the greatest of ease. The first time Typhon hurls a rock at Zeus, “he gave a small puff from the corner of his lips, and the gentle puff turned the circling craggy rock aside” (χειλεῖ δ’ ἄκρω / Ζεὺς ὀλίγου φύσησε, καὶ ὑψικρημνον ἐοῦσαν / λεπταλέον φύσημα παρέτραπε κυκλάδα πέτρην) (2.453-455). The second time, Zeus easily dodges it and burnt it with a lightning bolt for good measure. The third time, Zeus catches the projectile while spinning into his catch, and, pinwheeling, sends it right back to Typhon “like a bouncy ball” (σφαῖραν ἅτε θρώσκουσαν) (2.465) and hit him square. The fourth time, the boulder touches Zeus’ aegis and explodes.

The image of the ball playfully thrown about recalls the mirth of the bacchantes dismembering Pentheus, another story of a deity violently defending his claim to authority against a less powerful and short-sighted adversary. Here, too, an impertinent youth attempts to do violence by might, and is brushed off: Zeus puffs away, easily dodges, catches and returns, blasts, and even passively demolishes Typhon’s missiles and Dionysos shrugs off Pentheus’ chains and flits from his jail. Lately born of the earth, Typhon too is a young “man” of sorts, but he will not even receive the human treatment Pentheus does. The connection at first conjures a memory of the *Bacchae*, though the reader will discover that Nonnos himself treats the story, and consciously echoes Euripides’ plot while expanding it. His echo is a reminder of the explosive cyclicity Dionysos’ birth introduces to the world, and its constant renewal through new treatments of Dionysos. The sky-battle with Typhon is one in a series of melancholic events that mark the pre-stable, cataclysmic state of the world. As Zeus himself laments, “The primeval world will sorrow still, until I be delivered of one child” (7.78-9).

The battle reads as absurdly comic because Typhon is so hopeless, thankfully for us. Zeus maintains unquestioned domination of the world order, but he doesn’t choose to reign in the name of order; his systems still run in multiplicity. That is to say, the systems of divine action, of justice and



fate, fail to adhere to any predictable common metric because they arise from spontaneous divine usurpations and random acts of violence. In light of the unreliability of the gods, Zeus will rear Dionysos as a proper, joyful, but sound of mind god to give men some defense against caprice. Zeus will be the bulwark against universal collapse, but without Dionysos, he is as likely as any to commit capricious violence as any other of the Olympians. Zeus uses his rearing of Dionysos as a chance to practice a soberer mode of associating with the world. No longer must Zeus' frustration find its outlet in lashing out violently at the world. Zeus will become a god who maintains the boundaries of the world order, and allows flux to take the lead around the edges and in the details.

## Persephone's Prophecy

Following the settlement of Thebes by Cadmos in Book 5, Nonnos lays out the tragic plan for the Cadmeian family. He begins with the death of Actaion, in which episode Nonnos also attaches an attribute to the family: horns. When Autoñoë discovers the body of her son, Nonnos tells us that she “grasped by loving hand the sweet horn” (5.547), and in just a few lines projects the birth of a second “bullformed” (ταυροφύεζ) (5.564) Dionysos by the consorting of “many-turning” (πολυέλικτος) (5.567) Zeus in his dragon’s (presumably horned) form. This birth by Semele, he promises, will be of “a more brilliant union” (5.562), and will indemnify the world for the loss of Zagreus. Zagreus, it is worth mentioning, has not yet been born. Nonnos adorns for unlucky Persephone a portentous bridal episode indeed.

With that for prelude, Nonnos paints for us two scenes of Zeus’ voyeurism.

First, he watches Persephone watching herself in a bronze mirror (5.594-600), and again Nonnos reveals his obsession with false images, of mimicry, and of metamorphosis. The mirror creates an illusion, as Hera will madden Dionysos and Dionysos will madden women in Thebes and Argos, as well as Pentheus, whom he makes to hallucinate vividly. The mirror creates a double, a mimic copy, as Dionysos is to be a copy of Zagreus. But, as only one of the copies can ever really exist, so Zagreus will have to die for Dionysos to manifest. Zagreus, we will learn, takes up the mantle of greatness almost from the first, and thus makes himself a threat to Zeus. He is born a master, and we will find Nonnos apprehensive again and again of the arrogance of those who receive too much power too quickly. The childhood of Dionysos will give Zeus another chance to cultivate a responsible son. Here, as everywhere, minutiae signify. Persephone prophesies as she gazes at her comely reflection, as her “reflection,” as Zagreus’ is Dionysos, is Semele. Nonnos holds the coming process of metamorphosis frozen in these lines, while outwardly meditating on Zeus’ present lust, so turning the reader’s gaze

aside from the action of the poem to a sort of contemplation as Persephone experiences. Like Zagreus, Persephone will differ from her mimic. Where Zagreus is immediately powerful, Dionysos is forced to wait, to learn, and to practice in order to act like a god. Where Persephone is graceful and protective of her shy maidenhood, Semele will haughtily demand to meet Zeus in his true form and welcome motherhood.

Second, Nonnos gives a scene wherein Zeus catches sight of Persephone undressing to bathe in a stream after having left laboring at her loom and becomes maddened with desire for her (5.601-618). Unlike Actaion in the preceding passage, Zeus can espy divine maidens to his heart's content, as he holds the scepter of universal power.<sup>54</sup> Nonnos then makes an interesting turn. He affirms Zeus' status and continues his association with horns by recalling Zeus' engendering of the horned Cyprian centaurs (5.611-615) after having been similarly, but less extremely, maddened by the beauty of Aphrodite. Nonnos imbues the family with quite the charged attribute in the horns. While on Actaion, they are the downy horns of a young stag, rendered benign by his death, on Dionysos they signal a characteristic of the god, who is often called "bullroarer." Nonnos recalls "the stock of well-horned dichromatic Centaurs flourished" (Φηρῶν εὐκεράων διδυμόχορος ἦνθεε φύτλη) (5.615) on Cyprus, to auspicious effect. In Nonnos' world, we must remember always that narrative choices bear prophetic significance. In this small section, Nonnos foretells the action of the poem. First, the family of Cadmos, and indeed the whole world, will suffer. We will see this in the aftermath of Zagreus' mutilation. Next, a child will come of a "brilliant" sexual union, as Semele's in lightning. Then, the child will be fostered by the many coils of Zeus. This is almost plainly a conflation of the person of Zeus and the threads of prophetic fate that comprise his world. Through that upbringing, Zeus will

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<sup>54</sup> Nonnos plainly states, in the course of the battle of Zeus and Typhon, that "high heaven itself stood the prize, and on the lap of Nike sat the scepter and throne of Zeus for spoils of the struggle" (2.361-363). His power as world-orderer is unassailable and complete, as Typhon learned, no matter how triumphant one may seem against him at any moment.

cultivate a colorful and fruitful generation, which description seems to conflate Dionysos as the horned agent of fruitful flourishing and the purple fruit itself. Both are endeavors of Zeus for the purpose of improving the world for the sake of its sentient beings.

Nonnos' inclusion of a story wherein Zeus is sexually subverted is amusing, though it carries a deeper meaning, as Nonnos' digressions are designed to. Zeus' will here cannot *really* be avoided, but details of events may work out in one way or another, depending on the choices of involved characters. Zeus has a generative sexual experience after his infatuation with Aphrodite, but it's just with the ground. That motif recalls the manner by which Aphrodite was conceived: by indirect (and macabre) sexual union with the sea. Aphrodite manages to escape from Zeus' lust with her physical integrity intact, but Zeus still completes the course of his sexual interest with her in mind. Nonnos proceeds in this manner for the whole story of the generation of Dionysos, teasing the outline but creating anticipation by playing with details. He creates a world whose bounds comprise the milky threads of prophecy. Viewed from far off, the outline is clear, but where lies the fun in clarity, Nonnos asks. Nonnos, as he himself declares early on in the poem, has endeavored to write a real epic, and he relishes the minutiae of experience. His epic has the form of Zeus himself, that of a mazy dance (πολυέλικτος), glittering in its scaly coils.

With this, Nonnos concludes on the voyeurism of Zeus and gives us Demeter, trembling with apprehension for the fate of her daughter. She flies to the house of Astraïos, the god of prophecy (δαίμονος ὀμφήεντος) at the opening of the book (6.5-16), to find some means of saving Persephone. Astraïos amusingly foresees her visit, rather than by prophecy, by the information of Eosphoros; however, the animation of the morning star to act as messenger (ἤγγειλεν) (6.18) for Astraïos associates him intimately with the very substance of the world. Not only, then, does Astraïos have prophetic visual access to the threads of fate, but he can call upon the subordinate units of the heavens, which

he uses to read prophecy, to do his bidding. Astraios, then, seems to be someone very near to Zeus, rather than in power in rapport. Zeus gives form to the threads that underlie the *kosmos* and Astraios reads the tapestry. At times he even seems to tug lightly on a stitch here or there for response without upsetting the arrangement.

Eosphoros finds Astraios describing prophetic shapes in dark dust on his table (6.19-23). Nonnos will give us several glances into the methods of divination Astraios employs, but never a whole picture. Astraios' described shapes must serve some function, but Nonnos does not reveal it to us. They seem to indicate the connection between the physical world (and shapes, celestial courses, &c. within) and the threads of fate, legible to the knowing Astraios. They appear resonant with the types of mystical drawings common to later alchemy and Kabbalah, both traditions in which universal designs may be made legible by reading reality through a lens of omnisignificance.<sup>55</sup> Keeping those practices in mind can help illuminate the sort of ideas with which Nonnos is working. This is the equivalent of a mystical text, where, for example, mundane narrative belies a series of divine names of power. Every story in Nonnos has meaning for the whole, and every story's placement signifies.

Astraios leaves the table and greets Demeter (6.23-31), offering her cups of nectar, but she refuses, burdened with worry for her daughter. He gathers the winds and his command of Πειθῶ (6.34) to lighten her spirits by throwing her a party. Euros holds out cups and pours nectar, Notos holds the water for hand-washing, Boreas supplies the ambrosia, and Zephyros plays a “womanish” (θηλυς) (6.43) tune on springtime reeds. Eosphoros reënters to plait flower garlands and Hesperos holds aloft a torch and dances whirling around (ἐλελιζετο) (6.47) with “curving foot” (ταρσῶ ... κκαμπύλον) (6.48). Nonnos here remarks that Hesperos is an escort of Eros, and well-practiced in the bridal dance. The procession of the winds with their tasks create a thoroughly divine feast. Nectar and

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<sup>55</sup> Elman 1993

ambrosia are the stock food, of course, but they are separated by water with which to wash. The reader, however, might not immediately suppose this is the case. When Dionysos brings with viticulture to the world, feasts will unfold similarly, but the water will be for mixing with wine, his divine drink for mortals. For now, though, divine order is intact as it has been, and the gods simply wash up. Nonnos hints at the queerness of the innovation to come with his remark as to Zephyros' feminine tune on the pipes. Pipes, as we know, are typical instruments of rustic revelrous gods like Dionysos and Pan, and it will be a recurrent criticism of Dionysos that he is a womanish man. For now, though, Dionysos is unknown to the world, and Astraios' banquet is successful in soothing Demeter's worry. She supplicates him traditionally, left hand on his "ancient" (γεραιοῦ) (6.52) knees and right grasping his beard, hoping to find some comfort in a prophecy, and he assents. Nonnos has already given her a prophecy, though she didn't know to look deeply enough to find it.

Nonnos gives us a rapid-fire account of Astraios' divination, and includes some humorous imagery in describing the physical routine. First, he sets up Persephone's horoscope, fixing the exact moment of her birth, all while counting the years of her life back and forth on his fingers in a "double-yoked shuffle palm to palm" (ἐν παλάμης παλάμη διεμέτρεε διζυγι παλμῶ) (6.63). Next, with the aid of a servant, he hoists onto a chest a revolving globe to represent the universe and investigates the courses of the Zodiac, describing the conjunction of Earth and Sun productive of a lunar eclipse and looking for the suitors about which Demeter worries, "doubting Ares most" (Ἄρεα διζετο μάλλον) (6.81). Ares, we know, poses no risk to Persephone, so Astraios' focus on him seems odd. Lines like these are those that incline critical readers of Nonnos to conclude that he is carelessly baroque in his writing, and sticks this in simply to fill the metrical requirement. If, however, we remember Nonnos' wont to mislead, the line becomes a joke. Ares cleverly represents both the opposite (in temperament) of the joyful Zagreus/Dionysos and an inferior in strength to Zeus, who will in fact be Persephone's wooer. Nonnos calls Ares to mind in order to draw an encomiastic distinction between the world as

it is currently and the world as it shall be once Zeus has brought Dionysos into the world. Zeus excels Ares in combat, wielding universal dominion, and Dionysos will excel Ares in utility for mankind. Even in war, for the most part Nonnos leaves Ares behind, as Ares characterizes Homeric epic, which Nonnos seeks to supplant with his new curecare epic.

Aristaios, having reckoned the celestial courses, offers Demeter a “triple oracle” (τριπλόον ὄυφαίης) (6.89). First, he warns her against a wooer at the time of the lunar eclipse. Second, he predicts that the “counterfeit” (νόθον) bridegroom will come unseen and half-monster (θηρομιγῆ), as evinced by Ares walking by the Paphian in the sky, and the Dragon rising with them both (6.97-98). Here Nonnos makes a constellation play double duty. On the one hand, the Dragon is just another constellation with mystical significance. On the other hand, it will be Zeus in the form of a dragon who will seduce Persephone. Nonnos misleads while he impishly suggests. Third, he assures Demeter that through the union she will “deliver fruits from desolate land” (χθονὶ καρπὸν ὀπάσσεις ἀτρυγέτω) (6.100-101) and be known for having bestowed bounty. Nonnos here reveals a bit of a tender side. It may be easy to forget that side while reading his gory accounts of battle or the discomfiting passages of sexual predation, but he is equally capable of touching sentimentality. Demeter, he assures, will receive credit for Dionysos’ birth and the boon it will bring, even though it is her daughter who will bear Zagreus, and Zagreus is only the first iteration of Dionysos. The bounty of his birth here spills over even to the parents of the parents. This superlative again seems to resonate with the encomiastic elements of the poem, as Dionysos so excels other gods by bringing honor even to his sort-of, spiritual grandmother. Demeter remains worried about Persephone, and takes precautions to avoid her seduction by Zeus, but Astraios’ prophecy will play out as he gives it, and we as readers are assured that she will find comfort eventually.

Demeter, upon hearing Astraios' prophecy, experiences a mixed reaction. Nonnos tells us that "she smiled and groaned" (ἔστεινε μειδιόωσα) (6.107). Nonnos uses this double-experience to express the condition of those compelled by Zeus' plan to lose something but to receive great recompense multiple times in the poem, at especially emotional moments of personal dedication. Another of those moments will come as Dionysos receives the prophecy of his beloved Ampelos' death, but the promise of the grapevine that he will become. Nonnos holds his characters suspended in the experience of emotion. He allows the weight of his words to settle on Demeter (6.103-107) and as the implications of each part of the prophecy strike her, she becomes at once overcome with grief for the ineluctable loss of her daughter's maidenhood and hopeful for the fruits that will come of the loss. Her mixed emotion seems to signal the small tug of destiny on the mind of one who finds oneself compelled by it but remains defiant. Indeed, Demeter will proceed to defend her daughter's maidenhood as best she can, even though she knows she will be unsuccessful. Zeus' lust is inescapable because his lust becomes the fabric of reality that Astraios can read. We see that Zeus' desire physically re-orders the course of the heavens, and presents a legible oracle to the god of prophecy.

Again caught in her emotion, she flies back home to prepare her daughter's defenses. Amusingly, Nonnos tells us that she goes "to the dragon's manger" (ἐχιδναίη παρὰ φάτνῃ) (6.109) and fetches to accompany her the very creatures whose kin will ravish her daughter. Perhaps she is thinking of outmatching the bridegroom-to-be with two dragons against one. She yokes them and sets off in a black cloud, Persephone in tow, for her chosen hiding place. Boreas, who had before offered her ambrosia at Astraios' feast, now "roars thundercrashing against her car" (κτύπον ἀντικέλευθον ἐπιβρομέοντος ἀπ' ἡνῆ) (6.115), as though acting still on behalf of Astraios to cajole her into line with the prophecy. In the end, though, he assents to her "monster-ruling scourge" (θηρονόμῳ μάστιγι) (6.116) and she drives her team on expertly, on past the island of the Curetes where Zeus was hidden



as an infant and as Dionysos will be hidden as well, to Syracuse, and a grotto of the nymphs well-hidden. Her precautions would be, we know, for naught, so the tenderness with which she prepares the spot for Persephone tugs at the heartstrings. She places the dragons flanking the door like guard dogs, and leaves inside her nurse Calligeneia with all her baskets and everything Persephone could want to spin on the loom as she pleases. We recall from Zeus' voyeurism above that Persephone is often given to spinning at the loom, and in this mother's small gesture we see a gentle sentimentality that allows us to share in the despair of a mother at the foretold loss of her daughter's innocence.

Demeter then leaves her car in the care of the nymphs and departs. This choice may seem at first incongruous, as one may imagine that a mother in her condition would want to stay by Persephone's side to defend her, but Nonnos effects more empathy by his narrative choice. Now, Demeter seems to have accepted that her work has been futile and Persephone, despite her best efforts, will fall prey to Zeus. As Dionysos will display when he accepts the loss of Ampelos, Demeter needs space from her daughter. It is enough that she knows the fate, but to see it herself would be too much. Nonnos leaves the reader with the knowledge that Demeter, the most devoted of mothers, unwillingly leaves her daughter to a certain fate, and we despair with her. In fact, the piteous quality of the scene is so strong that Nonnos himself is drawn to address Persephone in lamentation (6.154-156). Nonnos as always manufactures in this scene an immersion in emotional poignancy.

Zeus enters after a metamorphosis, and Nonnos emphasizes the coiling nature of his movement (6.157-158) as he enters the cave. As he goes, he lulls the other dragons to sleep. Of course, there's no stopping Zeus with something as simple as a dragon, especially after he's bested a behemoth like Typhon. His act of sexual union is surprisingly chaste: a gentle lick of her body (*γαμίαις γενέσσει δέμας λιχμάζετο κόβρης μείλιχος*) (6.162, 164). With that, the seed of Zagreus is planted, and Persephone swells and delivers the infant Zagreus, whom Nonnos describes as "a living offspring of

fruit” (γονόεντι τόκῳ). Indeed he is both the fruit of her womb and will be instrumental in bringing the divine fruit of grapes to mankind. Zagreus is born a “horned babe” (κερόεν βρέφος) (6.165), and again Nonnos displays the family attribute.

Nonnos means to associate Zagreus with Dionysos closely, but to give us an idea of why it’s best that Dionysos came second as Dionysos. As soon as Zagreus is born, Nonnos tells us that he “ascended heaven and climbed on his own atop Zeus’ throne” (ὄς Διὸς ἔδρης μοῦνος ἐπουρανίης ἐπεβήσατο) (6.165-166), holding Zeus’ thunderbolts easily in his hand. He is the worst of Zeus’ fears: a rival in natural divine power. As much as Zeus delights in this creation, it poses a significant risk to him. He can, however, bear this child again, under different circumstances, as the orderer of the universe, in accordance with the prophecy that courses through the lines of this poem from the outset.

And so, Nonnos tells us, “Not for long did he hold Zeus’ throne” (οὐδὲ Διὸς θρόνον εἶχεν ἐπὶ χρόνον) (6.169). In a somewhat confusing passage, Nonnos describes the trick of the Titans, at Hera’s behest, to slaughter Zagreus. The Titans “smeared their round faces with chalk” (γύψῳ χρυσθέντες ... κύκλα προσώπου) (6.169-170) and while Zeus is distracted by a false reflection of Zagreus in a mirror they cut his limbs. At first it seems like this is it, as Nonnos is not unfamiliar with allowing a long buildup of drama to culminate in a feverish pace of action. But instead Zagreus seems to slip from their grasp, and he employs his characteristic defense, which is metamorphosis. He at first assumes the form of Zeus with aegis (6.177), then old Kronos, then a baby, then a beautiful youth, then a roaring lion, then a horse, then a serpent darting out to entwine (περιπλοκόν) the neck of a Titan in coils, then a tiger, and finally a roaring bull “butting the Titans with his sharp horns” (θηγαλή Τιτῆνας ἀνεσπέλιξε κεραιῆ) (6.199). At this, Hera herself roars (ἔβρεμεν) a stop to the transformations and Zagreus collapses, upon which the Titans go to work cutting him apart. The catalogue of transformations recalls the catalogue of Proteus’ transformations at the open of Book 1. Nonnos

includes a catalogue of metamorphoses for Zagreus' death to signal that the essential characteristic of the divinity Zeus is endeavoring to bring into the world through Zagreus and later Dionysos is change.

Zeus is deluded through this process, so his anger upon finding his child dismembered is justified. Although in reality prophecy in the end ties back to his will, and the events of the world will play out as he plans them, he has given himself a comfortable amount of plausible deniability. If we grant that Zeus has the power that Nonnos says he has, then there is in reality no way for Zeus to be deceived, so we must interrogate every apparent deception to determine whether it is in fact a course of events productive of Zeus' ends.

## The Deluge

*Avant le deluge, l'incendie.* In retaliation for the dismemberment of his precocious son, Zeus attacks the very Earth in punishment for her having birthed the Titans, locks the Titans in Tartaros, and sends the land up in conflagration (6.208-223). This scene, as the battle of Zeus and Typhon, is a tempting fruit for the harvest of a historical catastrophist. Both scenes, as well, are instrumental in Zeus' decision to offer mankind some relief from the toils of life. These scenes surpass toil, though. Zeus burns up the trees, the lands, even the seas and streams, until Oceanos cries out in lamentation and he relents (6.224-228). He relents, however, by ushering in a universal deluge, which reaches the upper limits of the atmosphere, reaching up even to touch Selene's seventh zone of the heavens (6.335-6). The images are, at first, comic: Nereids transform into Oreads, Echo finds herself paddling in open water, sea-lions and dolphins meet with boars, squids stalk hares in the hills, and Nereus pals around with Pan in mischief (11.259-78). The scene quickly turns from frivolity to consequence, as the torrent renders "drowned men, swollen in their wet death, many of the men heaped one on top of another, floating down the river hauled along by the strong current" (11.279-281). Among them we see the boar, no longer cavorting. The mountains and the valleys are all made watery graveyards choked with the bodies of the drowned. As Zeus suffers for not being able to spend his time with little Zagreus, so he will make the world suffer before he resolves to bring Dionysos' curecare to mankind.

This is not the form, I assume, Oceanos expected the abatement of Zeus' flames to take. Zeus has taken pity on the innocent victims of his projected anger, but the form of his pity is an inverse cataclysm. It is as though he is reminding the survivors that even pity can be painful, and that the natural state of the world is painful. He does eventually relent from the deluge as well, not thoroughly discussed and effected by Poseidon, and there is an eerily quick transition back to fertile expansion.

Nonnos notes Deucalion making his way across the waves in his ark, rather comically escaping the flood by making a “air-faring voyage” (ἔχων πλόον ἠεροφοίτην) (6.368), as the sky is now full of the waves, and he is said to sail with “a selfguiding ark without set course, with no moor or anchor, selfmoving scored the wintry waves” (στόλος αὐτοκέλευθος ἄτερ ποδός, ἄμμορος ὄρμου, / λάρνακος αὐτοπόροιο κατέγραφε δύσινφον ὕδωρ) (6.369-70). We see here more evidence of Nonnos’ interest in apparent contradiction, in cutting or scoring surfaces, and in recursive or self-generating action, as Newbold and Schmiel detail.

Just after the mention of Deucalion, Zeus realizes that if he pushes the deluge further, he will dissolve the structure of the universe forever and instructs Poseidon to strike a cleft in the earth to drain all the water. We are left to imagine a tremendous whirlpool here, which further reinforces Nonnos’ penchant for swirling motion. Immediately, the mud dries out, and “once again nature laughed” (φύσις ἄψ ἐγέλασσε) (6.387) and the air is full of fluttering birds. So ends Book 6, and Book 7 begins with the restarted work of Eros to populate the world. Nature again takes on orderly aspect as the four elements return to regular combination. But the world is not yet all healed. The work of Zeus is still not yet done because of Hera’s interference. He here begins to plan a new Dionysos who will, by means of wine, bring joy to mankind, and a release from the worry of the toil of life (7.14). His wine will grant access to the physical manifestation of the dynamic cycles that pervade Nonnos’ world: the dance. Wine is a divine liquid because it produces energy and choral spirit seemingly *ex nihilo* and inspires the imbiber to surrender his structured self to the apparent chaos of Protean transformation. Zeus is eager to give that gift to mankind.

## Sweet hope kindled

Nonnos chooses to end his tale of his Deluge and Deucalion's voyage on a particularly Heraclitean note. Although it is couched in the framework of Zeus' world-saving decree to Poseidon to strike a peak and allow the floodwaters to subside, the process follows Heraclitus' ideas of an elemental exchange.<sup>56</sup> Importantly, Zeus must bring on this draining before the combination of elements is forever ruined. Aion threatens to allow the entire world to fall apart if Zeus cannot keep himself from getting the world involved in his dangerous hobbies. As soon as the Sun hits the waters, "the rivers thickened" (παχυνομένων δὲ ῥοάων) (6.381), and earth again separated from water to form land, in fruitful exchange. Heraclitus is a felicitous direction for a nod from Nonnos, because his revolutionary vision of a universal world-order, a *kosmos*,<sup>57</sup> supports nicely Nonnos' conception of a universal world-order bounded by the threads of the lightning god.

Zeus punishes the world for Hera's spiteful organization of the murder of Zagreus. He floods the world and shares his tremendous suffering with those who had no stake in it. He is far from a Christian god, and will never assume suffering to assuage others'. Dionysos endures suffering at the loss of Ampelos, but even at that moment, he is conflicted, and Ampelos is not a true sacrifice. He also suggests the sort of innovation that Dionysos will bring, that "delicious wine, another drink like nectar self-distilled" (VII.77). That it is self-distilled, *autokhutoi*, as Aion the unbounded is self-begotten, *autosporē*, indicates the self-repeating, ordered cycles to which Dionysos' gifts of wine and revelrous dance will bring access. The world order, however, is still marked by tension, by contradiction, and by suffering. The world is so by default; the condition of life can only be improved, and Dionysos' dance will attempt to do the work of bringing the whole into gentler focus. The dance will allow a reveler to enter a state of transformative consciousness. That is, a state of consciousness

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<sup>56</sup> Heraclitus B31.

<sup>57</sup> Heraclitus B30

both where one feels one's own boundaries collapsing into flux and where one sees transformation happening before one's eyes. Wine and revelry somehow grant access to a state where the world's details appear to break down and provide a space for creative exploration to fill in details and layer narratives over one another. After Zeus relents from the Deluge, he has it in his mind to bring those spiritual technologies to the world he had not always treated so gently.

Zeus approaches Semele in Book 7 in a variety of forms; first a figure evocative of an Egyptian god, a man with a lowing horned bull's head; next, a shaggy lion; then a panther; last of all a young man done up with serpents and purple ivy in his hair, looking every bit the young Bacchos (7.319-27). Here Zeus grants insight into the primal Bacchic ritual, as though an errant Aeschylus: the loss of identity that intoxication brings. In the womb Dionysos is immediately himself, and infects his mother with bacchantic tendencies; she jumps at the sound of cymbals, lows mimicry at bulls, and dances and sings, joined by the unborn god, to the tune of herdsmen's pipes (8.20-30). The dance is central to the experience of Dionysian rhythm. In the dance is the recurring helical course of circles in space. Dancers circle one another, turn back in their courses, and move in ordered synchronicity. In the dance as well can be found a loss, or at least blurring, of identity. Fundamentally, a dancer is no longer the person who is doing the dancing, but a role, a function, a set of instructions performed without individual variance, but in conformity to harmony. Even the most chaotic dance is deeply ordered. In fact, the most apparently-chaotic dance is the most orderly and systematic, as it requires intense planning of motion to achieve and maintain fluid balance. Balance arises from the tension of the muscles and of motion, of bodies and arcing swings.

Dionysos' birth brings a great deal of backward-turning stress as well; his affair with Semele brings the lasting wrath of Hera, goaded by Envy, as it trespasses their domestic order. In her anger over Zeus' wooing of Semele, Hera happens upon the fiery gear of her husband abandoned (8.267-

283) and unmans her husband from a distance, but she does so in a fundamentally different way than she did when Zeus was delayed with Europa. She asks the personified bolts “has my cloudgatherer Zeus left you behind too?” (σὲ λέλοιπεν ἐμὸς νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς;) (8.270), and shares the discontent of her unhappy relationship with these other of Zeus’ neglected possessions. When she cajoled Zeus for his pursuit of Europa, she taunted him with the possibility that he would be abducted in his bull form and feel an unwelcome yoke. That episode was amusing because the chief deity Zeus would likely not fall easily under the goad of a lay farmer, and because Hera does not seem there to take Zeus’ infidelity very personally. In this scene, however, it is hard not to sympathize with the sense of abandonment that Hera feels when she sees her husband fornicating left and right without giving her a second thought.

She complains of his absence in agricultural terms, which serve to highlight the proper symbiotic relationship. Hera wants to enjoy the fruits of Zeus’ power that she, as his wife, is entitled to receive. She wants to be cultivated, for Zeus to see her as someone worth his investment. In her current state, she wallows in spite and loneliness, and sees the absence of him everywhere. She complains, “Still not does the earth receive a sprinkling of snow” (οὐ νιφετοῖο ἔτι γαῖα παλύνεται) (8.275), that “drought feeds on the corn-field furrow, making the crop useless” (περιβόσκειται ἀύχμῶς ἀρούρης / ἀύλακα, καρπὸν ἔχων ἀχρήιον) (8.276-277), and that he is so often away from his duties that “the bumpkin, instead of cloudwapt Zeus, now speaks of cloudless Zeus” (ἀγρονόμοις δὲ / ἀντὶ κελαινιφέος κικλήσκειται ἀννέφελος Ζεύς) (8.275-278). These do not sound like the word of a horrible woman, but Hera’s problem is that she cannot confine her rage. She doesn’t punish Zeus, she punishes the women he lusts after, or the children he engenders. Neither of those groups have much say in Zeus’ philandering, and her habit of lashing out doesn’t serve her well; Zeus usually enters to punish *her* for whatever she’s done, and Zeus gets off scot-free. Nonnos counsels healthy attitudes, but he



also demonstrates the consequences that are wont to befall those who act imprudently, like Semele or Ampelos. In Nonnos, good personal attitudes can make life easier for one, but the most productive characteristic of success is cleverness. Cadmos deceives Typhon and wins himself a city and Harmonia for a wife, while Ariadne bravely joins Dionysos and is summarily turned to stone.

Hera's cajoling includes some pretty clear allusions to Zeus' impotence, as he is now "cloudless" and the instruments of his power lie flaccid and unused. His unmaning here is again purely comic: the subject of its inspiration is his very real fertility. Zeus is unmaned through mockery, as gods and men alike can be. Luckily, we are spared the primeval unmaning like that perpetrated by his father against the first sky-god. The cosmic order is secure now under Zeus' domination, and the only option left to Hera, if she wants to complain about him, is to mock him behind his back. She will, however, leverage her divine power of deceit to perpetrate a very real violence against a mortal; she will bring on Semele's rash suicide. Mortals, we see, are still very much in play when it comes to divine violence. Their only recourse is usually to hide from the unpredictable gods who surround them. While boulders splinter off Zeus, when Zeus brings a deluge or Hera feels spite, mortals suffer tremendously. Dionysos will soften the blow, and lend the violence a measure of intelligibility. Dionysos will offer a second option: drink and dance and forget all about strife. Pain still may befall one during life, but Dionysos offers the opportunity to have some limited say in the matter. When one participates in joyous, intoxicated revels, one can begin to exert some mental control over one's experience of reality, or may give himself in to a reveling tide that gently pulls away pain by loosing the jailor's grip that self-doubt and fear have on the mind.

As we see again and again in Nonnos, Heraclitus will only be vindicated in his prophetic judgment that "thunder-bolt steers all things" (τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Heraclitus B64. <http://www.heraclitusfragments.com/files/ge.html>

## Chapter 2: A Chorus of Cymbals and a Clanging of Conflict: Dionysos Enters, Grows, Fights

*“Czech culture has its trumpets, but they summon not to war but to the dance”*

- *Unattributed*

### The Boyhood and Shuttling of Dionysos

Hera certainly doesn't make Dionysos' boyhood easy. Yet, it is more than eventful for a young man. From the second of his birth at the end of Book 8, he is a fugitive god. His first shelter is the thigh of his father after his mother is incinerated, and he will spend the rest of his youth being whisked from place to place by his brother Hermes and hidden from Hera. His mother Semele won't have much of anything to do with him, although she is capable of voicing her opinion from time to time. Nonnos gives us a blunt assessment of her death: “Zeus was pitiless; the breath of bridal thunderbolt turned his bride entirely to ash by parturient beam” (λοχίαις ἀκτῖσι γαμήλιον ἄσθμα κεραυνοῦ / Ζηνὸς ἀφειδήσαντος ὄλην τεφρώσατο νύμφην) (8.394-395). Semele walked into her death with eyes wide open (8.389-406). Nonnos even tells us that as she is being consumed by Zeus' fire, “Semele witnessed her fiery expiration, and was delighted to be undone in fatal travail” (Σεμέλη πυρόεσσαν ἐσαθρήσασα τελευτήν / ὄλετο τερπομένη λόχιον μόρον) (8.402-403). She is a thoroughly unnerving character, and her son will be far more personable. Perhaps it is for the best that Nonnos never grows up with her.

Semele, unlike Ampelos or Hera, has almost no redeeming qualities. She is aggressively boastful, she lacks forethought, and she heartlessly mocks family members who treat her with nothing but generosity. She is actually most striking because she manages to get away with her boasting and harassment, because her behavior is the kind that would typically, in this very poem, earn one a painful punishment. I'm thinking here of Marsyas' skin blowing in the breeze. Berenice Verhelst writes

interestingly on Semele's misanthropic speech in her 2016 book *Direct Speech in Nonnus' 'Dionysiaca'*. Most enjoyable to me in her work is her identification of military language in Semele's challenge to Hera (9.206-242), whom she takes for a suitable rival. Semele opens her invective toward Hera with a military term, the verb *σολάω*, connoting ruination, to claim that Semele's apotheosis has outdone the other Olympians. She bookends her speech with *εἴξατέ μοι*, roughly "yield to me." Since the subject of the argument between these women is far from martial, Verhelst interprets the language as intended to parody a victor's speech after battle.<sup>59</sup> Hera will actually make herself martial at various points during the poem, while Semele will never manifest again after the first 10 books. Perhaps we may be optimistic and imagine that Zeus removed her divinity, or at least shut her up somewhere she'd keep quiet.

If Verhelst is correct, and I find her reading compelling, then Semele's role in reference to the project of the poem becomes clearer. Nonnos' basic task here is to produce a radical new work in the genre to overturn the Homeric idealization of war and suffering and substitute a radical new sense of life with the creation of merriment as its focus. Dionysos will offer access to levity in the face of danger and pain through wine and dance, which captures Nonnos' signature self-generating circular motion. Semele displays the danger of the Homeric mindset infecting those who have no productive outlets for their desire for glory. Semele wants to be regarded as the best among women, but she's not willing to display any talents or unique and compelling characteristics. She wants to achieve Homeric greatness while remaining inexperienced, just as Ampelos attempts to equal Dionysos by riding a bull while a novice in Dionysos' host. Nonnos is a fan of deception, of sly trickery, but not of arrogant self-delusion.

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<sup>59</sup> Verhelst 2016. p. 268

Semele's sister Ino suffers Hera's lash of madness because of her willingness to help protect her late sister's child, and Semele repays her with mockery for having fled into the sea rather than into the heavens (10.129-136). Semele is one of the worst imaginable candidates for apotheosis, and Ino is a terribly pitiable woman. Ino displays abundant virtue where Semele doesn't see a compelling reason to cultivate any beyond her physical beauty. Ino seems incalculably more deserving than Semele of apotheosis, yet she has to endure madness and the death of her son Learchos before she is allowed the calm of her deification, along with her son Melicertes. Semele doesn't compare to the mother who saved her child from Hera's wrath and later claimed apotheosis as one with him (10.111-125). Even before her fiery nuptials, Semele was a haughty braggart, and needed hardly any persuading by Hera to demand that Zeus come to her in his full divine form. In fact, she welcomes the death she knows she'll meet, because it will inflate her ego. She boasts that "Ino has Nephelē, but Semele's lot is Hera for a love-rival!" (Ἰνώ ἔχει Νεφέλην, Σεμέλη λάχε σύγγαμον Ἥρην) (8.384). It is difficult to feel anything toward Semele besides resentment for her having drawn Hera's ire on Dionysos by antagonizing her. Semele even forgets a bare modicum of reticence she probably owes the wife of the man who just had a child by her.

Even before Semele meets Zeus, after she receives her dream prophecy of Zeus impregnating her, her scene of sacrifice at the altar of Zeus "lightning guardian" (ἀστεροπῆς μεδέοντι) (7.167) is disturbing and, I think, indicative that Nonnos also finds some psychological trauma lurking inside Semele. Nonnos tells us that "she drenched her bosom in blood" (αἵματι κόλπον ἔδευσε) and "besprinkled her maiden body with gore" (φόνω δ' ἐρραίνετο κόρυνη) (7.168), that then "lavish streams of blood sopped her locks" (πλοκάμους ἐδίηναν ἀφειδέες αἵματος ὀλκοί) and "with the bull's trickling streams she empurpled her garments" (βοέαις λιβάδεσσιν ἐπορφύροντο χιτῶνες) (7.170) before she "made her way along the meadow deep with rushes neighboring the Asopos" (δρομόν ἰθύνουσα

βαθυσχοίνῳ παρὰ ποιῆ / γείτονος Ἄσωποῖο) (7.171-172). Nonnos couldn't be clearer in calling attention here to Semele's disturbing relationship with blood, and with violence in general. She is blood-thirsty, and not just at Zeus' altar. Nonnos means, I believe, to caution us of the infelicity one brings upon oneself by granting eternal life to someone one does not know all that well. Olympians may seem bratty on occasion, but Semele is completely untrained in divine decorum. Her speech in scenes containing her has the effect of a belligerent sports fan with a bullhorn, in an empty stadium. Zeus displays admirable objectivity, though, in his mental preparations upon hearing of Semele's demand to meet Zeus in his divine lightning form. Nonnos remarks that the impetuous Semele "eagerly begged for her fate" (ἔννεπεν αἰτίζουσα φίλον μῶρον) (8.348), and Zeus "heard and blamed the grudging Moirai, and pitied Semele unripe" (Ζεὺς δὲ πατήρ ἄτων φθονεραῖς ἐπεμέμφετο Μοῖραις, / καὶ Σεμέλην ἐλέαιρεν ἄωριον) (8.350-351). Here his pity, despite Semele's unpleasant personality, is touching, and his blaming of the "grudging" Fates is an interesting way Nonnos adds nuance to Zeus' relationship to fate. Of course, he can see the unbreakable threads of fate, and he is the only god with the power to give them order, but he does resign himself to the way an episode will play out rather than jar the system to a halt for some adjustments. The main reason I suspect Zeus is unwilling to intervene here is because he has a tender heart, as he displays in this scene, and he knows that Semele must suffer the consequences of her rashness, so he allows her to die in a state of joy, although he pities her poor ideas that led her to the unfortunate fate.

Hera pursues Ino mercilessly for the great affront of Ino having treated her baby nephew Dionysos as family. It will take until Book 35 for Hera to lose the ability to openly pursue Dionysos herself, when Zeus forces her to breastfeed Dionysos and therefore formally adopt him.<sup>60</sup> She can and will, however, resist Dionysos as often as she can, right through the end of the poem, as when she

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<sup>60</sup> cf. 9.234

fights against the Bacchic troops at Argos in the guise of the seer Melampous (47.669-671, 685-687).<sup>61</sup> Her habit of wreaking collateral havoc to satisfy her jealousy makes her a difficult character to understand outside of her thirst for vengeance on her husband, but she serves an important role in moving the action of the poem forward. She provides turbulent nudges that spiral off into larger currents in the action of the poem. Her adversity to Dionysos' success, even his mere existence, pushes him to improve himself and refine his talents. As much as Zeus' plan for Dionysos is responsible for his becoming a full-fledged god and adult, so too is Hera's persecution. There is no better tutorial in divine politics than an adolescence subject to Heraian pursuit.

The birth of Dionysos, at the opening of Book 9, is a beautifully constructed, and very short, scene. It runs only 15 lines, and it displays the great tenderness and precise skill that Nonnos exhibits when they suit his ends in a given episode. Zeus, for all his off-putting callousness in earlier scenes, can be a warm and thoughtful father. Where Semele essentially abandons her son to win a status to boast about, Zeus consistently displays mature care for Dionysos and a cognizance of his own complicity in Hera's anger. Zeus gently takes Dionysos from Hermes, whose job it was to snatch up the fetal Dionysos before harm could befall him, and sews him up in his "manly thigh" (ἄρσενι μηρῷ) (10.3), while waiting to give birth by the light of the moon. Here's just what looks like a throwaway comment, but Dionysos will have a kinship with the moon, as they will both be horned. Zeus is a thoughtful enough father to time his strange birthing experience to the presence of the moon so that Dionysos will have something positive in his first moments of life, despite the fact that he will never know his mother. Zeus tries to make up for the loss rhetorically in these first lines as he moves from

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<sup>61</sup> As always, this joke is just another example of Nonnos' mastery of subtle humor made to look like nothing at all. Melampous is a great legendary Argive, so his selection by Hera is not necessarily remarkable, and to most readers, the name may not connect to anything, and may therefore seem arbitrary. But Melampous is both a seer, *μαντιπóλος* as Nonnos mentions in the text, and, according to Herodotos *Inq.* 2.49, he introduced worship of Dionysos to Hellas. Nonnos here gives us Hera putting on the disguise of a Dionysian in order to fight him by stealth, but right off the bat Hermes spots her though he cannot exist in Nonnos' world, where here in fact is Dionysos bringing the revels. He will, funnily enough, as soon as Hera stops impersonating him, counsel that the Argives lay down their weapons and take up Dionysian revels.

describing the “manly” thigh in which Dionysos was sewn to the “round thigh which, birthing, became female” (ὠδίνοντος ἵτους θηλύνετο μηροῦ) (10.8). Now with Dionysos having gained both a male and female parent in Zeus, Nonnos places the garland on this scene in the form of an actual garland. As soon as Dionysos completes his second birth, “the childbed Seasons crowned him with an ivy garland, and round the well-horned head decked with flowers they wreathed bull-shaped Dionysos with curved and coiled snakes” (στέμματι κισσῆεντι λεχῳίδες ἔστεφον ἸΩραι / ἔσσομένων κήρυκες, ἐπ’ ἀνθοκόμφ δὲ καρῆνφ / εὐκεράων σκολιῆσιν ὑπὸ σπείρησι δρακόντων / ταυροφυῆ Διόνυσον ἐμιτρώσαντο κερᾶστην) (9.12-15). Nonnos knows how to craft a scene of paternal affection and progressive single parenting in miniature, no matter who accuses him of lacking in control.

Hermes whisks the baby Dionysos off to his first home (9.25-50), with some river nymphs, daughters of Lamos.<sup>62</sup> The choice is fitting, because the river begins in a mountain range that has been called, since antiquity, Ὀρη Ταύρου, the Bull Mountains. And indeed, “Dionysos the babe has well-horned growth like the moon” (βρέφος εὐκεράοιο φυῆς Ἰνδαλμα Σελήνης) (9.27). The nymphs feed him, and then Nonnos shows us a lovely moment of intellectual curiosity. Dionysos, seeing the sky for the first time, “sleepless, on his back, fixed his eye on the heavens ... and laughed astonished at the round vault of his father’s stars” (ἔς οὐρανὸν ὄμμα τιταίνων / ὕπιος ἦεν ἄπνους ... θαμβαλέος δὲ / πατρῶην ἐγέλασεν ἵτυν δεδοκημένος ἄστρον) (9.32-36). This child is already beginning to learn productively. As opposed to Zagreus, who emerged from Persephone’s womb fully cognizant of universal order and strong enough to carry Zeus’ thunderbolts, this Dionysos will learn to be in awe before he expects others to be in awe of him. In other words, Zeus’ plan to cultivate a more thoughtful and feeling god is succeeding. Incensed at the sight of Dionysos happy in the open, “Furious Hera, in malicious wrath maddened the daughters of Lamos with her lash” (θυγατέρες δὲ Λάμοιο χόλω

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<sup>62</sup> Lamos is a river in Asia Minor running from the Taurus Mountains to the southern Turkish Mediterranean coast.

βαρυνήμιος Ἥρης / δαιμονίης κακότητος ἐβακχεύθησαν ἰμάσθη) (9.37-39) and they would have cut up the second Dionysos as the Titans did the first, if not for Hermes' timely rescue.

Hermes next brings Dionysos to the house of Ino, and informs her of her sister's affair with Zeus and of Hera's hot jealousy. He instructs that Dionysos be kept obscured from Hera's view at all times, so inside with no windows. Such a life would hardly be worthy of Dionysos, even as an infant. He needs his father's stars. She, however, accepts graciously and cares for him "with tender affection" (φιλοστόργω) (9.94) and treats him as one with her own infant son Melicertes, who, infected by Dionysian magic, "babbled euoi" (εὐία παππάζοντι) (9.110). Ino is, as far as the action of the *Dionysiaca* is concerned, entirely blameless, and her nurse Mystis is essential in teaching Dionysos the mystic rites (9.111-131), but that will not save her from Hera's wrath. Hera, seeing through the precautions to hide Dionysos, see him in Ino's house, and swears a curse on it. Hermes needs once again to swoop in and save Dionysos lest "she now would kill Zeus' son" (νύ κεν ἠμάλδυνε Διὸς γόνον) (9.137).

Next, Hermes leaves Dionysos with Zeus' own mother Rheia (9.145-159), with the excuse that it was inappropriate for Ino to be trusted to raise Dionysos; better his lionbreeding grandmother. She "set him to mount a chariot of ravening lions" (ἄρματος ὠμοβόμων ἐπιβήτορα θῆκε λεόντων) (9.161). The Corybants will conceal the baby Dionysos as they did the baby Zeus, and they will be more successful than his last two caretakers. They will raise him until he's ready to set off on mystical adventures on his own. By the time of his boyhood, he's already become a nature adept, and can catch, tame, and rollick with any animals he pleases (9.169-199). Dionysos decides to travel to Phrygia, and Nonnos moves back to tell the later story of Ino who had disappeared in madness and of Athamas who is newly-maddened.



## Boy Loves and Womanizing

The road to Dionysos' adulthood (and full godhead) is littered with the scattered petals of his unfortunate romantic partners. Nonnos brings each onto the stage in procession, not so much for the purpose of fleshing out their character, but instead for the thematic implications of their situation. As usual, Nonnos' language is, through the scenes, grippingly lavish, mournful, and at times unsettling if not outright terrifying. From the tenderness with which he treats the naïve play between Dionysos and Ampelos to the shock of Aura's filicide, Nonnos masterfully immerses the reader in a captivating experience of emotion. The development of Dionysos' character is illuminated by the emotional character of each successive scene. The god learns to assume his predestined role by leaving typically mortal affections behind, accepting loss by a process of transformation of objects of his affection into enduring objects, and using his sexual power to enact divine justice. Layer by layer he sheds his earthbound humanity and becomes a force. He becomes a force of mindful plan rather than a plucky hero whose narrative arc forms a major source of meaning. Characteristically, he becomes more and more like his father as time goes on, and finally, after a bookend scene to Hera's chastising in 1.324-343 and an expiatory transformation, he remembers Ariadne, who has become the perfected divine spouse, and ascends out of this world to join his father's table.

Dionysos' development reflects the prophetic progression of the will of Zeus. Zeus alone is the independent actor of this production, who although he appears at times constrained by destiny is in fact subordinate only to his own plans for Dionysos. His plans, then form the true bounds and ends of destiny, within which he may experience temporary anxiety or caprice, but through which his will is done. The figure of Dionysos is a project of his, of improving the world, rather than earnest progeny. Although Zeus plans to install the Zagreus/Dionysos figure in a position of divine power, even upon Zeus' very throne (6.165f.), there is only room for one patriarch, as we know from the line of patricidal

succession that leads down to Zeus himself. Dionysos is to be something else. He is to be another Metis, rather than another swallowed child of Kronos.<sup>63</sup> Nonnos several times subtly conflates Zeus and Dionysos, as when he has one of the Charites recognize Dionysos as her father (35.11) while almost always elsewhere in myth they are daughters of Zeus. Dionysos becomes a subordinate motif in Zeus' governing style, an attribute characteristic of Zeus' intention to bring some salvation to mankind. As at the end of a play, Zeus' will is done. Luckily for us, his will is now benevolent, so the fallout of his lessons is joyful rather than tragic.

Dionysos leaves behind new traditions, new substances, and a new thiasic (that is, bringing with him revelrous procession) deity in Iacchus (48.965-968) when he joins his father on Olympus. He leaves behind an escape from war. In Nonnos' telling, through wine, war is made absurd, as when Dionysos intoxicated an Indian battalion and led them off in chains without bloodshed (15.119-150). War among the gods is settled by Zeus' executive fiat, as when he awards Beroë to Poseidon and Dionysos quits the competition without complaint (43.373-380). Iacchus, as an Eleusinian deity, unites the Persephonean with the Semelean lineage, and in a way replaces the child she lost in Zagreus. Within Zeus' own household, he has used Dionysos as a means of getting his affairs in order. He assimilates the attributes productive of harmony in the relationship of Dionysos and Ariadne by compelling Hera to de-fang herself by breastfeeding Dionysos (35.300-335). He thus renders her powerless to act meaningfully against either Dionysos or himself. She had already been subordinate to Zeus, so protested against him by attacking his favorites, but by the end, she can't even muster the forces to seriously challenge Dionysos. He thus uses outrage at misdeeds done to his son as an excuse

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<sup>63</sup> Zeus swallowed Metis both in order to gain the benefit of her counsel and in order to prevent her from bearing a son who would overthrow him (Hesiod, *Theogony* 885-900). He plans a great drama for his future son Dionysos to safeguard against the same danger. Where he ate Metis to prevent an upstart divine child from challenging him, he plans a course of development for Dionysos so that by the time Dionysos would be powerful enough to challenge him, he will have been tamed with respect to his passions, and Zeus will simply be able to avail himself of Dionysos' intoxicating power. He will thus incorporate a powerful divine son and deliver the benefits of the new god to mankind without violence.

to deny Hera's even limited agency and manifest his will uninterruptedly. Nonnos foreshadows this means of besting his mother just before the scene which immediately precedes Dionysos' first boy love. I don't imagine the connection is accidental or purposeless on Nonnos' part. The scene includes a boast by the deified Semele to surpass Hera for having produced Dionysos, and Semele compares him favorably with other divinities by their birth stories, like those of Hephaistos and Herakles (9.208-242). Semele recalls Herakles' breastfeeding by Hera, which, as Rouse reminds us in a footnote, "disabled her from showing hostility to him" (320) only to reject it for Dionysos, who she claims will not need such a trick, for the blessedness of his mother. Semele's boasts underscore the risks of too-quick ascent to divine status, even for mortals who've had a childhood. Nonnos here reminds us that he has included every story purposefully, that the speeches are not in fact rhetorical hodgepodge, but *poikilia* put to perfect use.

At the outset of the poem, Hera can seriously set back Zeus' plans, for instance killing Zagreus. After breastfeeding Dionysos, however, she can try to foment plots against him, but all are fated to fail. In fact, Dionysos makes use of the very weapon, madness, that Hera had used against him (32.100-124) in order to break the Hera-led Argive resistance to his cult (42.481-495). Although Hera succeeds in having Perseus transform Ariadne to stone, the move plays to Dionysos' advantage. It frees him from the burden of a flesh-and-blood wife. In the form of a constellation, Ariadne can do little else but watch while Dionysos starts to tread in his father's footsteps, beginning to indulge in his father's wonted promiscuity. She can appear as a miffed spirit in a dream to upbraid him for repeating the offense of forgetfulness committed against her, but, humorously enough, Dionysos seems capable of forgetting the rebuke almost immediately and returning to deliberation as to the best way to seduce more women (48.563-569).

Even the mutilation of Zagreus, when viewed thematically, does not really undermine Zeus' aims. In fact, it may be better productive of them. Zagreus was born an immediate godhead and equal of Zeus, taking up his lightning with ease and assuming his seat (6.165-168). In Zeus' family, precocity is a prelude to usurpation. Unlike human children, divine offspring lack any need for adolescence, and are rather comfortable trespassing familial bonds with violence. The birth of Dionysos, by the mortal Semele, rather than the god Persephone, offers Zeus a felicitous opportunity to tend deliberately to the garden of his designs. Rather than take his chances with the reveling wunderkind, Zeus can instead invest long-term in fashioning a son who, he can be sure, will not immediately challenge him for supremacy, and who can instead experience a gradual transcendence of earthly ties in favor of the kind of divine action Zeus has planned for him. That sort of action is, namely, to enforce the limits of divine justice charted by Zeus in accordance with the new aim Nonnos attributes to him: to privilege joy over honor, dancing over battling, and transformation over steadfastness.

Each of Dionysos' romantic (to put euphemistically, in some cases) encounters has a deliberate place in Zeus' *kosmos*, which itself is Nonnos' thoroughly ordered arrangement itself. The encounters recall some formulaic scenes of Roman novels, but rather than repeat empty rhetorical devices and motifs, Nonnos uses his skill at capturing and controlling the flux of emotion and experience, often through incorporating the viewer into the scene as a *voyeur*, as Robert Shorrock argues.<sup>64</sup> The scenes build on one another in a discernable order to construct meaning. Zeus guides Dionysos' development with an emotional program that is aimed at preparing Dionysos for his role alongside his father as an adult god. His partial belonging to this world, which is clear at least from the confidence adversaries have in undermining his divine credentials (20.319-324; 44.167-183) separates him from the other Olympians, who were born perfected and needed no didactic childhood adventures. Zeus has seen

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<sup>64</sup> Shorrock 2014, 272

first-hand the consequences of that form of generation for domestic bliss, and presents us instead with an elaborate plan to raise a savior god from the rough equivalent of a young human boy. He's really a rather thoughtful father. He's planned out achievable milestones for the production of a right-minded god and invited us as readers to peer through the haze of prophecy that hangs as though in serpentine caves of myth upon myth toward the unfolding of the ineluctable plan of Zeus.

### 1. Ampelos – Frivolity gives way to necessity

Nonnos introduces us to the first of Dionysos' boy loves, Ampelos, immediately after telling the story of Themisto's and Athamas' murderous madness and Ino's divinization. Semele returns to mock her sister for not having been impregnated by a god (10.129-136), and she does not come across at all sympathetic. Semele's mockery is jarringly inappropriate, especially in light of Ino's automatic welcoming of Dionysos. Nonnos even remarks that she offers him her breasts along with her own son (9.94-97). Nonnos' language in the preceding passages tug at the heartstrings, as when Ino arrives to the grisly scene of Athamas having butchered his son Learchos, Athamas being under a spell of madness from Hera for having harbored Dionysos. Just as he has plopped little Melicertes in a boiling cauldron, Nonnos tells us that she runs in "wind-swift" (ποδήγεμος) (10.75) just as her boy "cried out 'papa!'" (παππάζων) (10.72) in desperation. She seems like a mother placed in a desperate situation because of her sister's divine entanglements, and one is inclined to feel a release with her when she is accepted into Poseidon's arms (10.121-123). Rather than pitying her sister, or welcoming her to a release from suffering, Semele mocks her cruelly. The scene inspires discomfort. Semele appears totally out of touch and ill-suited to divinity. She seems, rather than protecting her child from harm, as one might expect of a god-mother, to be egging on his most dangerous adversary and, by all signs,

to be making things harder for him. Dionysos has already had a nomadic youth due to Hera's vengeful pursuit, and like Ino, we are naturally inclined to wish for his undeserved sufferings to be ended.

It appears, at first, that we might get our wish. Nonnos moves immediately from Semele's mocking speech to a rich description of Dionysos' current home in Lydia (10.139ff.) abounding with frivolous imagery of splashing satyrs "tumbled plunging headfirst into a river" (εἰς ποταμὸν προχέοντο κυβισθηῖσι κερήνῳ) (10.149) and the river itself is literally "rolling in riches" (10.152) even while Seilenos and satyrs are diving headfirst into the muck to feel for gold nuggets (10.161-163). Dionysos himself "paddled his hands and grazed the golden calm" (χεῖρας ἐρετμωσας, χρυσέην ἐχάραξε γαλήνην) (10.170). On the banks, roses grow of themselves (ῥόδον αὐτοτέλεστον) (10.171), predicting (rather, giving away) the entrance of the "rosy form" (ῥόδωπιδι μορφῇ) (10.176) of Ampelos just a few lines later. It is as if Nonnos is breathless in his eagerness to describe Ampelos' beauty.

From his honeyed voice to his excelling even the Moon's beauty, Ampelos is as tender a youth as are Dionysos' current circumstances. Dionysos wins him over by charming him with the kind of proper, flattering language one would expect, from Homer, when addressing a stranger of incomparable, and therefore likely divine, beauty. Here is a moment of sentimentality flavored by humorous irony. Dionysos approaches this young satyr of his own company in the manner of Odysseus approaching Nausicaä, or even of a character in a Roman novel. The address itself is stock, if prettily varied by Nonnos' energetic skill; what is so naïvely charming about Dionysos' entreaty, and what must so delight Ampelos, is that Dionysos *is* in fact a god. That is both that he should know a god when he sees one and if a god should make those sort of sweet entreaties, rather than using force, as is their general wont, the act would likely speak highly to one's worth. Dionysos of course then seems to fall in a deep and youthful love with Ampelos wherein "if the boy tarries far off, his cheek

remains unsmiling” (εἰ νέος ἔκτος ἔμιμνεν, ἀμειδέας ἔσχε παρρηιάς) (10.221). Soon, though, the irony will turn against his favor.

Dionysos must have a sense, although he currently lives in golden calm, that he is not yet free of Hera’s plotting. Indeed, he worries about the many ways misfortune could befall Ampelos, from a quoit like that that slew Hyacinthos to a Ganymedeian abduction, or even a jealous grab by Poseidon like that of Pelops. The irony that will turn against Dionysos here is that the instrument of Ampelos’ death will be the bull of Dionysos. It is against his own attributes, not those of Zephyros, Poseidon, or his father that he should guard. It will turn out, however, that even with Dionysos’ warning, Ampelos is fated to die by the horn of a bull.

The foreshadowing of Ampelos’ death is especially heartbreaking in light of a speech Dionysos makes to his father to spare him a divine life and instead give him Ampelos’ company (10.292-320). He recalls that Zagreus “became another rainy Zeus while yet a whelp” (πέλε δεύτερος ἄλλος ἔτι βρέφος ὑέτιος Ζεῦς) (10.297) with access to the thunderbolts, and he rejects those thunderbolts. He chooses, before the epithet is applied to him, to be unwarlike. He complains that he is “lovetoleap Dionysos” (φιλοσκάρομω Διονύσω) (10.304) and would rather just be left to his love than handle the weapons that killed his mother. Tragically, the mind of Zeus has other plans. Ampelos, by his very name, foretells his own fate. He will die and be reborn as the grapevine. Zeus has decided to bring the joy of wine into the world, to supplant an extant Apollonian tradition with a new Dionysian, and for that, he will need the vine.

Nonnos gives a touching account of the loveplay of Dionysos and his beloved youth, wrestling under the banner of Eros (10.339-372), with a tenderness that seems to mark something very genuinely romantic. They lift each other in turn, squeeze one another’s hands and forearms, and Dionysos holds tight “his palms around the boy’s frame with loving touch” (Βάκχος ἐρωμανέεσσι δέμας παλάμησι

πιέζων) (10.351). Ampelos gives Dionysos a gentle kick and he falls back, humoring Ampelos, who “lay naked upon Dionysos’ belly” (γυμνῆ νηδύι κοῦρος ἐφίζανε) (10.358). Their game is intimate and back-turning like the gentle churn of waves, and as though caught adrift by his infatuation, Dionysos proclaims that he is “in heaven amid the honey-sweet sporting” (Βάκχος Ὀλύμπου ἀμφὶ παλαιμοσύνης μελιηδέος) (10.344-345). The two continue sporting, and even have frivolous races with small musical prizes (or simply sand for third place). Ampelos triumphs, but like Semele, success starts to go to his head. He fails to understand the proper way to behave in relation to a god, and allows his status as a favorite to make him overconfident. On one hand, Ampelos errs in thinking that Dionysos’ divinity will act as a talisman for his own safety, as neither Dionysos’ divine status nor even being a consort of Zeus have protected anyone from the vicissitudes of life in a world with Hera as an enemy. On the other, Ampelos is overconfident in a young god like Dionysos, who, until Book 48, will lack the status of Olympian. Dionysos is not in a position to be the divine *erastês* Ampelos thinks him to be. This is still a learning experience for Dionysos, who will experience this loss in the manner of a mortal.

Dionysos’ indulgence of Ampelos, while understandable and enhancing to the effect of naïve romance, is part of the reason for Ampelos’ death. Perhaps when a god fawns over one and endeavors to make one feel equal to him, one can, if one isn’t careful, start to take him seriously. After Dionysos allows him to win in swimming races, Ampelos begins to behave as though he were actually divine. He wears a cluster of vipers in emulation of Dionysos, and when he espies Dionysos driving a car of panthers, he boastfully vaults over lions, tigers, and bears (11.56-70). Dionysos offers a portentous warning: it is not the wild lions, tigers, or bears that Ampelos ought to fear, but only the horns of the bull (11.78-80). Ampelos, alas, is too far-gone to be helped at this point. Ate, the “death-bringing” (θανατηφόρος) spirit of delusion, has caught sight of him, and he is beyond the reach of Dionysos’ reason.



The portent that comes to Dionysos that night, however, complicates the situation as it has appeared thus far. He dreams of a horned dragon carrying a young fawn to an altar, onto which it tosses it and gores it. In a chilling comment, Nonnus relates “the hillranging fawn screamed a piercing strain as his vagrant spirit flew off” (ὄρεσσινόμοιο δὲ νεβροῦ ὄξυ μέλος κλάγξαντος ἀπέπτατο θυμὸς ἀλήτης) (11.89-90). The sudden change in tone is not surprising by now in Nonnos, but psychologically, this is a fascinating scene, because of Dionysos’ reaction to it. Nonnos tells us it is “sorrow mixed with laughter” (πένθει μίξε γέλωτα). Why is his “reason restless and mind twofold” (καὶ ἄστατον εἶχε μενοινῆν διχθαδίη) (11.96)? On the one hand, of course, the metamorphosis will avail the world of the fruit of the vintage, but on the other, to be able to think in those terms is absurd. Dionysos, far from the risk of having too little character, seems often to risk having one actually sinister, or at least worryingly capricious. But if we consider that perhaps this is a symptom of Zeus’ will’s corrective force, the reaction takes on a different resonance. Dionysos has, ostensibly, license of action, but in reality, he is a subordinate deity to Zeus, and Zeus’ will, expressed in prophecy or Nonnos’ own literary structure, and Nonnos allows us to see those little nudges that keep the hero on his journey. Dionysos obviously, if he is to be understood as having anything resembling humanity, cares passionately for Ampelos, and it is the unchosen influence of the subtle systems that Zeus made to stand.

The following lines reflect the sort of maturing mind that Dionysos has displayed thus far. Even after receiving the prophecy, he still ranged the hills with Ampelos, and made the most of his remaining time. The detail Nonnos includes is beautiful in its delicate wistfulness. If Ampelos should pipe, he says, an experimental tune and botch the notes, he would spring with bounds cheering and acting as though the notes were lovely, rejoicing in Ampelos’ pleasure. Dionysos matures as he accepts the coming loss of Ampelos, but he also becomes jaded to loss. Ariadne will return to this point again and again, and indeed it is included in one of the last refrains of the poem. His next sexual encounter

will be the rape of Nicaia in Book 15. That encounter will be an act of enforcing justice, but mortal justice rather than divine. Nicaia murdered a mortal herdman, Hymnos, in flagrant assault on Love in a sort of Artemesian fundamentalism. Dionysos avenges a human wrong, where in Book 48, he will avenge a divine wrong on Aura. In Book 15 too we will see our first glimpse of Hymenaios, Dionysos' second boy-love, whom he compares to Diomedes (15.160-165). Dionysos is taking his first real steps toward gaining the psychological sound-mindedness required to be an effective part of Zeus' new world-order.

The *Dionysiaca* is very comfortable criticizing Dionysos. His character is attacked by Lycurgus, Hera, Deriades, and now Ate. In each case, however, Zeus will assure that Dionysos will triumph. In this scene, he enjoys a double outcome: both laughter, in the form of the vine; and bitter sorrow in the loss of Ampelos the youth. His mutilation is disturbing, as most of Nonnos' violent descriptions, and he lingers on the destruction of the boy's beauty, the ruddying of his pale skin (11.222-223). When a satyr discovers the body and alerts Dionysos, he, like Ino, flies to him "as swift as the breeze" (ταχύς ἔδραμεν αὔρατις) (11.226). Perhaps there is a bit of a substantive difference in that *aurais* typically refers more to a "breeze" than a gale. Dionysos here has foreseen the death, and there would be nothing to be accomplished by celerity.

Even headless and dirtied, Dionysos still finds him desirous (ἰμέροτις) (11.248), and he bears a satyr's "lifelike" (πανεικελος) smile. Dionysos mourns at length (11.255-350), despairs at the world, and requests that his father reanimate Ampelos just for an hour (11.315). Eros then approaches him in the guise of Seilenos (11.351-2) and entreats him to forget (λησάμενος) the dead. He regales him with the story of Carpos and Calamos (11.369-481), two boy lovers who raced in a river, as Ampelos and Dionysos had. Carpos, however, falls victim to the current and drowns. Calamos, unwilling to live without him, throws himself into the river and becomes the reeds, while Carpos grows up as the fruit of the earth. The story comforts Dionysos, but he is again stricken with the pangs of love lost (11.484-485). The Seasons then take up a dance

(11.487-521) that leads into the next book, where Ampelos returns as the vine and Dionysos celebrates him (12.175ff.), after an extended astrological and prophetic audience with the Horai (12.1-172). Once the vine has been magically and abundantly spread, Dionysos and the satyrs celebrate Ampelos and imbibe the sweet drink he made possible. This closes the book, and Book 13 opens with a directive from Zeus to begin the Indian War.

## 2. Nicaia – Avenging mortal wrongs

Nonnos' episode dealing with Nicaia comes in two parts. First, we see the ill-fated efforts of the earnest young shepherd Hymnos to woo the nymph and her cruel murder of him. Second, we see Dionysos' entrance as he effects punishment by deflowering her, to the delight of Nemesis (16.264), although he does so in a lush floral baldachin. Nicaia is not a truly malicious figure, as Aura will be, so after her deflowering, she can be rehabilitated. She will join Dionysos' thiasos and begin a new life in a band of revelry. Of course, she doesn't have much of a say in whether or not she can stay as a nymph of Artemis, because Artemis only accepts virgins.

Hymnos is a tall, handsome young shepherd, who falls in love with the chaste nymph Nicaia after "the wily Eros kindled longing in the herdsman and stung him with a more turbulent passion" (δολόεις ἐρέθειζεν Ἔρωσ ποθέοντα νομῆα / οἷστρω λαβροτέρω δεδονημένον) (15.220-221). He watches her hunting in the woods silently, unable to work up the courage to speak to her. One day, he makes off with her hunting gear (15.290-297) and spends kisses the inanimate nets and arrows as if they were her. One day, he plucks up the courage to play her a tune on his pipes, but she mocks the song fairly cleverly, recalling other unrequited lovers whose songs drove away the object of their desire. Hymnos, broken-hearted, requests that she shoot him down just so that he may escape the bonds of love, and she does just that. For that crime Eros foments a punishment through Dionysos. Her punishment will

be the fulfillment by trickery and force of what Hymnus attempted to win openly and earnestly: the blossoming of her maidenhood. He deludes her by transforming a river into wine, as he had deluded the Indians, but rather than despoiling the arms of a sleeping enemy, he gathers up with her in a sort of Dionysiac gazebo. I include here Rouse's translation of the scene:

Earth unfolded her teeming fragrance, and brought forth a plot of plants, to do pleasure to Dionysos. Tangled poles of spreading vine lifted a wide covering laden with clusters of grapes and shaded the bed with its leaves ; a selfgrown arbour of vinery embowered the couch with its rich growth, and many a bunch of purple fruit swayed to and fro above it, under the Cyprian's breezes. It screened them both, while in crinkling clumps a lovely sapling of the wine-plant entangled intoxicated the wreaths of ivy which climbed over the growing fruit (16.270-80).

After the act has been accomplished, Hymnus returns as a spirit, now vengeful. Again, Rouse's translation:

“Then the soul of the herdsman, passing on the winds, started up and taunted the sleeping maiden in dreams of the night:

‘A lover also has his avenging spirits, happy bride! If you refused Hymnos as bridegroom, Dionysos has made you a bride! You are a crooked judge, you matchmaking maiden bride! You kill the lover, you pursue him that weds not! Maiden, a brazen sleep you gave to your impassioned Hymnos: maiden, a honeyed sleep lost your maidenhood! The dead herdsman's piteous blood you saw with a laugh ; there was worse piteous groaning when you saw the blood of your maidenhood’ (16.292-301).

Here we see Hymnus the one who turns on a dime, from impassioned wooer to pursuing Fury. Her crime was the betrayal of levity: she rejected the harmless wooing of a simple shepherd by cruel and unjust violence. Nonnos makes clear that it is not for her chastity alone that she's punished; the Bassarids too are chaste, and championed for being so. Instead, it's for her transgressions against an innocent lover, for having laughed at Hymnus' innocent blood. She thereby forfeited the blood of her

own innocence. Dionysos is not a god like Hera who will pursue a furious vengeance for the rest of his days, so his justice-bringing escapade can end there.

Dionysos quickly forgets about Nicaea and moves on, but not before founding a city in her name. She's been left, though, pregnant and suicidal. Book 16 ends with her almost attempted suicide by noose, then resignation to her life, and the birth of Telete, the personification and leader of Dionysos' nighttime revels. Nicaia will return in Book 48, now the leader of Dionysos' rites to try to offer consolation to Aura (48.811-826), but she rejects Nicaia's attempts and mocks her for the outward signs of having born a child. Nicaia's breasts give forth milk, as soon Aura's will too, but the camaraderie between the two is missed. I think Nonnos means to keep these two apart to emphasize that they are two different lessons for Dionysos to learn. Nicaia was a nymph who offended the moral order of the universe, and thus brought a curse on herself from her victim, which Dionysos carried out. He acted in that capacity as a policeman, avenging Hymnus' murder by an extreme violation of Nicaia's body. Once his justice had been done, he moved on, because he was motivated to use sex to punish. He had no interest in romantically pursuing her, as Hymnus did. Both this and the episode with Aura will be important moments for Dionysos' maturation toward godhood, which requires the ability to step back from human emotional investments and run a *kosmos*. These episodes are jarring, and have led some scholars to label Nonnus (or at least his Dionysos) a sociopath. I must dispute that, however. For one, the violations themselves aren't clear-cut enough to view Dionysos' actions as morally horrendous. Nicaia has murdered the innocent Hymnus, and Aura has humiliated and got near to sexually violating Artemis herself. For another, a god can have a different role vis-à-vis humankind than humans have with one another; Nonnus himself recognizes the power dichotomy in the course of Nicaia's interior agonizing; he remarks dismissively, while she is frantically looking around for Dionysos, at whom she would delight in shooting volleys of arrows, "Many times she strained her eye over the mountain to see if she could find an unsteady track of invisible Dionysos, in

order to shoot her bow's rays a woman at a god! That she might subdue the grape god" (πολλάκι δ' ὄμμα τίταινε δι' οὐραεος, εἴ που ἐφεύροι / ἴχνιον ἀστήρικτον ἀθηήτου Διονύσον, / ὄφρα βάλῃ τόξοισι γυνῆ θεόν, ὄφρα δαμάσση / δαίμονα βοτρύοντα). There is always a difference when discussing ethical prescriptions among humans and deities. That's a sticky topic lacking in real-world anchors to which I can refer, so I shall leave that at that.

It is important to note that Dionysos is now a father. He will have another child by Aura, but he is definitely advancing toward adult godhead once he is able to reproduce. He doesn't yet need the progeny, and Telete will be a marginal character, but because Dionysos will have an apotheosis at the end of the poem, his children are a connection he leaves on earth between the power that he learns how to access and those who want to follow the Dionysian band. Nicaia even ends up being something of a positive mark on the world, and none of Dionysos' efforts have yet been for naught. As her offense was a mortal one, even though it was a murder, the stain won't stay with her forever. After she discovered her violation by Dionysos, Nonnos tells us that "she spoke, and many tears gushed like heavy rain, and she earnestly wanted to plant a sword in her throat" (ἔννεπε, καὶ πολὺδακρυον ἀνέβλυσεν ὄμβρον ὀπωπῆς / καὶ ποτε μὲν μενέαινε κατ' ἀνχένος ἄορ ἐρεῖσαι) (9.365-366). A few lines later, she almost goes through with a suicide attempt, in this case by hanging, but instead she chooses to live for Dionysos' child she bore, Telete. Telete provided a sort of bridge between Nicaia, a member of the conventional world, and Telete, who exists in a liminal space closer to the heights of divinity.

### 3. Hymenaios – The war-love

Hymenaios has a bit of a tumultuous time during the Indian War, but Nonnos marks him, in his way, for survival at a couple of points before he is even introduced as a character (15.160, 24.88). He, unlike Ampelos before him, can stand on his own two feet in Dionysos' fighting force. Ampelos

was a boyhood love, through and through. Hymenaios gives Dionysos something to admire, something to motivate him in battle. He also gives Dionysos a sense of self-confidence in his abilities as a divine leader, as well as a lover. Here, for the first time, Nonnos allows Dionysos a real romantic indulgence. There is, however, the least in the poem about him, and he will come and go without too much of a central role. I believe that as Zeus is training Dionysos to be an effective god, he is teaching him how to maintain fulfilling relationships without becoming so emotionally invested in the life of a given mortal that he would sacrifice something of his godhead in miserable mourning or in the kind of unproductive chaos-making that Zeus has pursued. It seems that the birth and youth of Dionysos have helped to mature Zeus as well. After his deluge, he no longer amuses himself by throwing the world into cataclysmic peril. Instead, he actively supports Dionysos when he truly needs the help (as when Hera had maddened him and Zeus forces her to breastfeed him).

We first meet Hymenaios as just one of a few in Dionysos' army. This is the point just after Dionysos has enticed the Indian troop to drink the transformed wine of their river, and they've fallen drunkenly unconscious. The Dionysian muster is currently engaged in stripping the Indians' armor. Hymenaios is just one of the troops, but his beauty makes him stand out to Dionysos, especially when "he stripped a golden shield" (συλήσας χρυσάσπιδα) (15.161). The young man himself seems to shine like gold (15.164-168), and Dionysos watches him admiringly from afar. The episode is short, but it comes almost immediately after Dionysos is comforted for having lost Ampelos.

We next see Hymenaios for a split second in Book 24, as "Ourania rescued Hymenaios from destruction because he had her son's name, and scored the high courses like a star born along, to please her grapey brother" (Οὐρανίη δ' Ὑμέναιον ἀνεζώγησεν ὀλέθρου / παιδὸς ἐοῦ γονόνεντος ἐπώνυμον, ἠερίας δὲ / ἀτραπιτοῦς ἐχάραξεν, ὁμοίος ἀστέρος ὀλιῶ, / γνωτῶ βοτρύοντι χαριζομένη Διονύσῳ) (24.88-91). One of Rouse's footnotes to the page assures the reader that in fact, this

Hymenaios is not just a namesake of the son of Ourania, but a single godling made out of the marriage cry ὦ ὑμῆν ὑμέναιε. I don't think the question is really the most important to consider, because as Nonnos can collapse many into one, he can also split one into many with his hallucinogenic prose. What is worth noting here is the word “score,” ἐχάραξεν, which is one of Nonnos' favorites, and mirrors the clefting that Nonnos has done with his two Hymenaioi. When Nonnos needs a certain element of his world to come more alive than it would normally be capable of becoming, Nonnos will multiply it internally, and make one object play multiple role, like the symphony Dionysos makes out of the forest when his revels bring it to life

Hymenaios reappears in 29.15-178, and it is there that Dionysos receives his opportunity to derive the benefit and growth that Zeus means him to from this relationship. The episode is quite moving. As Hymenaios rides through battle with the Indians, he is quite obviously a more impressive man than Ampelos was, and he is independent enough that we only hear about him when he is noteworthy. Ampelos was noteworthy, of course, because of the product of his death, but Hymenaios is noteworthy for his achievements, rather than his beauty. Nonnos uses language of Hymenaios that suggests divinity on his part. His hand is “rosy,” ῥοδοιδέει, and his “splendor flashes like lightning,” ἀγλαΐη δ' ἥστραπτεν. Dionysos, for his part, “drove the enemy to flight, since for Hymenaios' beauty's sake Dionysos filled his fighting with divine strength” (ἐπεὶ νό οἱ εἵνεκα μορφῆς / μαρναμένῳ Διόνυσος ἐνέπνεεν ἔνθεον ἀλκήν) (29.20-21). When Dionysos watches Hymenaios fighting, he inspires him to fight even harder, and unlike Ampelos, Hymenaios is capable of keeping it up.

An Indian launches an arrow at Dionysos, but “Zeus pushed the dart away from Dionysos, and instead the feathered arrow pierced Hymenaios' bloodstained thigh (βέλος ἰθυκέλευθον ἀπεπλάγχθη Διονύσου / Ζηνὸς ἐρητύσαντος, ἐυστεφάνου δ' Ὑμεναίου / αἰμοβαφῆς πετρόεντι χαράσσετο μηρὸς οἰστῶ). Here, Zeus' plan becomes clear. There is no reason why a god would need



to have an arrow plucked from his path, and for him to have hit Hymenaios suggests that Zeus is providing Dionysos with one of his small nudges of fate. This wound will serve as an opportunity for Dionysos to try his hand at saving someone he loves. When Ampelos was gored, Dionysos was a far way off, and heard the news. Here Nonnos is clear that “the arrow failed to to evade Dionysos’ vision” (οὐ δὲ λάθεν Διόνυσον) (29.78) and he softened the impact of Melaneos’ shooting. This scene takes its inspiration from *Il.* 4.85 ff., and I don’t think it’s an accident that the far-shot comes from Melaneos, whose name resembles Menelaos awfully closely. Nonnos has switched the name around, and he has switched sides!

Hymenaios, wounded, is still brave enough to approach Dionysos to show him the wound, rather than writing in agony on the ground. Nonnos tells us that as he came close to Dionysos, “he shed a lovely tear” (δάκρυ χέων ἔρατεινόν) (29.89) to entice Dionysos to help him. The effort is unnecessary, though, because Dionysos has not been able to take his eyes off of Hymenaios. He helps Hymenaios into his car and heals him (29.145-166). Dionysos performs the healing in a manner like pressing cheese curds in a basket, and Hymenaios reenters the battle and stays by Dionysos’ side. They’ve both proven their worth to one another, and Zeus’ violent nudge has helped them more than an honest battle against the Indians. That doesn’t bode well for the Indians.

Interestingly, Hymenaios does not factor into the rest of the poem, except for a brief cameo at 33.64, where he is playing *kottabos* with Eros, and at 48.5, where he starts the fight over . Hymenaios was Dionysos’ perfected earthly lover, but no god can have a lasting mortal lover, so Zeus has taught him how to let go. At first by force of fate, but with Hymenaios, Nonnos has simply gained better control of himself.

#### 4. Ariadne – The perfected wife

Ariadne is an interesting specimen, as far as Nonnian women go. She is only with Dionysos for a short while, but she is the only woman he meets who enjoys the Dionysian life so much, and who so desperately wants to give up her virginity, where most in Nonnos are fiercely protective of it. She bewails Theseus' departure and will eagerly accept Dionysos. She represents a fulfilling, harmonious relationship that Dionysos would be best suited to. Alas, the dangers of human life mean that such a relationship would be necessarily impermanent.

When Dionysos comes upon Ariadne asleep on the beach, he takes her for several goddesses, but dismisses each possibility as he checks for specific attributes. His questioning grows too loud, however, and Ariadne awakens. Dionysos hides to listen to her curse sleep and Theseus (47.300-418). Luckily, he hears that Theseus left her “longing unfulfilled” (πόθεν Θησῆος ὑπόσχεσιν ἠπεροπῆος) (47.414). Dionysos enters to comfort her with the option of himself for a new lover, and in response Ariadne “quivered with joy” (ἐπάλλετο χάσματι κόρυνη) (47.453). Ariadne decides to join Dionysos to bring his revels to all of Hellas. Unfortunately, she doesn't make it far, and when Dionysos gets to Argos, Perseus turns her to stone. Ariadne will enter once again in person, and once again as her attribute given apotheosis. In a dream, after Eros has infected Dionysos with love for Ariadne, she complains that Dionysos has forgotten her. Dionysos shakes off the dream and lamented her sorrow, but moves on to keep pursuing women.

He will prove, though, that he didn't forget Ariadne, as in the second-to-last set of lines, Nonnos affirms that he has not forgotten his Cydonian bride, and placed “the roundcircling crown ... as a witness of his love” (Στέφανον περίκυκλον ... μάρτυν ἔης φιλότητος) (48.971-972). Ariadne is a perfect wife for Dionysos because she's not around to impede his raucous lifestyle, and she lacks a form beyond the occasional dream visitation, so she cannot make trouble in the way that Hera does.

## 5. Aura – Defending divine decency

Aura is not a mindful woman. Most scholarship on Dionysos' affairs has tended to be dedicated to Aura at least for the most part,<sup>65</sup> largely because of the great depth of emotion Nonnos investigates in this scene. Aura will be the last step in Zeus' tutelage, and fittingly, the resolution of her story comes only about 40 lines before the end of the entire epic. She is a different kind of enemy than any Dionysos has subdued before in the poem. Dionysos has always been the one on the outside looking in to the lives of the gods in camaraderie. Hermes has been a consistent ally, since the moment of Dionysos' fiery birth, likely because the two share such a similar story. They are both wily gods, though Dionysos' wiles lie mainly in tricking people into getting drunk, where Hermes deceives for a different reason on any given day. Hermes and Dionysos, though, both had to earn their way into Olympos, and Hermes likely feels a stronger spiritual affinity for Dionysos than for any other of the gods. This episode, however, is about Dionysos doing a favor for Artemis.

Nonnos shows us that Aura, like Semele, has some issues. Aura has an excessive fear of sex, even for one of Artemis' nymphs. We first meet Aura dozing under a laurel, where she has an unpleasant dream (48.258-286). In the dream, she is a hunting companion of Eros, Aphrodite, and Adonis. She holds Eros' arrows, and Nonnos remarks "she was unaccustomed to carrying Eros' quiver upon her shoulder after she was wont to carry Artemis's bow (Ἄρτεμιδος μετὰ τόξον ἀήθεος ὑψόθεν ὤμου / ἀγρευτῆρος Ἔρωτος ἐλαφρίζουσα φαρέτρην) (48.269-270). She dreams that Eros, once he tires of shooting, captures a lion with Aphrodite's charmed girdle, the *κεστῶν*. Eros identifies her as the lion in the dream, and foretells her fall to Aphrodite's cestus. She awakens from the poem furious, and begins a verbal assault on Eros and Aphrodite. She is offended that the gods are trespassing one another's boundaries; as she is a nymph devoted to Artemis, she should be free from Aphrodite's

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<sup>65</sup> Lightfoot 2000, Schmiel 1993

meddling. But the gods will not let such a regimented world stand. They must push one another in order to produce big, spontaneous innovations. One of these innovations will come from Aura's womb.

Aura will invalidate her claim to separate divine realms when she impugns Artemis' body for being too sensual (48.351-369) and feminine, compared to Aura's, "strong, boyish bodily" (*βραρὸν δέμας*) (48.362). Artemis, furious, betakes herself to Nemesis and asks her to inflict a punishment on Aura. Dionysos will be the instrument of this god's vengeance as he was the instrument of the mortal Hymnus' vengeance. Dionysos is here acting within the prescribed boundaries of divine justice, so I think to label him as lacking in empathy misses the point. Dionysos is here acting under the nudge of Nemesis to punish a human who has offended a god. He pulls his usual trick, turns a fountain to wine, and Aura drinks from it, marveling at the apparently magical water (48.602-612). Dionysos violates her. She wakes up frenzied with fury at discovering what's befallen her. Artemis catches sight of Aura and takes the opportunity to return some of her mockery.

## Hosts and Harassers

### 1. Dionysos, absurdist general

In the whole action of books 1-13, Dionysos fails to engage the Indian troops in battle. There is a tremendous buildup to battle, however, in the stretch from Book 13, when Zeus instructs Dionysos to muster for battle and we receive a catalogue of the Bacchic host, to Book XIV, when we receive a catalogue of divine troops in support of Dionysos, including Naiads, Cabeiroi, Corybants, Telchines, Bacchoi, Bassarids, and a few variations of Centaurs. The fighting begins around line 340 of this last book, after Hera has riled the Indian troops against Dionysos by assuring them of the superiority of their weaponry, of the metal spear over the wooden thyrsus. Unbeknownst to the Indians, however, Dionysos has hedged his bets, and when assembling “a pointed thyrsus wound about with purple ivy,” he places “at the end a heavy bronze head covered with leaves” (14.243-5) for his warriors. This remark calls into question the nature of the Dionysiac fight; up to now, and as we shall see moving forward, a main feature of the characterization of the troops for combat is that Bacchic troops need no metal weaponry or armor, and wage destruction by vegetation, but their efficacy will fluctuate with the action.

It is this uncertainty, given that Dionysos’ triumph is prophesied, that manufactures a sense of anxiety in the reader. This anxiety, however, is not primarily concerned with Dionysos himself, who will never receive more than a superficial lashing and whose flight from the battlefield inspires more amusement than dread, but with his troops. His troops do not enjoy the same sort of divine inviolability as their chief, and we often see large numbers of them routed and terribly slaughtered. As Dionysos is a god, the frequent criticism that he makes an un compelling hero on his own is just the point: Dionysos cannot be killed, not in this fight with men of another land, but without a war-host, he wouldn’t be able to do much of anything. His failure can only come in the form of unfulfillment,

while it comes as painful and disturbing violence to both enemies and allies. Indeed, when the Indians and armies of Bacchos finally rush at one another, there is a slaughter on both sides. Nonnos reveals the nature of the true victims of war by its first casualty: an Indian camel shorn through by a Bassarid's thyrsus-cleft. This occurs just following about two dozen lines describing the animals and animal skins the Bassarids don and the peaceful relationship between woman and creature, where one "coiled a serpent thrice round under her breast unharmed, a girdle next to the skin, while it gaped at her thigh so close, hissing gently" (14.363-6) and another danced unhurt over brambles and prickly pears. Immediately they turn from caressing and cavorting to a truly unnerving display:

One attacked a longlegged camel, and sheared through its curving neck with a sweep of her thyrsus : then half to be seen, went stumbling over the path with blind feet the headless body of the camel staggering about in winding ways, until a hoof sank into a slippery hole and the creature rolled over helpless on its back in the dust (14.370-6)

Another proceeds to perform a *sparagmos* on a wild bull. The very first casualties of war we see are the innocent animals, who follow because they are summoned and commanded, rather than by any personal stake in the combat. So too the worst-suffering victims of war are not its commanders, but the men who are made livestock in strife.

The Bassarids continue to cut the Indians to pieces, staining the earth red with blood, and choking up the lake and bubbling river beside which they fight. Immediately, however (from line 410 to 411), Dionysos drops his thirst for war, overtaken by "his heart of merry cheer" (14.411) and transforms the surrounding waters into wine, and "the banks were empurpled" (14.417), this time with a liquid producing honeyed fragrance. The Indians become drunk and start running about rather comically, catching up and slaughtering wild bulls and goats, thinking them to be Dionysos or his troops, dancing over the hills in newfound revelry. One succeeds in catching a mainad by the hair and attempts to ravish her, but one of her hidden snakes leaps out to defend her chastity and makes of

itself a snaky necklace on the Indian soldier. Soon the Indians are put to drunken sleep wholesale and bound by the Bacchic troops. Victory comes in the first day by a mixture of trickery (by the concealment of the metal tip of the thyrsus and by the introduction of mindbetwitching wine) and blind overconfidence sent by Hera. We do not see any distinction between the Indians and the followers of Dionysos in terms of merit, and we can easily find sympathy for these peoples who exist at this time seemingly just to be conquered. The “unwarlike” Dionysos casts doubt on the glory of war by highlighting its desperation: This is a fight he hasn’t chosen, where he must sacrifice those who would typically be satisfied to revel with him drunkenly in peace, in order to conquer those who have committed no crime and are themselves compelled by Hera’s jealousy.

The effect of this scene is completed by its ending. As his troops despoil the dead and sleeping Indians, he catches sight of a new, beautiful boy (his love Ampelos has died a couple books ago), Hymenaios, who “shot out a rich brilliance, like as Diomedes sparkled among the warriors, flashing with the rich target he had taken from Lycian Glaucos” (15.164-6), before an immediate transition to the story of the nymph Nicaea, who will slay a handsome, peaceful shepherd named Hymnus. Nonnos again turns on a dime from playfulness to gore to comedy to disquietude to infatuation to presaged indignation.

Dionysos begins his tour of viny evangelism in the wake of a fabulous first victory of the Indian War.

Book 16 returns to combat with the Indians:

After he had made captive the Indian nation, shackled in sleep by their potations, immovable without a wound, Dionysos did not commit his quarrel to the forgetful winds, but once more lifted his Phrygian thyrsus ; for he went in haste at the challenge of highcrested Deriades, and left forgotten behind him the trick he had played on the Amazonian girl, the drunken passion and the drowsy nuptials (17.1-7).

He returns to marshal his troops:

The god led the van, wearing a heavenly radiance on his shining face, to proclaim him the son of Zeus. Around the Lydian chariot of giantslaying Dionysos were lines of thyrsus-bearers ; he was ringed about with warriors on either side, conspicuous in the midst, and shone in splendour like another heaven. In beauty he threw all into the shade : to see him you might have said it was fiery Helios in the midst of farscattered stars. The lord of the host had brought Enyo without the steel trappings of war ; for he carried no sword and no deathdealing ashen lance, but for bronze he had his own invincible spear, the ivy (17.8-17)

To contrast this picture of a shining Dionysos like Helios himself, outshining the host (as one would expect of a warlike god, not Dionysos), we see the state of his enemies:

To share the enterprise of Bromios came the whole company of Bacchoi, full of confidence from the first battle, when Seilenos happy-mad, unarmed, picked up in his linked arms a living corpse unspeaking, an Indian in full armour, and marched off heavy-kneed, a sluggish wayfarer.” (17.8-27)

Here we see the context of the comparison. Dionysos has been mocked consistently through the poem by his enemies for being womanish and unused to war, so it is among crazed Seilenoi and incapacitated Indians that he shines out. This amusing realization serves to qualify the praise being heaped on the god. Nonnos, after all, is not afraid to point out Dionysos' weak spots. His inefficacy in battle is a testament to the type of god he is: a bringer of revels, not of war-drums. If he's going to be made to participate in a war, as indeed he is, he's not going to play by conventional rules. He visually eschews the typical trappings of war by the gear of his followers and his own behavior on the battlefield.



## 2. Brongus and Staphylos

He proceeds to dine and revel with a rustic herdsman named Brongos, who extolls the superiority of wine over milk, and to introduce to him the cultivation of the vine:

‘Forget your wish for your old-fashioned milk : the snowy-white drops pressed from the udders of goats that have just kidded do not make men happy or drive their cares away.’

So saying, he gave his gift of gratitude for the shepherd’s table, the fine fruitage of the grapes, the mother of wine, sorrow’s comforter. And the Lord taught him the flowerloving work of the vineyard” (17.78-84).

This routine will mark the pattern of Dionysos’ travels. He will come upon welcoming and less-welcoming hosts on his way to India and his way back to Greece, and will take food and relaxation with them before securing the cultivation of his plant.

After this interlude, Dionysos returns to the pursuit of battle, seemingly hotter for combat than he has been previously:

Leaving the herdsman and the ridge of the wild forest, he now hastened to a new conflict with Indians in the mountains. Bidding the Satyrs who were with him to go on at full speed by the upland tracks he joined himself again to his wild attendant Bacchants. Thirsting for blood and battle under his thyrsus, he took in hand the loudbraying trumpet of the Tyrhenian Sea, and boomed a note on his conch for battle as he gathered the people. He intoxicated the stout warriors, and drew the men on to war with hotter spirit, to destroy the race of Indians that knew not Bacchos (17.87-96).

The second combat is marked by a fiercer violence on both sides: Orontes on the side of the Indians is furious at their loss to Dionysos, and he instructs his troops to avoid wine to escape the same fate. The battle, as always, however, is weighted toward Dionysos. Even though his troops will be routed,

the force of their attack remains jarringly playful. Where the Pheres join battle by “[tearing] up the foundations of the ravines and cast them, or some crag from the top of the hills,” the Pans

madly made battle skipping with light foot over the peaks. One of them gript an enemy’s neck tight in encircling hands, and ript him with his goat’s-hooves, tearing through flank and strong corselet together. Another caught a fugitive Indian and ran him through the middle where he stood, then lifting him on the curved points of his two longbranching antlers, sent him flying high through the airy way, rolling over himself like a tumbler. Another waved in his hand the strawcutting sickle of sheafbearing Deo, and reaped the enemy crops with clawcurved blade, like cornerars of conflict, like gavels of the battle-field (17.139-55).

While this narrative emphasizes the vegetative potency of the Bacchic weaponry, the Indians persist in their futile reliance on metal. Orontes calls into the crowd with just such unwarranted confidence, though it will at first seem justified:

‘Could unwarlike Bacchos ever hold front against me in open field? If he is able, let the runaway champion stand up to me, that I may teach him what champions Deriades arms for the fray! Let him fight with leaves, I will use flashing steel! While I hold a metal spear, what can a Lydian do to me with a bunch of twigs, a volley of vegetables?’

‘I will match your championesses with amorous Indians—they shall be hauled off to bed as brides won by the spear!’

“With these words Orontes dashed hot upon the front ranks, reaping a harvest in both kinds” (17.176-8, 190-3).

Orontes proceeds to cut down soldier after soldier of Dionysos’, in one of the anxiety-producing moments of the poem. Orontes is fighting here as though he were engaged in a typical combat, in which case the battle-hardened Indian soldier would have no trouble dispatching the dancing unarmed troops dressed in skins rather than steel. It will take another Nonnian turn to get Dionysos out of this mess:

Next he struck the hairy front of another Centaur with a two-bladed axe, and shore away the curving horn from his bull's-head. He fell in a great heap on the ground, and rolled headlong tumbling about half dead and brushing the dust with his ears ; then lifting his body on his feet, with a last wild effort he danced a stumbling hideous dance of death : the monster let out a harsh roaring sound, like a bull struck on the skull which bellows horribly with grinning jaws (17.208-16).

Even as a Bacchant falls slain, she protects her chastity, in a moment of tenderness that seems to confirm clearly that Dionysos is not opposed to chastity or to modesty, even in his own reveling followers, and that his punishments will not reflect a pugnacious anti-prudery as other gods' punishments often stem from pugnacious prudery:

As her lovely gore welled up over the skin, she modestly smoothes the errant vesture with her right hand, guarding the bare secrets of the snowy-white thigh (17.222-4).

In order to save the battle, Nonnos grants Dionysos access to a larger-than-life battle-spirit, Ares, in emulation of *Iliad* 5.860<sup>66</sup>:

The god, seeing victory pass to the enemy, and the Satyrs cowed, uttered a loud cry in the turmoil, like an army of nine thousand men pouring defiant shouts with united voices from thunderous throats. (17.225-8)

This un-Dionysian cry seems to push the moil to a higher level of combat, where Dionysos' fury renders his followers invincible. We see Dionysos enter into combat himself for the first time, taking on Orontes in single combat, in which he triumphs because of his divine aspect:

Orontes proud of his armament struck Bacchos on the top of his head, but wounded him not ; he grazed the sharp horn of Bromios all for nothing. For Lord Dionysos wore on that invulnerable head nothing like the shape of the bullfaced moon which can be

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<sup>66</sup> "Diomedes, good at the war-cry, drave at Ares with his spear of bronze, and Pallas Athene sped it mightily against his nethermost belly, where he was girded with his taslets. There did he thrust and smite him, rending the fair flesh, and forth he drew the spear again. Then brazen Ares bellowed loud as nine thousand warriors or ten thousand cry in battle, when they join in the strife of the War-god; and thereat trembling came upon Achaeans alike and Trojans, and fear gat hold of them; so mightily bellowed Ares insatiate of war." (*Iliad* 5.855-63)

cut by the devastating steel of the slaughterer's axe, as they sing of horned Acheloös, when Heracles cut off his horn and took it to adorn his wedding. No, Lyaios wore the heavenly image of the cow's-eye moon, a growth of divine horns which cannot be broken, which enemies cannot shake. The bold Indian facing Bachhos, heavy-thundering like a tempest in the sky, again cast a spear, hut the point when it touched the fawn-skin crumpled up like lead. Bacchos in his turn let fly his purple thyrsus at the broad shoulder of Orontes, and missed on purpose (17.232-47).

The unbelievable impregnability of Dionysos' person becomes comical when juxtaposed with the ease with which Dionysos strips his rival:

Lord Bacchos was angry when he heard him, and with a vine cluster he tapped him gentle on the chest. This tap of an insignificant vinegrown bloom split his breastpiece. The god's pike did not touch the protected flesh, did not scratch his body ; but the coat of mail broke and fell with a heavy clang—Orontes was naked! (17.262-8)

The undressing of his adversary marks the beginning of the end of the battle, which will end with Orontes' suicide by throwing himself into the neighboring river and giving it his name. The battle goes on around Dionysos and Orontes, but not felicitously for the Indian soldiers in the wake of Dionysos' war-changing roar:

The enemies of vineloving Lyaios were slain with bloody wounds from the wooden steel. Bronze-clad Indians marveled, when steel was cleft by the viny spear of an unarmed Bacchant woman, and their chests were bared and freshly wounded by the sharp ivy ; for those who wore the corselet were shot down more easily than the unprotected. Death took many shapes in that indescribable carnage on the Tauros, where the coats of the fighting men were sliced open by twigs and reddened with gore (17.321-30).

The humor of this reversed rout comes through in remarks that seem to come from an incredulous observer rather than an omniscient poet. Out of this seemingly-uneven fighting, where armored Indians seem the clear favorites against leaf-dressed bacchantes, a dainty dancer spirals his way up to tap a great soldier and relieve him of the metal gear that had been massacring the unarmed Bacchantes,

and the observer is amazed by the unexpected turn, and indeed now, in a puzzling twist, all the Indians in armor find themselves especially vulnerable to leafy domination, while the forces of Dionysos need no armor at all:

In that combat the Bacchoi, servants of unwarlike Dionysos, stood like a stone wall unhurt by all the blows of axes and two-edged swords ; but their curlyheaded enemies were killed by little bunches of leaves (17.333-6).

The battle is turned on a dime and Dionysos will be free to press on to revels in Arabia. The Indians will always be easy to dispatch if certain gods are on Dionysos' side that day. If, however, Hera is stacking a battle against Dionysos, or persuading Zeus to preserve or embolden the Indian troops

### **Dionysos tries his hand at world-ordering**

After Dionysos escapes the threat posed by Lycurgos in Book 21, he departs the halls of Nereus and returns with his troops to march on to India. What follows is a scene of hallucinogenic quality, wherein Dionysos inspires nature itself to luxuriant exuberance. Nonnos provides for us a voyeur in the form of a messenger from an Indian contingent that is waiting in the forest to ambush Dionysos, whom Dionysos' miracles bewilder (22.55-73). Nonnos builds anticipation that we will see another iteration of Dionysos' victory from Books 14-15, but twists our expectations by supplying a Hera *ex machina* to infect the Indians with pugnacity. She starts the battle, and supplies the Indians by her divine backing a chance against the forces of divine Dionysos. Even though he is early in his martial and divine education, he is the child of Zeus, predestined to triumph, and has enjoyed tremendous success against mortals thus far. Hera provides a counterbalance for Nonnos to facilitate his construction of anticipation, perturbation, and victorious ecstasy. He will use this scene, and the battle to come in Books 22-24, as a training ground for Dionysos. He will allow Dionysos to push his boundaries, but not too far, and will use Zeus to soothe Dionysos' anger when it threatens the natural order over which Zeus reigns. As Dionysos enters the war, he is well on his way to becoming the god that Zeus is grooming him to become, but there are lessons yet for him to learn.

Nonnos gives us a view into the Indians' battle-deliberations in light of Dionysos' advance from the sea at the end of Book 21: Deriades splits the army in two and stations one on either side of the river Hydaspes (21.315-326). For the contingent under Thureus he selects a well-hidden hollow in the forest, where Nonnos tells us "no stream of air-faring Zeus poured on the thick-shaded copse" (οὐ χύσις ἠερόφοιτος ἐδύσατο δάσκιον ὕλην / ἐκ Διὸς ὑετίοιο) (21.332-333). Nonnos emphasizes the stillness of this part of the forest and of the Indians within it. This is an area where Zeus' order has reigned unchallenged for some time. The effect is comic, since Zeus seems shut out from the dense

forest, but he is in fact shut out by the seniority of his *kosmos* in this place. Nonnos gives us another reversal of fortune while revealing the pervasive nature of the chief orderer.

With the entire Indian army present in the forest, Nonnos tells us that they “in the bosom of the forest guarded noiseless their stepping sandals” (ἐνὶ δρυόεντι δὲ κόλπῳ / εἶχεν ἀδουπήτων πεφυλαγμένον ἴθμα πεδίλων) (21.338-339) and that “no foot thrashed the leafy thicket” (οὐδὲ διαξαίνων κρυφίῳ ποδὶ φυλλάδα λόχμην) (21.340). This silence will be riotously overturned by Dionysos’ rollicking entry in the opening lines of Book 22. Dionysos will here clearly begin to exert divine power over the world, while others persist in their conventional habits with regard to it. Hera will fight to maintain that world, and will use the Indian troops as her tools to do so. Zeus will, as its orderer and her lover, allow her to persist for a while, but in the end, he will allow Dionysos to effect fundamental transformation of the world-order with his cult.

Nonnos tells us that Nonnos’ advance is presaged by the song of his Bassarids (22.4), who sing along with the satyrs “in mystic voice” (ἔβρεμε μύστιδι φωνῆ) (22.5). Their singing enchants nature as Dionysos does his enemies, but rather than bring comatose drunkenness or madness, their song brings verdurous explosion. In a light line with suggestive implications, Nonnos tells us that “all the earth laughed” (γαῖα δὲ πᾶσα γέλασεν) (22.7),<sup>67</sup> joined by the rocks. Remember, of course, that Gaia has not always been so kind to the plans of Zeus. In resentment Nonnos leaves unexplained,<sup>68</sup> she sent Typhon to overthrow Zeus and his world-order in an attempt to substitute his own, sinister travesty. Typhon’s inclination was toward a domination and strife that characterized even the world

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Homeric Hymn to Apollo, line 118: μείδησε δὲ γαῖ’ ὑπένερθεν

<sup>68</sup> In the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, Gaia produced Typhon in response to Hera’s request in order to punish Zeus for producing Athena without her, such a tremendous god opposed to her lame Hephaistos. A connection appears evident, as the *Dionysiaca* is a poem wholly about Zeus’ endeavor to engender a child not by Hera who would become a tremendous god. In the *Dionysiaca*, though, Typhon attacks before Zeus has even considered forming the first Dionysos and it is the destruction left in the aftermath of the cosmic battle that inclines Zeus to create Dionysos and spare mortals some of the tragedy he had been inflicting on them.

before Zeus takes charge, so Gaia’s motivations seem to tend sometimes toward inscrutability, and it is good to see her charmed. It will be significant that Nonnos makes a distinction between the earth and the rocks, because we will find that the river Hydaspes himself, in the Nonnian vein of anthropomorphizing constellations, vegetation, and the thiasos itself, will lend aid to the Indians and himself require Dionysos to subdue him before the war can end.

In response to the animation of the earth and stones, Nonnos paints a scene of a forest playing itself like pipes. To animate the trees, “the nymphs spiraled in mazes above the silent stream” (ὕπερ ποταμοῖο δὲ Νύμφαι / σιγαλέοις ἔλικηδὸν ἐμιτρῶσαντο ῥεέθροις) (22.8-9). The stream, remember, has not yet joined the chorus. After the nymphs prance through, “The skilled trees sounded of themselves the tunes of *auloi*” (μέλος ἐφθέγγξαντο σοφαὶ δρυὲς εἵκελον ἀύλῳ) (22.13), he tells us, as hadryades<sup>69</sup> and “Nymphs sang and peered half-seen above the beautiful leafy cluster” (ἐπ’ εὐπετάλοιο δὲ Νύμφη / ἡμιφανῆς ἤειδεν ὑπερκύψασα κορύμβου) (22.14-15). The playful image is ethereal as it is mind-bending, as Nonnos invites one to imagine a tree fashioning itself into an instrument like an oboe and nymphs darting among them. He effects the sonorous effect of an *aulos* by use of a repeating η in lines 14-15, and also imbues the line with the rhythm of trees swaying and creaking in the wind with the dance of the nymphs. Nonnos returns to his imagery of mazes and circles often in this passage, as he often does when describing physical motion. He does this sort of description often and to great effect of immersing the reader in the action of his world. As among his various stories, the reader is pulled back and forth with the motion of the word ὑπερκύψασα as well has an interesting tension in itself between the upward motion of ὑπέρ and the downward, sly motion of κύπτω, and the preëxisting unity of hamadryad and tree imbues her motion with an especially mystical aspect.

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<sup>69</sup> This is an unusual name for hamadryads. Nonnos, as always, is fond of peculiarity.



After the earth and vegetation have been brought into the revel's song, the forest's streams join the action and are metamorphosed into milk, which the naiads drink and in which they swim (22.16-19). In addition to singing, the rocks now sprout attributes of mammalian breasts and "surge wine from red nipples, empurpling themselves" (ἐρευσθιόωντι δὲ μαζῶν οἶνον ἐρευγομένη κραναή πορφύρετο) (22.19-20). Holes produce honey of themselves, apples emerge from mundane bushes, olives press themselves and spill oil still on the tree. This world of Nonnos' is very much alive. After the inanimate becomes animate, Nonnos pushes the already-animate to the next (and completely unnatural) level. As always, a scene that on first reading may appear to be building up haphazardly is in fact proceeding logically, as Nonnos brings each part of his natural setting into mystical action like the building presence of the arriving thiasos itself. His comments are not spurious; he remarks specifically on the water's dormancy to draw the attention of the reader when he does mention it.

The dance next infects benign, adorable animals. "Prancing hounds swung round with hares" (κύνας ὀρχηστῆρας ἐπηχύνοντο λαγωοί) (22.28), but soon they will be joined by higher orders of animals. First predators, then larger animals and then the largest mortal animals on land. Serpents "embacchanize and join the dance" (ἐβ ακχεύοντο) (22.29) with the hares and dogs to "whirl round in coils" (ἐλέλικτο περίπλοκος) (22.34), followed by tigers and elephants. The animals dance in unexpected or miraculous ways. The tigers dance on the precipices of mountains, and the elephants descend "bounding" (ἄνεσκιρτησεν) (22.38) into the glades. The elephants' size is no object to their nimble skipping, and animals of all kinds get on as though there is no such phenomenon as predation. Next go Pans, running across ravines where even a bird wouldn't dare, then lions dancing with boars. It is amusing that the Pans should be included among these beasts, because we imagine them to be rather on the human side of the dichotomy, along with satyrs, one of whom, in fact, becomes Dionysos' lover Ampelos. Nonnos reminds us to remember the dual nature of these beings, and the

animalistic energy of Dionysos' thiasos. Parakeets then become seized by the Dionysian spirit and sing a "mimic" (μιμηλῆν) (22.46) human tune to prophesy Dionysos' victory. Here the spirit of Dionysos himself is enough to inspire prophecy in these emerald birds gifted with speech, and Nonnos gets to pepper in another indication of Dionysos' ineluctable victory. To wind down the procession, Nonnos shows us a panther dancing with a bear (22.50), before extolling Dionysos by showing Artemis bewailing Dionysos' taming of the wild beasts she is wont to hunt. Nonnos leverages the moment to push the scene from merely fabulous to exceedingly divine. This upstart Dionysos is on the right track if his revels render Artemis' hunt pointless.

With Artemis' displeasure for conclusion to the vision, we pull back to realize that we are not alone in having played spectator to Dionysos' procession. Indeed, we realize in the course of Nonnos' description that we are in an identical position as the spy. That there is a voyeur anchors the scene in space, and gives reason to Nonnos' choice to place himself in wait for Dionysos' train rather than narrating alongside it. Nonnos subtly places us among the leaves in the forest with this man, as alone as readers, as he is as a watchman. Nonnos tells us that the man had been viewing Dionysos' miracles through a small peep-hole in the leaves that "let him see as much as a man could espy through the holes of his helmet" (ὅσον περιδέρκεται ἀνήρ / ὄμμασι ποιητοῖσι διοπτέων τρυφαλείης) (22.58-59), or an actor through the eyes of his mask.<sup>70</sup> It is no accident that Nonnos leaves the messenger unnamed, to be bewildered and terrified as an unwary reader. We are like the messenger, because we are removed from the action of the poem by the bounds of written language. As the messenger misses the view on his peripherals, so we miss the experience of viewing, and we have only Nonnos' description. Nonnos

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<sup>70</sup> These lines strike me as the final touch on Nonnos' identification of the reader with the messenger, and the pairing of the helmet with the mask strikes me as suggestive. Dionysos is marching off to war, and this Indian is his enemy, so the comparison of the peep-holes to those of a helmet is typical, but the comparison to a theatrical mask seems a sly hint to the dramatic nature of Nonnos' world. Nonnos ornaments his epic with these hints that his story will show the inescapable universal force that is the will of Zeus.

revels in controlling our view, and likes to remind us that we have no other choice than to indulge him.

The messenger returns to tell Thureus of the scene he's witnessed and Thureus, terrified, bemoans Deriades' and Morrheus' having gotten him into his hopeless mess; he would have removed himself and his troops from their positions if not for Hera's incitement (22.74-75).<sup>71</sup> The Indians and Dionysos fight for several hundred lines, and in the course of battle Oiagros and Erechtheus distinguish themselves as champions. They are the two who had competed in a singing competition at Staphylos' funeral games in Book 19. They, with Dionysos, massacre the Indians and leave only Thureus alive.

The river Hydaspes joins the fight when Hera, furious, descends in the wake of the Indians' defeat and incites him to attack Dionysos. He does so with crashing waves, disorienting bassarids and knocking Pan's syrinx into the waves. Dionysos does not long stand the insult, and launches into a furious rhetorical attack, in which he appeals to his father's universal power to threaten Hydaspes with being dried up. Instead, Dionysos chooses to take matters into his own hands and sets the banks of the river alight himself (23.255-266) with a fitting fennel stalk.<sup>72</sup> The fire magically spreads to the water and begins to boil the river, sending smoky blazes through the reeds and foliage by the banks as well. Hydriads and naiads are forced from their homes by the tumult, much as they were by the tumult of Typhon's fiery assault or Zeus' fiery punishment for Zagreus' death.

Nonnos' echo of the earlier passage following the murder and dismemberment of Zagreus becomes fitting when Hydaspes reveals to Dionysos, while pleading for his life, that he was entrusted

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Schmiel 1998, p. 401—he remarks on this Homeric formula as it crops up through the text characteristically un-Homerically. Specifically, Homer reserves the phrase for a point of tension late in an episode, as when Aphrodite whisks Paris away from his losing fight with Menelaus in 3.373, while Nonnos uses it to introduce a markedly un-Homeric occurrence: the entrance of lesser mythological being, like the hamadryad who will warn Dionysos about the ambush.

<sup>72</sup> The *thyrsus*, a Bacchic staff and common attribute of worshippers wrapped with ivy and topped with a cluster of leaves, is composed of a fennel stalk.

by Zeus to wash the baby Zagreus before Zagreus' dismemberment (24.43-47). For the time, however, Dionysos rages in the manner of angry Zeus and poses an open threat to the stability of this part of the world. He is getting carried away by his success and takes too great offense at being opposed. Zeus will enter to soothe his anger after Oceanos complains about the affront to liquid powers and threatens an assault on the heavens. Zeus, in order to avoid another chaotic delay of Dionysos' mission, soothes Oceanos and guides Dionysos to proper behavior and proportionate action (24.1-6). Hydaspes takes the opportunity to supplicate Dionysos, which is a great compliment to Dionysos' climbing status, and complains that he only fought for the Indians because Deriades is his son, and he cannot be blamed for defending his son. Dionysos accepts Hydaspes' entreaty, retracts his torch, and crosses the river in peace (24.62-67). He is succeeding swiftly in his lessons in godhood. He will proceed to battle the Indians with a view to victory without upsetting the bounds of his world.

## Dionysos' Shield

Nonnos makes a number of subtle boasts to convey his claimed superiority over Homer. Among the clearest is his treatment of the war; it proceeds for 24 books, the length of a full typical Homeric epic, but starts over a dozen books into the poem, takes several books' break within the action, and ends several books before the poem itself does. Nonnos turns the *Iliad* on its head by taking not one episode for close consideration, but the entire war so that we see what war is really like: year after year of butchery, even while one side claims this or that ephemeral victory. War is a monotonous horror that can only be escaped through absurdity, like Dionysos' unwarlike weapon and the frequent victories by intoxication. Nonnos also provides a key boast in the form of a narrative of the bringing of a divine shield by Attis, wrought by Hephaistos, to Dionysos. He places this episode in a central point in the poem itself (Book 25), just following a comic episode of bellicose missed connections where Deriades, king of the Indians, assembles his troops on the banks of the Hydaspes as Dionysos is crossing with his army, in order to cut him down, but Zeus lifts Bacchos and his army away to the hills, and the Indians return, frustrated, to their city.

The break in the action is on the one hand a moment where Dionysos has escaped bloody conflict by way of comedy, and on the other a moment that subtly conveys Nonnos' superiority over Homer. Nonnos has here outdone the typical epic, having already written 24 books, and not yet come to the climax of the war, but places a key to the whole just after the 24-book point. The episode of the shield, far from being what Lind calls "a mere wild mélange of myths and phantasy compared with the reasoned, orderly, and beautiful group of pictures on the shield of Achilles" (58), is in fact deeply ordered and tells the essentials of Dionysos' story in miniature. The episode bears the prophecy that Dionysos will triumph, as we have already heard in earlier books, but its placement in the middle of the war reminds us that no matter the losses and the pain of the Bacchic troops, Dionysos is inevitable,

as world-chaos has been assuredly averted by the easy victory of Zeus over Typhon. Because victory is assured, however, the reader is more inclined to see the suffering on both sides for itself, rather than to worry about the stakes for the war. The very length yet to come of the narration of the war urges us to find some purpose for the frequent and horrifying tribulation of the combatants, but none is to be found, and every return to the fray is a sorrow for the reader as for the victims on the field. The shield provides welcome relief not only to a god who shouldn't need it (as Lind complains Dionysos doesn't, already being divine) but to us as readers who need a reminder that this suffering will come to an end.

On the shield, first described is, in the middle, “the circle of earth, sea joined to land, and round about it the heaven dotted with a troop of stars” (25.387 ff.). Here we see the foundation Nonnos wishes us to assume: the earth. Nonnos literally grounds us in this world, around which the eternal and unchanging dance proceeds, first of all with the stars who never touch, and second with the coursing basket of Helios and the bright circle of the moon. Constellations are Nonnos' key image, as they twirl and charge on always and predictably. Next we see the founding of Thebes, which will be a site activated by the birth of Dionysos as the shield seems activated by the silent music of the harps thereupon. Here Thebes is founded in music, and that music has the power to activate the landscape, inspiring even the rolling hills to skip and trip along. Next we see Zeus carrying Ganymede to Olympus in his talons, but worried that the boy will fall and drown in the waters below, as did Icarus and Helle. Here we are reminded of the suffering of Dionysos after the death of Ampelos, but instead of recounting an analogous story of loss, Zeus does not drop Ganymede but succeeds in bringing him to be the Olympian cupbearer. We receive indication that Dionysos will triumph at last and overcome loss, becoming as satisfied as Zeus, even while Hera seethes. In addition to overcoming the loss of a boy-love, we see, Dionysos will also triumph over jealousy and the static order of monogamy.

Next, at length we see the description of events in Maionia. This episode is the longest depicted, and captures the snowballing energy of the description. The story is specifically of Tylos' slaying by a serpent, Moria's lamentation and vengeance through Damasen on the serpent, and of the reanimation of both serpent and man by use of medicinal flowers. This, like the story of Ganymede, is the task of Dionysos in pure Dionysian bliss, beyond the necessity for pain in this world. Here death and sorrow are impermanent, and a man horribly slain may return quickly to the dance with the introduction of a subtle (and, notably, beautiful) medicine. This is a way of telling Dionysos' triumph. In an eastern land, along a winding river, a man battles with a vicious serpent, as Dionysos' troops battle with the serpentine Indians, who like snakes are armored against the soft flesh of men or Bacchoi. The serpent strikes Tylos down and his sister Moria despairs, before calling Damasen to kill the serpent, which he does. The serpent's mate comes from her hole and mourns her dead partner like a human widow, which evokes the morning of Orsiboë, Deriades' wife, after he has been killed and tossed into the Hydaspes. The serpent, however, gathers healing flowers and reanimates the other, who quickly slips away. Moria excitedly does the same for Tylos and he is returned to life full of energy. Nonnos here imagines a battle where suffering need not be permanent, and where the grief of a fellow woman, even a female serpent tending to an aggressive husband, has equal emotional force and instructive capacity. As Moria learned from the she-serpent, so too may we learn from the strife of the *Dionysiaca* to abandon war and to find comfort in the floral liniments from the gods.

Nonnos ends the episode with a final reference to Rheia, who was his nursemaid and thereby aided him in overcoming Hera, as Rheia overcame Cronos with her counterfeit baby. This brief ekphrasis ties up the rest of the stories by assuring Dionysos' final victory over divine resistance and his ascendance, like Zeus, to Olympian power. However, unlike Zeus, and Cronos before him, Dionysos will not challenge his father in violence, but revel with him and bring intoxicating relief to mankind. The battle will rage on, and battalions fall under savage blade and cutting twig, but the

inevitable triumph of Dionysos becomes more welcome with every passing story, which approach and entertain like diversions brought by the god himself, turning the reader's head from unpleasant gore.



### **Hera maddens Dionysos**

If Ronald Newbold's identification of a fascination in Nonnos with characteristic sadomasochistic actions, such as scoring, binding, and lashing<sup>73</sup> is truest for anybody in Nonnos' poem in particular, I think it would be Hera. She is the only character who is singularly motivated through the poem by spite. Other characters may experience an offense and retaliate, but no character can hold a grudge like Hera. She will take any opportunity she can get to undermine the efforts of those she dislikes. She is capable of putting her displeasure into clear words, though, as she does when convincing Aphrodite to loan her her enchanted girdle to seduce Zeus (31.199-282), as she does in Book 14 of the Iliad. In Nonnos, however, Hera hasn't put Zeus to sleep just to send an ally into the battle, but to send Dionysos himself into a state of madness (32.98-109).

The nature of Hera's maddening is that she sends a Fury to torment him with poison and terrifying transformations. Here Hera uses the Dionysian power against Dionysos himself. Of course, he is not immune to fright from a transformation simply because he is a god of transformations. Dionysos' transformations are not evil, so his creatures are relatively benign. Dionysos is not a god accustomed to creating terror. He creates confusion, he outwits, and he astounds, but he never resorts to terrifying, except when he is tormenting Pentheus to great comical effect. Because he himself doesn't need to drink wine to achieve the Dionysian state, he is actually somewhat more vulnerable to intoxicating experiences than he would be otherwise. I am inclined always to look for a way to interpret Hera's impediments as constructive. I think, like Zeus, when Hera makes things difficult for Dionysos, he learns Hera is a vicious god, and will go to whatever lengths against her enemies. It is for this reason that Miguélez-Cavero calls her "The Persistent and Unreasonable Enemy."<sup>74</sup> She is a force of

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<sup>73</sup> Newbold 1984.

<sup>74</sup> Miguélez-Cavero 2010. pp. 29-30

resistance, which in the complex world of coiling eddies and multiplying systems can be productive of more and more nuanced systems.

### Chapter 3: Evangelism and Consolidation

“In psychological terms, the issue of man’s survival does not confront his consciousness as an issue of ‘life or death,’ but as an issue of ‘happiness or suffering.’ Happiness is the successful state of life, suffering is the warning signal of failure, of death.”

- Ayn Rand

#### Nonnos wraps things up

The last couple of pages of Nonnos’ poem are incredibly interesting in their economy and great energy. One paragraph here may contain an entire episode Nonnos tosses in for us, and it may seem almost ready to leap off the page and begin its own dance. Nonnos, by the end of the poem, has readied us for a world of enduring uncertainty and flux. Here, he no longer needs to surprise the reader in order to remind him of the expansive application of *poikilia*, though he would never abandon his thorough style on the basis that readers know what he’s doing. When the Indian War is won in Book 40, the motivating factor for a reader of the poem cannot seriously be curiosity about the plot, because Nonnos gives away his ending up front. The motivation for finishing the poem isn’t whether Dionysos will succeed in gaining apotheosis. We know he will. We read on because Nonnos has more to share with us. As he proves by his Aura episode, he can keep secrets up his sleeve, hidden in the crannies where conventional literature sticks the unimportant. Nonnos builds a grand castle from a mountain of tiny gemstones, each differing slightly from the other.

## Conclusion

In this project, I've attempted to take an epic poem in 48 books and both walk you through its major plot points and introduce you to the structure that I think undergirds the whole thing. I hope that more of my ideas about Nonnos' style will remain memorable than the details of particular stories. The joy of Nonnos lies in experiencing those scenes, and noticing connections that reveal themselves upon repeated reading. Although, for the sake of clarity, I will here provide a quick review of the plot I've dealt with, and a general picture of events I haven't. I want to take this time to thank you for coming this far with me. It is truly an honor to share my cup of Nonnos.

The poem begins with Nonnos' claim that the lightning bolt, which brought a god who was "half-completed" (ἄμειευτος) and "twice born" (δισσοτόκοιο), who has a dancing partner in Proteus. Nonnos tells us that we are about to hear the story of Cadmos, but then he begins with Zeus abducting Europa from Sidon, and Cadmos is lost to sight, but then the sides switch, and Europa is lost to sight, while Cadmos narrowly avoids coming upon Typhon at home. Cadmos uses trickery to get Zeus' sinews returned. Europa is impregnated and discarded, and after Typhon challenges Zeus to battle, and Zeus laughs a prophecy of victory, Typhon is destroyed, and Gaia pouts. Cadmos finds a home in Thebes and, with the help of some gods, convinces Harmonia that he's worth marrying, which is awkward, because Zeus promised her for nothing, and Cadmos isn't sure he wants to have to prove anything.

Cadmos founds Thebes, and the Cadmeian line is begun (Autonoë, Agauë, Ino, and Semele). Autonoë marries Aristaios, and they raise Actaion, who is soon torn apart by his own dogs for having seen Artemis naked. Other Cadmeians marry. Zeus and other gods fall in love with Persephone. Demeter, in fear, visits Astraios, the god of prophecy, and receives the prophecy that Persephone will

bear a great god of bounty. Demeter tries to hide Persephone, but Zeus produces Zagreus with her. Hera has the Titans cut Zagreus up, so Zeus burns the world. Oceanos persuades him to abate, so he floods the world.

After a long while of many stories, Dionysos sets the world in circular motion.

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