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**“SING THE DIONYSUS”: EURIPIDES’ *BACCHAE*
AS DRAMATIC HYMN**

by

Rebecca Richards

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

UNIVERSITY HONORS

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Reflection Paper

In the spring semester of 2010, I went to Dr. Mark Damen to ask if he would be willing to be my Honors Advisor for my thesis. He accepted, but instead of my pursuing a traditional route where I would research and write my own paper, he offered me the unique opportunity to co-author an article with him with the intention of getting it published in an academic journal. He warned me that the project would take a lot of time and energy, but I chose to accept. I little understood exactly what he meant about the effort entailed in such a partnership, and I now understand maybe a little too clearly about the seemingly unending road, but the path has been more than rewarding. I consider the work I've completed with Dr. Damen the most beneficial in my undergraduate career, not only in terms of our finished product but also in terms of the process. This reflection paper, then, is to offer other students a candid picture of what it was like to work on a collaborative project with a professor. As such, before I continue, let me simply say that the process was difficult and stressful, but I learned more about the field of academia, about the ins and outs of research, and about myself and my strengths than I would have found otherwise. I hope that the following report will illuminate these pros and cons of my experience for any student who is interested in or is offered a similar opportunity.

One of the first things I learned from my project was how to prepare secondary sources for an academic article. In my undergraduate English classes, I've only ever needed to find three to eight sources then I was done and could write my paper. As an author of an article, however, you need to be fully aware of the scholarly debate surrounding your topic and amass that information into a coherent picture. Furthermore, as a student, you're hitting most of the facts for the first time unlike a professor who has been studying the field for years. Unfortunately, one of the biggest regrets I have about my project is the way I went about acquiring this information. In

light of this, I've decided to list four of the top things I've learned, and hopefully my conclusions will be helpful for any future student working on a co-authored article or on any big research project:

First, make sure you fully understand what your professor wants you to research.

At the beginning of Dr. Damen's and my collaboration, I jumped into source-gathering before clearly grasping what the goal of my side of the paper was. As such, I spent quite a bit of my first semester of work chasing red herrings instead of getting to the crux of the issue.

Second, dive into your topic. I gathered my sources too slowly. On the one hand, it is good to thoroughly analyze and soak in one or two particularly helpful books or articles, but I found myself clinging to these few authors rather than branching out and getting a fuller picture. I was treating the project like a short-term paper I would write for an English class rather than systematically familiarizing myself with the topic. Also, I let myself be intimidated by the prospect of facing a subject I knew nothing about and which had been researched for over a century. Now I wish that I had been more confident and had leapt into the whirlpool to see where it took me.

Third, don't be timid when acquiring resources. Use the Interlibrary Loan services and use them well! I tended to put off requests for articles, books, and especially theses which weren't readily accessible via the internet or our library, and consequently, I didn't get until this semester two of the dissertations which ended up having a profound impact on my paper. Be aggressive and force yourself to request a source as soon as you find that it might be pertinent to your research.

Fourth, absorb the information; don't rely too heavily on quoting. As I started to write my side of the paper, I was taking the undergraduate tact of quoting other scholars' words

too much. Observing Dr. Damen's writing, however, I found that he absorbed facts instead of just regurgitating them, and where he still gave proper credit in the footnotes to any idea which was used by someone else, he developed conclusions in his own way and words. When I decided to try such a tact, I found that I understood the facts at hand better and also felt more strongly about the opinions I wrote.

Essentially, I learned how to explore a scholarly topic through trial and error, but I am very grateful that I've experienced these mistakes before going to graduate school. Now I understand how to approach a long-term research project, and I feel as though I will be better prepared the next time I embark on a venture such as this one. I probably could have learned these same lessons by completing a normal thesis project, but the importance I felt of needing to get all of the information out there in order to be prepared to write an academic article really pushed me to address my weaknesses in researching. Now I look forward to my next big project where I can test the new skills I've gained.

Another benefit I have received was the opportunity I had to attend the 35th Comparative Drama Conference with Dr. Damen. Although we co-authored the paper, I was the one who presented our research, and it was a remarkably daunting yet instructive experience to speak as an undergraduate to a room full of doctorates. Moreover, the aspect of the conference which most impressed me was the people. Dr. Damen dragged me to lunches and dinners with some of the foremost experts in the field of classics, and hearing them all discuss scholarly issues with such excitement, depth, analysis, and personal attachment gave me the unique occasion to see a side of academia that undergraduates don't typically see. I saw my professor and others not in their roles as lecturers but as members of a specialized, scholarly community. Every gathering was a collaboration of sorts where individuals were always building off of each other's ideas,

developing and testing them, in an attempt to fully grasp the issues at hand. Thus, attending the conference helped me to better understand what it means to pursue a career in academia, and whereas I was at first intimidated by these scholars' vast knowledge, I left Los Angeles feeling invigorated. Before the conference, I had gotten to the point where I was sick of school and was not sure whether or not I wanted to go to graduate school, but afterwards, I was excited about the prospect of continuing my education and learning more about the classics. Attending this conference was truly one of the most influential academic experiences I've ever had. As such, I highly recommend that any student who is thinking about attending graduate school go to a similar conference, not necessarily to present but to observe, and I can vouch that it will be a mind-opening experience.

The last thing I would like to mention is how co-authoring this article gave me the ability to work closely with my mentor, Dr. Mark Damen. I often felt like I was Pentheus and he Dionysus as we spent hours and hours on draft after draft, but I would submit myself and my writing to such *sparagmos* any day. He included me in every step of the process, expressing a confidence in my skills which I certainly didn't share but which always encouraged me to keep going. He also trusted my research. I was in charge of my half and he didn't interfere, something which repeatedly gave me a bad case of anxiety that I'd misinterpreted or missed something, but which also gave me a strong sense of autonomy and authorial responsibility. From him, I learned facts and how to write better syntax, but perhaps the best gift he gave to me was his time, time not only to develop our research but a relationship. He has become a mentor in the full sense of the word, helping me through both academic and personal decisions, and I feel as though the entire project has been worth it if only to have gained such an advisor.

All in all, I can't even imagine having not completed this project with Dr. Damen. It has certainly been one of the most stressful and difficult things I've ever done, and at the beginning I was wishing that I hadn't signed on, but now I acknowledge that our collaboration has been the capstone to my experiences at USU. If any student is offered a similar opportunity, I recommend that he or she take it. The work and the worry will be intense, but the reward will be immeasurable.

* * *

Note about paper: The thesis that follows is a copy of the article which Dr. Damen and I have been writing. There are still a few more sources and ideas which we are working on integrating, and passages whose prose still needs to be tightened, but this version is relatively complete. For the most part, I was in charge of researching the form and content of ancient Greek hymns. As such, the majority of my participation is found on pages 10 to 21 where we discuss the nature of hymn and how Euripides uses the genre both traditionally and innovatively in the first third of *The Bacchae*.

Abstract

Of the extant classical and pre-classical hymns to Dionysus, both literary and cultic, none praises him as the god of drama nor explicitly connects him with theatre. This paper will argue that Euripides has modeled the dramatic action of *The Bacchae* on the conventional form of Greek hymns, creating a play that is a variegated quilt of songs, all designed in one way or another to extol Dionysus and the benefits he brings to humankind. Some of these have a conventional appearance; others are more innovative in content and form, in particular, what we call the “dramatic hymn” which encompasses the middle part of the play. We will argue that in these central scenes Euripides presents theatre itself as one more item to be added to the traditional list of Dionysus’ blessings, like wine and joy, those divine gifts most often featured in traditional hymns to this god. It is natural, then, that *The Bacchae* does not just recount this new benefaction through a straightforward narration, the way Homeric Hymns typically do, but reenacts it in a manner appropriate to drama, “the active art.”

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I would like to thank the Honors and History Departments for their generous financial support of my participation at the 35th Comparative Drama Conference in Los Angeles where I was able to present my thesis.

I am also in debt to all of the professors in both the English and Classics programs with whom I have worked as a student and Undergraduate Teaching Fellow. Special thanks go to Dr. Brian McCuskey for the mind-blowing class discussions, Dr. Phoebe Jensen for first exciting me with the prospect of teaching at the graduate level, Dr. Sue Shapiro for encouragement unlimited, and Dr. T for your patience and support as your husband and I sweated through draft after draft.

And lastly, I would like to express the utmost gratitude to Dr. Mark Damen, my mentor in every sense of the word.

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I. Introduction

Our central purpose in this article is to weave together two important threads in recent Euripidean scholarship: one, the metatheatrical nature of *The Bacchae* and, two, its many hymnic resonances. First, scholars including Segal and Foley have elucidated in this play the several ways in which Euripides makes what happens on and off the stage assume the appearance of a theatrical production staged the way plays were during his lifetime. For instance, the numerous allusions, direct and indirect, to costumes, masks, viewers, rehearsal and even actor directions prod the viewers constantly to remember they are in a theatre watching a drama. Second, Dodds, Festugière, Mantziou and many other scholars have pointed to hymnic elements in the choruses of *The Bacchae*, especially its parodos which follows a pattern common in many Greek hymns. To this, we will argue, should be added Dionysus' prologue (1-63), as well as Teiresias' speech explaining the fetal god's rescue from his mother's holocaust (286-297).

When put together, all these studies point to a new way of looking at the central portion of the tragedy, from the Palace Miracles through the second messenger's report (576-1152). Understood as both psalm and drama, these scenes take on the form of a "dramatic hymn," a new-fangled type of ode to Dionysus in his persona as the inventor of theatre.¹ Here, the god's birth, travails, triumphs and blessings are replayed yet once more, some of them for the fifth time in the tragedy, but now they are re-envisioned as theatre and acted out by the characters on stage. Following that tried-and-true dictum of playwriting, "to show, not tell the story," Euripides at the end of his life delivered an innovative on-stage encomium of the deity whose name was attached to this art. However frail the connection may have been between Dionysus and the theatrical

¹ For Euripides' innovative approach to theatre, see Arnott 1990.

productions presented at the Dionysia, it was a fitting conclusion to his career as a “teacher of choruses.”

II. The Nature of Hymn

At its most basic level, a hymn in the ancient Greek tradition is a song of praise to a deity.² It is often divided into a tripartite structure: an invocation, a praise section, and a prayer.³ The first section, the invocation, functions as the deity’s “calling card,” citing his or her name, epithets, genealogy, and birthplace or other locations associated with that divinity.⁴ In the last section, the prayer, those singing the hymn specify the benefactions or help they desire. Often this plea comes in the form of a request to the deity to come and make an appearance. These particular hymns, commonly sung in the cult of Dionysus, are called kletic.⁵

Between the invocation and the prayer, hymns often lay the groundwork for why the divinity should respond favorably to the plea that concludes the song.⁶ Although these so-called “praise sections” vary widely, this part of a hymn often articulates the deity’s functions, power, nature and gifts to mortals and is sometimes expressed through narrative. The god’s birth story is a common topic,⁷ often accompanied by other important incidents in the deity’s life story such as

² There has been much ancient and modern discussion on the exact nature and definition of “hymn.” See Harvey 1995; Furley and Bremer 2001, 1-14, 40-50; Haldane 1963, 12-35. For the purposes of this paper, we will be using the term in its general sense and not limited to its cultic connotation.

³ The following lists of what elements are found in each of the three parts of a hymn are based on the discussions in Furley and Bremer 2001, 50-64; Haldane 1963, 92-144; Mantziou 1981, 5-8; Race 1990, 85-117; Janko 1981; Bremer 1981; Furley 1995; Race 1982. The terminology used for naming the three parts differs among these and other scholars. The invocation is also called the “introduction,” *archē*, *epiklēsis*, and *prooemia*; the middle part the *pars epica*, *pars media*, *sanctio*, *eulogia*, *Begründung*, “argument,” and “expansions”; and the prayer the “petition,” “request,” and *euchē*.

⁴ Mantziou 1981, 5, refers to the invocation as an “identity card.”

⁵ See Haldane 1963, 172-73.

⁶ See especially Bremer 1981, 196.

⁷ For the prevalence of the birth story in hymns, see Haldane 1963, 123-24, 166-67; Janko 1981, 11-15. Cf. Parker 2003, 736: “For the hymn, the fundamental form of ‘theology’ is ‘theogony.’”

wanderings, conflicts with foes, miracles, epiphanies and certain special activities associated with the deity, along with accounts of how he or she acquired specific functions and gifts.⁸ While there is a diverse range of themes found in these middle sections of hymns, many praise sections share distinctive grammatical features. In particular, the transition from the invocation to the praise section is frequently signaled by a relative pronoun, especially when the hymn is heading into a narrative. A majority of praise sections also deploy at some point participles which come in quick succession.⁹

This three-part structure of invocation, praise and prayer is highly adaptable among both the cultic and literary traditions, and it is not uncommon for a hymn to be missing one or several of the elements mentioned above. For instance, some narrative hymns lack a prayer section at the end.¹⁰ Overall, however, the principle and aim behind Greek hymns remain consistent, to define particular gods by naming and specifying their places, functions, biography and other well-known traits, and through that to identify and please deities. The worshippers' ultimate hope is to receive divine aid in a sort of *do ut des* exchange where hymnists laud and gods relieve.¹¹ In the end, success depends on whether both parties feel *charis* ("grace," "gratitude").¹²

⁸ See Haldane 1963, 120-140, for the use of the term "function" and for the types of narratives commonly found in hymns. Cf. Furley and Bremer 2001, 56-60.

⁹ See Janko 1981, 9-11; Mantziou 1981, 6-7, 229; Haldane 1963, 107-09; Race 1990, 85-86.

¹⁰ See Mantziou 1981, 227-33. Cf. Haldane 1963, 92-93; Race 1989, 86: "In spite of the conventionality of the form and language of hymns, there is considerable room for variation, since the hymnist is free to expand, emphasize, or omit any element [usually encountered in hymns]."

¹¹ See Bremer 1981, 196. Cf. Furley and Bremer 2001, 7: "By narrating the deeds of the gods, the *Homeric Hymns* define the characters and areas of power of these gods. These definitions then become the basis and legitimation of cult. Thus the narrative becomes a kind of charter for the god's claim to worship of a certain kind, and conversely the basis for the worshipper's expectation of help."

¹² Race 1982, 8-10, emphasizes the importance of this bond of *charis*: "No other word epitomizes so well the relationship which the hymnist tries to establish with the god—one of reciprocal pleasure and goodwill. [...] The rhetorical [*telos*] of a hymn is, then, to secure the god's pleasure by a 'pleasing' choice of names and titles [...] and by the 'proper' narration of his powers and exploits [...]." Cf. Furley and Bremer 2001, 61-63.

III. Hymnic Elements in the First Scenes of *The Bacchae* (1-575)

The Parodos (64-169)

As has long been recognized, the opening song of *The Bacchae*, the parodos, follows one permutation of this hymnic pattern.¹³ After the maenads have entered and taken their positions on stage, they begin their tribute to the god with an invocation (83-87):

Go Bacchae! Go Bacchae!
 bringing home Bromius [**name**], god,
 son of god [**genealogy and epithet**], Dionysus [**name**],
 out of the Phrygian mountains [**place**]
 and into the spacious by-ways of Hellas,
 Bromius [**name**] . . .

The praise section then begins with the relative pronoun that traditionally initiates the narration of a god's birth—or, as in this case, Dionysus' double birth (88-104). Euripides even includes *pote* ("once") and *tiktein* ("give birth"), words found commonly at this part of a hymn (88-92):¹⁴

. . . whom [**relative pronoun**]
 once [*pote*] she carried, but then in the trauma
 of childbirth, the pain of labor,
 Zeus' thunder took flight and his mother gave birth [*eteken*]
 to him, a castaway of her womb.

After this birth story, the praise section continues with a variety of other hymnic elements, such as when the maenads etiologize the invention of the drum (124-134) and describe the power of Dionysus seen in the miracle of the plain flowing with milk, wine and nectar (142-143). The predominant topic of the passage, though, is its vivid description of Dionysiac revelry, including reports of the outfit and gear used by the bacchantes (101-102, 105-114, 137) and of their wild

¹³ See Dodds 1986, 71-89; Festugière 1972; Mantziou 1981, 301-07; Haldane 1963, 644-51. Our discussion of the many hymnic elements to be found in the parodos will be brief and basic since these and other scholars have already discussed them in detail. It is not our purpose here to explicate the wide range of cultic elements expressed through the chorus in this play but to build upon these scholars' observations and extend them into other parts of the play.

¹⁴ Haldane 1963, 107-08; Mantziou 1981, 236. Euripides calls attention to the relative pronoun and the adverb (*hon pot'*, 88) by placing them at the beginning of the antistrophe.

lifestyle (135-140, 144-151). For the latter, Euripides uses a string of participles to describe the god as is common in hymn: *anechōn* (145), *erethizōn* (148), *anapallōn* (149), and *riptōn* (150). Lastly, the third part, the prayer, is absent from this hymn, but, as noted above, this omission is anything but unusual for a narrative hymn such as this one.

In sum, the parodos is patently hymnic both in content and form,¹⁵ presenting a “liturgical” style which the chorus maintains throughout the play.¹⁶ If none of their other odes are as obviously hymnic as the parodos, these maenads are clearly and deeply invested in the cultic language surrounding Dionysus’ worship, exhibiting an overt religiosity more characteristic of tragedy in and before Aeschylus’ time than what was being written toward the end of the fifth century.¹⁷ Thus, Euripides’ audience is receiving an uncharacteristically large dose of hymn in both this and the other choral odes of *The Bacchae*, but it is only a taste of the many things hymnic which can be found across the rest of the play, sometimes in unexpected places.

Dionysus’ Prologue (1-63)

First and foremost, the tragedy itself opens with a series of hymnic echoes, beginning with elements traditionally seen in invocations (1-2):

I have come, the child of Zeus [**genealogy and epithet**], to the land of the Thebans here,
Dionysus [**name**], . . .

Right on its heels follows a close analogue to the first part of a praise section, in this case, one which, just like the comparable passage in the parodos, narrates Dionysus’ birth (2-3):

¹⁵ Dodds 1986, 71, sums up the overriding scholarly opinion on the parodos’ hymnic style by saying, “Both in form and content the ode seems to be fairly closely modeled on an actual cult hymn.” Cf. Mantziou 1981, 307; Haldane 1963, 650.

¹⁶ Both Dodds 1986, xxxvii, and Haldane 1963, 644, classify the choral odes as being “liturgical” in style. Haldane, 651, summarizes: “Liturgy throughout is blent with lyricism, its function to lend the desired sacred flavour to the chorus’ song and to imbue its words with the spirit—mystical, joyful but also on occasion savage—of the Dionysiac religion.”

¹⁷ See Dodds 1986, xxxvii-xxxviii; Haldane 1963, 579. Haldane also notes how *The Bacchae* and its ultra-hymnic chorus are very different from Euripides’ other tragedies, especially those written toward the end of the playwright’s colorful career.

... whom [**relative pronoun**] the daughter of Cadmus once [*pote*] gave birth to [*tikteī*], Semele, whose midwife was the lightning's fire.

In essence, the play's first three lines bear a striking similarity to the openings of many hymns, moving quickly through the god's name and genealogy, then via a relative pronoun into a birth myth, often in under four lines, with one outstanding difference.¹⁸ These words come not from a worshipper begging for a divine visitation but from a god who has already arrived. Accordingly, unlike in most hymns where the deity's name comes first, the first word in this case is the triumphant verb *hēkō* ("I have come").¹⁹ This small but significant change places a greater emphasis on epiphany than identity, in the same way the rest of the prologue stresses Dionysus' presence in Thebes, using verbs denoting "arrival" or "appearance" nine times and often placing them in verse initial positions (1, 5, 16, 20, 22, 42, 47, 50, and 63).²⁰ Furthermore, the prologue also includes a report of the god's previous wanderings (13-22).²¹ Dionysus has made the circuit establishing his rites, and now he has returned to his hometown to show himself as "a deity manifest to mortals" (22). As such, the god has, in fact, answered the common kletic appeals of his worshippers. He has come, and he is introducing himself in the hymnic equivalent of how a god should introduce himself to mortals, duly prefacing his arrival before his identity.²²

¹⁸ Cf. *Hymn. Hom.* 2, 4-6, 9, 10, 12, 15-20, 22, 23, 26-31, all of which follow a similar pattern. While this play is thinner on epithets and places as compared to many of the hymns, all exhibit the same basic design.

¹⁹ The actor's costume would, of course, signify the god's identity to the audience and in this capacity could be seen as serving as a substitute for his name. All the same, the name still has an important place at the beginning of the second line.

²⁰ Common verbs used in hymnic descriptions of gods' epiphanies include *phainesthai*, *elthein*, *pareinai*, and *dekesthai*; see Haldane 1963, 130-31. Except for *pareinai*, permutations of all these verbs are found in the prologue.

²¹ For the theme of the wandering deity in hymns, see Haldane 1963, 125-26.

²² Haldane 1963, 131, explains that a "stock theme of the Dionysus hymn" was the god's epiphany to his worshippers. Similarly, Dionysus' appearance is one of the central issues of *The Bacchae*, and Oranje, 1984, 132, fittingly calls the play a "mimesis of epiphany." In fact, the dominant role of Dionysus in the play is highly unusual for a fifth-century tragedy. Gods rarely, if ever, have as much stage time as Dionysus does in this play, and such a detail makes his epiphany in the plot even more profound. Thus in a way, the god's appearance not only answers the kletic appeals of his maenad chorus even before they invoke him in the play, which presupposes their appeal for his epiphany, but also the invocation of the audience at the City Dionysia who are watching this very play.

Besides this obsession with epiphany, the prologue includes several other hymnic elements, all of which prefigure the account of the god's inventions, functions and behavior in the parodos. Both passages mention the "discovery" of the drum (*heurēmata* 59 = *hēuron* 125) and the god's ability to control nature in its abundance (11-12=141-143).²³ The prologue also has a string of participles which paints Dionysus' behavior (21-25) in a similar fashion to the illustration found in the parodos.²⁴ All these details of the god's gifts and worship are topics commonly found in the praise section of hymns.

Thus, the general impression left behind by the prologue is of a god who feels slighted. He's playing by the rules of traditional hymn. He's listened and come, he's Zeus' son, he brings things of great worth to mortals and as such should be invoked the way other gods are. But some of the Thebans, and Pentheus in particular, do not "include him in their prayers" (46). So invoked or not, Dionysus has returned to his birthplace to teach his detractors to treat him with the same respect they give his Olympian counterparts, to sing him hymns and praise him the way he's praising himself in the very speech he's speaking and the play he's about to play in.²⁵ All the same, his prologue is not a hymn *per se*, if only because it is not cast in a traditional lyric form, a change which seems intentional. If Euripides wants his audience to think in hymnic terms, he does not want them thinking about hymns as such. This is a play, not a song, and

²³ There are some notable differences between these two passages. For instance, the chorus describes how the land flows with milk, wine and nectar under the god's influence, whereas in the prologue Dionysus points to the grape vines covering his mother's tomb, a manifestation of his power. In both cases, however, nature obeys the new god's authority.

²⁴ Dionysus is a deity who causes people to dance (*choreusas* 21 = *choroisin planatas erethizōn* 147-148), excites people with cries (*anōloluxa* 24 = *iachais t' anapallōn* 149), wears the fawnskin (*nebrid' exapsas chroos* 24 = *enduta nebridōn stephete* 111-112), and holds the thyrsus dressed with ivy (*thurson te dous es cheira kissinon belos* 25 = *ana thurson te tinassōn kissō te stephanōtheis* 80-81).

²⁵ It is not unusual to have examples in art and literature where the gods show mortals how to worship the divine by praising themselves or other gods. For example, Pindar's Herakles-dithyramb describes the Olympians holding a bacchic celebration, thereby offering mortals a "divine precedent" (Furley and Bremer 2001, 15-16) for how to worship Dionysus. The gods themselves often dictate the ways in which they want to be praised. Cf. the fifth-century oinochoe (Malibu 86.AE.236=Beazley 276097) showing Apollo and Artemis libating, presumably to themselves as a demonstration of their proper worship.

despite the many ways in which these art forms may overlap, Euripides is using hymn to achieve a dramatic aim. His Dionysus has other cards up his long eastern sleeve.

The First Episode: Teiresias' Speech (266-327)

After the parodos, Teiresias delivers a lengthy speech defending Dionysus and his cult against Pentheus' charges (250-262), and recounting once again the god's nature and functions like a hymn might and the play already has. For example, the seer describes the god's activities with yet another traditional string of participles (306-309), and this segment is clearly hymnic in its description of the god.²⁶ In one respect, though, this is surprising because the tone of Teiresias' speech as a whole is academic not hymnic. The seer is drawing extensively from the philosophical and intellectual ideas circulating in Euripides' day, and as a result, he comes off as more of a lawyer than the religious figure he is supposed to represent.²⁷ But this mixing of prophet and rational thinker isn't as incongruous as it sounds. Teiresias is playing the role of a "theological sophist," similar to other intellectuals in the day like Euthyphro who eagerly blended theology with the new intellectual revolution and felt that their new ways of thinking deserved a place next to the old religion.²⁸

So when Teiresias enumerates Dionysus' functions like a hymn does in the middle section, he slathers his praise with scientific jargon instead of the cultic language the audience heard just moments ago from the chorus. In doing so, the prophet uses not song and emotion but logic and reason—in its current and popular form—to confirm that Dionysus is a preeminent

²⁶ Dionysus leaps (*pēdōnta*, 307=*skirtēmasi*, 167), and he holds a pine torch (*sun peukaisi*, 307=*floga peukas*, 145) and a thyrsus (*Bakcheion kladon*, 308=*elatas kadoisi*, 110) which he brandishes and shakes (*pallonta kai seionta*, 308=*tinassōn*, 80; *anechōn*, 145). In general, lines 306-09 convey the same bacchic excitement found in lines 144-50.

²⁷ Roth 1984, 60-63, characterizes the speech as an *epideixis* with a traditional *prooimion* and *epilogos*, and goes on to analyze the ways in which Teiresias is influenced by the fifth-century intellectual revolution. Cf. Dodds 1986, 89-113.

²⁸ See Roth 1984, 59-60, for the term "theological sophist" and for a discussion of the other fifth- and fourth-century intellectuals who mixed religion with reason, including Lampon, Antiphon, Miltas, and Philochorus.

deity worthy of being considered an Olympian. He calls Demeter the “Dry” and Dionysus her “Wet” counterpart (274-279). He then goes on to exploit the superficial similarities between the words *mantis* (“prophet,” 298), *maniōdes* (“what seems mad,” 299), *manticēn* (“prophetic,” 299), *memēnotas notas* (“maddened,” 301), and *maniā* (“madness,” 305) to present etymological proof that the god of madness is also a god of prophecy comparable to Apollo. He then assigns a portion of Ares’ powers to Dionysus (302-305), all in an effort to validate the new god by showing how he shares power with more established divinities.²⁹

In the middle of this *apologia* comes one of its more perplexing moments, when Teiresias issues his own interpretation of the god’s birth myth (287-296), repeating and at the same time reconstituting what the audience has by now heard twice before (2-12; 88-92). Sidestepping the traditional story that Dionysus was sewn into the thigh of Zeus, Teiresias performs a reconstructive surgery of sorts on the myth, claiming that the “thigh” (*meros*) in which Zeus sewed up his son after Semele’s destruction was later confused with a word that sounds similar in Greek but means “hostage” (*homeros*). What really happened, or so the seer claims, was that Zeus tricked Hera by crafting a phantom out of air that looked like the baby Dionysus. This he gave to his jealous wife in place of his new-born son so it could serve as her captive. The apparent absurdity of Teiresias’ explanation has led more than one modern scholar to question the validity of these lines, but however bizarre it may seem, this passage accords neatly with the general tenor of the seer’s speech.³⁰ For one, Teiresias has been refuting Pentheus’ preceding outburst point for point, and among the young king’s complaints about this new god is the incredible story that he was implanted in Zeus’ thigh (241-245). Second, the seer’s etymological

²⁹ See Roth 1984, 60-62; Dodds 1986, 104-09.

³⁰ Dodds 1986, 106-07, summarizes the modern skepticism over the passage’s validity then concludes that “[t]he passage is not out of character: Teiresias is trying to bring a barbarous myth, whose meaning had long been lost, into harmony with modern ‘science.’”

interpretation of the myth is consistent with the practices of fifth-century sophists who believed it was possible to uncover truth through word analysis of this sort.³¹ Even when practiced as strangely as Teiresias does, it was to many in Euripides' audience a valid way of unlocking a word's real meaning in the world.

Thus, the seer, true to his role as the play's theological sophist—and also its most blatant anachronism—unleashes fifth-century logic on his foe to make the old look new.³² In effect, then, where a conventional hymn praises a god through poetry, Teiresias in his speech, the closest equivalent tragedy has to non-metrical speaking, hymns Dionysus through “non-poetic” argumentation. In the end, despite its superficial appearance as a philosophical disquisition, this speech again reminds the audience to think in hymnic terms, if not about hymn itself, as the seer praises the god by citing his birth, functions and nature.

The First Stasimon (370-432)

After Teiresias and Cadmus leave, the chorus sings the first stasimon, picking up many of the seer's themes and reweaving them into a form that is closer to a traditional hymn, in much the same way some parts of the parodos paraphrase the prologue.³³ For example, the seer repeatedly warns Pentheus that he must be reverent toward the gods; the chorus, in turn, opens

³¹ See Roth 1984, 65. Cf. Haldane 1963, 128-29, for the common occurrence of etiological narratives in hymns. It was not unusual for hymnists to try and explain the origin of a god's name or some other attribute attached to that deity. For example, Pindar etymologizes “Dionysus” and “dithyramb” in fragments 75 and 76. We also see a similar approach in the parodos of *The Bacchae* when the maenads explain the origin of snakes and drums in Dionysiac worship (101-02; 123-25). There is also a repeated interest expressed in the play in the etymology of Pentheus' name, first as heard by Teiresias (367), then Dionysus (508), and lastly by Cadmus (1244). Thus, Teiresias' “homeros-meros” discussion fits nicely into the time period, the hymnic tradition, and the play itself.

³² This is, without doubt, part of a larger theme running through the scene in which old men like Cadmus and Teiresias feel and act young, while the teenage Pentheus is staunchly conservative and promotes traditional values the way elders more often do.

³³ See Mantziou 1981, 275-78, 183-86, 272-75, where she divides the first stasimon into three hymns: 370-85 (which is a mixed hymn of praise to Hestia and Dionysus), 402-15 (which is classified as a eucletic hymn with an “escape prayer”), and 416-32 (which is a hymn of praise to Dionysus). None of these passages is as authentically hymnic as the parodos is, but Mantziou and others have still found many hymnic elements. Cf. Haldane 1963, 651-57. It is also noteworthy to mention that the first stasimon's description of Dionysus celebrating at feasts and merriments with dancing and music (376-86, 417-19) echoes the account of similar revelry in the parodos (72-82, 126-34).

their song with an appeal to Holiness which is very hymnic (370-373).³⁴ Following Teiresias' lead, the chorus then condemns Pentheus for his "unholy hubris" (374-375) and adds ironic comments about wisdom, such as "cleverness is not wisdom" (395) which recalls Teiresias' admonition about glib and daring speakers who have no sense (266-271). The chorus also picks up on Teiresias' hymnic themes. Both passages mention Dionysus' genealogy as "Semele's child" (278=375-376), and praise the god as the giver of wine which "stops" grief (*pauei*, 280=*apopausai*, 381) and brings "sleep" (*hupnon*, 282= *hupnon*, 385). The maenads are clearly riffing off of the theological sophist's sermon, but now they've taken out all of the sophistry.³⁵ Essentially, this tug-of-war between tradition and innovation as seen in the first four scenes of the play lays the foundation for a continuing interchange between conventional and novel ways of praising the god and sets the stage for an even more daring journey toward a synthesis of old and new.³⁶

The Second Episode: The First Confrontation between Pentheus and Dionysus (434-518)

But, typical of Euripides, once this pattern of redundancy is set and things for a moment look predictable, the drama defies expectation. The first confrontation between Pentheus and Dionysus plays down any obvious connection to hymn, nor does it dwell on the themes heard so often in the scenes prior, the god's birth, in particular.³⁷ Brimming with threats of violence and

³⁴ Furley 1999-2000, 193, explains that the first stasimon begins "in perfect hymnic form."

³⁵ Cf. Dodds 1986, 117, who calls the first stasimon a "lyrical comment on the preceding scene" and concludes that "[t]he leading ideas of the Cadmus-Teiresias scene are taken up in this song and given emotional expression."

³⁶ In the ancient theatre, this interchange between new and old ways of praising deity would have been even clearer since the original staging of these scenes in the play called for one actor to play both Dionysus and Teiresias. Thus, Euripides' audience would twice have heard the same voice in non-lyric passages hymning the god in a new way—as prologuist then scientist—and in the wake of both these incarnations, the chorus reiterating many of the same ideas but in song.

³⁷ In this scene, Pentheus alludes only briefly to the birth story (467) and does not even say a word about Semele after Dionysus mentions her (468). This is somewhat surprising since in the previous episode Pentheus showed some interest in this tale (242-45). Thus, it would be very natural for him to interrogate the stranger about this aspect of the cult now infiltrating his country. Whatever Euripides' intention, the exclusion of any real discussion about the birth story or Semele makes this part of the play stand out from what precedes it and adds to the scene's non-hymnic tone.

bondage, it may recall the battles between gods and monsters in the epic and hymnic traditions, but it is more of a prelude to the real combat to come and lacks any substantial hymnic timbre.³⁸ Instead, in the tragedy's first lengthy passage of stichomythia, Euripides charts a new course as he steers the play into the heart of its dramatic action.³⁹

Although Dionysus says in the prologue that he will disguise himself as a human being, he has not as yet shown his mortal face to any human characters. In his meeting with Pentheus here, he assumes that role for the first time, choosing to play a witty yet weak leader of maenads and disguising himself as a character who looks like the god but is very different from him, an all-important hint of things metatheatrical to come. Ironically, then, while the first third of *The Bacchae* reverberates with the praise of the new god's power and authority, when Dionysus finally manifests himself before his mortal followers and detractors, he comes not as the god he is but in the form of an actor playing a sort of damsel-in-distress, albeit a very sassy one. To drive this point home, he makes oblique references to his double identity throughout his encounter with Pentheus.⁴⁰ These sly winks not only remind the audience who the god really is but stress the duality inherent in any theatrical scene where the actor is at all times both himself and the character he is portraying. Thus, in this scene the play begins to unfold not just as a real-world confrontation between mortal and immortal but also as a drama itself in which protagonist

³⁸ For the prevalence of hymnic narratives involving a deity's fight with foes and especially monsters, see Haldane 1963, 126-27; Furlley and Bremer 2001, 58. The chorus picks up on this theme when they refer to Pentheus as a "wild-looking monster, not a mortal man" (542-43) in the second stasimon. Moreover, though far from a clear recollection of the events surrounding Dionysus's birth, there are in this scene vague echoes of the quarrel (*Heras neikeōn*, 294) between Hera and Zeus over the baby's right to have a place in the heavens. Both Hera and Pentheus are murderously determined, albeit for different reasons, to prevent Dionysus from asserting his divinity. It is also fitting to compare this scene to the *Hom. Hymn to Dionysus* where the god, disguised as a mortal, is captured by pirates who try but fail to throw chains around him, just like what happens to Pentheus in *The Bacchae*. Cf. Oranje 1984, 121-23.

³⁹ It is worth remembering that long passages of stichomythy, though nothing new in the late fifth century, are not seen as often in Aeschylus' tragedies written a generation prior. The absence of long stichomythic dialogue was a feature of early tragedy probably well-known to Euripides' audiences familiar as they were with *The Oresteia*. Thus, a fifty-line passage of stichomythy would have sounded relatively modern, or at least not archaizing as the parodos must have, to Euripides' audience.

⁴⁰ Cf. lines 470, 494, 496, 498, 500, 502, and 518.

meets antagonist, play meets play, and god and viewer alone see the true nature of the peril facing the characters on stage.

The Second Stasimon (519-575)

After the drama of Dionysus' confrontation with Pentheus, the chorus sings the second stasimon in hymnic mode and recites yet one more narration of the god's birth, the fourth in the play so far.⁴¹ But here the maenads facing a real threat to their freedom and livelihood conclude their ode with a kletic hymn (550-575).⁴² This time the chorus is not just singing for the sake of singing. They really need their god to rescue them from impending incarceration. And so, deploying the frequently used imperative *mole* ("Come!," 553), they beg for the god's epiphany and call for a *deus ex machina* or some sort of divine intervention.⁴³ The irony here, of course, is that unbeknownst to these desperate worshippers, Bromius is already among them. Thus, whether or not it is a conscious effort on their part, the maenads are again recapitulating what just happened when the god faced Pentheus' inquisition. Dionysus is present as actor but not as himself, and he increasingly looks like the puppeteer behind the scenes, manipulating the action and the characters on stage. The prevailing sense is that something new and different is under way, that the dramatic action is being taken to new heights with the god returned as helmsman, and the audience is left in suspense as to what lies over the horizon. They will not have to wait long for an answer. The play will again begin recycling elements drawn from hymn in one of the

⁴¹ The four birth narratives which the audience has heard up to this point in the play (1-8, 88-92, 286-97, 519-36) are patently repetitive both in their content and actual vocabulary. Similar words include, but are not limited to, the following: gave birth (2=92, 99=524), childbirth (3=89, 94), fire of Zeus (3, 8=288=523-24), immortal flames (8=523-24), thunder (6=93=288), and thigh (96=286-7, 295=523). It is also important to note that after Teiresias' untraditional birth myth, the chorus in this second stasimon pays even closer attention to Zeus' male womb and delivery than they did before (519-36), specifying every incredulous detail as though trying to drum the seer's science out of their minds because it jars with their conventional view of the god's miraculous origin. Moreover, the second stasimon also echoes some of the same descriptions of bacchic revelry as seen in the parodos, first stasimon, and prologue. Two significant examples include how Dionysus is described as shaking his thyrsus (*tinassōn*, 553=*tinassōn*, 80) and causing dances (*choreusōn*, 567=*choreusas*, 21).

⁴² For a discussion of the hymnic elements found in the second stasimon, see Mantziou 1981, 82-91, 262-64; Haldane 1963, 654-56.

⁴³ See Mantziou 1981, 17; Haldane 1963, 105; Furley and Bremer 2001, 61.

most daring and effective innovations Euripides ever engineered in myth and drama, the middle scenes of *The Bacchae*.

IV. The Dramatic Hymn (576-1152)

The Third Episode, Part 1: The Chorus and Dionysus (576-641)

After calling upon the god to come and rescue them at 553 and receiving no immediate reply, the chorus drifts into a whimsical epode, wondering where he might be (556-575). Suddenly out of the blue, Bromius speaks from offstage. Hearing his voice, the maenads go wild with excitement, repeating their words in typical bacchic fashion (578, 582, 584). While this moment of epiphany does not last long, it is splattered with language typically seen in hymns, especially that used in the opening invocations which typically cite the god's name ("Bromius," 584), genealogy ("the child of Semele and Zeus," 581), and epithets ("Euios," 579; "master," 582).⁴⁴ The arrangement of these elements, however, is not hymnic but dramatic. They are not organized into the format of a typical invocation; they are spoken in dialogue. Thus, like the prologue and Teiresias' speech, Euripides is presenting the audience with hymnic hints that are conveyed in innovative ways, but this time, the allusions are new and different. This time hymn is being staged.

As he begins his escape from his incarceration in Pentheus' palace, a situation that recalls the fetal deity's confinement in his mother's womb, Dionysus calls upon the earth to shake and lightning to strike the palace (585, 594-595). It is a clear recollection of his own birth. The

⁴⁴ See Haldane 1963, 116, for the universal epithet of "master." See also Haldane 1963, 162-65 for the names and epithets traditionally used for Dionysus. Furthermore, in this passage there is no mention of the god's "place" as is common in invocations, but this is to be expected here since the preceding epode has just rehearsed in great detail Dionysus' favorite haunts.

chorus quickly picks up on this notion, envisioning the altar ablaze with the same fire which was ignited by Zeus' thunderbolt and which incinerated Semele (596-599). Here, *The Bacchae* is not just alluding to or narrating the god's first fiery nativity but is reenacting it on stage, in fact, on the very spot where it happened. And just as he did during that "blast of lightning, his mother's midwife" (3), Dionysus emerges from this life-threatening melee alive.

More hymnic echoes follow. When Dionysus reports to the chorus what happened inside the palace, Euripides recalls Teiresias' variation on the god's birth story in which Zeus "broke off a piece of the *aither* encircling the earth and made it a hostage (*omeros*)," that is, a surrogate to distract the vengeful Hera (292-293). It is a unique feature of this play that it contains two phantasms made of air. The first is Zeus' designed to fool his wife, the second Dionysus' own concoction, the "*phasma* Bromius made" (629-630) which Pentheus attacks with a sword. Though slightly different in their nature, each of these holograms, so to speak, serves the same purpose, to present a mirror image of the god on which his detractors may vent their wrath and violence, and both surrogates succeed in their mission. Instead of killing the god who just sits by and watches "idly" (622), a furious, sweating Pentheus "stabs the shining air" (631), a close analogue to the ethereal distraction that years ago deluded Hera and allowed the infant deity to find safety in a stealthy escape.⁴⁵ Thus, as with the lightning and fire on the altar, the tragedy yet once again replays the story of the god's creation and his escape from those who are seeking to kill him, but this time following Teiresias' *phasma* variation of the myth, not the traditional story involving Zeus' thigh.

⁴⁵ Textual difficulties in this passage make it difficult to grasp Teiresias' full story and the significance of his version of the god's birth story. Although the prophet does not say so explicitly, it seems safe to assume that Hera somehow exercised her wrath on the "*aither*-hostage," just as Pentheus attacks the airy phantom instead of Dionysus himself; cf. Dodds 1960, 107-108. It is obvious this part of Dionysus' speech to the chorus is designed to recall Teiresias' earlier explanation of the god's birth, even if the exact nature of their coherence is not entirely clear.

And just like in many a hymn, this re-creation of the god's birth myth has moved the play into territory analogous to the praise section. Here, however, instead of using the traditional relative pronoun to signal the beginning of narratives, the story has been turned into a small-scale messenger speech (614-637), a vivid report of action that took place recently off stage. So again, the play echoes with a drumbeat of hymnic elements, but this time translated into theatrical conventions and acted out for the audience, inviting the viewer to continue thinking about hymnic content but in radically different terms.⁴⁶

The Third Episode, Part 2: The First Messenger Speech (642-774)

In the same way he cultivated a hymnic mode in the prologue, parodos and second stasimon, Euripides follows this birth myth with a description of the power and wild behavior of the god. However, instead of presenting these attributes through a string of participles, the playwright produces a scene enacting the god's expanding cult, the forcible enthusiasm of the Theban women now living in the wild on Mount Cithaeron. Pentheus learns about this from a messenger who appears suddenly, as if at Dionysus' behest (657-658). The play then moves directly into a dramatic retelling of the latest instance of the god's assertion of his power by, in his own words, "making the people there dance and establishing my rites so that mortals may see my divinity" (21-22). Seen this way, the messenger's speech is an elaboration of the deity's attributes as they were enumerated multiple times in the first third of the play. Like the god they venerate, the Theban women inhabit a mountain wilderness (658 = 62-3, 86, 307-8), dance (680 = 21, 148, 380, 567), ululate (689 = 24), dress in bacchic garb (696-8, 703 = 24, 101-2, 106-14) and brandish the thyrsus (704, 724, 762 = 25, 113, 307-8, 531-4). When they strike the ground, "the god sends forth a spring of wine," and when they scratch at the earth, "streams of milk"

⁴⁶ Dunn 2010, 11, says "...the central aim of this drama is not so much to tell a story *about* (italics his) Dionysus as simply to enact who and what he is."

flow forth (707-710 = 11-12, 141-3).⁴⁷ Thus, where the passages preceding the messenger speech only narrate or cite Dionysus' nature, the maddened women as described by the herdsmen vividly dramatize his wild and wonderful behavior.⁴⁸

The Third Episode, Part 3: The Transformation of Pentheus (775-861)

Even after the first messenger's report and its explicit warning that the god bestows awesome and awful powers on his initiates, Pentheus is still determined to stop the women on Mount Cithaeron from celebrating Dionysus. As he is about to marshal his forces and stage a military assault on his own mother and her fellow revelers, the god unhinges his mind and releases its latent desire to see the women in their illicit ecstasy. Despite Ovid's platitude that the theatre is a place to see and be seen,⁴⁹ one of the other thrills it offers is to see and *not* be seen,⁵⁰ to peek into the lives of others through an invisible, or at most semi-permeable, "fourth wall" which, while it may allow characters to speak to the audience, is generally a one-way street. Viewers of this kind are truly voyeurs, staring in through the gates of Oedipus' or Agamemnon's palace and watching them do what they do. In this case, however, Euripides' spectators in the Theatre of Dionysus are not just the audience but also Pentheus. *A theatēs mainadon* ("a viewer of maenads," 829), as the god dubs him, both he and the audience are eager to watch women cavorting about in their bacchic celebrations: Pentheus the maenads on a fictional mountain, the

⁴⁷ The messenger also praises the god's gift of wine for its ability to "stop pain" (280, 381 = 772), and he associates Dionysus' power with Aphrodite's (773-4) in a manner similar to that Teiresias employs when he links the god with other Olympian deities (279-305).

⁴⁸ Whether literally or not, the god is certainly behind the Theban bacchant's victory against the herdsman's allies and the local villagers, driving home his point that men should not try to fight gods (45 = 635-636). In all, Dionysus' power and nature courses throughout this messenger speech, reformatting the praise part of a hymn as an element found often in drama, a messenger speech.

⁴⁹ *Ars Am.* 99: *spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsae*, "they come to see, they come to be seen themselves."

⁵⁰ Cf. Pentheus' intention, according to the second messenger, to spy in secret on the Theban bacchae: "so that we might see (them) and not be seen" (*Ba.* 1050).

viewers the chorus in a drama being presented on stage.⁵¹ Put succinctly, in releasing his mortal foe's inhibitions, Dionysus creates a theatre-goer of sorts.⁵²

Pentheus, however, is not just a viewer but, tragically as it will turn out, the viewed as well. As the scene continues, the audience in the Theatre of Dionysus watches him formulate a plan to spy on his mother and her fellow Bacchae, making him as much an actor as an observer. In this small-scale drama, Dionysus plays the role of producer, a primordial *choregos* of sorts, suggesting a suitable costume for his performer, in this case the gear of a maenad, notably the very same outfit the chorus of male actors is wearing at that moment. Just as he had earlier re-created the god's fiery birth, then his escape from confinement and his enemies, and the establishment of his worship abroad, Euripides now depicts the invention of drama itself. When Dionysus releases Pentheus' voyeuristic desires, then auditions him to play a part in his fantasy and finally describes what the role will entail, the theatre has been brought to life and a play is about to be born.

The Fourth Episode: The Transvestite Scene (912-976)

In the next scene, as expected, the drama Dionysus is concocting enters the theatre, not the tragedy one might have anticipated but a type of comic episode very unusual in late classical tragedy, a "drag scene." Although throughout his career Euripides had dabbled with interweaving comic threads into his tragic tapestries, never to our knowledge did he cross the line this far, incorporating a shtick better known in and more appropriate to Old Comedy, indeed one that Aristophanes had recently used to excellent effect in a comedy aimed directly at

⁵¹ The verb "to see" (*oidein*) occurs no fewer than four times in the first six lines after Dionysus releases Pentheus' inhibitions (811, 814, 815, 816), cf. Segal 1985, 159, on "the repeated verbs for 'seeing' in the so-called miracle (591-97)" which "call attention to dramatic illusion per se..."

⁵² We use the term "metatheatre" in the sense of a dramatic scene that appears self-conscious of its own theatricality. The metatheatricality of this scene and the next episode of the play has been much discussed; cf. Foley 1980, 110: "Dionysus makes . . . his destruction of Pentheus a 'play,' replete with set, costume and spectators." Dunn 2010 reviews scholarship on metatheatre in *The Bacchae* and looks forward to "a third wave of metatheatre, if it ever emerges" (6).

Euripides himself, *The Thesmophoriazusae*.⁵³ Importing the same device which Aristophanes had used to deride him, the tragedian turns the tables on his comic detractor, a person he surely imagined would be sitting in the audience at the play's premiere, and fires back with the same weapon, but not to humiliate a purported foe as Aristophanes had done, rather to glorify and hymn the god who governs both types of drama.⁵⁴

This transvestite scene recalls theatre itself not only because of its clear connection to comedy and its basic elements—costume, wig, props, impersonation, audience, a public viewing area—but also the way in which Dionysus and Pentheus interact. At the beginning of the scene, Dionysus calls Pentheus out on stage like a director cuing an actor.⁵⁵ The first sixteen lines of the scene contain no fewer than seven permutations of the verb *horān*, “to see” (914-916).⁵⁶ As Pentheus poses in his maenad trappings, Dionysus issues a telling remark (927): “Looking at you, I believe I’m looking at those women themselves (i.e. Ino and Agave).”⁵⁷ Though in some ways a snide and metatheatrical aside to the audience, what Dionysus says is also very important to the plot—Pentheus must believe his disguise will protect him—as well as the scene’s hymnic nature. Theatre rests on the audience’s engagement with the illusion unfolding on stage, that the actors

⁵³ See Foley 1980, 114: “... Euripides makes extraordinary use of what were primarily comic techniques in stage business to illuminate and help the audience to interpret the changes of costume and movement in the *Bacchae*.” Later she goes on to say “(Pentheus) is destroyed while enacting what might be termed a parody of a comic plot” (120).

⁵⁴ Euripides’ last laugh here was not, in fact, to be the last. In the year following the premiere of *The Bacchae*, Aristophanes one final time put Euripides on stage, or his dead soul at least, in *The Frogs*. While that play contains no “drag scene” as such, an admission of sorts that Euripides had won that battle (or at least had the last word), it does include a character in an overt costume, the god Dionysus disguised as Heracles. Thus, Aristophanes steals from Euripides the notion of making a play about theatre itself, which can be taken as evidence that right from the outset the play was seen as paean of some sort to the god. The comic poet, however, appropriates this notion for his own purposes and in doing so creates his own dramatic hymn to the god.

⁵⁵ See Foley 1980, 113, refers to “a series of spectacles directed by himself.”

⁵⁶ See 912, 914, 918, 924 (*bis*), 927 (*bis*). The use of *kataskopos* (“spy”) and *phainomai* (“appear”) add to the number of words which convey a sense of “seeing.” *Horan* is a different verb from the one used before (*oidein*, see above) and does not connote “knowing” as readily as *oida*. Its use here stresses the purely visual aspects of the scene, emphasizing its theatrical elements; n.b. *theatron* (“theatre”) is also based on a word for “see,” *theaomai*.

⁵⁷ See Segal 1985, 166: “Pentheus slips into the metatragic role of the actor playing different parts, trying on different roles, masks, and costumes, until his final role is to become only the mask, the empty *prosopōn*, carried by the original of one of those figures he was impersonating, the Maenad Agave.”

actually *are* the characters they seem to be. When the god speaks from a viewer's perspective and validates the perception that Pentheus looks like a real woman, he has created the illusion of theatre, indeed invented it or so the play implies, making this moment equivalent to the first time Apollo in the Homeric Hymn hears Hermes' lyre and realizes the power of his younger brother's creation.⁵⁸ The god becomes immanent through his gift.

If Dionysus' sly wink to the viewers at 927 does not evoke laughter outright, what follows very often does. Suddenly acting like an exasperated handmaid, the god tries to put the finishing touches on Pentheus' costume by tucking a curl of his wig back under his headband and straightening the hem of his dress (928-938).⁵⁹ It's as if Dionysus were a backstage attendant helping a star performer adjust his costume right before he goes on. Then just as quickly morphing into a director of sorts who is showing an actor in rehearsal how to walk in character, he instructs Pentheus to "raise your thyrsus in your right hand at the same time with your right foot" (943-944). The result is a silly-looking gait designed to humiliate the young king and elicit the audience's laughter, as it almost always does.

The interaction of the main characters here evokes the sense that they are putting on a show, or preparing to put one on, and ever more so the latter toward the end of the scene. After reining in Pentheus' overflowing sense of strength and physical prowess as the god fills him with ecstatic vigor, the king demands to be led through the middle of town, "the only man among them who dares to do this" (962). When in response Dionysus ominously forecasts *agones* ("trials, contests," 964), the scene on stage is a virtual snapshot of the Dionysia itself: a playwright/producer (Dionysus) dresses, rehearses and sends out an actor in costume (Pentheus) into a public viewing area (ancient Thebes) to participate in a contest. This is exactly what

⁵⁸ *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 420-3.

⁵⁹ See Foley 1980, 114: "(Pentheus) rehearses his part and adjusts his costume like an actor before a play."

happened when playwrights, producers and actors competed for prizes in the Theatre of Dionysus in front of an Athenian audience during the later part of the fifth century BCE. Thus, two Dionysia are happening at once in the play: the historical one in 405 BCE where *The Bacchae* is being performed, and the mythological one where the god is inventing and inaugurating his latest benefaction, drama, during the course of the play. As these two celebrations of Dionysus merge into a murky blend of theatre and metatheatre, as actor and character, Athens and Thebes, now and then collide and fuse on stage, drama and reality become one, forming the very illusion of “playing the other” that lies at the heart of any theatrical production. In the end, this scene performs for the audience the god’s most recent and, for this form of art, his most important blessing, drama, replacing the praise that a conventional hymn can only recite.

V. Hymnic Elements in the Last Scenes of *The Bacchae* (1024-1392)

The Fifth Episode: The Second Messenger Speech (1024-1152)

The god’s gift of theatre is the final attribute of Dionysus to be honored in hymnic fashion. After this point, the plot shifts its focus from the god’s blessings to his wrath fully deployed in all its brutal dimensions. Nothing comparable can be found in conventional hymns. This shocking and tragic passage, as reported by the second messenger, fulfills the promise delivered in the prologue that Dionysus will make himself a deity manifest to mortals (42) and put an end to Pentheus’ *theomachia* (“god-fighting,” cf. 45). In every scene after the tragedy’s opening speech until his demise, the young ruler is admonished to bear in mind all the good things this god can bring. His Theban elders, his servant, the god himself in disguise and the first

messenger all warn him that, even if he does not seek Dionysus' benefactions for himself, he must at least respect this new Olympian. Pentheus, nevertheless, remains unmoved and refuses to "include the god in his prayers," an obstinacy that in the end leads to a cruel destruction, the very opposite of what most hymns aim at but a common pattern in tragedy, the ritual gone awry.

Early in *The Bacchae*, Euripides includes only a few brief allusions to *sparagmos* (137-8, 336-40), the rending of a living victim during a bacchic celebration. Later in the play, the first messenger gives a more vivid description of the maenads dismembering cattle (734-47). In no way, however, does the play suggest at this or any other point that a similar horror will happen to Pentheus, and there is good reason Euripides alludes only briefly to this macabre rite. He is saving it for the climax of the play's tragic action, a new plot element he will introduce to replace the traditional resolution of the story in which Pentheus dies in combat at the hands of the Theban Bacchae.⁶⁰ Though this is the way the audience is probably expecting the plot to go, it doesn't. Instead, despite Dionysus' threat to counter force with force in the prologue (50-52), the military campaign turns out to be a "red herring," yet another in this tragedian's long career of misleading his public about what is going to happen in the play.⁶¹ To the contrary, Euripides' innovative dramatic hymn culminates with new and brutal force. Not just deprived of his manhood by being defeated at the hands of unarmed women in battle, this Pentheus is *literally* emasculated, no longer dying in armor but in woman's dress, stripped of both his masculine dignity and flesh.

⁶⁰ March 1989 builds a strong case that Euripides has altered the manner of Pentheus' death, toying with and ultimately subverting his audience's expectation that Pentheus will meet his fate in combat with the maenads. Nevertheless, no matter how well informed, all such arguments must be considered speculation in the absence of conclusive data about the tradition of this myth and, in particular, Aeschylus' play on the same subject.

⁶¹ See Arnott 1973, 63: "Euripides was always ready for a game with his audience. He usually knew just how far he could tease them." See also Arnott 1978.

Seen another way, although Pentheus is a man in actuality, figuratively he is the god.⁶² Having taken on the form of Dionysus, the long hair and flowing gown which so fascinated him when they first met, the young king serves as the god's surrogate, an analogue of the *phasma* Zeus gave to Hera on which to vent her wrath,⁶³ the archetype of the sacrificial victims in bacchic celebrations who took the god's place in *sparagmos*.⁶⁴ The bulls torn apart by the maenads, as the messenger reports (743-745), are another such surrogate for the god who is elsewhere envisioned in that animal form (920-922). In the same way that Dionysus' ability to alter his appearance and enchant his surroundings saves him from the pirates in the Homeric Hymn, Euripides' god does much the same except that he asserts his power by changing others along with himself and beguiling them through a different sort of magic, theatre, turning them into characters, *phasmata* of sorts, whose lives are offered up as part of his ritual celebrations. From this perspective, every Alcestis or Ajax ever dispatched on the classical stage is this god's hapless offering, his sacrificial victim. But Pentheus was the first, according to *The Bacchae* at least. Thus, in the same way that some cultic hymns would have been sung before a sacrifice,⁶⁵ Pentheus' *sparagmos* makes a fitting epilogue to the quilt of traditional and innovative hymns performed in this play. While it is not hymnic in the sense of belonging to a song, the second

⁶² See Segal 1985, 168: "Both literally and symbolically the hero-king becomes the surrogate of the god, changes places with the beast-victim who actually *is* the god."

⁶³ Segal 1985, 167, rightly compares Pentheus to "a helpless infant ... a small child, his most fearful anxieties realized in this encounter with the dark, destructive mother." In this respect Pentheus resembles the baby Dionysus whose foes threatened him with death by *sparagmos* and later succeeded.

⁶⁴ See March 1989, 63: "Thus Pentheus' death clearly becomes a kind of sacrifice, and Pentheus himself as the sacrificial victim becomes in some sense identified with the god." She goes on to equate the *sparagmoi* of these figures (64): "Pentheus' body, gathered up by his grandfather, is recomposed by Agaue ... just as in the myth of the death and rebirth of Dionysos the body of Dionysos himself was recomposed by his mother also so that he might be brought back to life."

⁶⁵ See Furley 1995, 45: "Hymn-singing combined with ritual sacrifice (animal and other) was the means—refined and developed over centuries—thought to give the gods pleasure and therefore have the best chance of securing benefits for humans." Furley 1995, 37, also points to *Iphigenia among the Taurians* where Iphigenia leads a hymn in a "sacrificial procession." Csapo 1997 investigates ways in which Euripides may have intended the audience to continue envisioning the dramatic action in the next episode (the second messenger speech) through the framework of ritual.

messenger speech forms an apt conclusion to all that precedes it insofar as the ceremony in which some hymns were performed ended in the blood of a victim.⁶⁶

The Sixth Episode: Agave and Cadmus (1168-1392)

But Dionysus' retribution doesn't end there.⁶⁷ In the final, heart-wrenching scenes of the play, a mother realizes she's killed her son, daughters are torn from their father, sisters are exiled, and the head of the family is cursed to lose his human shape one day. As the characters' lives are upended, so too is the hymnic thread which has been running throughout the play. The purpose of a hymn is to achieve *charis*,⁶⁸ to reach a moment where both human and deity are pleased, yet at the end of *The Bacchae*, there is no sign of either divine grace or gratitude. Dionysus, though present, is now aloof, and joyful dancing has been reduced to shuddering realization. When Cadmus hears the punishments he and his family are to face, he pleads with the god to change his mind: "Dionysus, we implore you. The wrong is ours!" (1344). Dionysus, however, does not relent and his refusal to show mercy stands in place of the prayer section of traditional hymns. Instead, he presents the converse—punishment, not favor—and it is fitting that this god who came in response to a hymn unsung in the play, who stood among mortals and yet never revealed his divinity, now denies the *charis* that concludes most Greek hymns. And so the play resolves in an anti-hymnic mode, where prayer has no power and grace no home. In the end, this is not a hymn; it's a tragedy where ceremonies typically turn to catastrophe, marriages become wakes and death is the fare at family reunions. In keeping with that principle, Euripides closes his dramatic hymn by showing how this god can destroy as much as heal, and where earlier his

⁶⁶ Barrett 1998 explores the metatheatrical dimensions of both messenger speeches in *Bacchae*, especially the second which he concludes (354) "invites us to examine the conventional messenger as a tragic 'institution' in terms of the play's presentation of the servant (and the herdsman)." Thus, it seems safe to say the metatheatricality of the transvestite scene bleeds into the next episode as the play transitions from a more hymnic mode back toward a more conventional tragic tone.

⁶⁷ Verdegem 2001, 9-21, discusses the shift in focus as the play moves from Pentheus' to Agave's plight and achieves two discrete climaxes both of which involve "changing from good to bad fortune" (*Poetics* 1451a13-14).

⁶⁸ Cf. The Nature of Hymn and fn. 12.

proponents invoke Dionysus' power to allay pain (279-83, 381-85, 423), the play concludes with a panorama of horror and sorrow.⁶⁹

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, is there any rationale discernable that might shed light on Euripides' decision to herald this god in such a way? It should be noted that the premise underlying the "dramatic hymn" in *The Bacchae*, that Dionysus deserves to be credited with the invention of theatre because it was celebrated primarily at his annual festival in Athens, is a supposition standing on shaky ground. Indeed, the association of this god with drama was notoriously fragile even in the day, as evidenced by the infamous classical platitude that tragedy had "nothing to do with Dionysus."⁷⁰ But even without this saying, it would still be readily apparent from the remains of classical tragedy itself that the majority of plays written to be performed at the Dionysia did not center on the god himself. Many that survive do not even mention him by name—compare biblical psalms not one of which fail to make some reference to the Hebrew God—making it hard to fathom how and why such inconsistency arose between the worship and the worshiped. Whatever the reason, it's clear the anomaly was not lost on the ancients.

One way, then, to see Euripides' final offering at the Dionysia is as a sort of curative to this disorder. *The Bacchae* not only serves as a paean to the god whose festival gave Euripides a

⁶⁹ Pace March 1989, who argues that "Euripides meant this scene to hold in it more of comfort, even of healing, than we, two and a half thousand years on, are capable of seeing" (64).

⁷⁰ Much has been written about this aphorism including an entire collection of essays edited by Winkler and Zeitlin 1990, focusing how the Dionysian festival context affects and informs tragedy in general. Scullion 2002, 102-137, restores some balance to the discussion, concluding that "in the dramatic component of the Athenian dramatic festivals the specific cultic context of the festival was largely irrelevant, the general civic context, including all manner of religious issues and cultic and rituals themes and motifs, centrally relevant" (134). He goes on to add that "[p]olitical struggle and intellectual ferment produced fifth-century drama, and politics and Hellenistic intellectual retrenchment produced the comedy of Menander, and the one is no more inherently Dionysiac than the other" (135).

platform for his talent but also ties that deity more tightly to drama by providing a divine etiology for tragedy at the very moment of the god's return to his birthplace in ancient Thebes, while not Athens, the setting of so much excellent Greek tragedy. Seen this way, the play creates for theatre the same sort of creation myth *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes* does for the lyre, showing how the new, if no longer new-born god "invented" the elements of theatre, in particular, impersonation, costumes and, most important, the illusion that what happens on stage is real. The play's unique blend of comic and tragic moments is particularly apt here because, in embracing a wider spectrum of tone than is typical of tragic productions even at the end of the fifth century BCE, it accords better with the nature of early Greek drama which by all accounts did not adopt the consistently serious posture of later classical tragedy. Euripides must surely have known this—and, no doubt, some in this audience did as well—and along with the play's other archaizing aspects like its lengthy *parodos*, he has accordingly rendered a tragedy closer in tone to the oldest representations of his art available to him.⁷¹ In sum, this fond farewell from a master craftsman to his divine inspiration, much like Mozart's Requiem, transcends the moment of its creation to encompass the very birth of the art form and its guiding spirit. The result is a hymn to Dionysus and drama itself, a play that replays the very birth of tragedy and the god in whose name it is celebrated.

⁷¹ Foley 1980, 113 (note 10), points to the "the more 'primitive' . . . tetrameters" of Dionysus' report during the Palace Miracles scene (604-641) which she compares to the early classical tragedian Phrynichus' use of the same meter in a messenger speech.

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