

CHORAL MEDIATIONS  
IN GREEK TRAGEDY

EDITED BY  
RENAUD GAGNÉ AND  
MARIANNE GOVERS HOPMAN

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## Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	page vii
<i>List of contributors</i>	viii
1 Introduction: the chorus in the middle <i>Renaud Gagné and Marianne Govers Hopman</i>	I
2 Choral polyphony and the ritual functions of tragic songs <i>Claude Calame</i>	35
3 Chorus, conflict, and closure in Aeschylus' <i>Persians</i> <i>Marianne Govers Hopman</i>	58
4 Choral intertemporality in the <i>Oresteia</i> <i>Jonas Grethlein</i>	78
5 Choreography: the lyric voice of Sophoclean tragedy <i>Simon Goldhill</i>	100
6 Conflicting identities in the Euripidean chorus <i>Laura Swift</i>	130
7 The choral plot of Euripides' <i>Helen</i> <i>Sheila Murnaghan</i>	155
8 Transcultural chorality: <i>Iphigenia in Tauris</i> and Athenian imperial economics in a polytheistic world <i>Barbara Kowalzig</i>	178
9 Maenadism as self-referential chorality in Euripides' <i>Bacchae</i> <i>Anton Bierl</i>	211
10 The Delian Maidens and their relevance to choral mimesis in classical drama <i>Gregory Nagy</i>	227

11	Choral persuasions in Plato's <i>Laws</i> <i>Lucia Prauscello</i>	257
12	The comic chorus and the demagogue <i>Jeffrey Henderson</i>	278
13	Dancing letters: the <i>Alphabetic Tragedy</i> of Kallias <i>Renaud Gagné</i>	297
14	Choral dialectics: Hölderlin and Hegel <i>Joshua Billings</i>	317
15	Enter and exit the chorus: dance in Britain 1880–1914 <i>Fiona Macintosh</i>	339
16	“The thorniest problem and the greatest opportunity”: directors on directing the Greek chorus <i>Peter Meineck</i>	352
	<i>Bibliography</i>	384
	<i>Index</i>	424

## Figures

1	The Aegean and the Black Sea	<i>page</i> 184
2a	and b Chersonesos on the Crimea. Remains of the Roman and Byzantine City. The Greek city was on the other side of the peninsula. Photographs by Angelos Chaniotis (2010)	192
3	The ancient theatre at Chersonesos. Photograph by Angelos Chaniotis (2010)	193
4	The temple of Artemis Tauropolos at Nas, on the island of Ikaria. Photograph by Karin Kowalzig (2004)	195
5	Regional maritime network of cults of Artemis linked to the legend of Iphigenia (Ikaria, Patmos, Leros, Samos)	196
6	Cults of Artemis in Attica, the Euboian and the Saronic Gulf, in the majority linked to the legend of Iphigenia	206
7	View of the tip of Euboia, where Karystos was located, from the shrine of Artemis Tauropolos at Halai Araphenides. Montage by Barbara Kowalzig	207

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Artemis, who notoriously integrates the other and the self; its meandering between slave and civic, between barbarian and Greek, and not least the traditionally integrating role of the travelling, theoric chorus, bringing different religious worlds together in their dance. All these amount to the tragedy as one big *choros*, a large-scale aetiology, mediating the transcultural economic encounter. The chorus can do what it does because of its connotations with Hellenicity (the civic, the freeborn etc.); but the Hellenicity it produces is a cultural hybrid comprising the religious imaginary of the entire Mediterranean, including the Black Sea.

## CHAPTER 9

*Maenadism as self-referential chorality  
in Euripides' Bacchae*

*Anton Bierl*

## Introduction

*Drama* – the action of ancient Greek tragedies, satyr plays, and comedies that are embedded in the institutional frame of the Dionysia – is staged in alternating choral and speech passages as a flux of scenes arising from a mythical model.<sup>1</sup> Beyond its ability to communicate an array of meanings on the political, social, and cultural level, ancient tragedy aims at displaying given patterns with the purpose of communalizing quintessential suffering. Since, compared to modern, naturalistic drama, it focuses to a lesser degree on the representation of dramatic events full of suspense, Athenian tragedy can to some extent be characterized as predramatic, especially its chorus, something that has been picked up by many recent trends in theater productions.<sup>2</sup> For the last two decades, the study of the Greek chorus and of other ritual forms of expression has been revolutionized by the application of modern literary and cultural approaches. Decisive contributions to an adequate understanding of *choreia* were made by focusing on ritual and performative aspects of the phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> These recent developments were triggered by a number of observations. One is Walter Burkert's view that choral dance is a quintessentially ritual activity. He defines dance as following: "Rhythmically repeated movement, directed to no end and performed together as a group, is, as it were, ritual crystallized in its purest form."<sup>4</sup> In addition, according to Stanley Tambiah, ritual – and thus choral dance – is performative in three

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Käppel 1998: 25–38, esp. 36–7.

<sup>2</sup> For the postdramatic theater (cf. Lehmann 2006) that has common features with the predramatic tragedy, see Lehmann 1991: esp. 2 and Bierl 2010.

<sup>3</sup> See Calame 1977, vol. 1 (in English, Calame 2001); Nagy 1990b: esp. 339–81; Lonsdale 1993; Golder and Scully 1994/5 and 1996: 1–114; Henrichs 1996b; Stehle 1997; Wilson 2000; Bierl 2001 (in English, Bierl 2009); Foley 2003; Murray and Wilson 2004; Calame 2005b; Kowalzig 2007b; Swift 2010. On the subject of procession linked to chorality, esp. in tragedy, cf. Kavoulaki 1999: esp. 306–19; see also Kavoulaki 1996. Particularly on the *Bacchae*, cf. Kavoulaki 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Burkert 1985: 102.

ways: (1) as a speech-act; (2) in the multi-media presentation by which the spectators undergo an emotional experience; and (3) in the indexical catalogue of metonymic and synecdochic relations between parts and the whole.<sup>5</sup>

The choral songs of the *Bacchae* are part of a performative and multi-media presentation where melodic, visual, olfactory, and kinetic stimuli converge.<sup>6</sup> One of the decisive features of the *Bacchae* is the fact that it is arguably the only transmitted tragedy where the dramatic and performative roles of the chorus are intertwined, and, as far as dancing is concerned, are practically indiscriminate and identical. Through the fusion of different levels of form and content, the performance gains authority. Moreover, mythical and ritual elements are blended in the performance, and in reenactment both forms are blurred. In the orchestra of the theater of Dionysos, the ritual and mythical identity of the maenads expresses itself mostly in the form of choral performance, since Dionysos and his entourage are intrinsically linked to choral dance.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the *Bacchae* in particular can be analyzed by looking solely at the references to *choreia*.

Furthermore, the chorus supplied by the polis collectively represents the actual citizens who, in the here and now, worship Dionysos in the Athenian theater of Dionysos. It is well known that the chorus oscillates between the distant past and mythic location in its dramatic role, and the here and now, in its cultic and performative role. Like a shifter, the chorus can move freely and alternate between multiple levels. It encompasses the communal,

<sup>5</sup> Tambiah 1985: 128: "Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterised in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition). Ritual action in its constitutive features is performative in these three senses: in the Austinian sense of performative, wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act; in the quite different sense of a staged performance that uses multiple media by which the participants experience the event intensively; and in the sense of indexical values – I derive this concept from Peirce – being attached to and inferred by actors during the performance." According to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic triad of symbol/index/icon a sign is a symbol when the reference to its object is based on convention; it is an index when it is directly influenced by its object (for example a weathervane), and an icon when it has specific properties in common with their objects (for example a portrait). These distinctions are important in the following argument, even though icon is often simply used as the visual quality of an object.

<sup>6</sup> On the choral songs of *Bacchae*, cf. Arthur 1972. On the chorus and character in *Bacchae*, cf. Segal 1997; Murnaghan 2006. The text of *Bacchae* is cited after the edition of Diggle 1994b: 287–56; for the translation (in square brackets) I follow, with slight modifications, Kovacs 2002b: 1–153.

<sup>7</sup> Simultaneously, *Bacchae* is the example *par excellence* of what I call a mythic-ritual poetics; cf. Bierl 2007a and Bierl *et al.* 2007; for "ritual poetics" see Yatromanolakis and Roilos 2003; Yatromanolakis and Roilos 2004.

the performative, and the dramatic voice, and according to situation and perspective, one comes particularly to the fore.<sup>8</sup>

In choral performance, events that belong to the mythical background can meet with anticipated facts that can be projected into the future like thoughts.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, in such choruses the here and now, the internal perspective of Athens, and the "there and then," the external perspective of the mythical and dramatic plot, can blur.<sup>10</sup> In such songs, choral self-references abound that pertain to the performance, the actual singing and dancing, as well as references to imagined choral engagements or to other choruses of gods, nymphs or maenads, the so-called choral projections.<sup>11</sup> The sophistic and technically refined poet designs the boundaries between these categories as particularly fluid. Moreover, Euripides knows all about adopting the tensions that work in the context of Dionysos and adapts them to his dramaturgical purposes.<sup>12</sup>

By means of self-references, the choral performance as speech-act is confirmed in an illocutionary manner, i.e. in saying something the chorus does something. Hence there is neither "suspension of disbelief" nor a breach of fiction, but instead, rituality is strengthened by performance. Through projections on other choruses, the differences between internal and external, myth and ritual, past and future are blurred again. Furthermore, choral self-references and projections are connected with other metatheatrical considerations. Everything takes place in the realm of Dionysos, the god of the theater. Such choral self-references serve to merge both instances, namely, the communal and the dramatic chorus, in an aesthetic way and strengthen the all-encompassing ritual and performative stage event.<sup>13</sup>

### A choral reading of the *Bacchae*

In my book *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie*, where I address the idea of metatheater, I contend "that the *Bacchae* reveals the process of how

<sup>8</sup> Bierl 2001: *inter al.* 62–4, 86 and index s.v. "shifter" and "Chor/Fluktuation (Ambiguität) der Instanzen und Rollen" (in English, Bierl 2009: esp. 45–7, 67). See in this volume especially the contributions of Calame and Swift.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kavoulaki 1996: 86; for the *Bacchae*, cf. Di Benedetto 2004: 80, 301; Kavoulaki 2005: 97–102.

<sup>10</sup> Bierl 2001: 38–45 and *passim* (in English, Bierl 2009: 24–31 and *passim*).

<sup>11</sup> On choral projections, cf. Henrichs 1994/5: esp. 68, 73, 75, 78, 88, 90; on Dionysiac choral self-references, cf. Segal 1982: 242–7; Bierl 1991: 35–6, 83–4, 99, 106–7, 129, 155, 164, 174, 190–1, 224–5, and 242–3; Bierl 2001: 37–45 (in English, Bierl 2009: 24–31) and index s.v. "Selbstreferentialität (Selbstbezüglichkeit)/chorischer Selbstbezug." See Calame in this volume. On choral self-referentiality Henrichs 1994/5; Henrichs 1996a; Henrichs 1996b. On χορεύειν in the *Bacchae* as a self-referential expression, which simultaneously stands for the Dionysian cult, cf. Leinieks 1996: 58–70.

<sup>12</sup> See Bierl 1991: 137–218.

<sup>13</sup> Bierl 1991: 111–19 and Bierl 2001: 43–4 (in English, Bierl 2009: 29–30).

somebody [i.e. Pentheus] resists theater and how eventually he will be so completely captivated by it that he will perish under its influence, or more accurately from a perverted form of theater.<sup>14</sup> In this play particularly, the maenads' self-references focus on their own performativity and rituality. Because of the chorus' dramatic role as Dionysian maenads, metatheater is completely absorbed in specific mytho-ritual and performative references. In the theater Dionysos becomes manifest in the choral dance. I propose here to look at the *Bacchae* from the perspective of performative chorality. I will focus my interest for the self-referential dimensions of this play on aspects of the chorus, in particular of the *parodos*, which I had left out in my former treatment.

As is well known, the *Bacchae* restages the arrival and the triumphant success of Dionysos. This marginal god, the incarnation of quintessential "otherness," returns now to Greece via oriental, barbarian countries where he introduced his cult (13–22). Most of all, he comes in order to show himself to mankind as the "coming" and "present" god. The play deals with his feature of epiphany,<sup>15</sup> with the revelation of his divine power (ἵν' εἶην ἐμφανῆς δαίμων βροτοῖς ["so that my divinity may be made manifest to mortals"] 22; see also φανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον'. . . 42). However, as usual, he meets resistance. Even the sisters of his mother Semele deny the fact that Dionysos is the son of Zeus. That is the reason why the god punishes them with *mania*.

Dionysos' vengeance is thus exacted according to the logic of the god's own ritual: all the women go mad and leave their houses, where they are normally under the guard of their husbands, in the direction of the mountains (32–8). In their movement to the outdoors, Semele's three aristocratic sisters become their leaders. The groups form ecstatic *thiasoi* and *choroi* which, in their wild dancing, show reverence to Bakchos. In doing so, they intonate the shrill scream of the *ololygē*. Moreover, they put on the *nebris* and they carry the *thyrsos* entwined with ivy. In short, the women who opposed Dionysos become by his intervention *de facto* worshippers of the god – that is, wild maenads. This "second" Theban chorus is only imagined offstage and never shown in the orchestra to the audience. In this case, myth motivates what ritual reenacts. It is well known that in cult women left the city in an orderly way as well in order to ritually celebrate the *oreibasia* on the mountains in the festive frame of exception.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Bierl 1991: 190, for an interpretation of Dionysos in the *Bacchae*, cf. Bierl 1991: 67–75, 177–218. For metatheater in the play see also Segal 1982: 215–71.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Otto 1933: 70–80, esp. 74–80 ("Der kommende Gott"); Henrichs 2008: esp. 19 (on presence).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Henrichs 1978.

Their state of frenzy is the mad ecstasy that is a constitutive part of the Dionysiac cult.

Against the mythical background of Pentheus' resistance, *mania* is now seen as a form of punishment which, beside rites of mystery initiation,<sup>17</sup> will be used to promote the worship of the god by all Thebans. Pentheus, however, denies the divine nature of Dionysos. In vehement opposition he tries to lock him out and to suppress the cult in his polis. Therefore, Bakchos wishes to prove his divinity to the *tyrannos*, the absolute ruler in the city, and thus to all male Thebans. He wants to substantiate his divine identity and to make himself manifest as a god so that his city will receive him in hospitality.<sup>18</sup> Finally, he asks his Lydian-Asiatic escorts to let their bass drums roar (55–61) so that Thebes might see his arrival (ὥς ὄρῃ, 61), because such a multimedial procession would captivate the onlookers. Dionysos announces that he will go meanwhile to the mountains in order to participate in the choruses of the new Theban maenads (ἐγὼ δὲ βάρκχαις, ἐς Κιθαίρωνος πτυχᾶς / ἐλθὼν ἴν' εἰσί, συμμετασχῆσω χορῶν ["for my part I will go to the glens of Kithairon, where the bacchantes are, and take part with them in their dances"] 62–3).

### The *parodos*

How is the god's divine power made manifest in the theater? On the stage this manifestation is necessarily achieved by theatrical and performative means, that is, by ritual equipment, paraphernalia, and props, which distinguish the group on the visual level, and moreover by music, noise, and rhythm as well as by ecstatic movement.<sup>19</sup> Since Dionysos is the choral god *par excellence*, the ongoing reference to his choral dancing serves this purpose, too. His ritual takes place in the collective *choros* and is thus *choreia*. To introduce someone into the Dionysian cult is conceived as an initiation into Bacchic mysteries (21–2, 40) that coincide with dramatic choral dance in the realm of theater (τὰκεῖ χορεύσας καὶ καταστήσας ἐμάς / τελετάς ["having set everything in Asia a-dancing and having established my rites"] 21–2). The procession of the *parodos* (64–169) has to be understood as a bipolar movement: it leads the Theban women outside to

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Seaford 1981. <sup>18</sup> On showing: *Bacch.* 22, 42, 47, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Hose 1990: 165 merely emphasizes the portrayal of the cult in simultaneously characterizing the chorus. With the accentuation of dance, song, and music, Euripides – according to Hose – "statt die Handlung voranzutreiben" ("instead of advancing the plot") is only able "eine bestimmte Atmosphäre zu schaffen" ("to create a certain atmosphere", 171). According to Hose, the purpose of the *parodos* is cult propaganda as well (Hose 1991: 166–7, 170; 332–42, esp. 338–42). For the purely religious sense of the *parodos*, cf. Festugière 1956.

the mountains, and the Lydian bacchants inside into the city.<sup>20</sup> To oppose this double movement, where the god is present in each case, inevitably means to resist Dionysos.<sup>21</sup> In the entrance of his followers as well as in their ritual performance, Dionysos becomes manifest. Hence, the epiphany of the “arriving, coming god”<sup>22</sup> is effectively acted out in a way that suits stage conditions.

In the *proōidē* (64–72), the chorus describes their ecstatic movement from outside, from Asia and Mount Tmolos toward Thebes. Their language is full of performative markers. According to John Austin’s speech-act theory, the group performs this action by uttering their choral voice in the first person singular.<sup>23</sup> The chorus is swift (θοάζω, 65) to perform “sweet toil and weariness happily unwearying” (πόνον ἡδὺν / κάματόν τ’ εὐκάματον, 66–7) in honor of Bromios, the roaring god: the dancers’ toil *is* the action itself, namely, the procession and the wild dance. In a state of ecstasy, such movements are highly exhausting and in the same time they create happiness.<sup>24</sup>

After the illocutionary exclamation “Out of the way!” (ἐκτοπος ἔστω, 69), by which they perlocutionarily clear the way,<sup>25</sup> strophe and antistrophe follow twice which mark again the up and down in space. The first strophe (73–87) represents the content of the announced hymn, first in form of a blessing (*makarismos*) (73–82). Whoever is initiated in the Bacchic mysteries is blessed, that is, he who has dedicated himself totally to the god and in his ecstatic religious experience has figuratively opened his “inner doors” through dancing in honor of Kybele and Dionysos on the mountains. Despite the focus on the actual performance in the city of Thebes, the view turns outside toward the second imaginary chorus of Theban maenads who worship Dionysos with ecstatic *choroi* in the mountains. Through projection, the chorus entering the city is associated with other dancing

collectives whose leaders are the three sisters of Semele.<sup>26</sup> These “choruses,” which only later become violent and whose actions are incorporated by two reports, become reality in the imagination of the spectators, and despite the women’s punishment, their actual actions partially overlap with proper cult practices. Jens Holzhausen is the only one, to my knowledge, who has seen this and he thus rightly speaks of a “superimposition effect.” Regarding lines 62–3, he expresses the idea of the blending of the two choral groups, the outer Theban choruses and the inner Lydian chorus as follows: “The *parodos* of women from Asia Minor takes the place of these choruses in the mountains: they bring onto the stage that which is happening simultaneously on Kithairon.”<sup>27</sup>

By mentioning Kybele (79), the great mountain-mother, another ecstatic cult of the wilderness is blended with Dionysos. The goddess gives the dramatic chorus its Asiatic, local color. Moreover, she is part of the musical aetiology which will be discussed later. From the projection into their own past and into the affairs of the Theban maenads, they turn their focus upon the actual choral procession.<sup>28</sup> This first, solemn entrance-song is the model of the cult to be annually repeated, and its content is, so to speak, the aetiology of ritual or “aitio-praxis.”

In the first antistrophe (88–104), the chorus turns from ritual, from cultic dancing, to the myth which “gives a reason and a basis” to its holiness. The perspective is shifted to the very beginning, to the scene of birth, which Dionysos already recounted in the prologue. The aetiological myth justifies the special divine authority and the ritual power of the god who manifests himself in the song and celebrates his entrance. Then the chorus speaks about Zeus’s thigh-pregnancy (94–8) and Dionysos’ second birth (99–104). At the same time, in reciting the birth myth, the bacchants underline the ritual of entrance in a metaphorical and iconic manner. Violence erupts twice through a bodily enclosure (from the womb and from the thigh). The city gate and the body represent the resisting boundaries that the baby as well as the Dionysian group will rupture.

By admonishing the Thebans to put on the Dionysian paraphernalia in order to adopt his cult (105–19), the chorus refers to its own visual props that indexically stand for Dionysos, the paradox between nature and

<sup>20</sup> This fact is also recognized by Di Benedetto 2004: 302.

<sup>21</sup> On the background of the resistance myth and the Athenian *eisagōgē* in the performative frame of the Dionysia, cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1994; Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 67–100, 197–200.

<sup>22</sup> Otto 1933: 74–80.

<sup>23</sup> On Austin’s speech-act theory as applied to the chorus, cf. Bierl 2001: 37–64 (in English, Bierl 2009: 24–47) and index s.v. “Austin, J. L.,” “Sprechakt und -theorie (speech-act).”

<sup>24</sup> With reference to the third Pindaric dithyramb (fr. 70c.16 πόννοι χορῶν) and Eur. *Bacch.* 65–8, cf. Henrichs 1994/5: 84. Cf. Soph. *Ichneutai TrGF IV F 314.223* (μετάστασις πόννων) and Bierl 2006: 129.

<sup>25</sup> On this subject, cf. Diggle 1994a: 3–4. He rejects the previously standard interpretation that uninitiated spectators should remove themselves, or at least that one in general should give way. On the contrary, he sees the words as an “invitation to approach” (4). In my analysis, I integrate both sides of the debate: it is about making room for the procession, which at the same time should draw the spectator into the spell.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Henrichs 1994/5: 68, 73, 75, 78, 88, 90 and Bierl 2001: 42–3, 77–8, 147–8 and index, s.v. “chorische Projektion” (in English, Bierl 2009: 28–9, 59–60, 122–4).

<sup>27</sup> Holzhausen 2003: 235.

<sup>28</sup> On procession as *choreia*, cf. Lonsdale 1993: 41.



civilization, measure, and transgression.<sup>29</sup> The appearance constitutes the actual choral dance to some extent. When people align themselves with Dionysos, “the whole land will dance at once” (αὐτίκα γὰρ πᾶσα χορεύσει, 114).<sup>30</sup> By means of such looping effects, the chorus highlights again and again its own *choreia* in which the divine power manifests itself. Following the performance in the orchestra, the choral dancing of the entire Greek land ensues: Hellas as well as Thebes and Kithairon and all later places will dance and dance already, in the same way as the Athenian orchestra is shaken by the actual dance. The *pathos* of choral motion is transferred to the central land to be conquered, that is, to Greece which, in a kind of projection or “pathetic fallacy,” is imagined to dance itself.<sup>31</sup> Mankind and the surrounding space merge in the execution of *choreia*, whose ecstatic, performative form becomes the determining feature of this song and the entire play. By entering into the city, the resistance to the ecstasy, which now spreads out universally, is broken. Therefore, Dionysos simultaneously leads (ἄγειν, 115) his *thiasoi* into the mountains, where the “female throng” (117) is waiting for them after the women have been driven away from their looms by Dionysos (115–19). Paradoxically the processional movement is again projected into the outside. Although the Asiatic bacchantes move toward the city in their dramatic role, they project themselves also onto the Theban maenads, their counterparts who dance on Kithairon. The ongoing blurring of perspectives and instances belongs to the ritual totality which finds expression in the choral dance. The verb ἄγειν refers not only to Dionysos guiding the women toward the mountains, where the cult usually takes place, but also to the fact that Bromios, the divine roarer, is notionally envisaged as an ideal choral “leader” (χορηγός 141). The sisters of Semele (Autonoe, Agaue, Ino) are leaders of ritually perverted *thiasoi* or *choroi* (ὄρω δὲ θιάσους τρεῖς γυναικείων χορῶν, / ὧν ἦρχ’ ἐνὸς μὲν Αὐτονόη, τοῦ δευτέρου / μήτηρ Ἀγαυὴ σή, τρίτου δ’ Ἰνώ χοροῦ [“I saw three covens, three choruses of women, one led by Autonoe, and a second by your mother Agaue, while the third was led by Ino”] 680–2), and Dionysos is the divine authority who is imagined as the *chorēgos* of the Asiatic as well as of the Theban maenads.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Versnel 1990 and Bierl 1991: 13–20.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the paean of Philodamos, ll. 19–23 (*Coll. Alex.*, 166): πᾶσα δ’ ὑμνοβρήτης χόρευ- / εἰν Δελφῶν / ἱερὰ μάκαιρα χώρα / αὐτὸς δ’ ἄσπε[ρ]όν δ]έμας / φαίνων Δελφίσι σὺν κόραις / [Παρν]ασσοῦ πτύχας ἔστας. On this subject, cf. also Kowalzig 2007a.

<sup>31</sup> On the term “pathetic fallacy,” cf. Copley 1937. In bucolic poetry, this stylistic device of poetic, pathetic symbiosis with the natural environment occurs especially pointedly; cf. Hunter 1999: 89. Cf. also *Bacch.* 726–7, where “the whole mountain with its beasts participates in the Bacchic dance, and everything was set in rapid motion.”

From the perspective of the cult on the mountains, the chorus now glides into the myth which is located in the world of the mountains as well. In the second antistrophe (120–34), by reciting the myth of the origin of the visible and audible *tympanon*, which is deictically addressed as βυρσότονον κύκλωμα τόδε [“this drum of tightened hide”] (124), the *choreutai* aetiologically speak again about the musical and rhythmical dimension of their choral performance immediately after narrating the events of the god’s birth. The Korybantes, who invented the *tympana* and mingled it with Phrygian pipe sound, handed the percussion instruments over to Rhea-Kybele and from her as intermediary the Dionysian satyrs obtained them as a musical accompaniment. They connected the sound with the Bacchic choruses (χορεύματα, 132) of the biennial festivals on Mount Kithairon (130–4). Through this mythical narration the prehistory of the choral performance is explained, and it gains authority from Zeus and Rhea.<sup>32</sup>

In the difficult *epōidē* (135–69) the chorus members return to Dionysos who, as χορηγός and ἔξαρχος (141), represents a projected leader of his chorus in the mountains. The god simultaneously fulfills the same function for the groups in Thebes (thus also for the dramatic chorus of bacchantes) as well as for the Athenian chorus in the orchestra. Again the dimensions of myth and ritual are blurred in a paradoxical manner. Ritual highlights myth while, on the other hand, myth highlights ritual. The chorus imagines how the divine chorus-leader falls to the ground after the exhausting performance in the landscape of Lydia and Phrygia, from where they, the chorus of bacchantes, originate and where they celebrated the rites before (135–7).<sup>33</sup> The wild procession represents a hunt through the barbarian mountains where the horrible pleasures of the Dionysian rites, the *sparagmos* and *ōmophagia*, are performed (138–40). Most of all, they describe how the god thirsts for the blood of a goat (αἷμα τραγοκτόνον, 139), which was probably killed by being torn apart, and how he takes pleasures in eating the meat raw (ὠμοφάγον χάριν, 139).<sup>34</sup> What appears to be cruel

<sup>32</sup> The aetiology of the *tympanon* as the invention of Rhea and Dionysos was already discussed in *Bacch.* 59: τύμπανα, Πέας τε μητρὸς ἐμά θ’ εὐρήματα.

<sup>33</sup> On the mistaken notion of a “male celebrant” (Dodds 1960, 82–3, cf. also 85–8) cf. Henrichs 1984; Dodd’s opinion has now been adopted once more by Di Benedetto 2004: 304 (*ad* 135–40). He then does, in fact, view the god as a leader (Di Benedetto 2004: 305 *ad* 141). The debate is somewhat exaggerated, since the god, in the minds of the *Bacchae* and in the fiction, is a human priest, in whose role the god has cloaked himself. The commingling of god and man here is constitutive; ἡδύς (135) recalls πόνον ἡδὺν / κάματον τ’ εὐκάματον (66–7). Cf. also ἐν τερπνοῖς πόνοις (1053).

<sup>34</sup> Arthur states (1972: 149) that “throughout the *parodos*, the wilder, more feral aspects of the worship are played down in favor of its joy-bringing character.” She relates this esp. to the epode (*ibid.* 149–50), arguing that the reference in *Bacch.* 138–9 to omophagy is singular.

and horrifying in myth is the reflection of a much more harmless cult celebrated throughout the Greek world.<sup>35</sup> Why should the god hunt a goat in the mountains (ἀγρεύων, 138)? I believe that this passage refers to the blood of the famous sacrifice of a billy-goat in Athens where tragedy or a form of proto-tragedy was performed.<sup>36</sup> With these words the perspective is simultaneously shifted to the here and now of Athens and to the actual cultic performance. At the same time, since the chorus deals already with aetiology, it embeds and refers to the origins of the genre in a metatheatrical manner. The myth is again the circular aetiology of the chorus' actual tragic performance. Furthermore, by alluding to the *sparagmos* and *ōmophagia*, the chorus anticipates the tragic events in store for Pentheus in the gorges of Mount Kithairon. Myth acts out the story of resistance and punishment in horrible ways, while ritual symbolically restores certain exceptional practices by reenacting these events. The envisioned performance happens in the medium of *choreia* and is choral dance.

In the dancing whirl Dionysos Bakcheus (145) tosses his hair into the air (150), a typically indexical image of choral performance.<sup>37</sup> Together with ritual cries of *euhoi*, Bromios shouts again (ἐπ' εὐάσμασιν ἐπιβρέμει, 151): ὦ ἴτε βάκχαι, / ὦ ἴτε βάκχαι (152–3). Previously, the chorus members had admonished themselves to depart to the mountains with the same words (83). The cry is now projected as an appeal from Dionysos, the chorus-leader. The call merges into another self-exhortation to keep up the actual performance, which is thus confirmed. At the same time, the Asiatic chorus is again notionally in the Phrygian-Lyidian mountains (cf. ἰέμενος εἰς ὄρεα Φρύγῃα Λύδι', 140) and even on the Lydian Mount Tmolos (Τμώλου χρυσοπόου χλιδά, 154).<sup>38</sup> The call to sing in honor of Dionysos is directed to the men of Thebes as well. Kadmos and Teiresias will obey immediately after this scene. The chorus members cannot appeal directly to their female Theban counterparts, but only in a projected form, since they are already on their way to the mountains. Moreover, the chorus includes the Athenian audience in the spectacle. Yet most of all, the imperative in the second-person plural μέλιτετε (155) is an exhortation to themselves to move in a wild choral dance in the role of barbarian bacchantes as well as in their actual function of Athenian performers. The Phrygian voice (159) corresponds to the *tympanon* and *aulos*, whose development was explained in the second

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the Dionysian cult statutes from Miletus (276/275 BC), Sokolowski 1955: no. 48; Henrichs 1969: 235–41 and Henrichs 1978: 149–52.

<sup>36</sup> Burkert 1966. <sup>37</sup> Cf. *inter al.* Alc. fr. 3.9; Ar. *Lys.* 1311; Autoc. fr. 1.4 K.–A.

<sup>38</sup> Dodds 1960: 89 and Seaford 1996: 166 relate the attribute “flowing with gold” to the river Paktolos, which, according to Hdt. 5.101, carries gold from Mount Tmolos.

antistrophe before. According to the bacchantes, the well-sounding pipes “boom” (βρέμη) their “sacred dances” (ιερά παίγματα, 161–2), and the drums are “deep-roaring” (βαρυβρόμων ὑπὸ τυμπάνων, 156). With this sound they merge with Bromios, the “roarer.” Moreover, the flow of ritual language and music is “suited to” or “in concert with” (σύννοχα, 162) the wild wanderers who are moving “to the mountains, to the mountains!” (εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, 163).<sup>39</sup> Almost removed from the syntactical connection, we are confronted with these ritual cries in the same way as we were in line 116, where Dionysos has been projected in the mountains as chorus-leader. Finally, the dancing performance of an exemplary bacchant is brought into focus. She moves like a colt (πῶλος ὄπως, 165), and with her wild leaps she leads or moves (ἄγει, 166) her swift-footed limb, which is due to press ahead with the procession.<sup>40</sup> As we have seen, the *parodos* is characterized by choral self-references and projections that almost merge. The performance confirms itself through speech-act and celebrates its holy rituality. At the same time, in this self-referential image of the foal, the differences between animal and man blur in the sign of the dancing god.

### Choral self-referentiality in the rest of the play

The mixture of choral self-references, which confirm the performance, and choral projections, which foreshadow the outside and envision the imagined world of the mountains, is a feature of the entire *Bacchae*. Immediately after the *parodos*, Kadmos and Teiresias take up Dionysian symbols. They begin their first dance steps and wish to go outside into the realm of nature in order to perform there an almost grotesque *choreia*.<sup>41</sup> Pentheus, on the contrary, tries to stop it all. He would prefer to jail the old men, but then he lets them do as they please. However, he has Dionysos and his female retinue put in prison. Yet the god as Lysios and Eleuthereus knows how

<sup>39</sup> On the cult cry, cf. the epigram in memory of Alkmeonis from Miletus, late third, or second century BCE; cf. Henrichs 1969: 225–34, esp. 232; cf. also Henrichs 1978: 148–9.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ar. *Lys.* 1307–12/13: χᾶ τε πῶλοι τὰ κόραι / πᾶρ τὸν Εὐρώταν / ἀμπάλλοντι, πυκνὰ ποδοῖν / ἀγκονίωσι, / τὰ δὲ κόραι σείονται / ἄπερ βακχᾶν θυρσαδδῶν καὶ παιδῶν. [“There, too, foals and girls strike fiercely with their feet by the river Eurotas, whirling dust, and their hair flies like that of bacchantes, who swing the *thyrsos* staff and dance”]. On the choral dimension of Ar. *Lys.* 1296–1321 and on the reference to Aleman's Louvre-Parthenon fr. 1 Davies, cf. Bierl 2007b: 272–7 (in English, Bierl 2011: 428–33). On foals as a metaphor for the choral dance of young girls, cf. Bierl 2001: 47 n. 85, 49 n. 89, 257 n. 416 (in English, Bierl 2009: 32 n. 85, 35 n. 89, 226 n. 416); Di Benedetto 2004: 307 views *Bacch.* 164–9 only as “Quadretto ‘idillico’, con gli animali che si tengono aparte rispetto alle agitazioni che turbano gli umani.” On *Bacch.* 165, cf. the foal simile in *Bacch.* 1056.

<sup>41</sup> On the absurd *choreia* of both old men, cf. *Bacch.* 184–5, 190, 195, 204–9, 323–4 and Segal 1982: 245–6.

to burst his bonds.<sup>42</sup> The chorus underlines the aggression against their leader in the stasima with images taken from their Dionysian performance. According to them, to take steps against Dionysos means to stop the chorus, and this is *hybris*, or transgression (375). The god's task is *choreia* and festivity: ὅς τὰδ' ἔχει, / θιασεύειν τε χοροῖς / μετὰ τ' αὐλοῦ γελάσαι / ἀποπαῦσαι τε μερίμνας ["these are his powers, to blend us, by dance, with the worshipful band, to laugh to the sound of piping, and to vanquish care"] (378–81).

Suddenly and miraculously the imprisoned girls are set free (443–8). After the altercation with Dionysos, who allowed it to happen so that he would be arrested, Pentheus is determined to incarcerate the strange priest (434–518). The bacchantes are desperate and try to call him. They assume that the absent god is in other cult sites, including at last Pieria (556–65). They are convinced that he would come to set the land in Bacchic frenzy and choral dance, and that as chorus-leader he would lead the whirling maenads over the river Axios (μάκαρ ὦ Πιερία, / σέβεταιί σ' Εὐΐος, ἦξει / τε χορεύσων ἅμα βακχεύ- / μασι, τόν τ' ὠκυρόαν / διαβάς Ἄξιόν εἰλισ- / σομένης μαινάδας ἄξει ["happy Pieria, Euhios honors you, and he will come to dance with his bacchantes: he will lead his whirling bacchantes, crossing the swift-running current of the river Axios"] 565–70). In such projections, the chorus dreams about freedom in remote locations. Dionysos loosens the bonds for a second time, now on his own body, and in the so-called scene of the palace miracle, the process of release is now acted out in a theatrical and spectacular way by means of an earthquake. The "dance of the earth" (cf. 114) destroys the center of Pentheus' political power. The god, once freed, steps in front of the ruins and recounts Pentheus' deception (576–641). Finally Pentheus wants to wage war against the bacchantes (778–86). He has no interest in listening to all the warnings. The play thus reaches its decisive turn (810): Dionysos convinces Pentheus to put on a female dress and maenadic paraphernalia and to spy on the bacchantes in the realm of the mountains (811–46). He then hands over his victim to the women (848–61).

The interplay between choral projection and actual dance as an expression of joy becomes particularly striking after the dramatic *peripeteia*. Just as with the foal in the *parodos* (165–9), so the fleeting and jumping deer is projected as an image of dance in the third stasimon (866–76).<sup>43</sup> In

the performative future tense, the chorus speaks about its actual choral performance. They place their white feet in all-night dances and toss their neck into the dewy air, like a fawn which has escaped a violent chase, now when the former hunter has gotten caught in a trap (ἀρ' ἐν παν- νυχίοις χοροῖς / θήσω ποτὲ λευκὸν / πτόδ' ἀναβακχεύουσα, δέραν / αἰθέρ' ἐς δροσερὸν ῥίπτουσι, / ὡς νεβρὸς χλοεραῖς ἐμπταί- / ζουσα λεί- μακος ἡδοναῖς. . . ["shall I ever in the nightlong dances move my white feet in ecstasy? Shall I toss my head to the dewy heaven like a fawn that plays amid green meadow delights. . ."]) 862–7; see also 868–76).

The cultic performance serves as a means of punishment: the god's opponent will put on the indices of Bacchic cult in the famous scene of costume change and will be led out in a procession by Dionysos (912–76).<sup>44</sup> In the call of the Theban maenads, who are to take revenge on him, the ritual cry ἐς ὄρος ἐς ὄρος ["to the mountains, to the mountains!"] (986) is taken up from the *parodos* (116, 164). In their imagination, they themselves are the dogs of *Lyssa*, of personified Frenzy, and should incite the Theban women to the insane deed (977–1023). In his desired epiphany, the punishing god is stylized as *Dikē* (992, 1011). Furthermore, in the messenger's report of the mythic and ritual *sparagmos* performed by the wild Theban bacchantes, we again encounter "choruses."<sup>45</sup> Before the Theban women are turned to outrageous maenads, they behave like peaceful and idyllic choruses, "like foals, having left the decorated yokes, they were singing antiphonally a Bacchic song" (αἶ δ' ἐκλιποῦσαι ποικίλ' ὡς πῶλοι ζυγά / βακχεῖον ἀντέκλαζον ἀλλήλαις μέλος, 1056–7).<sup>46</sup> Moreover, even the triumphant cry of joy about the ritual slaughter that takes place behind the stage turns out to be an exhortation to dance (ἀναχορεύσωμεν Βάκχιον, 1153). In a very macabre way, this is a joyful dance celebrating a "superb victory" (τὸν καλλίνικον κλεινόν, 1161), which might be compared to and allude to the victory of choral performance in the "beautiful *agōn*" (καλὸς ἀγών, 1163) of the actual Athenian Dionysia.

All in all, the chorus of the *Bacchae* provides a total mental and performative fantasy concerning violence that is acted out by their Theban counterparts and can only happen offstage according to the dramatic conventions. The play ends with another choral procession, again moving from outside to inside, that is, the choral *kōmos* by Agaue (cf. 1165–1201). In her

<sup>42</sup> On this subject, cf. Leinieks 1996: 303–25.

<sup>43</sup> On the deer (ἔλαφος, νεβρός), like foals, as a metaphor for the choral dance of young girls cf. *h.Hom.* 2.174–5, *Ar. Lys.* 1318–19 (ἔλαφος); cf. *Sapph. fr.* 58.16, *B.* 13.83–90, esp. 87, *Eur. El.* 860–1 (νεβρός).

<sup>44</sup> The ritual procession (πομπή, θεωρία) is played out ironically in punishment: Dionysos says that he himself will serve Pentheus as a "salutary guide" (πομπὸς εἰμ' ἐγὼ σωτήριος, 965). Later, the messenger reports that Dionysos, the foreigner (*xenos*) who should experience *xenismos*, functioned as a "guide to the spectacle" – ξένος θ' ὅς ἡμῖν πομπὸς ἦν θεωρίας (1047).

<sup>45</sup> See χοροὺς κρυφαίους, 1109; cf. ἐν χοροῖσι μαινάδων, 1143. <sup>46</sup> For the fillies, cf. 165.

putative victory and *mania*, she carries her hunting trophy on a stick – in reality, the head of her son – and leads her wild band into the city (1165–99, 1200–15). She is conceived again as the dancing chorus leader of a *kōmos*; in strongly self-referential terms she is announced as coming with her Bacchic, maddened dancing foot (βακχείῳ ποδί, 1230). In a fascinating way, then, she notionally becomes the leader of the Lydian chorus. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that Agaue is the only Theban maenad whom the audience now actually sees on the stage, whereas until now the Theban “second chorus” has remained invisible in the offstage. Moreover, the ongoing blending of the actual and imagined choruses culminates in this scene, since the merger now becomes theatrically real. The Lydian bacchantes receive this revelry of Theban maenads, who carry a trophy like a statue of Dionysos and regard them as equally celebrating in a Dionysiac context (δέξομαι σύγκωμον, 1172). In this new choral and highly performative procession, the agony suffered behind the scenes becomes manifest again. Finally, the projected backstage chorus merges into the actual chorus in the orchestra. Agaue arrives as a “false,” imaginary *chorēgos* since she actually does not lead a chorus but comes alone. The “united chorus” under her leadership has the quality of a mock-chorus for the Lydian bacchantes. Agaue’s imaginary *kōmos* thus turns out to be a kind of comic chorus in a Dionysiac tragedy which has changed into a form of *kōmōidia*. Furthermore, the play is characterized by the ritual structure *pompē–agōn–kōmos*.<sup>47</sup> However when Agaue recognizes the real circumstances of her delusion, she is weary of any ritual and performative action on Mount Kithairon and wants to go somewhere else in the future (1383–6). “Other bacchantes may take care of such cultic duties” – βάρχαις δ’ ἄλλαις μέλοιεν (1387). Only at the very end does the chorus then leave the stage by the side exits (*parodoi*).

### Conclusion

The *Bacchae* as a whole is characterized by an opposition between inner and outer space, between the actual stage and what is left offstage. Only the chorus as a mediator and shifter can cross these boundaries. The ritual power of the Dionysian cult can be experienced in the performance of the devotees, and in the theater of Dionysos, all of this cultic activity is identical with choral dancing. The entrance song which makes the god manifest by means of *choreia* breaks the former resistance to the god. The retained

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Foley 1985: 205–18; Bierl 1991: 208–15; cf. furthermore the formula *pompē–thysia–agōn*, likewise related to Foley, in Kavoulaki 1999: 309.

energy is released in an all the more violent manner as a consequence. Dramatically, the initial *parodos* functions as an interface for the further course of the play where the arrival in the city of Thebes simultaneously represents the transition to the brutal events on Mount Kithairon. Thus, the chorus of the Asian bacchantes as a theatrically and aesthetically confusing ensemble becomes the message in the rhythmical and ritual performance. By means of this chorus, particularly through the initial procession, the arrival of the “coming god” can be experienced in various media. Most of all, through choral projection, the movement toward the inside simultaneously becomes one toward the outside.<sup>48</sup> The dimensions of time and space, as well as other oppositions, blur in a ritual flux in the songs. Past, present, future, and the actual time of performance are fused, and the time of myth is reenacted in the ritual of drama. Multiple loops create a sensation of unity and *communitas* in a scenario of “anti-structure.”<sup>49</sup> In a paradoxical way the oppositions between barbarians and Greeks, Thebes and Athens, nature and culture, animal, man, and god, outside and inside, country and city, myth and ritual, chaos and idyll, ecstasy and happiness, brutal rites of sacrifice and blessed mysteries collapse in the acting out of *choreia*. As I have argued, in the *Bacchae*, chorality functions as a dynamic field of force between myth and ritual. On the basis of the tension between these forms of expression, the artful and sophisticated dramatist Euripides develops his self-referential and Dionysiac theater of coinciding oppositions that Dionysos encompasses.

The choral songs of this play – particularly the *parodos*, which executes the necessary entrance on the matrix of an implicit resistance – fulfill the criteria of rituality and performativity defined by Stanley Tambiah – i.e. by means of the speech-act, in the multimedia presentation, and in the indexical enumeration of metonymic and synecdochic relations between parts and the whole. Form and content interact closely. They possess a rhythmical and formulaic design combined and varied by the principles of condensation and redundancy. Most of all, ritual and myth, function and fictive role, and the various instances between which the chorus can shift merge and form the flux of performance.

As I noted above, Euripides, the consummate dramatic artist, is well aware of all of the tensions that are constitutive of the god Dionysos, and

<sup>48</sup> Segal 1982: 78–124 (“The Horizontal Axis: House, City, Mountain”), esp. 87 and 245 recognizes that the centripetal force of the inside will be inverted by the centrifugal dynamics of the outside. However, he does not localize the fusion of both forces in the *parodos* which anticipates, thus, the course of the action.

<sup>49</sup> On *communitas*, see Turner 1974: 274 (definition) and *passim*; on anti-structure (in relation to *communitas*), *ibid.*, esp. 45, 46, 50, 272–98 and *passim*.

he enhances them. The tragedian even constructs the revenge in such a way that all details of Pentheus' punishment stem from and can be identified with cultic and mythical elements of Dionysos' realm. The executors are the Theban women who, although they initially resist the god as well, tear the spy apart like furious maenads. Euripides translates the tensions between all of the dual oppositions into a revenge plot which works on the basis of a *mise en abyme* and degenerates into a cruel and perverted anti-theater. In this artful Euripidean construct, the female devotees of Dionysos cannot be divided into cultic, positive bacchants and mythic, negative maenads any more, as Albert Henrichs has argued.<sup>50</sup> Through *choreia* the poet mingles them into a dramatic medium which bridges space and time and transgresses boundaries, in particular the one between active engagement in the plot and passive spectatorship. Thus, the cultic chorus in its role as passive onlooker and commentator turns into an agent in its own right. Through their violent words and songs the cultic bacchants gradually slip into the role of a chorus which, like in the origin of tragedy, very actively participates in the action. Thus the cultic bacchants overlap with mythic maenads who execute the revenge through violent practices. Through aetiology, on the one hand, myth lays the ground of ritual. On the other hand, ritual reenacts myth. All in all, the highly self-conscious poet creates a drama which is based on ritual as origin. Yet ritual is translated onto the dramatic stage through *choreia*. Thus in highlighting choral dance by means of metatheater, *mise en abyme*, self-reference and projection, Euripides creates a highly self-referential play based on ritual and myth. Therefore both forms are intertwined in such a way that everything is put into question. Clear-cut ethical positions become indiscriminate from crime, ecstasy and violence. What is left is just a vividly contemporary flux of action which, however, is based on elements belonging to the origin of the genre. In front of such a chorally self-aware tragedy we have to give up exploring the specific message.<sup>51</sup> To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan's (1964: 23) famous sentence "The medium is the message,"<sup>52</sup> we could say: The choral medium is the message *qua* performance.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Cf. e.g. Henrichs 1969; Henrichs 1982.

<sup>51</sup> On a summary of the older scholarship on the so-called riddle of the *Bacchae*, cf. Bierl 1991: 177–8.

<sup>52</sup> See also the entire chapter titled after this sentence in McLuhan 1964: 23–35 as well as the book *The Medium Is the Message* (McLuhan and Fiore 1967), an error by the typesetter.

<sup>53</sup> See the translation to ritual studies by Rappaport 1999: 38: "The medium . . . is itself a message, or better, a meta-message."

## *The Delian Maidens and their relevance to choral mimesis in classical drama*

Gregory Nagy

### Introduction

My focus is on the Delian Maidens, as represented in the *Homeric Hymn* (3) to *Apollo*. These maidens, in verse 163 of the *Hymn*, are said to be engaging in an act of *mimēsis* "reenactment" (hereafter written simply as *mimesis*), as expressed in this verse by the verb *mimeisthai* "reenact, imitate," derived from the noun *mimos* "mime." I will argue that the act of *mimesis* as represented in this archaic hymn is related to the act of *mimesis* as performed by choruses in classical drama – specifically, in the composite dramatic genres of tragedy, comedy, and the satyr play.<sup>1</sup> In terms of my argument, the *mimesis* performed by the Delian Maidens in the *Hymn* is a model for understanding how the classical genres of drama assimilated various archaic genres of choral songmaking. As we will see, this model comes to life in the interaction of solo and choral performance as represented in the *Hymn*. Such an interaction, as we will also see, is an act of mediation that proves to be the essence of *mimesis* in classical drama.

My overall argumentation stems primarily from the book *Pindar's Homer* (1990).<sup>2</sup> In that work, I confronted two relevant questions: who are the Delian Maidens and what do they have to do with *mimesis*? My findings focused on the identity of the Maidens as a chorus, and on the essence of *mimesis* as a *mental activity* performed by a chorus. A summary of these findings was later published as the article "Transformations of choral lyric" by the journal *Arion* (1994/5), in an issue dedicated to the topic of choral performance.<sup>3</sup> I then expanded on these findings in the book *Poetry as*

<sup>1</sup> I mention here only three of the four genres of classical Athenian drama. That is because the fourth genre, the dithyramb, is unlike tragedy, comedy, and the satyr play by virtue of the fact that it is entirely choral. By contrast, the other three genres are composite by virtue of the fact that they are composed of non-choral parts performed by professional actors as well as choral parts performed by the nonprofessional chorus. As my argumentation proceeds, I will elaborate on the distinction I make here between the professionalized actors and the nonprofessional chorus.

<sup>2</sup> Nagy 1990b, hereafter abbreviated as *PH*. This and other abbreviations are listed in the Bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> Nagy 1994/5b, hereafter abbreviated as *TCL*.