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Democratizing Dionysus: The Origins Controversy and the Dual Evolution of Tragedy and Civism

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by

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Abstract

Finding the origins of tragedy has been a fascinating subject since late antiquity, and it continues to be a source of academic debate. The controversy I have examined is from the early years of our twenty-first century, and has questioned the testimony of Aristotle, opening the debate once again. The evidence continues to prove that tragedy's origins were religious, and even though there is no hard evidence to prove that it evolved from Dionysiac ritual, there is no hard evidence to disprove this theory either.

I have taken this opportunity to examine the origins of tragedy from its evolution, which I argue cannot be analyzed in isolation as literary genre. The evolution of tragedy was a dual evolution, both literary and political. Its development reflects political changes in Athens during the fifth century. It was in such evolution that tragedy's themes became other than exclusively religious, and that is the cause of the superficial estrangement between tragedy as genre and tragedy as part of religious ritual.

Key Terms:

Choregos: In ancient Greek theatre, the *choregos* was an officially appointed post from the wealthy citizenry, who assumed the public duty of financing the chorus and some other aspects of dramatic production not paid by the city-state. **Dithyramb**: ancient lyric song, which according to Aristotle tragedy derived from. ***Kommos*****:** unique kind of dialogue, which was sang between the characters in the stage and the chorus in the orchestra.

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INTRODUCTION

The general topic of my research is the role of Dionysus in the origins of tragedy and its relationship to Athenian democracy. This paper seeks to bring clarity to the contemporary controversy on the origins of tragedy. The controversy can be traced back to A. W. Pickard-Cambridge's publication in 1962 of an erudite and comprehensive work titled *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*.[1] The controversy, however, was fully developed by Scott Scullion in an article titled, "Nothing to do with Dionysus: Tragedy Misconceived as Ritual," published in 2002.[2] These works could be considered part of a general tendency in academia to challenge Aristotle's long held authority. Both works question specifically Aristotle's Dionysiac theory on the origins of tragedy put forward in *The Poetics*, in which Aristotle states, "Tragedy was at first mere improvisation and originated with the authors of the Dithyramb."[3] The dithyrambs or circular choruses were songs danced in honor of Dionysus, and they constitute the first form of performed lyric poetry based-dialogue when they begin to include solos in the fifth century BCE.[4] Scullion's article aspires, however, to be a more immediate reaction to what he calls "the current great revival of the ritualistic approach to the origins of tragedy" and thus treats said revival as an unchallenged consequence of a modern framework overly influenced by social sciences like anthropology and psychology.[5] Scullion's argument against the ritualistic approach to the origins of tragedy is primarily based on three points:

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[1]A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, Second Edition (Oxford University Press, 1962).
[2]Scott Scullion. "Nothing to do with Dionysus: Tragedy Misconceived as Ritual," *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 52, no. 1 (2002). http://www.jstor.org/stable/3556447 (accessed July 3, 2014).
[3]Aristotle *Poetics.* IV-5.
[4]Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb,"31, 33, 38, and 40.
[5]Scullion. "Nothing," 137.

a. The prominence of Dionysiac themes in tragedy is less than claimed by the revivalists, and constitutes less than four per cent.
b. Tragedy was not exclusively performed at festivals of Dionysus.
c. Tragedy is a "species of poetry and its principal congener is epic not cultic hymns."[6]

This thesis analyzes Scullion's argument against the Dionysiac origins of tragedy's revival. We do not have proof for every step, but the transition from dithyramb to tragedy was part of the evolution of a literary form within a religious framework. Authors like Scullion and Pickard-Cambridge have provided us with one single type of reading of tragedy, a reading that looks at tragedy not just exclusively as text, but as text isolated from its full cultural context. They cut tragedy from the two very sources that defined it and constantly fed it: religion and politics.

The 'revival', to which Scullion refers, may represent a need to comprehend pillars of culture, like Greek tragedy, from new perspectives. Authors like Nietzsche, Freud and Burkert have contributed to the broadening and depth of study of cultural questions across disciplines. Works like Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, Freud's *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex*, and Burkert's *Homo Necans* have been highly influential in the revival of the argument for the ritualistic origins of tragedy.[7] Scullion's argument falls short, as he misunderstands one of the more relevant aspects of ancient Greek thought: the ability to explain any event on two planes at the same time and the possibility of dual causality wherein the human and the divine are integrated. This

[6] Scullion,"Nothing," 110.
[7] Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* (University of California Press, 1983); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," *On Sexuality* vol. 7 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Freud Library, 1976), 313-322.

concept is fundamental to understand the ritual function of theatre and the nature of Attic tragedy.

I argue that Greek tragedy had a religious origin and that the representations of tragedies in Athens, during the classical period, openly derived from the cult of Dionysus.

If we examine the thirty-two extant tragedies, as text, they are not strictly ritual, or even religious, and we certainly do not find in them much that could remind us of Dionysus, the god of wine and phallic processions. Dionysiac themes in tragedy are indeed hard to locate, but tragedies do not have to be about Dionysus to be part of a religious festival dedicated to the god under the sacredness of ritual. We must remember that Dionysus was the only god who died and was reborn, and that there is a sacred presence always found in tragedy that reflects the cycle of life, which always includes death. [8] The heroes of tragedy accept this notion unconditionally.

Tragedy was performed during two festivals to honor Dionysus: The Great Dionysia in the spring, and the Lenaia in late December. Only during these festivals, to honor Dionysus, was tragedy performed at Athens.[9] Scullion points that this was only an 'Athenian phenomenon,' and that there is evidence of dramatic performances in honor to gods other than Dionysus. During the fifth-century BCE the production of tragedies was indeed mostly an Athenian phenomenon. The great majority of tragedies were written for and premiere at the Athenian festivals in honor of Dionysus. On the other hand there was nothing exceptional in tragedies being represented in Amorgos or Delphi to honor Apollo or Athena. Scullion ignores the fact that ancient religions were not mutually exclusive.[10]

Tragedy is characterized as a fusion of two separate elements: characters and

[8] Jacqueline de Romilly, *La tragédie grecque* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 15.
[9] Romilly, "La tragedie," 16.
[10] Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 4.

chorus into one new unit. This fusion first took place in the dithyrambs sung to honor the god Dionysus, where we see the first dialogue emerge between the chorus and an individual character.[11] This may help prove the Aristotelian testimony on the origins of tragedy, where tragedy is born from the dithyramb. In any case, Scullion sees no firm basis for the view that tragic choruses are markedly Dionysiac because the god "is not invoked by any of these choruses."[12] Scullion makes it a thematic issue again. The chorus did not have to be necessarily Dionysiac in theme to be of Dionysiac nature. The evidence for this not being so is the frequency with which the *kommos* takes place, at some point in almost every tragedy. This makes the *kommos* a characteristic of tragedy, and the one episode that transcends the marked separation between chorus and characters.

The origin of tragedy is not only revealed in tragedy as text but in tragedy as performance. The representations of tragedies were 'inserted', in what were entirely religious festivals, including processions and sacrificial rituals, and were not isolated cultural representations that happened to take place in a religious precinct. The texts show how tragedy was in continuous contact with a collective political reality and in continuous contact with the myths of Greek religion.[13] These two entities are ever present in tragedy. Tragedy duplicated the collective reality found in ritual, while offering the fortitude of the sacred myths it continuously reinterpreted.[14] Politics maintained tragedy's relevance, and its civic function in the polis, while gaining the strength of sacredness.

The eighty years that tragedy lasted coincide with the political growth of Athens

[11] Romilly, "La tragedie," 26.
[12] Scullion, "Nothing,"123.
[13] Romilly, "La tragedie," 27.
[14] Romilly, "La tragedie," 27.

and its democracy.[15] The first extant tragedy performed in 472 BCE, *The Persians* by Aeschylus, immortalizes the victory of 480 BCE of the young democracy over the invading Persians. And arguably the last tragedy, *The Frogs*, by Aristophanes — technically not a tragedy, but a tragicomedy— is from 405 BCE. In 404 BCE the defeat of Athens would put an end to twenty-seven years of war against Sparta.[16] The evolution of tragedy is parallel with the political evolution of Athens, and what started as religious improvisation was then reorganized by a political authority or the city-state with the help of three great tragic poets, Aeschylus (c.525- 455 BCE), Sophocles (c.495- 406 BCE), and Aristophanes (c.450-388 BCE) the great master of Old Comedy. The dual evolution of tragedy and civism ended in with a civilized Dionysus. In Aristophanes' play *The Frogs*, Dionysus begins as the god of theatre, then becomes a concerned god that wants the best for the *polis*, and ends as a dignified god of the city of Athens. This transformation is well captured by Aristophanes and signals the democratization of Dionysus.

The thesis is divided into three chapters, each subdivided into three sections. The first chapter offers necessary context for the origins of tragedy as well as its structure, with the goal to bring the reader closer to understanding tragedy in its original context. The second chapter analyzes Scullion's argument and the evidence provided. The third chapter analyzes the democratization of Dionysus through a selection of plays. Due to the scope of this paper and for the sake of simplicity, the third chapter has a double function: it seeks to offer evidence from the plays at the same time that it offers a modest, but direct account of the evolution of tragedy through the works of the three major

[15] Romilly, "La tragedie," 10.
[16] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1954).

playwrights: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Aristophanes's *Frogs*, which was traditionally considered a comedy, but now some scholars read it as tragicomedy.[17] It is the first example of such a genre and it offers an invaluable picture of Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War.

[17] Mark Griffith, *Aristophanes' Frogs* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

CHAPTER I:

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Dionysus

Dionysus, also known by his Roman name, Bacchus, was the son of the god Zeus and the mortal Semele, Theban princess, daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes.[18] In Greek mythology, Dionysus is a god of vegetation, wine and ecstasy, known as the "bull-horned god" because he often adopted the form of this powerful beast.[19] Dionysus is also the god of theatre. It is in this dimension that we find Dionysus' contribution to humanity to be the most profound, because theatre is the place where humans can change roles and transcend individuality, and access a different reality through dramatic art. Dionysus is also a god with close ties to the underworld. He is one of the few gods allowed to go to Hades, as when he goes to retrieve Semele from the underworld and brings his mother to her rightful place in Olympus.[20]

The myth of Dionysus' birth is most intriguing. Zeus' wife, Hera, overcome with jealousy, tricks Semele into asking Zeus to reveal his true nature. Hera knows that this would kill Semele instantly, because Zeus' true nature appears as a thundering bolt. Semele is carrying Dionysus in her womb, and Zeus saves Dionysus by getting the unborn child out from Semele's dead womb and stitching the fetus inside his thigh until Dionysus is ready to be born. Dionysus is born twice, first out of a human and then out of a god.[21] There is another relevant version of the myth, in which Hera, still envious of

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[18] The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Myth: *The Myths of Greece and Rome* (London: Hermes House, 2006), 39.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Charles Burton Gullick, "Greek Tragedy" in *Lectures on Harvard Classics: The Harvard Classics*, ed. William Nelson (New York: PF Collier & Son Co., 1909), 166, 209, 303, and 368.

Zeus' new son, has the Titans rip Dionysus' body to pieces, sparing only his heart. Rhea will use Dionysus' heart to bring him back to life, the time at which Zeus places Dionysus in the mountains under the care of the nymphs. Dionysus's nature is always said to be dualistic, based on his double birth. Some scholars argue that he is the fusion of two gods, one local Greek god of vegetation, wine, and fertility; and another foreign god, possibly Phrygian, who would be a more powerful divinity.[22] This theory is possible because syncretism is a common characteristic of ancient religions.

An interesting myth within the collection of Dionysiac myths is that Dionysus was a late arrival to Greek mythology. We have evidence to the contrary. Dionysus' name was written in Linear B tablets, the oldest writing on mainland Greece. These archaeological findings from Mycenaean Crete in the late Bronze Age (1400-1200 BCE) seem to point to a different direction and time of Dionysus' arrival or birth in the Greek world.[23] If Dionysus was known and worshiped in Mycenaean Crete then it is possible that the god might be even older than the late Bronze Age, as the Mycenaean absorbed much of the superior civilization it followed, the Minoan. The Minoans worshipped nature and the feminine as the ultimate manifestation of the life-giving capacities of the divine. In their art, dolphins, snakes, and bulls are often depicted as symbols associated with Dionysus' cult. Originally, it was believed that Dionysus had a mythological role somewhat similar to that of Demeter, which would make sense of the god's connection to vegetation and the earth. [24]

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[22] Gullick, "Greek Tragedy," 303.
[23] LBA, Late Bronze Age is subdivided into three categories: LBA I (1500-1400 BCE), LBA II A (1400-1300 BCE), and LBA IIB (1300-1200 BCE). Reinhard Jung, *The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean*, ed. Eric H. Cline (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 165-171.
[24] *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Myth: The Myths of Greece and Rome*, p.39. London: Hermes House, 2006.

Dionysus softens the boundaries upon which the social and cultural order is constructed.[25] Dionysus offers communion with the divine, as the god of wine. As the god of theatre Dionysus offers relieve from the burden of individuation. It is in the latter role that Dionysus is most unique among all of the gods.

Greek drama

The word "drama" is Greek and means action, but more exactly an immediate kind of action; a kind of action that happens right in front of our eyes.[26] The word "tragedy" comes from the Greek word *tragoidia*, meaning "goat song." The songs to Dionysus were sung during the wine harvest, and the wine was carried in goat- skin bags. The harvest of the grapes was, and continues to be around the Mediterranean, a communal effort. Historically, this was a time of celebration and hard work, when members of neighboring villages sang songs to honor the abundance of nature and the power of Dionysus. The songs were celebratory, playful, and appear to have had a competitive element. The separate groups would sing back and forth in a rhythmic question/answer pattern, in a manner similar to the two step beat of the dithyrambs.[27]

The history of Greek theatre developed over a period of approximately three centuries. The sixth-century BCE was largely an exploratory stage, while the fifth century saw the blossoming of tragedy, its development, and its death; the fourth century saw tragedy give way to what is called New Comedy.[28] The evolution of tragedy over the fifth century is the time-frame for this thesis.

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[25] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Arcaic and Classical* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 64-132, 161.
[26] Gullick, *Lectures on Harvard Classics*, 166.
[27] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 9.
[28] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 210.

1. The Dithyramb: Archilochus to Pindar.

Dithyrambs were the odes sung and danced in honor of Dionysus. "Dithyramb" is also one of the names of the god. Pickard-Cambridge discusses the efforts to throw light upon the original character of the dithyramb by its etymological derivation, and concludes that "most scholars agree in connecting *dithyrambos, thriambos* and *trium(h)us,* because whether in application to the song or the god appears identical", and the double use of the name is likely to be very old.[29]

And lastly, dithyramb is where tragedy originated.[30] According to Pickard-Cambridge the earliest mention of the dithyramb is in Archilochus of Paros in the first half of the seventh century BCE.[31] At this point it appears that there was one singer and not a chorus. The quest to find the origin of the name "dithyramb" by philological analysis or derivation appears to have led scholars to complete uncertainty.[32] As said the name has two meanings, one the song to Dionysus, the other the name for the god himself. The root of the word, "–ambos" means something close to a two- step movement, perhaps referencing the dance that accompanied the songs. The next reference is to Arion, who according to Herodotus was the first man to compose the dithyramb and name it in Corinth during the reign of Periander (c.625-585 BCE).[33]

Archilochus was a well-known author to the Athenians of the fifth century, and the first to give the name "dithyramb" to a performance.[34] The dithyramb as a literary composition for the chorus was the creation of Arion, making the chorus' song a regular poem for a stationary chorus, and named the dithyrambs as dealing with definite

[29] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 7-9.
[30] Aristotle *Poetics* bk.4, 1449.
[31] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 7.
[32] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 7-9.
[33] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 10.
[34] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 11.

subjects.[35] The next relevant name in the history of the dithyramb is Lasos of Hermione (590-545 BCE). According to the Suda, two important things are associated with his name: one, his introduction of the dithyramb to the contests of Athens; the other, his contribution to the range of music written for the dithyrambs.[36] Pickard-Cambridge reminds us of another allusion, this one to the connection between Lasos and dithyrambs, made by Aristophanes in the *Wasps*. Simonides and Bacchylides are said to be the most famous writers of dithyrambs, but no dithyrambic fragments survive. The last important name, in this brief summary, is the poet Pindar (518-442 BCE) pupil of Lasos. Pindar's extant fragments of dithyrambs are some of the finest examples we possess.

The dithyramb at Athens was especially significant because at the Great Dionysia dithyrambs reached full literary development, and also continued to be fully Dionysiac. In the later dithyramb, stylistic changes reflected the social and political changes. In 590 BCE, Hipodius of Chalcis won with his dithyramb the first democratic festival's victory. In conclusion, no dithyramb survives except those of Pindar and Bacchylides, and the extant fragments from the later period. These few extant examples are an indispensable departing point to understand the evolution of dramatic literary expression.

2. Aeschylus to Menander

When we talk about Greek drama we immediately think of fifth-century Athens and the dramatic competitions celebrated every year at the city's festival to Dionysus called the City Dionysia, founded by Pisistratus c. 534 BCE.[37] The role of this festival was crucial in the prolific production, development and unprecedented quality reached by the new plays written for it.

[35] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 10.
[36] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 13.
[37] Romilly, "La tragedie," 10.

Aeschylus (525-456 BCE)

Only seven of his plays have survived. He revolutionized theater by introducing a second actor and, therefore, the possibility of dialogue between two characters as opposed to character and chorus.[38] He also gave actors their specific apparel that would become the standard and famous tragic priestly-like costume from then on.[39] His play *The Persians* was innovative and deeply influential, because it was about recent events instead of past epics. *The Persians* elevated the Persian Invasion of Greece, their recent history, to heroic myth, thus helping validate the ideals behind their new political system: democracy.

Sophocles (c.496-406 BCE)

It is believed that he wrote over one hundred and twenty plays, of which only seven have survived. *Oedipus The King* and *Antigone* are two of the most famous. Sophocles introduced the third speaking character, allowing for further development of the characters as individuals through more complex plots.[40] He is said to be the inventor of scenography for introducing the design and painting of theatrical scenery.

Euripides (484-406 BCE)

Euripides wrote one hundred plays, but only eighteen have survived.[41] *The Bacchae* is central to my thesis, because it reveals Euripides' disenchantment with religion. Euripides questions the role of religion through portraying a terrifying god, Dionysus, who punishes humans with excess. *The Bacchae* was in many ways a very innovative play. Damen and Richards argue that the play introduces acting, since in the

[38] Romilly, "La tragedie," 54.
[39] Romilly, "La tragedie," 54.
[40] Romilly, "La tragedie," 56.
[41] Romilly, "La tragedie," 114.

middle of the play (576-976) the text is performed by the actors rather than recited by the chorus.[42] This is significant because Euripides uses the structure and resonance of hymn as dialogue for Dionysus. The result arguably would be a new type of hymn to Dionysus that used archaizing elements in new ways.[43] This innovation would be a way for Euripides to create his own language of religion.

Aristophanes (450-385 BCE)

Aristophanes wrote forty plays, all considered comedies, belonging to the genre Old Comedy. His comedies always address serious political and social issues and never once does he miss an opportunity to address them in his plays. He would exploit his right to free speech by ridiculing illustrious members of the audience. His play *The Clouds* pokes fun at the philosopher Socrates, and, in the *Frogs,* he criticizes Creon and his political maneuvers.[44]

Menander (342-290 BCE)

Menander wrote about one hundred comedies. Most of Menander's work has come to us in fragments, but among his best-preserved plays are: Diskolos, Aspis, Epitrepontes, Samia and Skyonioi. They could reflect a different political landscape from Aristophanes' time of democracy. Menander's plays appear to focus more on the individual and not so much in the polis and its political life.[45] This change of preoccupations could have been a direct consequence of the end of liberties, including freedom of speech, which came with the end of democracy under Macedonian rule.

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[42] Mark L. Damen and Rebecca A. Richards, '"Sing The Dionysus": Euripides' Bacchae as Dramatic Hymn,' American Journal of Philology 133 (2013): 344.
[43] Damen, and Richards, "Sing The Dionysus," 367.
[44] Aristophanes *The Clouds and Other Plays* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1964).
[45] Peter Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 66-67.

Attic tragedy

1. The Origin of Tragedy.

As we have seen, the dithyrambs, at least according to Aristotle, are the choral songs from which tragedy originated.[46] This primary source is at the center of the controversy that occupies this thesis. The controversy over the origins of tragedy put forward by Scullion does not offer an alternative theory for what the origins of tragedy may be. If we accept Aristotle's testimony, one thing seems certain: Greek tragedy had a religious origin distinct from comedy.[47]

The *Persians* is the earliest surviving play by Aeschylus, and the oldest extant tragedy (from 472 BCE). Tragedies had been written before this time, and from the inscriptions of the Parian Marble we know that Thespis won the first organized dramatic contest of the Great Dionysia in 534 BCE.[48] As said earlier, tragedy was represented only during the festivities in honor to Dionysus and at his theatre south of the Acropolis named the theatre of Dionysus. The theatre can still be visited, and has a richly decorated stone seat for Dionysus's priest, and an altar in the center of the theatre, where the chorus was. There were two festivals: one in the spring, The Great Dionysia, and the other, The Lenaias in late December. The theatre of Dionysus offers archaeological evidence in favor of the origins of tragedy being linked to Dionysiac cult. Aristotle's testimony is one of the most important pieces of evidence that tragedy was at first mere improvisation originated by the authors of the dithyramb and advanced by slow degrees; and each new element that showed itself was in turn developed. Having passed through many changes

[46] Aristotle *Poetics* bk.4, 1449.
[47] Aristotle *Poetics*, bk.4, 1449.
[48] Parian Marble: I G XII, 5, I, 444, in Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 75.

tragedy found its natural form, and then stopped developing.[49]

The dithyramb can be described as a lyric form, specifically a choral song to honor Dionysus. If tragedy originates from the dithyramb, it is then by definition the extension of a ritual. Pickard-Cambridge questions this interpretation, and thinks that Aristotle was theorizing about the origins of tragedy because he simply did not have enough evidence. Pickard-Cambridge illustrates this further, stating that there is too much difference between a dithyramb and the solemnity and grandeur of a tragedy.[50] Pickard-Cambridge acknowledges that Aristotle was much closer to the evidence and to the events than we are.[51] The fifth-century was testimony of a great change between an oral and a written culture, and manuscripts were rare until the end of this period.[52] The point about Aristotle and the evidence is a significant one. Let's not forget that most knowledge was passed down orally and documenting was not the norm, especially for rituals from mystery cults.

Scott Scullion's article "'Nothing to Do with Dionysus': Tragedy Misconceived as Ritual," follows with other arguments that start from the premise that if the origin the tragedy is in Dionysiac cult, then the tragedies should also be about Dionysus. This argument is based on the assumption that they were not about Dionysus. We only have thirty- two tragedies extant out of more than one thousand that were written, if we count all the authors mentioned in other works— Thespis, Pratinus, Frinicus, Ion of Kios, Neophron, Nicomacus, Ariston, Kritias, Agathon, and more— but whose works have been lost, along with most of the tragedies written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and

[49] Aristotle *Poetics*, bk. 4, 1449.
[50] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 131.
[51] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 131.
[52] Nancy Rorkin Rabinowitz, *Greek Tragedy* (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 18-19.

Euripides.[53] We do not know one or way or the other whether the majority of these plays were about the god or not. It is true that out of the thirty-two plays that we have, only a few mention the god directly, and only one, *The Bacchae*, is about Dionysus; but the sample that we have may not represent an accurate proportion of the actual themes.

On the other hand, if we take the thirty-two plays as an accurate sample representative of the themes of tragedy at large we must remember that the authors of these tragedies were artists inventing a new genre and were very innovative. The tragedies written in the fifth century were new plays produced as revivals.[54] They constantly broke limitations, adding actors, special clothing, and reinterpreting traditional themes. We must remember the highly competitive nature of the festivals as well. The themes could not remain static or mono-thematical for too long. Maybe they were about Dionysus initially, although we do not know that with certainty. Either way, what characterizes tragedy during the fifth century is change. The themes of mythological nature were incessantly being reinterpreted to relate them to the communal problems of the moment, which had been political, but reached a watershed moment at the end of The Peloponnesian War in the plays of Euripides and Aristophanes.[55] Scullion's argument about the lack of Dionysiac themes ignores the social, political, and philosophical changes that Athens went through the fifth century, which directly influenced the evolution of tragedy and its themes.

There are obvious elements in tragedy that invoke the sacred always. Sacredness is always present in tragic death. Although this is not an exclusive Dionysiac element, Dionysus is the only god that dies, just as humans do. Essentially, there is not a better god

[53] Romilly, "La tragedie" 11.
[54] Rabinowitz, "Greek," 19.
[55] Aristophanes *The Frogs* and Euripides *The Women of Troy*.

to understand the tragedy of human life, which is ultimately death, than Dionysus, and consequently offer hope to humans with his seasonal resurrection.

Another dimension of tragedy is the fact that from the beginning it was promoted by Pisistratus (c. 600 - c.527 BCE) to organize the festivals officially, and thus connect them to the civic life of the city. Tragedy goes hand in hand with the political development of the city state. This explains why the themes of the tragedies refer to big national problems like war and peace, like justice and civism. It is interesting that Pisistratus also promoted the cult to Dionysus erecting, a temple to the god at the foot of the Acropolis and organizing the Great Dionysia.[56]

It is significant that the meaning of the word *tragoidia* is also not agreed upon. *Tragos* means goat and *oidos* means song, but in translating the possible relations one naturally finds several meanings. According to Romilly, the most accepted hypothesis has been to translate the word as "the song of the male goat" and from there associate it with the satyrs, also associated with the cult of Dionysus; as well as to accept the two main points that Aristotle makes in the *Poetics*.[57] The problem appears to be in the interpretation of this, which tends to confuse the origins of tragedy with those of comedy. Satyr plays are described as groups of Dionysiac initiates dressed as satyrs, which looked like male goats.[58] This is the "song of a goat chorus" meaning that tragedy and satyr drama have the same origin. This hypothesis could be accurate, but there is a better translation for the word tragedy; one that refers to a song for a goat or better "chorus dancing for the goat as a prize or around the goat as sacrifice.[59] The goat possibly had a

[56] Romilly, "La tragedie," 18-19.
[57] Romilly, "La tragedie," 19. Romilly is referring again to the *Poetics*, bk.4, 1449 a 20.
[58] Romilly, "La tragedie," 19.
[59] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb,"113. Rabinowitz, "Greek,"18.

double function: prize and sacrifice.

Our earliest mention of the goat-prize is in the *Marmor Parium,* which says that Thespis won the competition with the tragedy, *Pentheus*, and won a goat as his prize.[60] Also we have vases from Corinth depicting padded dancers and a goat tied to a mixing bowl as awaiting sacrifice.[61] The hypothesis of the goat having a double function of prize and sacrifice makes sense as the evidence points out. The two functions were not mutually exclusive, but perhaps complementary. The existence of a central altar in the theatre of Dionysus seems corroborate a possible double function. In any case there is an important difference if we translate tragedy as a "song for a goat," instead of "the song of a goat chorus." If the goat was a sacrifice prize, tragedy was a solemn and religious act, and the dithyramb was just the form that served as lyric model for tragedy and for satyr drama.[62] If we take this argument to its final conclusion, then the dithyramb may not have been the exact origin of tragedy. An interesting argument, that offers a different reading on Aristotle's testimony. An argument that gives emphasis to the commonality between tragedy and satyr drama, which are parallel genres derived from the same dithyrambic form. But more importantly it honors the distinction between the gravitas of tragedy and the burlesque of satyr-plays, which can get blurred.

Second, since antiquity there were those who like Horace preferred to interpret the word "tragedy" as the prize offered to the winner or the victim offered in sacrifice.[63] Dioscorides, from the third century, is mentioned by Pickard-Cambridge, but only to

[60] Parian Marble: I G XII, 5, I, 444 in Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 76-77.
[61] Corinthian *kothon*, Wurzburg L 118, Martin Von Wagner University Museum, Germany, in Pickard Cambridge, "Dithyramb,"306.
[62] Romilly, "La tragedie," 20.
[63] Horace, Ars Poetica, *On Style*, 220 in Romilly, "La tragedie," 20.

provide evidence that this interpretation is a mere Hellenistic invention.[64] Interpretations do not have to be from the fifth century to be valid. In any case poets, like Horace were still writing from antiquity and were closer to the sources than we are.

It is certain that we do not have all the steps from the improvisatory religious beginnings, to the organized official representations. Aristotle says the transition was gradual.[65] One has to ask about what other origins may be possible for tragedy. As we will see, ultimately both Pickard-Cambridge and Scullion offer no alternative.

2. The Structure of Tragedy

The structure of tragedy is usually broken into five principal parts: the prologue, the *parodo;* the episodes, *stasima*; and the *exodo*. The prologue, as we continue to use the same word, preceded the chorus's entrance. The *parodo* is the actual entrance parade of the chorus. The episodes are what we would call the acts, or the distinct parts where the action takes place. The *stasima* are the lyric parts sung by the chorus, which separate the episodes. The *exodo* is the exit of the chorus.[66] These are not fixed rules; e.g., the play *The Persians* has no prologue.[67] The element that is most striking when contemplating the structure of tragedy is the importance of the chorus. It is an original feature of tragedy to fuse characters and their individual dialogues, with a singing chorus.[68] This in essence is the nature of the dithyramb, and makes clear the direct connection between the two. Whether tragedy was born directly from it, or whether it imitated dithyrambic form, the same duality seen in tragedy's structure from the start is also present in the double bit of the dithyramb, and what Romilly succinctly defines as "a dialogue between a character

[64] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 123-124.
[65] Aristotle *Poetics*, bk. 4, 1449 a 20.
[66] Romilly, "La tragedie," 28.
[67] Aeschylus, *The Persians and Other Plays* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2009).
[68] Romilly, "La tragedie," 26.

and a chorus."[69] We can say that the structure of tragedy has a built in duality from its origins. This duality continued to be reinforced by tragedy's dual function, religious and civic, after Pisistratus.

Another structural duality is reflected in the architecture of the theatre itself, the theatre of Dionysus in Athens and all ancient Greek theatres were built around a circular patio, the orchestra. This central area was where the realm of the chorus had an altar to Dionysus in the center. The orchestra was connected to the stage by a set of steps, but otherwise separated clearly by its function. In the thirty-two tragedies extant the characters never mixed with the orchestra, and the chorus never gets on stage. It seems true that the actors and the chorus never were mostly independent from one another.[70] This separation makes tragedy be represented always in two places simultaneously.[71] By extension one could say, this structural separation manifests the Greeks' preoccupation with other divisions; e.g., the communal versus the individual, and the divine versus the human realms. The chorus represented often the communal voice, like in *The Persians*, where the elderly members of the chorus's and by extension the entire people of the Persian empire's well-being depends directly on the actions of the Great King; and at the same time the hubristic and foolish actions of one individual can upset the gods and bring about complete disaster, the defeat of the entire Persian Empire.[72] Also, in *Seven Against Thebes*, we have the chorus, formed by the young women of Thebes, singing in panic because Thebes is under siege and voicing a communal concern, warning Eteocles to stay

[69] Romilly, "La tragedie."
[70] Ibid, 27.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Aeschylus *The Persians*, 715-720, 749-750, 790-795.

in Thebes.[73] Tragedy's structure reflects a separation of two different functions, but this duality of functions unifies the play. Also there are songs that are shared by the chorus and the actors on the stage, usually marking emotionally grave moments. Aristotle says, "The *kommos* is a lamentation that originates from both the chorus and the stage."[74] Most plays have an episode with a *kommos* in it, which makes it a unifying characteristic of the structure of tragedy.

3. The Relevance of Tragedy

Attic tragedy is a unique genre that stands apart from all other forms developed since.[75] It was an original Greek invention that became very successful and influential. This alone is impressive enough, but it becomes fascinating to think that we are still writing tragedies today. The influence on literature is outstanding, but also penetrates other fields such as psychology and philosophy. According to Romilly the broad field of influence of Attic tragedy comes partially for is "purity" of thought.[76] This argument understands something unique that deserves attention. If the thought processes in tragedy are raw and primordial, then this makes the genre of tragedy be a language in itself capable of accessing the world of the emotions, and able to offer a striking reflection on the human condition. Tragedy's influence, however, may also come from the fact that Attic tragedy offers a well- structured and organized action that shows familiar mythological characters constantly reinterpreted by the authors to address the current political and social events of the moment, always within the sacredness of a religious framework.

[73] Aeschylus *Seven Against Thebes*, 685-720.
[74] Aristotle *Poetics*, bk.4, 1452 b
[75] Romilly, "La tragedie,"15.
[76] Romilly, "La tragedie,"15.

The tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and the comedies of Aristophanes continue to be performed because of the powerful reflections on human fate and individual responsibility that they provide. New tragedies are constantly being produced. Ariane Mnouchkine, from Théâtre du Soleil, in the early nineteen nineties produced a tetralogy called *Atrides*, combining Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis* with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.[77]

The commonalities with the universal themes of Greek tragedy make any new tragedy relevant, but the religious aspect is no longer there. The ritual function of theatre is hard to erase completely, though it has not been acknowledged since Antoin Artaud.[78] The public of fifth-century Athens, unlike the modern public, did not separate religion and ritual from theatre or religion from politics. This great difference separates contemporary and ancient audiences, but the universality of the themes present in tragedy also brings them together. Perhaps the most important difference may be again in the purity of the emotions of the ancient plays, where there was not gratuitous cruelty.[79] The characters respond to raw but pure emotions. In Greek tragedy the characters are often unaware of the real consequences of their actions, even in the face of a doomed destiny or terrible circumstances. When Oedipus kills his father he does not know the true identity of the person he is killing.[80] Tragedy's success is found in its relevancy as it continues to offer a literary structure of universal themes, which can be reinterpreted depending upon circumstances.

[77] Rabinowitz, "Greek,"181-182
[78] Antoin Artaud, *The Theatre and its double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).
[79] Romilly, "La tragedie," 9, 12.
[80] Sophocles *Oedipus King*, 700-860.

CHAPTER II:

THE ORIGINS CONTROVERSY

Historiographical Review

1. Aristotelian Reaction

Partially introduced earlier, the controversy over the origins of tragedy had to do with an Aristotelian reaction that begun in the 1960s. The controversy could be said to have begun with Pickard-Cambridge, and culminated with Scott Scullion.

2. Dionysus' Identity

It also had to do with, what Albert Henrichs calls, the emphasis on Dionysus as, "projection of the human psyche or human imagination."[81] Sigmund Freud's internalization of Dionysus set the stage to influence modern thought.[82] The internalization of Dionysus served as reference point for the scholarly work produced about the god in the twentieth century. Christopher Faraone comments on Henrichs work;

> …Taking for granted or neglecting the obvious fact of Dionysus's divinity, nearly all twentieth century scholarship, from the Cambridge Ritualists to the most recent work of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne, tacitly shares a fundamental misconception that frames our modern understanding of the god in a manner that would have incomprehensible to those who worshiped Dionysus in the ancient world.[83]

[81] Albert Henrich., "'*He* Has a God in Him': Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysus." Masks of Dionysus, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, 3-4.
[82] Freud, "The Oedipus Complex."
[83] Christopher Faraone, *Masks of Dionysus*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.

It appears that such internalized views of the god have shaped modern formulations and systematically misrepresented the most important fact about Dionysus, as the Greeks understood him, his divinity. Dionysus was integral to Greek existence in practical ways.[84] This is an accurate description, but Dionysus was also transcendental. This is explained by the fact that Dionysus was a god who died and resurrected.

3. Tragedy, Decontextualized

The third factor has to do with the traditional approach to tragedy as texts, often isolating them from their cultural context by classicists like Pickard-Cambridge and Scullion. To move from a literary outlook to a cultural one has become more accepted, but not entirely.[85] Many elements of tragedy are dualistic, so it seems appropriate that we use that same principle in analyzing it. Fusing a predominantly textual approach with the historical context approach seems fitting for the task, because the role of Dionysus in tragedy is dualistic as well. On one hand it was a religious role, and on the other served as civic role. The civic role was central to the re-interpretation of the themes of tragedy, giving it political currency. This contributed to tragedy's success and influence. The political dimension of tragedy is there for the development of a civic ideology among the people of ancient Athens. This will also fit with what we know was the role of art: a cultural production with high educational, moral or ideological value.[86] The religious role of Dionysus also fit with the popularity of the god among the common people. Ritual elements of dedication, invocation, and manifestation that took place at any religious festival, also took place at the Great Dionysia and Lenaea. Tragedy gained sacredness from the ritual framework of the festivals as well as from its mythological themes. We

[84] C. Faraone, *Masks of Dionysus*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.
[85] Rabinowitz, "Greek," 33.
[86] Rabinowitz, "Greek," 35.

would benefit from looking at tragedies as literary works written to be performed in public and not read.

Limitations

1. Tragedy as Text

During most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tragedy was read exclusively as text. Classical philologists provided some of the first translations during this period, and in depth commentaries creating the philological classical foundation and offering to the world what the Greek texts actually said. The field of classics owes greatly to the colossal work of these scholars.[87] Based on their work Rabinowitz reminds us that surprisingly in the 1950s and 1960s a new brand of criticism emerged:

> A method of close reading that stressed the coherence and interpretation of the text itself to the exclusion of everything else, built on earlier forms of humanism that made tragedy accessible to the modern reader by emphasizing its universality. It focused on elements that were familiar and comfortable, such as character, themes and images.[88]

An example of this reading of tragedy is Pickard-Cambridge's *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedies,* edited in 1962. Pickard-Cambridge was a bastion of the old school, and viewed tragedy primarily as text. He wrote his book as a response to the later studies of tragedy. These alternative studies were clearly outside the exclusively textual and literary tradition, and were more historical and structural in their approach. In other words they approach the reading of tragedy within its historical context. We can read in Pickard-Cambridge's preface:

[87] Rabinowitz."Greek," 3.
[88] Rabinowitz, "Greek," 4.

> Much has been written during the last thirty years upon the origins and early history of Greek Drama. The conclusions reached by some of the writers appear to be so speculative and even incredible, that I began the studies, of which the results are summed up in this volume, with the object of examining the evidence, and entertaining what conclusions it would really justify. The result has too often showed that no conclusions are possible, least of those, which have been put forward; and although I hope that these studies will be found to yield some positive results, it must be admitted that they are in a measure critical.[89]

Pickard-Cambridge was not open to other approaches, outside the literary or textual tradition, in the study of tragedy, reducing anything else to "ingenuity and imaginative accounts."[90] Pickard-Cambridge is a good example of the exhaustive erudition of nineteenth- century method, as he is a direct heir of that tradition. Its inherent limitations don't invalidate such tradition, for it remains relevant as foundation to build upon. Cambridge's work still remains the authoritative voice, and scholars like Hamilton remind us of this fact, when he chooses to use Cambridge's precise definition of dithyramb:[91] "An antistrophic composition dealing with special themes taken from divine and heroic legend, but still maintaining its particular connection with Dionysus, which celebrated apparently at or near the opening of the song, whatever its subject."[92] This definition of dithyramb is concise, but should not be exclusive. As Rabinowitz says, "there are many approaches to the study of tragedy"[93] Is there one way to study tragedy and another way to study its origins? The study of tragedy in this thesis seeks to offer an

[89] T. B. L. Webster in Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," v.
[90] T.B.L. Webster in Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," v.
[91] R. Hamilton. "The Pindaric Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy." Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, Vol. 93 (1990), under "Settings," http://www.jstor.org/stable/311286 (accessed August 31, 2013).
[92] Ibid.
[93] Rabinowitz, "Greek," 3.

inclusive rather than exclusive approach, because the fifth-century BCE was above all a high context culture.

2. Freud and Psychoanalysis

Freudian psychology recognized several useful concepts in the themes of ancient tragedy. From the directness of the emotions and the brutality of the circumstances found in Sophocles's tragedy *Oedipus The King*, Freud articulated his famous 'complex of Oedipus.'[94] Which in turn revolutionized the subfield of psychiatry and helped shape the modern concept of psychoanalysis.

Oedipus The King inspired Freud's work, and his reading on *Oedipus* was a fascinating interpretation, but it was not necessarily the poet's interpretation. Tragedy doesn't offer much in the way of psychological explanations, so it leaves room for many interpretations.[95] This could be part of tragedy's genius and part of its success, but in any case we must know that modern psychology's reading of Greek tragedy is just that, a modern reading. It is often possible for the modern reader to be more familiar with Freud's work than with the plays themselves. It is possible that the modern reader be equally familiar with both, in which case there is also the risk that the Freudian reading becomes too influential in our predisposition towards the play.

It is clear when reading *Oedipus The King* that Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother.[96] But it is also clear that he does such things in total ignorance and that he could not possibly had the desire to do these things. There is nothing incestuous in Oedipus's marriage to his mother, because he doesn't remember anything about his real

[94] Freud, "Complex."
[95] Romilly, "La tragedie,"157.
[96] Sophocles, "Oedipus King,"1185.

parents.[97] Greek tragedy transcends time in dealing with universal emotions, but it is important to understand that the cultural context the plays were written for was very different from our own.

3. Scullion and Aristotle

Scott Scullion challenges in his article, "Nothing to do with Dionysus: Tragedy Misconceived as Ritual," as he puts it, "*the* almost universal assumption that tragedy arose from the Dionysiac cult."[98] Scullion makes it clear from the start that he makes no claim to prove that tragedy did not originate in the cult of Dionysus, and that he is merely suggesting, in his own words, "a credible alternative view" to the generally accepted opinion that tragedy emerged and evolved from Dionysiac cult. Scullion claims that such opinion is just an assumption. What Scullion calls "assumption" has been traditionally considered evidence, largely drawn from *The Poetics*. According to Scullion only another scholar before him, Gerald F. Else, denied the Dionysiac origins of tragedy. If Scullion is correct about Else being the first scholar to question the universally accepted origins of tragedy in *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy,* published in 1967, then Aristotle's opinions (384- 322 BCE) were overdue for review. Scullion does not agree with Else, however, as he seems to rely too much on the traditions of Thespis.[99] Scullion believes that the basis for the widely acknowledged assumption is nothing but faith.

As Scullion says in his article, Aristotle has been the most important evidence for the origins of tragedy, but he is skeptical of Aristotle's evidence of the origins and early development of tragedy. Scullion argues that there was hardly any evidence available to Aristotle about drama from before the fifth century. Scullion fully agrees with Pickard-

[97] Sophocles, "Oedipus King," 975. Romilly, "La tragedy," 157.
[98] Scullion, "Nothing," 102.
[99] Scullion,"Nothing," 102.

Cambridge's conclusion that Aristotle is only theorizing when he originates tragedy from the satiric and the dithyramb, and comedy from the phallic processions. These suppositions deprive Aristotle's work of all possible historical value.[100] Scullion's assumptions may also be conjectural. Scullion assumes that Aristotle's evidence was exclusively textual and archival in nature, and accepts the probability of such evidence being a mere list of competition victors beginning around 502 BCE. Scullion assumes this probability as factual merely because of another possibility—that of a new system of *choregia*— had been set up by the Athenian democracy. Aristotle could possibly have had access to other texts, archives or songs, as he was closer to the sources. We certainly have access to the archaeological record, but he certainly had access to an oral tradition completely lost to us. So if the figure of the *choragus* can be traced back to the seventh century BCE, where references to their titles have been found in recovered fragments of the earliest choral lyric poetry, the *Parthenia* of Alkman, a poet of archaic Sparta; then why should we assume that Aristotle had access to records of *choregos* exclusively and only after 502 BCE?[101] When Scullion states that Aristotle had very little evidence to draw from about the early years of tragedy, again he asserts as fact something we have no evidence for, and makes conjectures based on extant documents to then assume those were the same ones to which Aristotle had access.

Scullion says, "Aristotle makes no attempt to dispute what 'it is said' about the historical element of tragedy."[102] Reading the *Poetics* one thing becomes clear, Aristotle was not trying to prove the origins of tragedy, and perhaps this could be seen as

[100] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 95, 96, 97.
[101] Peter Wilson, *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia, The Chorus, The City and The Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21-38.
[102] Scullion, "Nothing,"107.

significant enough evidence to validate Aristotle's claim. In other words, if the origin of tragedy was not an issue for Aristotle, then it is fair to presume it had not yet become a question up for debate, either because the "origin of tragedy" was a completely ludicrous and irrelevant question or because the "origin of tragedy" was accepted as tradition based on mythological and historical truth. Scullion sees "speculation, guesswork, and free invention and not genuine tradition," but if Aristotle was indeed inventing, Scullion does not offer convincing enough evidence to support his claim. Scullion imagines that Aristotle's theory "involves an oddity" because, as Aristotle derives tragedy from dithyramb and comedy from phallic songs, this would imply "the oddity" of two parallel and therefore independent developments.[103] This also appears to be the case with satyr plays and tragedy, both originating from the dithyramb, but having distinct inspiration. Having two or more styles develop from one initial artistic form is more the norm than the exception.

Scullion argues that tragedy becomes fully realized the farther it evolves from "its choral roots."[104] It is true that the chorus, in its origin, was the more important of the two elements in tragedy's structure: chorus and characters. Tragedy evolved radically in less than one hundred years, and ended with the characters being the central element. To say that tragedy became more realized the further it moved from its choral origins, is to imply that Aeschylus's plays are somehow inferior to later works, and that is an absurdity. Aeschylus's plays would not have what they need to express their majesty of thought and language without the lyricism of the chorus.

Ultimately, Aristotle should be second-guessed and questioned, as he had a

[103] Scullion, "Nothing,"108.
[104] Scullion,"Nothing,"109.

defined Hellenistic ideology, which had moved away from the political and religious preoccupations of fifth-century Athens and the *polis*. Scullion cites Edith Hall's work, *Is there a Polis in Aristotle's Poetics?*[105] It seems Aristotle avoided everything to do with Dionysus, outside Dionysiac cult as tragedy's point of historical origin. This omission appears to be an intentional oversight.[106] That Aristotle may be partially wrong about satyr plays evolving into tragedy doesn't make Scullion's arguments any clearer.

Aristotle and Scullion agree that tragedy is closer to epic than it is to cultic hymns. If tragedy was a kind of poetry for Aristotle then we must also pay tribute to its lyric heritage. Attic tragedy is among the best literature the world has produced. These facts, however, do not contradict that the theatrical tradition, including tragedy, would have evolved from the cult of Dionysus, even if there was a shift from "Dionysiac to mythological subject matter" and consequential morphological evolution.[107]

Scullion makes no claim to prove that tragedy did not originate in the cult of Dionysus, because he cannot substantiate such a claim. We must remember that making claims against tradition has been a fashionable way to get attention in academy in the last half a century, but it seems that the ultimate goal in Scullion's arguments against the Aristotelian tradition are unsatisfactory—mere suggestions. If we are to consider traditional evidence as mere assumption, then we should rewrite much of our history, since a large part of it originates in tradition, which is nothing but interpretations of interpretations or interpretations of an oral tradition. Scullion unveils the true essence of tradition and reduces it to a sort of collective faith, hastily dismissing its significance. Scullion overlooks the fact that Aristotle was direct eyewitness or should we say ear-

[105] Edith Hall, "*Is there a polis in Aristotle's Poetics?*, in Scullion 110.
[106] Scullion, "Nothing,"110.
[107] Scullion, 'Nothing," 110.

witness, to both oral and written accounts referring to tragedy's origins.

"Nothing to do with Dionysus"

The phrase "Nothing to do with Dionysus" is not original to Scullion, but originated in antiquity. Plutarch wrote about it in these terms "When Phrynichus and Aeschylus developed tragedy to include mythological plots and disasters, it was said, 'What has this to do with Dionysus'"[108] There is an entry in the Suda explaining the meaning of the phrase, "Originally when writing in honor of Dionysus they competed with pieces which were called satiric. Later, they wrote tragedy and gradually turned to plots and stories in which they had no thought for Dionysus. Hence this comment."[109] It is clear that the saying originated from the changes that the pieces performed in honor of Dionysus went through, being initially about the god and then evolving into other themes.

"Nothing to do with Dionysus: Tragedy Misconceived as Ritual" was the paper that catapulted Scullion to academic recognition.[110] Scullion's work is basically a radicalized version of Pickard-Cambridge.[111] As we have seen above, Aristotle's *Poetics* linked tragedy with dithyramb.[112] This Aristotelian view was unchallenged for centuries. Pickard- Cambridge, in the sixties, argued against Aristotle's opinion on the origins of tragedy. Aristotle did not have enough written evidence of prior fifth- century drama available to him; therefore, according to Pickard-Cambridge, Aristotle was just theorizing when he said that tragedy derived from dithyrambs and satyr-plays. The logical connection between dithyramb and tragedy seems to be backed by the evidence; but we

[108] Plutarch *Moralia* 615 A. Symp. Quaest, I, I 5:85. www.Perseus.tufts.edu
[109] Suda Lexicon, Alder # o806 Plut. 69.1 Zenobius 5.40 , www.stoa.org
[110] Scott Scullion. "Nothing to do with Dionysus: Tragedy Misconceived as Ritual." *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 52, No 1 (2002), 102-137.
[111] Arthur Pickard-Cambridge. *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*. Second Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).
[112] Aristotle *Poetics*, bk. 4, 1449.

have already seen the unlikeliness of tragedy deriving from satyr plays and argue the case that they were parallel but distinct genres. Not making that distinction clear has partially prompted the disagreement over the origins of tragedy.

Scullion's Six Extra-Aristotelian Arguments

Scullion identifies six main arguments that argue that tragedy is by origin and essence Dionysiac. Contemporary scholars have offered these arguments to defend their claims. These are the counterarguments developed by Scullion.

1. Dionysiac Themes in Tragedy

The first argument Scullion disputes is the claim that Dionysiac themes are leading in tragic drama. Scullion reviews the names of nineteen plays with possible Dionysiac themes out of arguably five hundred tragedies. From these nineteen tragedies there is only one extant, Euripides's *Bacchae* c. 406 BCE, which is indeed Dionysiac in its theme. Scullion does not cite who has used this argument, but it is doubtful that it could ever be considered sound, as the themes of most tragedies are not Dionysiac. Independently of how one looks at the numbers of plays about Dionysus the argument proves nothing; even if the majority of plays had obvious and easily recognizable Dionysiac themes, these would not necessarily lead us to their origin. We must look beyond the literal. What do tragedy and Dionysus share? The motives of this identification go beyond themes, aesthetic or even religious. Greek tragedy honors human freedom of choice, because its heroes fight against the superior forces of destiny by making choices. The fact is that both tragedy and Dionysus celebrated freedom of choice. This is the true constant theme in tragedy: *freedom* of humans to change their destiny— even if this represents a contradiction— because this is also the quintessential message in

the worship of Dionysus. In the end, the ultimate Dionysiac paradox is the systematic failure of the heroes in tragedies that crystalizes their freedom. It is their lucid compulsion to act that determines the substance of their ego and identity.

The other aspect of this argument is how often the name of Dionysus is mentioned directly or in the world of metaphors, since other gods such as Zeus are mentioned much more often than Dionysus. For example, Dionysus is mentioned in Aeschylus just once, in sharp contrast with the on hundred seventy four times the author names Zeus. Sophocles writes Zeus's name one hundred fourteen times, and Dionysus is mentioned seven times. Euripides names Zeus one hundred sixty three times and Dionysus twenty times. Again, we have to side with Scullion in his taste for numbers as uniquely eloquent examples, but it may be necessary to interpret these numbers. Scullion says that numbers do not require of the "subtleties of interpretation."[113] These numbers, according to Scullion, speak of the small presence that Dionysus had in the tragedies. We must initially agree with this conclusion, until we realize that tragedies did not have to be about Dionysus to be of Dionysus or for Dionysus. How we prove that they were of Dionysus or for Dionysus is by looking at the context. The tragedies were written for the Great Dionysia and the Lenaea and were written to honor the god.

Scullion chose a number of Dionysiac themes and number of direct references to the god in the extant tragedies as the basis for his first counter argument, and it seems a flashy victory. This argument works when we decontextualize tragedy, because as isolated texts there is not much that relates them to Dionysus. Whether by theme or by mention, Dionysus, as Scullion correctly points out, is mostly absent. It is easy to separate tragedy from context because we have inherited the texts and not the context.

[113] Scullion,"Nothing," 112.

Tragedy as genre was meant to be part of a communal and public events and it was to be performed, not simply read. Greek tragedy is more than text, and by separating it from its context we can only grasp at best part of its nature.

2. Tragedy and Festival

Scullion admits the unquestionable fact that in Athens Dionysus was the god of tragedy, and that indeed tragedy and Dionysus are "above all an Athenian phenomenon," but that out of Athens Dionysus may not continue to be the god of tragedy.[114] Scullion appears to try to delegitimize Dionysus role as patron of theater by reducing it to the confines of Athens. Scullion's evidence to support his claim is a series of inscriptions from the third and second centuries BCE confirming dramatic performances at festivals throughout the Greek world in honor of gods "other than Dionysus."[115] Scullion mentions Nicophon of Miletus, who produced three dramas for the god. The god in question was not mentioned. Scullion assumes it is the god Apollo because the inscription was recorded at the temple of Delian Apollo. This is reasonable since it was Apollo's temple, but Scullion implies that Nicophon, by dedicating his dramas to a god other than Dionysus, was renouncing Dionysus. So, if Nicophon was renouncing Dionysus, then it was Dionysus who clearly was the god of drama. Also, in the polytheistic Greek world of antiquity the idea of gods being mutually exclusive simply did not exist, so it is perfectly possible to have a god patron for drama and still dedicate dramas to another god.

Scullion goes on to compare drama with wine and brings up Dionysus as the sole recipient in the dedication of wine festivals by the Greeks, thus proving him the god of wine and wine exclusively Dionysiac. Scullion believes that tragedy was not on the same

[114] Scullion,"Nothing," 112.
[115] Scullion,"Nothing," 112.

footing with wine, because if both were the fruits and gifts of the god Dionysus, why were the festivals of wine always dedicated to Dionysus, and tragedy was not. That tragedies could have been offered to gods other than Dionysus does not necessarily disprove a Dionysiac origin.

It is certainly possible that the performances of tragedy at other festivals, like the Delphic Soteria constituted ritual acts in the cults of Apollo, Zeus and Nike. By the third and second centuries BCE the Greek world was absorbing many new ideas after the conquests of Alexander and the expansion of its dominion. During the Hellenistic period, we see examples of religious syncretism in Ptolemaic Egypt with the cult of Sarapis, and perhaps this influenced the adoption of elements of Dionysiac nature in rituals dedicated to other gods. Tragedies had become so popular that everyone wanted to use this medium for their particular cults, or festivals. The popularity of theatre is proven by the fact that theatres were being built in almost every city of the Greek world during the fourth century, and they were built by renowned architects like the theatre of Epidaurus by Polycleitus the younger.[116]

Scullion writes as an example the case of Delphi, where Dionysus had an important cult, and yet there was a dramatic festival in honor of Apollo, Zeus, and Nike but excluding Dionysus. Scullion is showing us that not every theatrical representation was dedicated to Dionysus, and that in fact theatrical representations could be used as offerings and ritual acts to gods other than Dionysus. This proves nothing. But a place like Delphi needs to be explored further to understand its mythologically complex past. Scullion suggests the obvious. Dionysus was excluded, and that is eloquent enough for us

[116] Pausanias, tran. and ed. by W.H.S. Jones, except Vol. II by W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod, and Vol.V. *Descriptions of Greece* Volumes I-V (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1969), Vol. III, BOOKS 6-8, (1-21), Loeb Classical Library no. 272, 113.

to interpret as significant, but an exception does not unmake the rule.

Gonzales-Cortes writes that the ancient temple of Delphi was dedicated to a water serpent named Delphin[117] "Delphi" meant "uterus," as the temple held in its womb a sacred guardian god in the shape of a serpent named Piton. We do not know if Delphine and Piton were one and the same serpent, but these facts strongly suggest that serpents had an enormous social and religious prestige and occupied singular relevance among chthonic deities. The serpent was a sacred animal and key in the Greek world. We can understand, then, why the Greeks like to erect temples dedicated to them. The Temple of Delphi was defined religiously by the serpent, which in turn represented the earth life's force. Only then can we understand the aura of barbarity that surrounds the act of killing such a sacred serpent.

It was a son of Zeus, the god Apollo, who executed the transgression and murderous attack. The annihilation of Piton was a sacrilegious act of the first order against chthonic gods and goddesses, but allowed Apollo to gain control of one of the most important and prestigious oracles, taking the place of a most revered ancient telluric deity. Apollo would absorb the qualities of the serpent as well as the oracular knowledge from the titan Themis, becoming the ultimate transmitter of divine messages and thus usurping the place that rightfully belonged to Piton and Themis.[118]

The god Dionysus was a chthonic god of androgynous nature and aspect, who is often represented and associated with serpents, sexuality and the feminine. Also a god of vegetation, its cornucopia of abundance manifested in wine, and of course represented in the company of felines like the leopard, both representing sexuality and healing.

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[117] Maria Teresa Gonzales- Cortes, *Eleusis: Los Secretos de Occidente: Historia agraria y belica de la sexualidad* (Madrid: Ediciones Clasicas, 2000), 215.
[118] Gonzales-Cortes, "Eleusis," 216.

Dionysus also represented the primitive and monstrous chaos of the dark chthonic energies of the underworld.

We know that Delphos had represented since its origins one of the most powerful sacred places and accordingly one of the most prestigious oracles in the Greek world. Delphos was dedicated to the most sacred serpent. The exclusion of Dionysus doesn't seem so strange anymore if we know the history of Delphos as an initially chthonic sacred temple, and the role that Apollo played in the extermination of the sacred feminine and the role of Dionysus as a god that continued to represent those same telluric forces and attributes of the mother goddess.

Apollo perhaps had to be honored independently of Dionysus, and jealous of the tragedies and plays that the poets had written to honor Dionysus, he demanded to have his very own theatrical festival. We can speculate and come up with many interpretations, but one can easily disagree with Scullion. His argument of using an exclusion of Dionysus at Delphi, as proof that performances of tragedy outside Athens existed may work. Scullion's argument falls short on proving that dedication to other gods other than Dionysus as the god of theater.

3. Masks and the Origins of Comedy

Scullion is determined to separate religion from art and literature. He wants to believe that tragedies were just exclusive works of literature, and never play any part in the cultic and religious character shared by the festivals of the Great Dionysia and Lenae. Scullion ignores the fact that for the ancients religion impregnated civic life as well as the divinely manifested art forms.

On the subject of masks and whether they were an element that worked overtime

in the process of the development of comedies, or whether they were a remnant of a cultic past, Scullion sides with Aristotle in regarding the mask as a step forward on the road to perfection and having a clear dramatic purpose. Evidence points to dithyrambs not played with masks, since they were odes to be sung, and wearing a mask would get in the way of singing clearly and comfortably.[119] On the other hand, if phallic songs were performed with masks, that also would make sense. Either way, wearing masks was probably an addition to tragedies. This proves nothing against tragedy's origins in Dionysiac ritual. It only points to the fact that singers of dithyrambs, as alleged precursors of tragedy, did not wear masks for practical reasons. Satyr plays and Phallic processions used masks, and tragedies also continued that tradition.

Masks are connected to rituals and cults, but not wearing a mask to sing does not prove that dithyrambs were not composed to honor Dionysus in the same way that it does not prove they did not evolve into other dramatic performances involving choruses or eventually dialogues or both. Are we to believe that in order for tragedy to have a Dionysiac origin, it had to look and sound exactly as the dithyramb or satyr plays did?

4. The Dionysiac Spirit and Satyr Play

Scullion puts forward the fourth argument of the scholarly community in favor of Dionysiac origins, in which drama is a manifestation of ecstasy as in "standing outside of the self."[120] Scullion counter argues this argument with an excess of semantics in which according to him Dionysiac *ekstasis* is "really about escaping individuality as such" and "not about representing or entering into a particular individuality other than our own."[121]

Scullion's argument interprets correctly that Dionysiac ecstasy is about escaping

[119] Pickard-Cambridge, "Dithyramb," 34.
[120] Scullion, "Nothing," 116.
[121] Ibid.

individuality. It may be insufficient to define Dionysiac ecstasy as "escaping individuality" merely because this is specific to the Dionysiac. A better definition might include "standing outside the self to escape individuality." Scullion claims that escaping individuality is not about representing or entering into a particular individuality other than our own. Actors in tragedy literally become someone else and wear masks to accentuate the fact. Standing outside the self is central in drama and Dionysiac ecstasy, uniquely common in tragedy and Dionysiac ritual.

This unique commonality between tragedy and Dionysiac ritual is more important than to try to theorize about how many different ways there are to achieve escaping individuality and how those differences might separate tragedy and Dionysiac ritual irrevocably. Role playing derives from the character or individual not accepting his societal role as the only option, thus fulfilling the need to create his own role by changing or escaping his individuality or social destiny. Ultimately, transcending individuality can take many roles and can be achieved by different paths, including the arts of dramatic representation. By entering into a particular individual other than our own, the individual can stand outside the self, but through the self. The dramatic process stretches the original self, giving it freedom of perspective, and irreversibly enriching it. The actor only has the self as tool for representation, so it must make good use of self to become other than self and therefore know intimately himself.

In other words, the point is that Scullion may be overly concerned with the minutiae of semantics. An emphasis on semantics robs his argument of the necessary depth to understand that Dionysiac ritual and the techniques used in Greek cult to induce ecstasy might not have had as goal the evasion of self, but the actual confrontation of self

with self. Consequently, to misunderstand cultic ecstasy ritual as mere license for evasion of self is indeed a limitation of modern scholarship and has no basis in Greek religion. Scullion sees Attic tragedy as the culmination of a development, as though it contained no primitive elements, and assumes that this development proceeded from the simple to the complex in a sort of literary isolation from society and religious ritual.

Burkert describes how *ritual* used to describe the steps and rules of religious behavior, but this definition changed when biology as a science developed, and Sir Julian Huxley redefined "ritual as a behavioral pattern that had lost its primary function."[122] According to Huxley, ritual would still be present in an *un-ritualized* form like tragedy, thus continue in its new function—communication.[123] According to Burkert the new *un-ritualized* ritual and its new purpose of communication reveal the two basic characteristics of ritual behavior, repetition and theatrical exaggeration, and in this way ritual creates and affirms social interaction.[124] Even if the meaning of ritual had not lost its primary function completely, it is possible that in the context of drama Scullion and Pickard-Cambridge's definition of ritual becomes too narrow and ultimately obsolete to measure what could have become a new conceptualized ritual on the stage at the Great Dionysia in the sixth century BCE. The Dionysiac ritual in tragedy may have lost its primary function, thus become *un-ritualized*. Maybe tragedy had more than one set of actions motivated only by the rules of religious behavior. Maybe it had gained a more relevant function of communication created through the literary epic tradition and the oral lyric tradition communicating a reflection of the human experience in a Dionysiac context.

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[122] Walter Burkert. *Homo Necans*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 22, 23, 24, 25
[123] Burkert, "Homo," 22, 23, 24, 25.
[124] Burkert, "Homo," 22-25.

5. The Billy Goat Price

Scullion briefly discusses the goat as price in the dramatic contests as an invention made cannon by Burkert, who had equated the goat as the contest prize and as sacrificial offering to Dionysus. Scullion argues that the goat was among one of the most common animals offered in sacrifice in the Greek world. Scullion claims that this argument is used to prove that tragedy originated in cult. Burkert did not invent that the prize was a goat or that the prize may have also been a sacrifice. As we have seen above, Thespis won a goat as his prize in 534 BCE, and there are a few vases from Corinth depicting a goat tied to a sacrificial bowl.[125]

6. Tragic Choruses

Scullion claims that there is not firm basis for the view that tragic choruses are Dionysiac, and that the *interpretation Dionysiaca* is too subjective and random to use in the reading of tragedy.[126] It is true that there are only four out of twenty-four Euripidean choral references to dance to Dionysiac dance, but as Henrichs made clear in his article about the self-referentiality, the Dionysiac nature of "the tragic chorus in the orchestra is more than any other a collective character, and also it collectively embodies the continuity of ritual performance."[127] And with more precision, we could add the continuity of *un-ritualized* ritual performance as we have identified in tragedy. Scullion's interpretation of what defines the tragic chorus, or rather what makes it Dionysiac is

[125] Parian Marble IG XII, 5 I, 444 – Thespis; Corinthian vase, *kothon* L118, Wurzburg in Pickard-Cambridge, 306.
[126] Scullion." Nothing," 125.
[127] Scullion cites Henrichs' article "*Why Should I dance?: Choral self-referentiality in Greek Tragedy*"118.

unclear. Henrichs thinks that the tragic chorus communicates "not as a direct voice in the drama, or as a citizen of the polis, but as a self-conscious performer of the Dionysiac ritual in the orchestra and as an active participant in the festival of Dionysus."[128] We cannot accept only literal Dionysiac themes and direct references to the god Dionysus or Dionysiac ritual as exclusive and valid evidence for the origins theory as Scullion suggests. If on the contrary we accept Henrichs's argument that tragic choruses are markedly Dionysiac and clearly attribute a ritual role to the tragic chorus, not only on the basis of its context as Dionysiac, as the festival would clearly provide, but also on the premise of its collective character, as Dionysiac language, then we observe Dionysiac elements that are constant in tragedy.

Scullion bases the essence of his argument on his interpretation of Aristotle's testimony, in which Dionysiac cult is only relevant to tragedy as historical point of origin. This may be an accurate reading because Aristotle doesn't say anything else about Dionysus beyond that point of origin. But if we separate tragedy from its context, as Aristotle does, then it seems easy to prove that tragedy had nothing to do with Dionysiac ritual. And this is what Scullion does exactly. Scullion appears to question Aristotle, but in the end uses his same framework of deconstextualization to examine and analyze tragedy.

The problem with deconstextualization is that tragedy cannot be separated from its ritual context, and yet that is exactly what we have, tragedy separated from its context. We have inherited the texts and not the context. We can only recreate the context through the study of other evidence, archaeological and historical. This takes an effort that

[128] Scullion cites Henrichs, 118.

requires intense scrutiny combined with a fair amount of speculative hypothesizing. It is all too easy to simply look at tragedy as texts standing alone. Above everything tragedy was to be performed not read.

Another problem built into this argument is that according to it, for the Greeks and for Aristotle in this case, the point of origin for anything would be a somewhat trivial matter that seldom needed to be theorized over. The importance of origin cannot be emphasized enough. In the ancient world it mattered where one was from, where one came from, or where something originated, because origin defined and was central to identity. So it remains unlikely that Aristotle would have speculated over the origins of tragedy. Maybe the presence and role of Dionysus in theatre was so obvious for the Greeks that Aristotle did not need to theorize over the question of origins.

CHAPTER III:

THE EVOLUTION OF TRAGEDY

The production of the extant works of tragedy lasted for less than a century, from 472 to 404 BCE. Coincidentally this is the period of the political blossoming of Athens. It would be difficult to claim that this relationship was casual, when in fact evidence found in the plays proves the opposite.[129] Additionally, the evolution of tragedy would be incomplete if analyzed in isolation from the political changes that Athens was experiencing. The evolution of tragedy is manifested in the changes of its literary form, and in a constant reinterpretation of the myths, but also in a full spectrum of political themes. It is an evolution that directly reflected the changes that the city-state went through during the tumultuous fifth century.

This chapter explores the dual evolution of tragedy and civism through the analysis of three plays. The changes from Aeschylus to Sophocles, to Euripides are at times radical, each reflecting a unique period in the political and philosophical life of Athens. A few particulars of how this evolution of tragedy unfolded are analyzed here.

The tragedy of Aeschylus: Divine Justice and Civic Accountability

In 490 BCE Aeschylus (c.525- 455 BCE) fought in the Battle of Marathon. Ten years later, in 480 BCE, he fought again in the Battle of Salamis, while the city of Athens was occupied and burnt down by the Persians.[130] The epitaph of Aeschylus, found in the town of Gela, Sicily, commemorates his having fought in these two fateful battles.[131] The

[129] Romilly, "La tragedie," 10.
[130] Romilly," La tragedie," 53.
[131] Pausanias, "Descriptions of Greece," Vo. I, 1.23. - "This tomb the dust of Aeschylus doth hide, Euphorion's son and fruitful Gela's pride, How tried his valour Marathon may tell, And long-haired Medes

fact that his epitaph would be silent about Aeschylus being a famous playwright is highly significant of the importance that these two battles had for the ancient Greeks. Aeschylus wanted to be remembered for being a brave soldier, not for being a playwright of fame.

The oldest tragedy extant, *The Persians*, was performed in Athens in 472 BCE, eight years after the great victory at Salamis. This play celebrates the unlikely victory won by Athens under its brand-new democracy, consecrating Athenian prominence. Aeschylus's life and artistic career coincided with a great victory and the beginning of a proud and prosperous city-state. A young Pericles was the choregos chosen to organize the representation of Aeschylus's play, *The Persians*.

Aeschylus chose to tell this commemorative play from the point of view of the losing team, the Persians. Victory and defeat are matters ultimately decided by the gods, and an excess of hubris leads to a sacrilegious behavior, like Xerxes's invasion of Greece and his destruction of the sacred temples. This kind of arrogant behavior was punished by the gods, and could happen to anyone who dared forget divine law. The concept of divine justice is universal, but also very close to Aeschylus's heart. Desecrated Athens had prevailed victorious, and Aeschylus had been a personal participant and first-hand witness of such divine justice.

The sense of divine justice is omnipresent in Aeschylus's plays. In a world of chaos and mystery, his tragedies inspire a faith to find order and balance. In *The Persians*, the story is not only told from the losing side, but the Persians and the gods are the only protagonists of the play. The power of the play comes from the opportunity that Aeschylus offered the audience to see the enemy as opposite, but also to see it as

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who got the point full well.'

similar.[132] There is a strong emphasis on identification, and a strong need to learn from the enemy. Persian wealth had motivated extreme hubris and the resulting impiety had tilted the scales of divine justice. This was Aeschylus's warning for the Greeks.

The plot is uncomplicated and straightforward, characteristic of Aeschylus's plays, along with a slow rhythm that adds to the majesty and profundity both in language and theme.[133] The Persian elders are wondering about the "Persians, who have departed to the land of Greece."[134] At this time in the evolution of tragedy the chorus was the most important element. It reflected a predominance of the group over the individual characters. It was the beginning of a democratic city-state, where there were many concerns and the emphasis was on doing what was best for the group or state. Many of the titles reflect the chorus's importance for being named after them. *The Persians* is one such case, its chorus formed of elderly Persian men.

In *The Persians* the anxiety of the chorus increases when the dream of the Queen is unfavorable.[135] A moment after a messenger arrives announcing "Oh land of Persia, repository of great wealth! How all your great prosperity has been destroyed in a single blow."[136] It had come true, a great humiliation of the Persians by the Greeks. The ghost of Darius appears and wants to know what has happened. Darius quickly understands the foolishness of Xerxes' attempt. The Queen says, "some divinity must have touched his wits" and Darius agrees "Ah, it was a powerful divinity that came upon him, to put him out of his mind!"[137] Finally Xerxes, the Great King of the Persian Empire, arrives in

[132] Nancy Sorkin, *Greek Tragedy* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 93-4.
[133] Romilly, "La tragedie," 57.
[134] Aeschylus, *The Persians* 1, 2.
[135] Aeschylus, *The Persians*, 180-215.
[136] Aeschylus, *The Persians*, 250, 251, 252.
[137] Aeschylus, *The Persians*, 724, 725, 726.

desolation, "alone, on foot and with his royal robes in rags."[138] The play moves slowly from anxiety to desolation. The majesty of the play is partially in its pace, which allows for the progressive discovery of a tragic event caused by the gods, and in this case the defeat of a mighty empire. Aeschylus makes sure that in the slow unfolding, we realize along with the characters the role of the gods in the outcome. The choruses have a counseling role in Aeschylus's tragedies, and *The Persians* is no exception, because the chorus is composed of wise elders offering their advice.

The Persians reflects a world in which everything depends on the gods. We have the prophetic dream of the Queen. Afterwards, we see a king appear from the dead. We have the chorus of elders, anxious because they know their king Xerxes has been won over by pride, and they also know how this pride put into action –in what the Greeks called "hubris"—upsets the gods like nothing else. Even the messenger is clear about it, when he says, "As soon as Xerxes heard that the Greeks would not stay where they were, and not understanding the deceit of the Greeks and the jealousy of the gods, he proclaimed the following order to his admirals… and arranged the mass of their ships in three lines to guard the exits all night… So much he said, speaking from a very cheerful heart, because he did not understand what the gods were about to do."[139] The messenger also was aware of divine justice, when he says, "It was some divinity that destroyed our fleet like this."[140] The idea of divine justice in Aeschylus, however, implies that humans are fully responsible for their actions, because they are always at risk of offending the gods.

The individual is also responsible for his actions in relation to the community or

[138] Aeschylus *The Persians,* 905.
[139] Aeschylus, *The Persians,* 359-360, 364-365, 370-375.
[140] Aeschylus, *The Persians,* 345, 346.

group that he leads, because he is always at risk of making the wrong choice and bringing the entire group to defeat, disaster or death. This second responsibility toward the group has a civic or political nature intertwined with the first religious responsibility. Aeschylus is preoccupied with the tension between the ideals of democracy and those of tyranny. We see this clearly in plays like *Agamemnon*, but there is a constant ideal of such civism throughout Aeschylus's work.[141] In *The Persians* we see this when the Queen talks about Xerxes and her vision of an eagle being attacked by a hawk: "This was terrifying to me to behold, and must be terrifying for you to hear; for you know well that if my son were successful he would be a very much admired man, but were he to fail – well, he is not accountable to the community, and if he comes home safe he remains ruler of his land."[142] Aeschylus emphasizes the difference between Persians and Greeks, and this is the very core of the ideals that led the Greeks to fight and prevail against all odds. This core ideal was based primarily on a land free of tyranny, and a land where there was political accountability from leader to community.

In Aeschylus's tragedy, divine justice converges with individual responsibility. Whether leaders bring ruin to their cities or offend the gods personally, the same doom is provoked. There is divine justice in the world. Aeschylus was a witness of it in the battle of Salamis. Civic accountability derives from individual responsibility in Aeschylus, who saw a direct relationship between offending the citizens and offending the gods through individual hubris.[143] *The Persians* is the oldest extant play, and it marks the beginning of the peak of tragedy as genre. *The Persians* also reflects a view of a world ruled by these two principles, divine justice and individual responsibility. From the later one derived a

[141] Romilly, "La tragedie," 77.
[142] Aeschylus, *The Persians*, 210- 214.
[143] Romilly, "La tragedie," 79.

strong preoccupation with civic accountability. This period saw the incipient and promising beginning of a new and proud democracy. The military victory of the Battle of Salamis was ultimately an expression of divine justice, and it represented divine approval for Athens's democracy. The play *The Persians* consecrated this victory with divine justice, while warning of the universal danger of blinding arrogance and lack of civic accountability. These were the preoccupations and beliefs of Aeschylus's time, which he expressed through his plays. Attic civism, for Aeschylus, necessarily combined divine justice (religious responsibility) with civic accountability.

The Tragedy of Sophocles: Human Justice and Individual Destiny

Sophocles (c.496-406 BCE) was a young boy during the Battle of Salamis. His was a very different generation than that of Aeschylus. Sophocles lived during the peak of Athenian prominence, but he also lived through the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE).[144] Sophocles' life coincided with the emergence of the Athenian Empire, and he was witness to the building programs of Pericles, including the new Acropolis. Sophocles was the only one of the three great playwrights who continued to live in Athens during his entire life.[145] Sophocles had a very successful career as a playwright, but he also participated actively in politics. He was named a *strategos* in the Sicilian campaigns during 426-425 BCE.[146]

Sophocles lived most of his life in an era of great optimism. This was a period where there was a switch of emphasis from divine justice to human justice, which reflected the unfolding of the democratic political process. The Athenian democratic experiment brought up new issues and concerns for citizens about the newly prominent

[144] Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War*, bk. 1, 66-88.
[145] Romilly, "La tragedie," 81.
[146] Thucydides, "*History*," bk. 3, 115, 116, and bk.4, 2-3.

role of human justice, which often conflicted with the traditional role of divine justice. Such issues of ethical order are a constant in Sophocles' plays, but they are most notably addressed in *Antigone* and *Electra*.

In opposition to Aeschylus, at the center of this classical moment, for Sophocles, are not the gods anymore, but mankind. The conflict that results from the split between human justice and divine justice, largely due to the emergence of a powerful state with many new laws, is the most notable change in the tragedies produced at this time by Sophocles.[147]

The play, *Antigone* (c. 442 BCE) is a clear representative of the ethical conflict that emerges when human justice contradicts divine justice. Antigone has attempted to bury her brother Polynices, following traditional honorable religious customs, who has been killed fighting his brother Eteocles. In doing so, Antigone has violated human law under the order of Creon. The new king has prohibited anyone in the city of Thebes from burying Polynices, his nephew. Antigone is condemned to death for trying to do so. Antigone is alone when she pours the funeral libations on her brother. She does not receive the support of anyone, not even her sister, Ismene.

The play is organized in four great scenes, and in every scene there are two characters being confronted.[148] First, Antigone confronts her sister Ismene, on their duty to bury their brother.[149] Second, Creon is confronted by the testimony of the guardian, who seems a charlatan, but who has captured Antigone *infraganti crimine*, pouring the triple libations over her brother.[150] Third, Creon confronts Antigone and Ismene.[151]

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[147] Sophocles produced about 123 tragedies in his lifetime, of which only seven have survived.
[148] Sophocles, *Antigone* in Romilly, "La tragedie," 83.
[149] Sophocles *Antigone*, 1-100.
[150] Idiomatic Latin for 'being caught while committing a crime.' Sophocles Antigone, 425-430.

Fourth, Creon confronts his son, Haemon, who is betrothed to Antigone, without any success.[152] Then Creon confronts Tiresias, the blind prophet, whom Creon first accuses of fraud, but who then convinces Creon of the mistake he is making by not burying Polynices.[153] The gods are offended by these actions from the new king of Thebes. The chorus is formed of Theban elders, who are at first deferential to the King, but then plead for Ismenes's life and later for Antigone's.[154] Creon finally agrees, but it is too late, as the impetuous Antigone has hanged herself. Haemon finds out Antigone is dead and kills himself. When Eurydice, Creon's wife, finds that her son Haemon is dead, she also kills herself.[155] These actions leave Creon in desolate desperation and in remorse for all the tragedy that he has caused. The order and his kingdom have been preserved, but he has angered the gods, who have unleashed upon him divine justice.

All these conflicts that guide the action of the plot reflect the various aspects of the central conflict, which happens in the middle of the play. Antigone and Creon are confronted over two sets of rules, two ideals, and two duties. Antigone's principles are of great moral nature and only respond to the gods; in her famous monologue in which she explains that the mandate of Zeus is above that of any man and that there are unwritten laws that cannot be broken.[156] Antigone is not going to risk being punished by the gods for fear of any man. Antigone embodies the ideal heroine, and she has inspired many causes against the tyranny of deluded leaders throughout history.

On the other hand, Creon represents the tyrannical ruler, whose principles may be

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[151] Sophocles *Antigone*, 440-580.
[152] Sophocles *Antigone*, 630-780.
[153] Sophocles *Antigone*, 990- 1090.
[154] Sophocles *Antigone*, 1090- 1110.
[155] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 1280-1305.
[156] Sophocles *Antigone*, 452-459.

well intended but prove disastrous. For the Greeks, a "tyrant" was not necessarily a bad leader. In this case, however, Creon's authority is based on human justice, an ordinance passed to protect the city of Thebes against her enemies. Polynices had attacked the city of Thebes in a fratricidal war against Eteocles for the emptied throne of Oedipus, his father and former king of Thebes.

Haemon represents a different political style from that of his father when he says, "The people of Thebes say no," and Creon replies, "And the city is going to tell me what to do?"[157] Haemon gives importance to what the people, the demos, think and want, and tries to emphasize that importance to his father. Haemon thinks that this argument would convince his father. Creon, on the contrary, is surprised and indignant at Haemon's ideals. The response of Haemon to such indignation is, "Do you realize that you have spoken like a youngster?" This mature response makes evident the absence of these qualities in his own father, Creon.[158] The conversation continues, and Haemon says, "there is not a city that belongs to one man only," to which Creon replies, "is it not considered that a city should belong to whoever rules over it?" At this Haemon affirms, "you would govern best in solitude, in a deserted country."[159] Haemon is being critical not only of his father's decision to condemn Antigone, but of his tyrannical governing style. Haemon represents the ideal ruler, as concerned with human justice, and law and order, but also concerned with the opinion of his people, and with honoring the gods. Haemon would have made, had not tragedy ended his life, a humane and wise king. Sophocles gave Haemon an ideal balance between piety and political sense. The opposition is ever more striking because Haemon is Creon's son, and the expectation is

[157] Sophocles *Antigone*, 732-4.
[158] Sophocles *Antigone*, 734-5.
[159] Sophocles *Antigone*, 737-39.

that he would be less mature than his father.

In *Antigone* Tiresias is the voice of the gods, and represents the religious aspect of the issue at hand: human versus divine justice. Creon is accused of "having thrown to Hades a living body," Antigone, and of having "retained a dead body, deprived of the honors that belong to the dead and that belong to the gods of Hades."[160] Tiresias says, "These acts are not for you to deal with nor are they for the gods from above, but you are forcing their hand."[161] In the end his words convince the king, but it is too late.

Antigone is constructed on moral confrontations, and the excessive power of the state, which had become a prominent preoccupation in Athenian society during the life of Sophocles.[162] The contradictions arising between divine and human justice serve as a kind of moral test for the characters of *Antigone*, but also for the validity and strength of human laws. The tragedy of Sophocles is characterized by the constant contrasts derived from the moral dilemma that the characters must deal with. It signals a separation between humans and the gods not present in Aeschylus's play. We also see the philosophy of Socrates (c.469-399 BCE) and Plato (c.427- c.347 BCE), and an increasing focus on human behavior

Aeschylus explains destiny through divine justice, but Sophocles explains it through the irony of destiny, in which both the gods and men have an active part, but humans must find the balance between the two. Sophocles, as we have seen in our case study, Antigone, had great faith in the ability of humans to find the right balance between human and divine justice.

[160] Sophocles *Antigone*, 1065-70.
[161] Sophocles *Antigone*, 1070-75.
[162] Plato *Republic*, bk.3, 386-417.

The Tragedy of Euripides: Divine and Human Justice Are Relative

Euripides (c.480-406 BCE) saw the splendor of Athens, but being about sixteen years younger than Sophocles, he was also strongly influenced by the Peloponnesian War.[163] The twenty-seven year civil war ruined the Athenian Empire, which ended with its total defeat. The political decline and popular disenchantment with the democratic process, religion, and society during the war is reflected in Euripides's plays.

Euripides wrote about one hundred plays, of which only eighteen have survived.[164] He added more characters, and thus added movement to the action, but Euripides's significant innovation was the realism, the humanism, of his heroes. They are not better than average or idealized in any way. Heroes are affected by weaknesses, necessity and circumstances just as the rest of mortals. The different political circumstances that Athens went through during the war are reflected in his new concept of hero and in the different stages of his work.

Euripides went through a diversity of phases, no doubt reflecting Athens's volatile political situation. During the beginning of the war he wrote patriotic plays like *The Heracles* (c. 430 BCE), and *The Suppliants* (c.423 BCE).[165] Later on Euripides's work reflects his disenchantment with the war in plays like *The Trojan Women* (415 BCE). At the end of his life he wrote plays like *The Bacchae* (405 BCE), which can be initially looked as an "evasion play."[166] *The Bacchae* is also about Euripides' disenchantment with religion and shows a clear sophist impulse to question everything and deem everything relative. The world of right or wrong had begun to be questioned, and

[163] Romilly, "La tragedie," 113.
[164] Romilly, "La tragedie," 114.
[165] Romilly, "La tragedie," 115.
[166] Romilly, "La tragedie," 137.

Euripides is right there questioning it in his plays.[167]In *The Bacchae* Dionysus makes the city of Thebes see the importance of his divinity. The king Pentheus is sacrificed for not acknowledging the god Dionysus, and consequently undergoing a tragic fall due to his own "disastrous errors of perception."[168] The play shows a need to escape from the difficulties and chaos of the war, but it is not just about an impulse to return to nature. *The Bacchae* also shows a need to question the nature of Dionysus, an impulse that shows up in other plays, such as Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, where Dionysus is also portrayed in the beginning as a cowardly and shifty character disguised as Heracles in order to descend to Hades.[169] In *The Frogs*, the nature of the god of theatre is put into question, but the play makes Dionysus triumphant in choosing Aeschylus to save the city, and in the end Dionysus becomes not only the god of theatre but the patron god of Athens as well.[170]

In *The Bacchae* there is also a need to question the role of the myths, and the gods, and how useful these were to the people suffering during a war of twenty-seven years' duration. Euripides did not have the kind of faith in divine justice that Aeschylus had, nor did he have the kind of faith in justice that Sophocles had in humanity. Euripides was a sophist and a rational man of his time.[171] He put everything into question the gods, the state, the heroes and the myths. Euripides, as we can see in *The Bacchae*, seems to initially rescue the prevalence of the chorus that we have seen in Aeschylus's plays. In the beginning the chorus sings with great fervor the joys of the cult of Dionysus, "We run

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[167] Plato *Apology*, 17- b, c.
[168] Helen P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (New York; Cornell University, 1985), 217.
[169]Aristophanes *The Frogs*, 1-41. Helene P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 206.
[170] Aristophanes *The Frogs*, 1462.
[171] Romilly, "La tragedie," 144. Plato, *Symposium*, 178-180 (Phaedrus), and 178 d – 185 c (Pausanias) the two sophists.

with the god of laughter; Labour is joy and weariness is sweet, And our song resounds of Bacchus!"[172] The cult of Dionysus is associated with nature and often celebrated away from the city, in the mountains. A return to nature— and leaving the city— could be Euripides's message to the Athenians with *The Bacchae*. Euripides does not offer any kind of solution on how to end war with Sparta. Euripides had left Athens, and he wrote this play at Pella, the capital of the Macedonian court. *The Bacchae* marks the end of Euripides's life in Athens. It is written at the end of his life as well.

In *The Bacchae*, there is the revenge of a god, Dionysus, against a king, Pentheus, who has become too confident in his own abilities.[173] This sounds like a return to the idea of Aeschylus's divine justice. Dionysus, however, is not portrayed as a respected and feared god, but as a terrifying one.

Dionysus hides his true identity and pretends to be a Lydian priest.[174] He deceives everyone, and throughout the play only the audience knows who he is. When Pentheus says to Dionysus, "It is time you were punished for your foul, slippery tongue," Dionysus replies, "And you for your crass impieties," and then Pentheus gets outraged and imprisons Dionysus.[175] Dionysus mocks constantly at the king and points to the fact that Pentheus is living in an illusion. Dionysus has shifted forms from priest to bull, and continues to deceive and mock Pentheus, who tries to tie the bull's knees and hooves. Dionysus laughs at the king and he makes "the building shake and the flame of his mother's tomb flare up" so that Pentheus believes that the building is on fire.[176] All the confusion, chaos, errors, false identities and illusions characteristic of Euripides are

[172] Euripides, *The Bacchae and Other Plays* (Maryland: Penguin Classics, 1954), 183.
[173] Romilly, "La tragedie,"145.
[174] Euripides, "The Bacchae," 195.
[175] Euripides, "The Bacchae," 196.
[176] Euripides, "The Bacchae," 200.

concentrated in *The Bacchae* on Dionysus.[177] It is not only the sorrowful king who lives in an illusion. It is not only Pentheus who will be punished because of his impiety and insults, "The god that makes men fools and women mad."[178] In the middle of the play there is a shift, from whence Dionysus gradually establishes a complete ascendancy over Pentheus. Dionysus achieves this with the promise that Pentheus will be able to see the women dancing the secret rites of Dionysus in the mountains. Dionysus has tricked the king, but that is not all. Dionysus makes Pentheus change identity and sex, by dressing him like a woman. Eventually, the king is found out by the maenads, who are being led by Pentheus's mother, Agaue.

The maenads, or female followers of Dionysus, discovered him cutting Pentheus's throat, head, and the rest of his limbs.[179] This is divine justice at its best, but Euripides takes it farther, as Agaue returns triumphantly to the palace holding the head of her son, Pentheus.[180] Agaue, who had become the most ardent maenad, is also living in a delusional reality. She thinks that her trophy is first a calf's head, then a lion's. She is completely confused. This delirium ends when Cadmus, Agaue's father, brings her back to reality by asking her a few questions; Cadmus almost wishes that his daughter had remained mad and ignorant, so that she will not comprehend what she has done. "Now I understand: Dionysus has destroyed us," says Agaue.[181]

Euripides portrays Dionysus as a cruel god who punishes excessively, even by tragic standards. Dionysus inspires terror instead of fearful respect. The gods in Euripides seem to only increase the suffering of humans. The divine justice of Aeschylus has turned

[177] Romilly, "La tragedie," 145-6.
[178] Euripides, "The Bacchae," 201.
[179] Euripides, "The Bacchae," 213, 214.
[180] Euripides, "The Bacchae," 218.
[181] Euripides "The Bacchae," 222.

into terrifying wrath. Euripides may have been so disenchanted with the Peloponnesian War, and the hubris of Athens that he portrayed religion, and society, both as barbaric. His plays reflect a society that had reached its peak and now was moving backwards. Divine and human justice may only be as good as the circumstances, but they are certainly relative to them in the world of Euripides.

CONCLUSION

Attic tragedy found in Aeschylus' testimony of divine justice a correlation to civism. Aeschylus's play *The Persians* reflects a historical moment in which the victory over the Persians verified for Aeschylus and his contemporaries that divine justice existed, and that the gods were close to human kind. The gods had protected Athens and helped her prevail, along with the rest of Greece, against the barbarian invader. The presence of the gods is everywhere. This divine presence reveals itself in the majesty of language in Aeschylus's plays and is representative of his religious views. The gods and their justice were also expressive of this proud moment in the political history of Athens.

Attic tragedy evolved from the divine justice of Aeschylus to Sophocles's preoccupation with moral decisions. This ethical concern departed from an increased conflict between divine and human justice, but placed an unprecedented faith on human potential to be able to find a balance between the two. Finally the evolution of tragedy arrived at a complete questioning of both divine and human justice. In Euripides's tragedies everything is relative, and there is not fixed right or fixed wrong. Euripides was an intellectual in a postmodern sense, in privileging moral uncertainty, as he was strongly influenced by sophist philosophy.

We have also seen how tragedy achieved a unique resonance with ritual, as it similarly provided a religious framework, where collective concerns could be expressed, which during this time were of a clear political nature. The theatre was the place for the collective representation of political problems, and the themes of the tragedies offered a permanent contact with the collective realities of the political life of Athens.

We also have examined how tragedy gained the strength of the sacred because of its themes being a constant reinterpretation of the myths familiar to everyone. The authority of the myths of Greek religion provided tragedy with a sacred quality. The continuity of mythological themes in tragedy gave it transcendental significance and religious authority.

Consequently, tragedy used Dionysiac ritual, voiced political concerns and gave them literary expression through the reinterpretation of familiar myths. Tragedy gained in the process a moral strength from the sacred setting, achieved the resonance of ritual, and the relevance of politics. The evolution of tragedy reflected and fed on the changes that Athens experienced at the political and philosophical levels. The dual and parallel evolution of tragedy and civism in Athens was a unique process that lasted less than a hundred years, but this process points to the estrangement of tragedy from Dionysus. During the process of evolution of tragedy, the Athenians democratized the semi-civilized god of vegetation Dionysus, who liked to duel in the wilderness and preferred nature to cities. The city signified civilization. The god Dionysus had been associated with a ritualized release of self- control, with the feminine, and the wild. Also, he was identified with the life outside the confines of the polis, with the mysteries of religion and the gifts of wine and revelry of festivals. The god Dionysus had always been worshiped quite theatrically, with masks, music, dance, and dithyrambs. The missing steps from dithyramb to tragedy remain lost, so there is no hard evidence to prove that tragedy evolved from Dionysiac ritual, but the concept of origins was almost a religious concept in ancient Greece. Everything was defined by where things came from. Evidence for this can be found in the importance that the Greeks and Romans gave to the ancestor and hero

cults and the founding myths of cities and dynasties. Origins were central to identity in Greece and in the larger Mediterranean world from the archaic period. There is no reason to believe that when Aristotle wrote in the *Poetics* that tragedy evolved from the dithyramb and Dionysiac ritual he was only speculating. Aristotle had access to testimonies and traditions passed down orally, and he was witness to traditional festivals.

The dithyramb is the bridge between Dionysiac ritual and tragedy. Whether tragedy evolved directly from the dithyramb or whether it copied its form, the fact is that tragedy derived from it. Additionally, the fact that tragedies continue to be performed in religious festivals dedicated to the honor of Dionysus must be significant of its religious origins. There had always been a tradition, in which the cult of Dionysus was associated with the people, good tyrants, and the community. Herodotus tells the story: Cleisthenes the tyrant of Sicyon, and maternal grandfather of the famous Cleisthenes of Athens, wanted to get rid of the former king of Sicyon. Adrastus's shrine was located in the market place, and he invited to come to Sicyon the Theban hero Melanippus, who was a mortal enemy of the house of Adrastus. "Once there he transferred to him the religious honors of sacrifice and festival, which had been previously paid to Adrastus and one of the most important tributes was the tragic chorus. Cleisthenes changed this and transferred the choruses to Dionysus, and the rest of the ceremonial to Melanippus."[182] The same connection to a good tyrant goes back to the organization of the Great Dionysia in honor of Dionysus in Athens, by the good tyrant Pisistratus (died c. 528 BCE) during the sixth-century BCE. In any case, the evolution that tragedy went through was radical. There are arguably more differences between the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides than between Euripides and modern theatre. It was during the evolution of tragedy in the fifth

[182] Herodotus *The Histories*, bk.5, 67-8.

century that "tragedy" became politicized. It was a development that manifested in a dual evolution of literary and political nature. The dual evolution of tragedy and civism "democratized" Dionysus, separating him at least partially from the god's more uncivilized origins and ultimately making him the patron god of the city of Athens.[183] The process of this dual evolution also explains the apparent estrangement of tragedy with Dionysiac themes and the origin of the ancient saying "Nothing to do with Dionysus."[184]

[183] Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, 1463-1519.
[184] Plutarch, *Moralia,* 612e, 671e

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