

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

ΣΤΕΛΛΕΤΑΙ AT *BACCHAE* 1000: THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES?

Let me begin this brief note by stating my complete agreement with Dodds' pronouncement on *Bacchae* 997–1010 that “this passage is the hardest in the play, and full of textual uncertainties.” I do not pretend to be able to solve any of the more vexing problems here (for example, those at 1002–7), though I do suggest that in the preoccupation with textual *divinatio*, commentators and translators may have missed an important metaphor in these lines that is of some consequence for the interpretation of the play. This concerns the word *στέλλεται* at line 1000, which, regardless of whether they have adopted Murray's, Diggle's, or some *Mischtext* for the troublesome line 998 (Murray: *περὶ* (σά), *Βάκχι'*, *σᾶς* τ' ὄργια *ματέρος*; Diggle: *περὶ* (σέ), *Βάκχι'*, ὄργια *τε* *σᾶς* *ματρός*), translators seem to be unanimous in taking as a verb of motion (so Seaford, Roux, Kirk, Winnington-Ingram). Here, for example, is Dodds, translating Murray's text (*Bacch.* 997–1001):

ὅς ἀδίκῳ γνώμῃ παρὰ νόμῳ τ' ὄργᾳ
περὶ (σά), *Βάκχι'*, ὄργια *ματρός* *τε* *σᾶς*
 μανείσῃ *πραπίδι*
παρακόπῳ *τε* *λήματι* **στέλλεται**,
 τάνικατον ὡς κρατήσων βία . . .

Whosoever with conscienceless purpose and unlawful rage against thy worship, god of bacchanals, and against thy mother's worship **sets forth** with crazy craft and false daring, thinking to master by force that which cannot be mastered . . .

The middle voice of *στέλλω* to express motion is a common construction, found in and out of tragedy (LSJ II.1–3), which perhaps explains the present consensus. *στέλλεται* in this passage is cited by Liddell and Scott, however, for the meaning “to make oneself ready,” “be fitted out” (sc. “to go”). This comes closer to the sense of the word as it is used here, but still falls short given the larger context of this ode, for the contest between Dionysus and Pentheus that leads up to this choral passage is riddled with instances of the verb *στέλλω* and its derivatives in the sense “to clothe,” or “to dress.” At 821, for example, Dionysus exhorts Pentheus to put linen robes on his body (*στεῖλαι* νυν ἅμφι χρωτὶ βυσσίνους πέπλους); at 827 he offers to do the dressing himself (ἐγὼ *στελῶ* σε), to which Pentheus replies “What clothing do you mean?” in 828 and 830 (τίνα *στολήν*). At line 836 and again at 852 we learn it is “woman's clothing” (θηλυὴν *στολήν*; cf. 1156 θηλυγενῆ *στολάν*), with “pleats” (*στολίδες*) that do not want to stay in place (936). The Chorus too joins in and reproves Pentheus as a man in woman-mimicking guise—*γυναικομίμῳ* *στολᾷ*—in line 980.

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The emphatic repetition of στελ- and στολ- in the preceding exchange must color the sense of στέλλεται at line 1000, and perhaps also of ἀποστέλλη at 959, which would imply that Pentheus is now (or so Dionysus would have him think) “decking himself out” as a guardian against the supposed sexual license of the maenads. Thus, where the Chorus invokes Justice to come “carrying her sword to thrust the godless, unjust, lawless, earth-born son of Echion through the throat” (996), we should consider continuing the translation, adapting Dodds, “who **is arraying himself** with conscienceless purpose and unlawful rage against thy worship and thy mother’s worship, god of bacchanals, with crazy craft and false daring, thinking to master by force that which cannot be mastered.”

The idea of clothing oneself in a quality or attitude is, of course, as old as Homer. Achilles, for example, attacks the Trojans, “with a heart dressed in strength” (φρεσὶν εἰμένος ἀλκήν, *Il.* 20.381); at *Iliad* 1.149 he accosts Agamemnon as a man “clothed in disgrace” (ἀναιδείην ἐπιειμένε; cf. 9.372). The two Ajaxes are similarly described as “clothed in reckless strength” (θοῦρην ἐπιειμένοι ἀλκήν, *Il.* 7.164). M. L. West calls each of the last two instances “a remarkable metaphor . . . alien to ordinary Greek idiom,” seeing here an influence from the Semitic languages.¹ Yet in Euripides we find something of a parallel to our passage in the *Medea* (582), where Medea charges a clever speaker like Jason with “cloaking bad behavior with his tongue” (γλώσση . . . τᾶδικ’ . . . περιστελεῖν).² There are grammatical differences between our *Bacchae* passage and these examples, of course: in the Homeric phrases we find the perfect tense (of ἔννυμι) with a retained accusative of the quality in question, whereas Euripides’ στέλλεται is present tense and the attributes are in the dative. In the *Medea* example περιστέλλω is a compound, transitive verb in the active voice. But the construction στέλλειν τινὰ ἐσθῆτι (“furnish/array someone with clothes”) is normal enough (LSJ στέλλω I), making στέλλεται, in the interpretation offered here, a middle or passive expression of it, with qualities substituted for clothing.³

Among the several (if not seven) types of ambiguity one encounters in verbal art forms is the type that “occurs when two ideas which are connected only by being both relevant in the context, can be given in one word simultaneously.”⁴ This, I suggest, is the situation we have here. While the primary denotation of στέλλεται may suggest motion (the translators cannot be all wrong⁵), the immediate context of this

1. M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 1997), 238–39.

2. The metaphor of clothing oneself in a quality or attitude can also be expressed with the verb ἐνδύω, which, like στέλλω, can mean literally “go,” “enter,” “undertake,” and also figuratively “clothe,” “don,” or “dress,” as indeed it does at *Bacch.* 836, 852, and 853. Aristophanes, for example, has a chorus of cross-dressing assemblywomen describe themselves as ἐνδύόμεναι τόλμημα, “clothed in daring” (*Eccl.* 228). For Semitic parallels with ἐνδύω not adduced by West (*East Face of Helicon*, n. 1 above), cf. Job 8:22 (LXX): οἱ δὲ ἐχθροὶ αὐτῶν ἐνδύσονται αἰσχύνην (also Ps. 131:18; Prov. 31:25; Is. 51:9, 52:1). In the NT, cf. 1 Cor. 15:53: ἐνδύσασθαι ἀφθαρσίαν (also Rom. 13:14: ἐνδύσασθε . . . Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν).

3. Note too the structural and semantic parallelism of those qualities—ἀδίκω γνῶμα παρανόμα τ’ ὄργῃ . . . μανείσῃ πραπίδι / παρακόπῃ τε λήματι—where a structurally identical pair of phrases (each consisting of two roughly synonymous adjectives [ἀδίκω = παρανόμο; μανείσῃ = παρακόπῃ] each of those modifying its own noun) is coordinated by τε . . . τε, with the object of Pentheus’ ill-will—περὶ . . . ὄργια—completely, as it were, enveloped. I follow Dodds in taking περὶ . . . ὄργια closely with the first two dative phrases.

4. W. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York, 1947), 102.

5. The participle in the phrase ὡς κρατήσω (1001) is future, a construction often (but by no means exclusively) used to express purpose with verbs of motion (see Smyth §2065, but cf. §2086 [where ὡς = quasi]).

ode certainly invites us to think of clothing. The metaphor is reinforced by the fact that the phrase παρακόπῳ τε λήματι στέλλεται in line 1000 answers antistrophically to ἐπὶ τὸν ἐν γυναικομίῳ στολᾷ in 980, a metrical and semantic correspondence that could well have been emphasized choreographically in performance with gestures. Moreover, a clothing metaphor is perfectly in keeping with the larger themes of the play. Barlow, for example, draws attention to Euripides' fondness for the "separation of appearance and character," and for the discrepancies between "outer layer and inner truth."⁶ Pentheus' descriptions of Dionysus' physical appearance "often seemingly gratuitous for one who holds Dionysos in such contempt, are designed by Euripides to express his real attitude, his attraction for the figure he scorns."⁷

Clearly, Pentheus' change of clothes at *Bacchae* 810–976 symbolically represents his change of mind under the influence of Dionysus. Seaford, following Leitaō, argues specifically that ritual transvestism in cult is "a means of detaching the initiand from his previous identity," and that this "seems to complete [Pentheus'] reversal of personality" in the *Bacchae*'s refraction of those cultic elements.⁸ If, however, we or the ancient audience were to understand στέλλεται—even secondarily—as a clothing metaphor, it would imply that the Chorus is fully awake to the fact that, in spite of his mock initiation, Pentheus' real nature has not been changed:⁹ he is intellectually (γνώμῃ) and attitudinally (ὀργῇ) clothing himself with unrighteousness (ἀδικία) and illegality (παρανομία) with regard to the Bacchic mysteries. When, in his dying moment, he throws back his disguise to reveal himself to his mother (1115–16), he is nothing more, or less, than Pentheus, son of Echion, θεομάχος.¹⁰

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6. S. A. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides: A Study in the Dramatic Use of Pictorial Language* (London, 1971), 85–86.

7. *Ibid.*, 92.

8. R. Seaford, *Euripides "Bacchae"* (Warminster, England, 1997), 222.

9. Cf. C. Segal (*Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' "Bacchae"* [Princeton, 1997], 169), who speaks of Pentheus' "failure in the symbolical passage to male adulthood."

10. It is a pleasure to thank an anonymous referee for chastising an earlier draft of this note. I would also like to thank Stephanie Timm, Nigel Nicholson, and David Douglass for their opinions on various points.

A PUN IN VIRGIL'S *AENEID* (4.492–93)?

At Virgil *Aeneid* 4.492–93, Dido addresses her sister Anna:

testor, cara, deos et te, germana, tuumque
dulce caput, magicas invitam accingier artis.

The reference to Catullus 66.40, *invita: adiuro teque tuumque caput*, has been noted. J. Wills observes that *invitam* substitutes for *invita*, *testor* for *adiuro*, and