

THAT TROUBLED HOUSE OF PENTHEUS IN EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*

VICTOR CASTELLANI

University of Denver

The scene that begins at line 576 of Euripides' *Bacchae* has raised and raised again two interesting and much discussed questions: what actually happens on stage? and what does it all mean? These matters are, as it happens, so tightly interconnected as to close a particularly vicious circle. How we may fairly interpret any miraculous events here depends on possibilities and likelihoods of their stage realization, which in turn depend on the meaning that the author intended for this scene in the context of the whole play.¹

This circle is by no means easy to interrupt. Considering each question separately, however, we may at once exclude some views of the problem that have been taken, recall others that seem to be perceptive and helpful, and finally, in part only tentatively, place some new suggestions alongside them.

In brief my new suggestions are (1) that something quite striking and specific very likely did happen to the *skênê*-building before the eyes of the audience, and (2) that, whatever did or did not happen to the building, the "miracle" as described in the text corresponds significantly to Dionysus' ritual seizure and destruction of the family of Cadmus.

What, then, was the visible palace miracle?

It is generally and properly agreed that we may discover the correct answer only if we compare what the text says at 585–603 (and perhaps at 633 f.) with what we understand to have been possible at the Theater

¹ This article derives from my dissertation, *House and Home in Euripides* (Princeton 1971), whose supervisor, the late Robert D. Murray, Jr., I honor in happy memory. My debt to many scholars, especially to E. R. Dodds' commentary, is, I hope, unconcealed. I acknowledge with particular gratitude the criticisms and positive advice of *TAPA*'s two anonymous referees.

of Dionysus in the late fifth century B.C. The second edition of Gilbert Murray's Oxford text for 585 ff. reads as follows:

Δι.	〈σεῖε〉 πέδον χθονὸς Ἐννοσι πότνια.	585
Χο.—	ᾄ ᾄ, τάχα τὰ Πενθέως μέλαθρα διατι- νάξεται πεσήμασιν.	
	—ὁ Διόνυσος ἀνὰ μέλαθρα· σέβετε νιν.—σέβομεν ὦ.	590
	— εἶδετε λάινα κίοσιν ἔμβολα διάδρομα τάδε; Βρόμιος <ὄδ'> ἀλα- λάζεται στέγας ἔσω.	
Δι.	ἄπτε κεραύνιον αἴθοπα λαμπάδα· σύμφλεγε σύμφλεγε δώματα Πενθέος.	595
Χο.	ᾄ ᾄ, πῦρ οὐ λεύσσεις, οὐδ' ἀνγάζη, Σεμέλας ἱερὸν ἀμφὶ τάφον, ἄν ποτε κεραυνόβολος ἔλιπε φλόγα Δίου βροντᾶς; δίκετε πεδόσε τρομερὰ σώματα δίκετε, Μαινάδες· ὁ γὰρ ἄναξ ἄνω κάτω τιθεῖς ἔπεισι μέλαθρα τάδε Διὸς γόνος.	600

Without reading their entire translations into the record at this point we should notice some wording, as well as the supplied stage directions, by two well-known literary translators. By Philip Vellacott (1954): "Pentheus' palace is falling, crumbling in pieces! . . . [stage direction:] *The flame on Semele's tomb grows and brightens . . .* [stage direction:] *A noise of crashing masonry is heard . . .* Your god is wrecking the palace, roof to floor; / He heard our cry—he is coming, the son of Zeus!" And by William Arrowsmith five years later: "Look there, how the palace of Pentheus totters. / —Look, the palace is collapsing! . . . —Above the pillars, how the great stones / gape and crack! . . . [stage direction:] *(A burst of lightning flares across the façade of the palace and tongues of flame spurt up from the tomb of Semele. Then a great crash of thunder.)* . . . He walks among the ruins he has made! / He has brought the high house low! / He comes, our god, the son of Zeus! [stage direction:] *(The Chorus falls to the ground in oriental fashion, bowing their heads in the direction of the palace. A hush; then Dionysus*

appears, lightly picking his way among the rubble . . .)" Both translators, fine writers and provocative scholars, reflect and vivify common opinions about our Dionysiac miracle. I hope to show that we should not accept all that they assert or imply.

A number of commentators deal with the problem the way Alexander did with the Gordian knot. Their solutions, I trust, may be quickly ruled out. Those who cut on one side of the tangle deny that anything at all takes place physically.² They argue that the whole business of earthquake and lightning is nothing but an illusion. This illusion, produced in the chorus by self-deception, by hypnotic suggestion, or by divine working, must not take in the audience. Behind such an interpretation lies the assumption that anything less than complete demolition of the palace on stage will falsify the chorus' hysterical claims. But (1) the stage-building as we understand it cannot have been so demolished; (2) from Pentheus' return to stage at 642 until the end of the surviving text no one mentions or even implies any such event—on the contrary, (3) some of the subsequent action clearly seems to demand that all or at least very much of "Pentheus' halls" remains standing. So one group of scholars reason with the evidence. Their interpretation is unsatisfactory, however, because it argues to confine Dionysus' power to a psychological or spiritual realm, against considerable evidence, from both of the messenger speeches, that this same power can manifest itself very physically indeed. The play's intention simply cannot include the denial of all the wonders, material as well as psychic, which reliable witnesses report in careful detail and on which the catastrophe so largely depends.³ Indeed from the

² Gilbert Norwood, *The Riddle of the Bacchae* (Manchester 1908), and A. W. Verrall, *The Bacchae of Euripides and Other Essays* (London 1910). Subsequently the former, "The Bacchae and Its Riddle," in *Essays on Euripidean Drama* (London 1954), retreated to a more tenable position, denying the physical but not the psychological reality of the miracle. (Cf. G. Méautis, "Les 'Bacchantes' d'Euripide," *Acropole* n.s. 3 (1928) 153-65.)

³ H. Rohdich, *Die euripideische Tragödie* (Heidelberg 1968) 133 ff., believes that E. regularly intended an "interpretatorische Ambiguität" between sophistic and religious understandings of a situation, a possibility in this play only if some of the Dionysian, religious side's assertions (viz., about the miracle) are doubtful or untrue. But it seems to me that the god and his immense power are, as in *Hipp.* and *Ion*, given, not to be challenged by any positivist skepticism. Many careful studies, notably R. P. Winnington-Ingram's *Euripides and Dionysus* (Cambridge 1948), have properly pronounced the miraculous happenings, at least in some details, more significant or even more credible

imprisonment of the Lydian stranger to the end of the play visible proofs of the new god's omnipotence dominate and guide the action. (For example, the stranger *does* escape from Pentheus' dungeon.) Furthermore, the "rationalist" supposition that the lyric passage describes a total razing of the royal palace must be resisted, as we shall see.

The other direct and simple solution, evident in the two translations quoted above, cuts the knot away on the opposite side. This approach is by far the more usual one today. Scholars argue (or command in stage directions) what others seem to assume without thought or argument, that the palace actually does collapse on stage, "before our eyes," as we try to imagine the performance in the Theater of Dionysus.⁴ But can Pentheus and Dionysus really have had—or their theater have allowed them—to pick their respective ways *back* again through the rubble at lines 846 and 861?⁵ We may have our reasonable doubts.

It seems certain to me, therefore, that while something material and important ought to happen during the miracle, and this something should be both noticeable and remarkable, Euripides was quite content with rather less than the special effects we ourselves might visualize, combining, say, "Earthquake" and "The Towering Inferno." Very

"symbolically" and psychologically than they are as literal fact. Nevertheless William Sale, "The Psychoanalysis of Pentheus," *YCS* 22 (1972) 68, diagnoses correctly: "The question is, Symbolic of what? And the answer to that question is likely to arouse antagonism, no matter what the answer is."

⁴ See, for example, Albin Lesky, *Greek Tragedy*, 3rd ed., tr. H.A. Frankfort (London and New York 1967) 197, and W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, 1. Teil, 3. Band, 1. Hälfte (München 1940) 674 and note 4. The latter cites Aeschylus fr. 58 N² (ἐνθουσιᾷ δὴ δῶμα, βακχεύει στέγη) as if we could be sure of its context in the *Edonoe* or elsewhere in the lost *Lycurgeia*. (See E. R. Dodds, *Euripides Bacchae* [Oxford 1960²], p. xxxii.) The anticipation of E. is clear, but precisely what is anticipated? A narration? a seer's or coryphaeus' enthusiasm? an event? a metaphor? Cf. the troubled text at Aeschylus *Cho.* 698—not to mention 725 in *Bacchae*.

⁵ Verrall (74 ff.) argues from Pentheus' silence that nothing at all has actually happened. What the chorus and the Lydian say is simply false. Norwood (*Essays* 54 ff.) and Rohdich (134) concur; but Dodds (148 f.) has a sufficient reply: "Theseus in the *Heracles* shows the same lack of interest in the material damage . . . people in Greek plays do not waste time in saying what is natural unless it is dramatically relevant; and after the scene is over comments and explanations would be irrelevant dramatically so they are simply dropped (cf. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, 379 f.)." (There Kitto [p. 381 = 375 in 3rd ed.] adds the observation—presumably known and rejected by one translator—that "every new arrival . . . was not in fact picking his way among rubble.")

properly several commentators have, of course, tried to identify some impressive *and* feasible alteration of the scene short of this impossible utter ruination. Before we come to their thoughtful prescriptions, however, it will be useful to look back at the text.

Our key passage mentions four distinct occurrences. Two of them are relatively general in nature, the earthquake and Dionysus' attack which turns the palace "upside down." We may well believe that the choreography of the sequence could and did indicate a temblor of whatever intensity was desired, perhaps by means of a "sudden lurching of the chorus."⁶ Furthermore, we may safely presume that at least some of the barbarian women carried and here used the drums they had sung about in the *parodos*, providing a non-realistic but entirely appropriate sound effect. (In fact the rumble of this Dionysiac earthquake might be said to begin with the drumming before the palace that the god commands at 58–61.)⁷

Of the two more specific occurrences in the miracle scene the second, the flare of fire at Semele's tomb (596 f.), should have presented little difficulty for the ancient stage manager. Commentators agree that there must be a flame or at least smoke here, and a couple of them even speculate about the available incendiary resources.⁸ But the first thing

⁶ G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1940; repr. 1961) 409. Cf. H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (New York 1961³) 374, who acknowledges a debt to Grube's discussion as first published in "Dionysus in the *Bacchae*," *TAPA* 66 (1935) 37–54; also Marilyn Arthur, "The Choral Odes of the *Bacchae* of Euripides," *YCS* 22 (1972) 159.

⁷ On the presence and considerable importance of the *tympana* at the *parodos* see W. Steidle, *Studien zum antiken Drama* (München 1968) 32 f.

⁸ I assume that the *μνῆμα... δόμων ἐρείπια* (6 f.) lies in view of the audience. Dodds (61) locates it a bit vaguely "on stage," adding antiquarian details on pp. 62 f. Donald Sutherland, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (Lincoln, Nebraska 1968) 76 f., places it alongside the palace façade. The chorus certainly seem to see it at 597–99; and its *ἄβατον πῆδον*, apparently visible to Dionysus at line 10, may just possibly lie in the orchestra—where it would offer the chorus a kind of asylum. But how Pentheus can have seen it at 624, if he really is supposed to see it, is not clear. Jeanne Roux' solution to this curious problem must be rejected. In "A propos du décor dans les tragédies d'Euripide," *REG* 64 (1961) 41, and *Euripide Les Bacchantes* II: Commentaire (Paris 1972) 242, she argues that the smoking *σῆκος* lies out of sight *within* the palace complex, whereas the *μνῆμα* is an entirely different thing *outside*. If E. did, as she says, confound two things, that one confused thing surely must be in the open for Dionysus to devote seven early lines of the prologue to it. Both Peter Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions in the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford 1962) 63, and N. C. Hourmouziades, *Production and Imagination in Euripides* (Athens 1965) 51 f., believe that burning incense would have provided the desirable effect for the miracle scene.

that happens, described at 591 f., remains difficult and controversial. G. M. A. Grube translates the choreut's question so: "Did you see the entablature parting asunder?" and comments: "Here something does happen to the palace, namely a fissure in the wall, by a metope on the top of a column, which may possibly fall to the ground. But the phrase would be strange if the whole palace were falling in ruins."⁹ His position that *something* actually does happen at this point, even if only some partial damage and it perhaps rather slight, even quite invisible to the audience, has won wide support. E. R. Dodds' translation and explanation of 591-93 offers a similar view:¹⁰

"You saw how yonder stone lintels upon the columns gaped apart? It is the Lord of Thunder who lifts the cry within those walls." The *ἐμβολα* are the long cross-pieces which rest upon the columns of the façade and compose the architrave (*ἐπιστύλιον*). The earthquake shock has loosened them and cracks have suddenly appeared between them. (We need not suppose that the cracks are visible to the audience, still less that any part of the backscene falls down at this point—it is doubtful if built-up sets were in use even at the end of the fifth century.)

D. J. Conacher also makes a suggestion along the same lines when he prescribes as needed here a "spectacular or theatrical manifestation of the scene's powerful effects," effects that would "here be satisfied by a sheet of flame from the tomb of Semele and by the Chorus' onstage observation of cracks (not necessarily visible to the audience) in the lintels of the temple [sic] columns."¹¹ Donald Sutherland, on the other hand, although he translates the sentence very moderately ("See the stone lintels, starting asunder!")—where he reads the imperative *ἴδετε* in 591), has strongly objected to the idea of a merely "token collapse." "The language of the play," he writes, "indicates a more thorough collapse, and I do not think Euripides' audience, even if no

⁹ *Loc. cit.*; again followed by Kitto, also *loc. cit.* P. W. Harsh, *A Handbook of Classical Drama* (Stanford 1944) 241, suggests that "a few stones probably fall by some stage device." (In his 1935 article Grube permitted [p. 45] "perhaps the fall of a stone or two at most." Cf. Vellacott's "noise of crashing masonry" in a stage direction.)

¹⁰ Dodds *ad loc.*, pp. 150 f. As regards the question of a built-up stage one might cautiously suppose that the Theban palace for *Phoen.* and the Argive for *Or.*—two other late plays of E.—were fairly sturdy structures. The *skênê*-building for E.'s posthumous trilogy could represent both Agamemnon's praetorium at Aulis and a Corinthian palace as well as Pentheus' house.

¹¹ *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto 1967) 66.

sticklers for realism, would have been satisfied with so dinky a half-measure."¹² We must certainly agree with him *if* we are to take all the vivid language of this scene (and of the speech of the Lydian/Dionysus that follows) as describing immediate and physical devastation. The same language, however, as I intend to show, may rather and better be understood figuratively in many of its details. A careful look into the words will suggest that the miraculous and truly awesome damage to Pentheus' "house" affects it not materially but spiritually and morally.

This is not to argue that all the wonders take place "in word and not in deed," for some things do happen, according to my hypothesis, and they are "miracles" themselves. They ought to be both astonishing and clearly visible to everyone in the theater; precisely what they include besides an indication of fire I shall propose presently. Before that, however, we should remind ourselves of an important axiom. Poets, by their concrete imagery, and dramatists, by stage effects and major props as well as by their characters' enactment, communicate something beyond the literal facts of a verse or scene at many critical moments. Both of their arts use symbols. Details of language, setting, or action bearing a special stress may both complicate and structure part or all of a poem or play and broaden and refine its power to win a reader's, hearer's, or viewer's assent based on his own experience of life. The latter function of symbolism in the palace miracle and in the *Bacchae* as a whole has drawn much recent attention; the former, the operation of the "shaken house" within Euripides' tragic poem, will concern us here.¹³ The physical event now to be described was chosen as a symbol to fit the pattern of the play.

¹² *Op. cit.*, the translation and p. 76.

¹³ See note 3 above. After Grube and Winnington-Ingram, interpreters of this drama have become more and more elaborate, even clinical in "reading" the dark stables, the bull, etc., and in offering E.'s characters belated psychiatric advice. In addition to Sale's persuasive article (cited in note 3 above) and G. Devereux' fascinating examination of Agave in "The Psychotherapy Scene in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *JHS* 90 (1970) 35-48, see J. A. Larue, who points out Pentheus' Freudian slips in "Prurience Uncovered: The Psychology of Euripides' Pentheus," *CJ* 63 (1967) 209-14, and J. Wohlberg, "The Palace-Hero Equation in Euripides," *Acta Antiqua* 16 (1968) 149-55, who somewhat heavy-handedly discovers a "parable of modern psychology" in the play. (His general "equation" is, in my judgment, mistaken; its second term should not be the individual figure, who cannot be isolated from the *family* and the distressed relationship among a number of *oikeioi*. Philip Slater in *The Glory of Hera* [Boston

It would probably be easy to contrive on a wooden palace façade—and I believe it agrees with the text: two or more fairly large sections of (false) architrave swing *out* and mutually *apart*. Consequently, if I picture it to myself correctly, the upper entablature and roof (with intervening pediment?) stand while their apparent support is seriously displaced. Immediately the audience must marvel at the visual paradox. In fact G. S. Kirk has recently suggested something very like this: “. . . the architrave of the front portico (which must have been represented at the back of the stage) splits asunder . . . Greek scenic resources, slight though they were, could have produced an adequate effect.”¹⁴ This effect or another of similar sort would clearly reveal two important things about the god’s power. It is truly immense, and to it the *physical* order of the world—the law of gravity and the principles of mechanics—is subject; Dionysus’ attack, moreover, unlike that by Pentheus’ henchmen on the *oracular seat* of Teiresias (346 ff.), is direct, and is not aimed merely or mainly at timber and nails, stone and mortar.¹⁵ Not only does the new deity, therefore, have strength enough to override the *political and moral* order of Thebes, but it threatens the Cadmean royal *oikos* in their very persons.

A grave objection does quickly present itself. My position calls for very limited damage. At 633, however, Dionysus himself says: δῶματ’ ἔρρηξεν χαμάζε· συντεθράνωται δ’ ἅπαν, which we should conservatively translate “He [Dionysus] broke the house to the ground; it is all fallen together.” Literally understood this must denote a complete razing of the palace or, at very least, of a major part of it.¹⁶

1968] is basically right to argue—whatever we may think about pp. 294–301 on the *Bacchae*—that an acute concern with both gods and mortals in their “domestic” context pervades Hellenic myth itself as well as its tragic telling. My unpublished dissertation [cited in note 1] in effect finds an equation “palace = heroic family” throughout Athenian tragedy.)

¹⁴ G. S. Kirk, *The Bacchae by Euripides* (Englewood Cliffs 1970) 73 f.

¹⁵ For the gravity-defying strength of *entheoi* see esp. 737 ff. and 755 ff.; cf. Pentheus’ subjective feeling of enormous lifting power at 945 ff. and in general the high leaping dance of the bacchantes. Below p. 77 it will be argued that Dionysus has a supernatural power over all elevation.

¹⁶ Hesychius explained the second verb as equivalent to συμπέπτωκε, “has fallen together,” perfect passive and likely deponent. I must disagree with Dodds (*ad. loc.*, pp. 155 f. and refs. there) on the etymology. It is quite possible that Hesychius or his source is only guessing from the context. The element -θράνω- certainly *does* suggest something to do with “beams”—perhaps even the beams of my proposed miracle.

Commentators who do so understand it have either awkwardly denied that it *means* what it so oddly says or, with equal awkwardness, have tried to explain (what we have already said to be unlikely) how it can have been staged. Grube has offered what is at first thought an attractive theory, stating his opinion that Dionysus here refers only to "what happened inside the palace, or more exactly inside the stables. We may if we wish suppose that these are wrecked, but there is no reason to suppose that they were visible on the stage. Even if they were, the characters for the rest of the play have other things on their minds than the state of Pentheus' outhouses."¹⁷ I must join Norwood in this matter. He protests that 633 obviously cannot refer to some stables only but to the palace itself: "Dionysus proclaims that the palace lies in complete overthrow."¹⁸ Unless like Verrall and Norwood we want to make a liar of the Lydian we must contrive to have a real palace/house destroyed that lies entirely or mostly offstage. Such a solution has been proposed.

Jeanne Roux has tried to prove that for *all* Euripidean drama the main house or temple is by convention imagined to lie behind a courtyard wall and gate, *which are all that the audience ever actually sees*. The Theban palace of the *Bacchae*, seen only in our mind's eye, we can easily "see" shattered.¹⁹ Since this general hypothesis seems highly unlikely (characters in the plays are consistently said to come from or

(Very tentatively I offer an emendation: ἐρρήσει for ἐρρηξεν, where with 634 the meaning would be something like, "The palace *will fall in ruin* to the ground, and it is entirely joined in construction to [lit. "beamed together with"] the one who has seen my binding to be most bitter," etc. This verb is used almost exclusively with personal subjects, but my interpretation would welcome the fact. If correct the new reading would provide a future threat to correspond to that of Pentheus at 356 f.: note λυμαίνεται in 354 and 632. It would also nicely support my thesis; but I can hardly build upon a foundation so frail, and I base my discussion on the MSS and OCT reading.)

¹⁷ P. 410. Dodds (149) takes a similar view: "... the δώματα which have collapsed (633) must be somewhere at the back, and need not be identical with the 'house of Pentheus', which was merely 'shaken' (606, 623)—a Greek palace consisted of a number of buildings grouped round a central courtyard (αὐλή, 630)." This is also Roux' position (see note 19 below).

¹⁸ Norwood, *Essays* 54. Because his conclusions are unacceptable to most scholars his many sensible observations—and those of Verrall, for that matter—are too commonly overlooked.

¹⁹ *Les Bacchantes* II, 440–44. For a convincing refutation of her general views concerning the stage "house" in E. (article cited in note 8 above) see Hourmouziades (also cited in note 8).

enter the *building* at their cues; the houses of Admetus, Jason, and the Mycenaean peasant, the palaces of Theoclymenus and Orestes, the temples of Pythian Apollo and Taurian Artemis are all supposed to be visible), a solution to our problem deduced from it does not offer us much help. Nevertheless, Sutherland's somewhat kindred proposal deserves notice. Behind "outer fortification walls and outer gate of the palace complex" he would situate "the tops of columns and the entablature of the main hall" so as to be visible above them. "This upper part can fall out of sight during the collapse, with the effect of a whole, and be out of sight and mind for the rest of the play."²⁰ This is ingenious; but such a business would require a much more elaborate set and trickier stage effect than we should readily credit to the Theater of Dionysus.²¹ Furthermore, if we keep the future tense value of *ἔπεισι* (602), it is difficult if not impossible to see where *during* the miracle sequence the collapse should take place. More importantly, this solution seems to me to presuppose a more anxious illusionism than properly belongs to Attic tragedy. It will be much better, I believe, for us to get away from a literal translation of 633 into English prose and thence into fact. We should instead read this whole part of the play, especially the tetrameter speech of Dionysus, as symbolic utterance (which so many of the commentators have insisted it is) rather than as factual statement (as the same commentators have often required it to be in every detail). The student of the *Bacchae* ought to keep it in mind that Dionysus is a (disguised) god—and that Euripides is a poet. Neither of them is a journalist.

A comment of Winnington-Ingram is quite pertinent. He regards

²⁰ P. 76. Sutherland's considerable practical experience in the theater makes his an imagination to be reckoned with.

²¹ Gilbert Murray, *Aeschylus* (Oxford 1940) 38–43, argues for some very grand stage effects in the *Prometheus*; see esp. 38 f. But what may have been possible with painted screens there, granted that impressive realization of the final cataclysm was desirable, was not necessarily also possible with the stage building of the later fifth century and the *Bacchae*. Furthermore, even were a major *collapse* manageable, the palace could hardly have *shaken up and down* as a literal reading of the miracle would demand. (Knowing much more than we do about Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia*, esp. fr. 58, would help us; see note 4 above. Near the end of the fragmentary *Erechtheus* of E. [C. Austin, ed., *Nova Fragmenta Euripidea* (Berlin 1968), fr. 65.51 ff.] Poseidon causes an earthquake that apparently wrecks his enemy Erechtheus' palace; we cannot be certain of this play's setting and of what may have been enacted on stage. We do know that the Athenian king's *family* had already suffered a grave calamity.)

Dionysus at 604 ff. as a "Messenger" whose story "has an atmosphere of its own" and, for obvious artistic reasons, must not "make what follows an anticlimax."²² He goes on to assert that when Pentheus emerges from the palace he "has come less from a scene of real cataclysm than from a nightmare of terrors and phantoms." In fact, if we take the entire miracle sequence thus, as I argue we should, we shall find that this "nightmare," like so many other literary dreams, turns out to be allegorical and prophetic. The chorus are inspired to prophecy by their god (as again later in the fourth *stasimon*), while the god himself speaks much more as "Prophet" than as "Messenger." In the striking *words* that both god and devotees use some study will give us very good reason to doubt what might be called a fundamentalist interpretation of the wonders they describe.

Strong evidence appears both in noteworthy patterns among a handful of *directional notions* and in a special *Dionysiac vocabulary* that we can recognize from other, ritual or quasi-ritual parts of the play. The former include the prefix/prepositions *συν-* and *δια-*, *κατα-* and *ἀνα-*; the latter a number of striking verbs (which are often combined with the former). We discover that the experience of the palace, so often loosely described as a general sort of shattering, is really something else surely even more remarkable.

It seems reasonable to begin with the chorus' crucial words at 591 f.: "Did you see [indicative] / Look at [imperative] the architrave-pieces *διάδρομα*? / !" Although this is what I have argued ought to be represented exactly on stage, it leads the way to my non-representational explanation of the scene. Note the prefix *δια-* in the rare and unusual adjective. With the same apparent meaning "apart, asunder" this semantic element has appeared just a few lines before (587 f.) in the very rare and very striking verb *διατινάσσω* which Dionysus himself will echo later, at 606. The hearer has a vivid word-picture of things coming violently apart. This would, of course, aptly describe a physical catastrophe, as for example from some kind of explosion. For an ordinary earthquake, however, it is rather odd. Remarkable in this connection are two other important passages in the *Bacchae*, one

²² *Op. cit.*, 82 ff.; Conacher (66) quotes him with approval. (Cf. Kitto 374: "... this miracle, however great or small, is essentially an event in the minds of the actors and audience." *Ibid.*, for his thoughts on the danger of anti-climax.)

earlier (389-92), the other later (1308 f.). In the first the chorus sing of "the life of peaceability" that the rash young king of Thebes has rejected, which "abides unshaken" and which *συνέχει δώματα*, "holds house(s) together." In the second, after the death of Pentheus and well after the miracle, Cadmus apostrophizes his late grandson: *ῥῆ δῶμ' ἀνέβλεψ'*—*ὅς συνείχες, ὦ τέκνον / τοῦμόν μέλαθρον*, "by whom the house had recovered its sight [Dodds *ad loc.*]*—*who, my child, had held my house's hall together." While the compound verb *συνέχω* is not particularly unusual in tragic diction, only in these two places do we find it with a building as its object. They complement each other and the language of the miracles nicely. Cohesive and explosive forces seem to be struggling over the "house." But our question remains: must we regard these forces as exclusively or even mainly physical?

Perhaps Cadmus' words at 1304 f. give us a hint toward the answer. The ruined old hero complains that his divine grandson has been needlessly harsh *ὥστε διολέσαι δόμους κάμ'*. The god has destroyed Cadmus and his family (for so we must interpret "house" here) not only "thoroughly" but also "apart, severally." The course of the play demands this. During Dionysus' visitation those who normally live in the palace, the biological House of Cadmus and Pentheus, are separated from their home and from each other and are in diverse ways destroyed. When the action of our play begins Dionysiac madness has already driven Agave and her two surviving sisters out of the house (35) to the mountain revels that will end so horribly. Their father Cadmus goes to the mountain afterward, leaving the palace behind at 178; but he apparently goes with Teiresias to a different spot, for he is not mentioned in the first messenger's report nor does he try to intervene later when Pentheus is being hunted and slain. (Indeed Cadmus has already returned to the city when he first learns of the horror; see 1223 f.). Finally the disowned god himself leads his royal cousin out and away to dismemberment, by means of the madness that starts *inside the palace* during the choral part of the miracle scene. Somewhat deranged already when he comes out at 642, Pentheus is totally possessed when he leaves his wonder-stricken palace for the last time immediately after 914. This must be stressed: Dionysus' control over his principal opponent—soon to be his victim—is complete and his intention clear

starting in the episode that opens with the miracle sequence. Pentheus and Pentheus' unbelieving family are all to be taken over and destroyed in a strange and terrible manner. The god has now invested their very habitation with his centrifugal power, and inexorably forces his enemies to move both physically and mentally "asunder" and astray. The disguised Dionysus' escape from imprisonment (*διαπέφευγε*, 642, and *διαφυγών*, 648), the expectant prayer of the chorus that Justice's sword stab—or decapitate—Pentheus *λαιμῶν διαμπάξ* (994 with the correction; = 1114 in refrain), maddened Agave's eyes *διάστροφοι*, "rolling apart" (1122 f. and 1166 f.), and the horrible game of catch (*διεσφαίριζε*, 1136) with the rent flesh of Pentheus' body (*διασπαρ-κτόν*, 1220) are all the working of this awesome power. (See also 739, 753 f., etc.)

At this point it is proper to note some general features of the play. The story moves repeatedly to Cithaeron and the bacchic countryside (see especially 114 and 726 f.) away from the king's palace in the city that Cadmus built. Those who go up and away include Dionysus himself at his "first birth" and after the prologue, Agave and the other women of Thebes before the prologue, Cadmus and Teiresias, the freed maenads, and finally Pentheus with the god as guide and master. Those returning from the mountain are Dionysus, thrice (for the prologue, under arrest in the second episode, and in triumph for the *exodos*), the messengers bearing their tales of the new god's wonders, Agave with her son's head, and Cadmus with attendants bringing back the rest of Pentheus. Each return has a direr effect on the royal house. The young dynast Pentheus wishes to arrest and imprison all the maenads (226 ff.; cf. 443 f.) and their leader (239 ff. and 355 ff.), gathering them into the walls and laws of his town; he intends to force the women back to their domestic duties (217) and to cut off the Lydian stranger's head or have him stoned. Dionysus, however, not only breaks from all restraint but also breaks down the would-be restrainer. By a cruel kind of talion he makes Thebes (as he predicted at 21 f.) and Pentheus' palace—more precisely the stables, the place of animals' confinement—his dancing ground, as if to spite the king's sarcasm at 511; then, in animal epiphany, he leads his demented and helplessly dancing enemy out of the palace, openly through and out of the city, to Cithaeron, his own realm, where his *bacchai* will first pelt

Pentheus with stones, pine branches, and thyrsi, and finally tear him head from limb. The three most critical moments of the history of Dionysus at Thebes as Euripides tells it seem to be these: (1) the god's "first birth" in lightning, which blasted Semele's chamber and killed her; (2) the "palace miracles," in which Semele's son returns with his own special sort of lightning and upsets the rest of his unbelieving family's house; and (3) the catastrophe, which compels Cadmus and his daughters to acknowledge what Pentheus could never comprehend—that Semele's bastard lived and was a divine son of Zeus. The second of the three moments is pivotal. Before the miracle scene the palace is the center of propriety, of Cadmus' little faith and Pentheus' persecution of the bacchants; after it the same building becomes the setting for Pentheus' increasingly disordered behavior and his grotesque conversion and transformation.

Returning to my suggestion for staging 586 ff. we can now see how the movement of structurally important beams out and away from each other and from the palace is appropriate to the greater context. This action would correspond to other actions, things done out of our sight and, largely, in the future, which pertain to the soundness of the "house" in its human sense. The reported and producible event of 591 f. would be a uniquely apposite sign or symbol on the royal *palace* for what the power that caused it is doing to the royal *family*. The Cadmean dynasty's cohesion has been lost—and collapse of its higher parts seems inevitable.

In a number of respects this visible architectural symbol resembles the broken pillar in Euripides' earlier tragedy *Heracles*.²³ A violently

²³ Wohlberg (154) points out that "even in the *Heracles*, which lies outside the Dionysiac tradition, Euripides uses Dionysiac language in describing the irruption by Lyssa" and goes on to provide detailed demonstration. He believes, like Dodds and Schmid (see note 4 above), that destruction of a persecutor's house is probably part of the traditional story pattern; but even if that is true, E. may very well be "rationalizing" as he did, for example, with Hecabe's metamorphosis in an earlier play. At the end of *Hec.* she becomes a vicious bitch in temper and behavior *without a physical change*. In any event, believing that "some conventionalized representation of destruction did take place" in the *Bacchae*, Wohlberg identifies the palace as "a physical, as well as a metaphysical, equivalent of Pentheus" so that the stage presents "the parallel picture of the palace in ruins and Pentheus sunk in exhaustion" (p. 152). As already stated, I would change the equivalence to "palace = Theban royal family" (see note 13 above; see also Kitto 150 f.: Pentheus is *not* Dionysus' only target in this tragedy); on P.'s supposed exhaustion see nn. 26 and 31 below and text, p. 81.

displaced architectural element represents a whole family's calamity brought about by one member, in that case Heracles, in our play Pentheus (or, just possibly, Cadmus and Pentheus both). In the other instance, however, there *has* undeniably been a good deal of physical damage behind the scenes, and for it the broken pillar is a concrete token. In the *Bacchae* we seem to have not a sample but a foretokening of damage, for one tremendous difference between this and the earlier play is that here the visible damage to the house does not follow but precedes (by hundreds of lines) the awful human havoc.

Looking into the crucial scene in the *Bacchae* for further enlightenment we discover that, besides the disturbed architrave, the rest of what the Asian bacchants and their leader declare about the miracles includes some very unusual language. We have already remarked on the verb *διατινάσσω*, which twice describes the god's treatment of the palace. To it we must add its close cousin *ἀνατινάσσω* in 623. Since neither of these rather rare words, denoting as they do a rapid waving or brandishing motion in a person's hand or hands, can refer to a possible physical event, we might fairly suppose that they were not used literally. *τινάσσω* divided from *ἀνά* by tmesis occurs earlier in the play at 80 and very likely also at 553 f. (cf. 80; we should surely prefer the third interpretation Dodds lists *ad loc.*). In both cases the compound verb describes a Dionysiac ritual motion, the ecstatic shaking of the sacred thyrsus. Quite possibly Pentheus in effect mocks a technical term of cult when he brusksly asks his grandfather at 253: *οὐκ ἀποτινάξεις κισσόν*; A reader may suspect, therefore, that at 623 the strange verb has a direct Dionysiac application. To confirm his suspicion he might recall precisely what has been happening inside the palace. As Dionysus relates it, Pentheus *ῆσος' ἐκέισε κῆτ' ἐκέισε* (625; cf. 631): the excited persecutor of the god has been darting about like a maenad.²⁴ At this early stage of his madness, it is true, he still waves a sword (628) and not the bacchic wand; but soon enough, wholly "enthusiastic," he will take his first lesson in the pious use of the thyrsus before the audience's eyes (941 ff.). With this partial conversion of his violent opponent Pentheus to a kind of unwitting maenadism during the miracle scene, Semele's son has now

²⁴ For *ἀίσσω* as a Dionysiac motion see esp. 147, 693, 1090.

brought the whole royal family under his sway. He has really, in *this* sense, caused the House of Cadmus to “shake in bacchic worship.”

We observe further that, if the god’s voice does in fact bid Goddess Earthquake *σεῖε πέδον χθονός* to start the miracle (585 with Wilamowitz’ supplement), he is only using another verb with strong Dionysiac connections.²⁵ Its previous occurrences at 185, 240, and 308 establish this. The limited yet striking business with the false architrave would thus demonstrate the fact of a divine “shaking;” but rather more so do the psychic repercussions in the wits of the palace’s master. We should recall that the chorus implied at 389 ff. (it was a generalization) that Pentheus in his violence would not remain “unshaken” (*ἀσάλευτος*) nor be able to “hold house together.” Later, in and after the miracle scene, when the palace’s entablature seems poised for a crashing fall and the man who held Cadmus’ house together is moving crazily in body and mind, that prophetic warning is fulfilled.²⁶ Still later, moreover, during the third *stasimon* when Pentheus has returned inside the possessed building for the very last time, he will himself prance *προσείων ἀνασείων τ’ . . . καὶ βακχιάζων* as a full-fledged *bacchos* (930 f.—cf. 240 f.).

Additionally, the language at 601–603 deserves our careful attention. The chorus proclaim of their god that “the Lord will attack these halls turning [them] upside down.” Here once more we should be reminded of important and emphatic words from earlier in the play. At 348 f. Pentheus orders his deputation to demolish the “seat” of Teiresias, *ἄνω κάτω τὰ πάντα συγχέας*, “confounding everything upside down.” But when the mortal potentate can command damage to stone and wood, his divine adversary ought to be capable of something rather worse; and so he is. (Given the conditions of Euripides’

²⁵ As noted, the verb is a supplement; Murray’s OCT incorporates it and Dodds *ad. loc.*, p. 150, warmly commends it. I agree with them, of course, but can only add the obvious circular argument that my discussion provides.

²⁶ It should not be necessary to argue that Dionysus is already manipulating P. at this point in the play. His control merely becomes more thorough as the third episode proceeds. His persecutor has already undergone a kind of initiation in an involuntary dance, as if for bacchic worship (see p. 75), and has witnessed a bovine epiphany of the god. P. is still “shaken” when he enters at 642, very possibly still waving his sword and literally “hopping mad;” yet he goes on to obey without objection his enemy’s commands to stand quietly (647) and to hear out the pro-Dionysian report of the messenger (657).

theater, as I have argued, and given too the usual methods of angered Euripidean gods, the main outrage against Pentheus almost *had* to be "spiritual," which is to say *internal to its target*. Compare the fates of Hippolytus and Heracles.) Nor does it follow that if the god's attack is (mainly) non-material and not directly perceivable by the audience it is less awesome. On the contrary: the smiling one's sure and deadly control of his victim's mind, established during the miracle scene, shows by how much his power exceeds a man's, even that of a determined king.²⁷ Furthermore, here again we can recognize diction especially fitting for *Dionysiac* seizure of the house. We may compare the up-and-down, overturning motion of the palace at Dionysus' anticipated onslaught with the actions of the Theban maenads in the mountain revels—led by the queen mother and her sister—at 741 and 753. Agitated up-and-down movement is, in fact, characteristically bacchic, in both the leaping dance and combat of the bacchantes (see especially the epode of the *parodos*, the third and fifth *stasima*, and the first messenger speech) and the dizzying ascent and descent of the holy mountains. The prefix *ἀνα-* occurs again and again in what appear to be ritual expressions, a number of them quite striking.²⁸ And, of course, Pentheus' doom includes a physical fall—of just the sort that the blind but pious Teiresias will avoid (see 365). The impious king is raised in order that he may fall, in a literal *catastrophe*. Through the second messenger's words we see Pentheus up (1070 and 1076; as *ἀμβάτης*, 1107), Pentheus down (1110–12), before we see Pentheus dismembered.

Finally, returning to the unique word *διάδρομα*, we find in its verbal stem *-δρομ-* still another element to which the poet has taken some pains to give an ecstatic connotation. (See again the wild

²⁷ See note 15 above and p. 68. Throughout the play there is, of course, a strong likeness between the two cousins. For example, despite their unequal power they are equally vain (see 319–21) and cruel. (Winnington-Ingram 55 has observed the significant repetition of *ἄνω κάτω* in this play; note esp. 741 during the cattle *sparagmos* and 753 during the maenads' attack on towns—and cf. *HF* 1307.)

²⁸ Examples: *ἀναβακχεύω* (864), *ἀναβοάω* (525, 731, 1079, 1154), *ἀναίσσω* (693; see note 24), *ἀναπάλλω* (149, 1190), *ἀναχορεύω* (482, 1154), and *ἀνοιστρέω* (979: here the verb stem is also *Dionysiac*/maniac; cf. 32, 119, 665, 1229). Roux, *Les Bacchantes* II, 439, has listed a few others, noting the abundance of this prefix "dans la langue du culte dionysiaque, culte de l'exaltation." (See esp. 1153 f., at a moment of terrible triumph: *ἀναχορεύσωμεν Βάκχιον*, / *ἀναβοάσωμεν ξυμφορὰν* . . .)

astrophic ending of the *parodos* and also individual lines 731, 748—cf. the same image at 1090 f., and 985; cf. the fawn, *stasimon* 3). The “house” of Pentheus, in the amazing words of the miracle scene, is utterly obsessed with the ecstasy of the god it would deny.

The playwright Euripides, therefore, selected and repeated words and word elements with particular care in this work, especially for the “miraculous” beginning of its central third episode. He probably *invented* a number of compound words—several occur only or first in the *Bacchae*—for a special effect on the sensitive ear or reader’s eye. By adding a visible effect something like what I have proposed above he would have gained even more. Miraculous enough, yet with no risk of anticlimax, such a business foretokens, indeed guarantees, a strange and terrible fate for those who make their home under the roof of the Theban palace. Damage that the audience can see—perhaps Pentheus cannot—at this relatively early point in the drama contributes a concrete and powerful, suggestive but somewhat enigmatic symbol for the human destiny to be played out in the following scenes. But only from what follows can the symbolism be fully understood; like Dionysus’ predictions in the prologue, the prophetic symbol does not give the whole game away.

Nevertheless, despite the foregoing verbal and thematic support for a mainly symbolic miracle sequence, I have not yet removed one very considerable obstacle to my interpretation. One must ask: doesn’t the Lydian/Dionysus *really* make an all-or-nothing claim about the destruction of the visible palace at 633? He says, apparently, that the god “broke the house to the ground; it is all fallen together.” (For the line’s obscurity and my tentative emendation see note 16 above.) At the first and easiest understanding of these words we must, given the theatrical conditions and the rest of the play, take the speaker either to be mistaken—that is, *lying*, since as a god he must know better—or to be giving us a conventional signal that we are to *imagine* much more damage than we can actually see. Whatever, then, we may make of Pentheus’ failure to say anything at all about it when he comes out of the “fallen” palace a few lines later (he is, after all, half mad), we must certainly allow that much, more likely most or all of the building is and can be imagined to be standing at 843. There Pentheus announces matter-of-factly that he will go back inside to determine his next move.

That Dionysus at 633, as a kind of *exangelos*, should stress total destruction, when this contradicts what his audience sees *and* it is hardly necessary for the plot, must remain a perplexing problem. Or so it must as long as we insist on regarding him as a messenger and not as a god. For a *god*, unlike a messenger (who would, we may remark, speak iambs, not the trochaics of our Dionysus), is able and even likely to utter prophecy; he may very well employ a bit of oracular paradox and/or ambiguity in his utterance.²⁹ Certainly line 629, *ὥς ἔμοιγε φαίνεται, δόξαν λέγω*, should at least put us on our guard. Later he will confirm what Teiresias has said of him at 298 ff., that he is indeed a *mantis*, that he knows "of old" what his father Zeus has ordained (1349). Honoring the Lydian/Dionysus as a god—and Euripides as a poet—the exegete might look ahead from the house crashed "to the

²⁹ The tone and implications of the meter have been variously identified. Most scholars think the passage excited or "emotional" (e.g., Lesky, *loc. cit.*), while Verrall pronounced it bantering (cf. Arrowsmith's translation, where D. "speaks to the Chorus with a solicitude approaching banter."). Thomas Drew-Bear, "The Trochaic Tetrameter in Greek Tragedy," *AJP* 89 (1968) 385-405, describes tetrameters as generally expressing excitement or haste; in the *Bacchae* "while it is doubtless possible to interpret the tone . . . as 'light' and 'almost humorous', this lightness and humour characterize only the god's point of view, certainly not that of the Chorus and not necessarily that of the audience" (p. 402). On the other hand Harsh, p. 241, asserts that D. "maintains an Olympian calm." Remembering that it is the god who selects and continues the meter, we might find the closest parallel in *Or.* 1506-36 and the prince's mixed self-assurance and impatience with the groveling Phrygian. M. Imhof, "Tetrameterszenen in der Tragödie," *MH* 13 (1956) 125-43, classifies Dionysus' 26 continuous lines as "ein Bericht," admitting that there is no other example in known tragedy of a messenger report in trochaics (p. 137). U. v. Wilamowitz, *Aristophanes Lysistrata* (1927; repr. Zürich and Berlin 1964), Introduction p. 19, finds an apparent "Botenbericht" in a trochaic fragment from Cratinus' *Odyssees*, and consequently Imhof suggests that E. "sich vielleicht anschliesst" to comedy. Perhaps the closest example in this respect is the messenger at *Phoen.* 1335 ff. who *enters* with trochees, then shifts to iambs for the actual report—and who is hardly lighthearted. In a careful study of the trochaic passages in E., C. A. Manning, *A Study of Archaism in Euripides* (New York 1916), finds that commonly they appear "when the characters come into contact with the divine" (p. 60), although at the same time we nowhere see "a god *as god* using the trochaic meter" (p. 61). Clear and authoritative prophecies and divine decrees are always iambic, whether spoken by god or mortal; personal reactions, on the other hand, may be trochaic. About our specific passage Manning concludes: "Dionysus, posing as a mortal, speaks in the [trochaic] metre. This emphasizes in a very skilful manner the disguise of the god" (p. 62). I like the notion of disguised divine utterance here, but the evidence is really rather meager for such a subtle point. All I can say is that both the manner and the content of D.'s trochaic speech are unique, even mystifying. This is wholly appropriate for his role here. (On the role of "apparent messenger" see note 32 below.)

ground" to the eventual experience of Pentheus, the house's master and mainstay, partner in its fate, at 1111 f. The doomed king *χαμαιριφῆς πίπτει πρὸς οὐδας*, "falls groundward to hard earth." This fall of his from the pine tree just before his death, like his earlier mental "fall" at 813 (where he has "fallen into a great passion" to spy upon the maenads on Cithaeron), can in retrospect be understood to actualize the "falling" predicted at 587 in future tense: *τάχα τὰ Πενθέως μέλαθρα διατινάσσεται πεσήμασιν*. In the same retrospect we might almost translate this: "Soon will Pentheus' halls be tossed apart at his falling." At all events here, too, we must note the special place of a precise verbal motif, the fall to-the-ground, in the celebration of Dionysus. As we have already seen (above, p. 77) a fall can be fatal; more strictly speaking, we can say that like so much else in Dionysiac cult the fall to earth is quite ambiguous. The ecstatic maenads collapse to the ground at 600, like their god-bearing leader at 136 and at the same time like their victims the *ταῦροι ὕβρισταί* at 744. (These bulls, of course, both prefigure the fate of the similarly violent Pentheus and embody the bull-god of the scene in the stable and of Pentheus' later hallucination [920 ff.]. The god inhabits and becomes the victim for his worship.) Furthermore, although the mortal members of Cadmus' house have been physically scattered by Dionysus' influence, as we have seen, they nevertheless all *go down together* with Pentheus at his downfall. In his and their ruin the collapse that the gods have decreed at 633 (hence the perfect tense?) finds its relentless fulfillment. Certainly if 633 is a prophecy, as I argue, it does seem to be fulfilled exactly—according to the symbolic equivalences that I have tried to demonstrate. Cadmus sums up the god's plan and achievement thus: *συνῆψε πάντας ἐς μίαν βλάβην . . . ὥστε διολέσαι δόμους* (1303 f.).³⁰

For some corroboration of this hypothesis that reads prophecy in Dionysus' trochaic lines I would adduce two items of evidence. First,

³⁰ See the god's statement of policy in the prologue: *ξυνάψω* [sc. *Θήβας*] *μαίνασι στρατηλατῶν* (52); and cf. his adversary's purpose as the chorus describe it at 545-48: *ὅς ἔμ' ἐν βρόχοισι τὰν τοῦ / Βρομίου τάχα ξυνάψει, / τὸν ἐμὸν δ' ἐντὸς ἔχει δώ- / ματος ἤδη θιασώταν*. Cf. 615. *ἄπτω* is common throughout, meaning "catch hold" and (e.g., at 594) "ignite;" see esp. 624 in Dionysus' prophetic speech and Pentheus' angry words at 778 f. for the latter. For the former application, where "fasten" will translate the verb, see 24 (donning of the fawnskin), 132 f. (making of the bacchic drum), and 176 (putting together the thyrsus).

there is the parallel sequence in the *Heracles*, whose resemblances to the *Bacchae* have already been mentioned. Iris and Lyssa are the only other gods to appear in the middle parts of a Euripidean tragedy. After her argument with Iris, which ends with four tetrameters, Lyssa proceeds in the same meter into a monologue (859–73). She explains *in advance* what she is about to do both to Heracles *and to his house*. Then, of course, quickly and with dreadful efficiency she does what she has promised. Secondly we have a detail in 634 f. of the *Bacchae* itself. Verrall, as could be expected, cites this as another example of the untruth in the Lydian's account: Pentheus, our trochaic reporter tells us, is laying his sword aside *κόπου ὕπο*. But in fact no such thing happens until much later, perhaps after 809.³¹ I would join in this view of the stage action but hardly in the accusation of fraud. Dionysus' speech does not narrate but *predicts* action, at least from 629 on. The word *κόπος* should refer not to some fatigue on Pentheus' part (even if 644 may indicate panting—and see Dodds *ad loc.*—the king seems to be in full rage at 647), but rather to the irresistible "pressure" of Dionysus' psychological onslaught, to the extreme agitation within the mind of Pentheus. This pressure begins with the miracle and betrays itself during the third episode; it intensifies to the breaking point of Pentheus' mind—again inside the shaken palace—during the subsequent choral ode. Its awful result is the "mad scene" of 918 ff. Therefore, according to my interpretation, in his confident words immediately following the physical miracle the god does *not* tell us what has already happened. He does not play the human messenger's part, however much he seems to at first hearing. The visible facts belie what he says—for the present. He really offers a virtual dream-symbol for his adversary's inevitable frustration (the business with the bull and with the unquenchable flame) and signals what his own prevailing power is now committed to bring about.³² The House of

³¹ Verrall 74. P., he says, comes quickly out of the palace, "vigorous as ever." I must agree. I expect that he should wave his sword wildly when he comes almost leaping out (see note 26 above). But the falsity of D.'s words is only apparent: we shall see their prophetic truth later.

³² For symbolic interpretation of the bull see Sales (above, note 3) 69, commenting on Dodds' comment on comments by Winnington-Ingram; see also p. 80 above. The bull seems to represent D. in a characteristic antisocial form, to which P. is hostile at 618 ff., admiring, with mind changed, at 920–22, and finally assimilated. P. is likened to a bull both during the terrible *sparagmos* (1125 ff.—cf. 737 ff.) and in part of Agave's

Cadmus, tossed one and all into bacchic frenzy, *will* in truth "all fall down."

Summary. In the view taken here the "palace miracle" in the *Bacchae* consisted of both stage business and poetry. Each closely complemented the other. The stage business ought to include a minor but conspicuous and threatening alteration of the *skênê*-building's façade, accompanied, no doubt, by violent choreography and music. The chorus' motion, jumping and falling, would have been desirably ambiguous. They might experience either a physical impulse, left largely to their mimetic ability and the audience's imagination, or a psychosomatic one, which they simply enacted. Whatever their motions, their words show a divine influence and a basically involuntary power of prophecy, their mantic utterance couched in a special vocabulary and imagery that refers in a mixture of tenses to the ongoing Dionysiac catastrophe of the Theban royal family. The poetry of the scene involves both the choral prophecies in their rich ambiguity and

confused reminiscence of her "hunt" (1185 ff.). Dodds, on 920-22, declares that the bull is a "sinister epiphany" visible only to P.; Roux, *Les Bacchantes* II, on 618, writes that both there and at 920 it is only an hallucination. The chorus, however, may imply at 1159 that in the 4th episode the Lydian actually wore visible horns—cf. the epode of the next *stasimon* (1017-23), where they seem to exhort the still unrecognized *stranger*, as *bacchos*, to appear as bull or snake. (The *god* is consistently called *Bákχios*, as 998 of the *stasimon*, in this play. See Roux, on 67, for the distinction.) On D.'s peculiar "role-playing" in the tetrameter scene we might observe the following. D. does something quite different from stating present facts and the likely course of events (as he and other gods do in several of E.'s prologues) or directly revealing the divine plan for the future (as he like other gods *ex machina* will do at the end of the play). Through most of our play he appears in disguise, and as the young Lydian he assumes the more precise roles of hierophant, *exangelos*, and eventually royal adviser—and valet. The second of these does not make him an outright false "messenger" as, for example, in Sophocles' *El.* and *Phil.*, although everyone, actors and audience alike, can see that what he says is not at present true. He seems rather an insidious riddler like Clytemnestra the "devoted wife" in Aeschylus' *Agam.*, Medea the "loving mother" in parts of *Med.*, or Agamemnon the "doting father" in the *IA*. Like their words, D.'s (as I understand him) hint about a concealed purpose and future atrocities. But D., uniquely, does not speak plausibly in his role—and speaks in a strange meter. His prophetic implausibility makes him akin to Aeschylus' Cassandra, if to anyone. (Sophocles' Ajax might also be mentioned; but his concealed meanings—if such they are—give him no precise "role," unless perhaps that of "normal man" as against "hero," before Tecmessa and the chorus. In the much later *Phil.* Neoptolemus does the reverse, starting the play as an obedient "normal man" who plays an angry "hero." In both plays we find a moral irony absent, I think, from the *Bacchae*. This is *not*, of course, to deny that disguised D. is a rich mine for another sort of irony.)

the Lydian stranger's performance in its entirety. To the audience's initial confoundment, he speaks as a prophet and oracle, disguising his true meaning as he does his identity. If we hear him as a mortal we must be unsettled by his apparent lies; but his words were to be taken, as we only realize later, symbolically and proleptically. The visible evidence of *some* wonderful event, like the very real experience of *something* by the chorus, both affirms the power of the Lydian's god and presages the disaster that impends for his opponents. Damage to the palace is real, yet, more than that, it is "miraculous" and portentous, especially in light of the strange, inspired words that surround it. Once upon a time Zeus' lightning-bolt has, through Hera's malice, incinerated the quarters of a Theban princess; now Semele's lightning-born son, with his own more insidious thunder and lightning, will empty the whole palace. His earthly House has not acknowledged him as the natural son and great god he is. After his peaceful but disturbing first approach has been rebuffed, Zeus' "bastard" wages a violent war not against the unoffending building we see but against the impious mortals whose security and glory it represents.