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THE MASQUE OF DIONYSUS*

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From the earliest times Greeks worshipped Dionysus in a theatrical form—through masks, costumes, miracle plays, music and dance. Euripides wrote the *Bacchae* at a time when his contemporaries were becoming increasingly self-conscious about the nature of their theater god. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Dionysus, as spectator, actor and judge in his own festival, seeks to save the city by rejuvenating its dramatic art. Contemporary visual artists were just beginning to popularize the theatrical Dionysus, seated among actors who display the masks and costumes of plays performed in honor of a young and often effeminate god.[1] In this paper I argue that Euripides closed a career of increasingly manipulative and illusion-breaking treatment of dramatic conventions[2] by presenting us in the *Bacchae* with yet another *fin-de-*

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[1] The controversy over the relation between the origins of Greek tragedy and the worship of Dionysus is irrelevant to my argument, since we know that Euripides' contemporaries thought of Dionysus as a theater god. See *Clouds* 518–19 for another reference to Dionysus as patron of comic poetry. The earliest known artistic treatments of Dionysus in a theatrical context are the Pronomos vase (*ARV*2 1336), the Peiraeus relief (fig. 51 in A. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2nd ed. rev. by John Gould and D. M. Lewis [Oxford 1968]), and possibly the fragments of a vase from Taranto now in Wurzburg (*ARV*2 1338). These works date from the end of the fifth to the early fourth century.

[2] See, among others, Charles Segal, "The Two Worlds of Euripides' *Helen*," *TAPA* 102 (1971) 610–12 and R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Euripides, *Poiêtês Sophos*," *Arethusa* 2 (1969) 129–42, on Euripides' self-conscious treatment of dramatic conventions.

siècle "theatrical" Dionysus.[3] Nevertheless, unlike many modern playwrights, he was less interested in a self-conscious exploration of his own drama than in the way art interprets human and divine experience for the city.

In the *Bacchae* Dionysus reveals himself to Thebes primarily through means which are common to theater and the larger Dionysiac tradition—voice, costume, music, dance, and song. It is precisely for this reason that the *Bacchae* is one of the few Greek plays in which we can make reliable inferences about the stage production from the text. We know the musical instruments that the chorus carried, and the major features of the costumes of all the principal characters with the exception of the messengers. We know that the mask of Dionysus was smiling (439, 1021). We can reconstruct much of the stage business concerning costume and musical instruments. The language of the play refers with remarkable frequency to the visual and musical experience on stage and emphasizes that both honoring and comprehending the god are essentially theatrical acts, an exploration of the nature of illusion, transformation and symbol. If the Thebans are to receive the god without disaster, they must, like Cadmus and Tiresias, accept a transformation of the ordinary self through costume and respond to the music, dance and emotional release that Dionysus offers. Compare, for example, the effect on Pentheus of Tiresias' speech about the god with Tiresias' and Cadmus' gesture of dressing and dancing as his followers. The physical transformation communicates to the king as the rationalizing speech does not. Sound, gesture and symbol express the god even more effectively than language. Pentheus, the ruler of Thebes, is destroyed through his inability to understand truth in the symbolic form that Dionysiac religion and theater offer to the adherent or spectator. Hence he finally cannot play a role, but surrenders to it. The *opsis* of the *Bacchae*, to use Aristotle's term for theatrical spectacle, is not simply a *hêdusma* or additional "seasoning." The plot or arrangement of events, the action or *praxis*, and the spectacle become for large parts of this play one and the same thing.[4]

[3] My position here is meant to be complementary to and not exclusive of the standard—and I think, correct—interpretations of Dionysus in the *Bacchae* as a nature god or a god of religious ecstasy. The mysterious divinity of the *Bacchae* has multiple aspects; but I wish to stress, by emphasizing here the way in which Euripides presents Dionysus throughout the action, that the proto-theatrical form of his appearance is also a key to his dramatic meaning.

[4] See *Poetics* 1450b28 for Aristotle's discussion of *opsis*. I do not intend to imply here that the *Bacchae* abandons words as a mode of effective communication; this would be absurd in any drama. But both Dionysus in the prologue and the chorus in

Up to the death of Pentheus, when the god withdraws from the level of human action, Euripides has his Dionysus control the play and make it a manifestation of his divinity (I). Dionysus makes the death of Pentheus a kind of "play within a play," which is characterized in the language and action of the text as a proto-dramatic festival. In his own "drama" the god who fuses and blurs the antithetical distinctions by which Greek culture defined itself—man and woman, god and man—also blurs the distinction between the tragic and comic genres. The terrible death of Pentheus is to the god, the mad Agave, and the chorus of believers a cause for the kind of joyous celebration which traditionally closed old comedy. Euripides, by contrast, offers the audience in the final scenes an answer to Dionysus' play and a tragic perspective on the same event (II). Finally, the way in which Dionysus presents his mask to the audience precisely summarizes in theatrical form the way in which Euripides uses the stage action to illuminate the ambiguous nature of his patron divinity (III).

I

Dionysus' Play

Euripides has Dionysus begin the play by sending his followers into Thebes to beat their drums about the palace of Pentheus "so that the city of Cadmus may *see*" (61):

> αἴρεσθε τἀπιχώρι' ἐν πόλει Φρυγῶν
> τύμπανα, Ῥέας τε μητρὸς ἐμά θ' εὑρήματα,
> βασίλειά τ' ἀμφὶ δώματ' ἐλθοῦσαι τάδε
> κτυπεῖτε Πενθέως, ὡς ὁρᾷ Κάδμου πόλις.
>
> Lift up the drums that are native in the land
> of the Phrygians, the invention of mother Rhea and myself,
> and surrounding these royal halls
> of Pentheus, strike them, that the City of Cadmus may see.[5] (58–61)

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the parodos place extraordinary emphasis on presenting the god's divinity through voice, costume, music and symbolic actions—that is, non-verbal means of apprehending the god. After the stranger leaves the stage at 976, having completed his plans for vengeance on Thebes, there is a gradual movement to a renewed emphasis on effective verbal communication.

[5] The translations in the paper, unless otherwise noted, are from Geoffrey Kirk, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1970). Greek quotations throughout are from Oxford texts.

He will make himself manifest (*emphanês*, 22) to Thebes through dance (21). He will fasten on fawnskins and hand the *thyrsus* to the citizens (24–25). He has forced the female population of Thebes to adopt his costume (*skeuê*, 34). In short, Dionysus, himself in human disguise, will reveal his divinity to Thebes primarily through spectacle, costume and sound as he controls and stage directs the play.

The language and action of the play allow Dionysus, until the return of the second messenger, to make the play and the manifestation of his divinity part of one indivisible process. His role as stage director corresponds with his role in the plot—to demonstrate and then to avenge his divinity; his role as *chorodidaskalos* (58 ff.) is inseparable from his being leader and god of his worshippers; his role as producer of stage illusions matches his ability to inspire a change of mental state in his followers; and, as we shall see, his presentation of his smiling mask, his "comic" performance in a tragic *agôn*, communicates the meaning of his religious ambiguity for the audience. Dionysus makes the chorus his players and his destruction of Pentheus a "play," replete with set, costume and spectators. Until the final messenger speech there is no action in the play that is not controlled by the god or voluntarily supportive of him (the chorus, Cadmus, Tiresias, the *therapôn*, the first messenger) except, for a brief period, Pentheus' own. The play itself becomes the net in which the increasingly isolated Pentheus is trapped.[6] Euripides' characters, especially his gods, sometimes execute their own staging. Medea, for example, perhaps expresses her transformation to something more than human through her power to stage her final encounter with Jason from the chariot of the sun. But in this play the process becomes a pervasive expression of Dionysus' own nature, and of his control over theater as its patron. Yet Dionysus' "play within a play" does not, like many modern "plays within plays," or like the tragic parodies of ancient comedy, function primari ly to distance the audience from the drama and call attention to and question its own reality as art; instead, it implicates the audience in the drama and calls attention to its own art as reality. That is, theatrical illusion demonstrates the reality of the god and illusion and symbol are our only mode of access to a god who can take whatever form he wishes (ὁποῖος ἤθελ', 478).

[6] As has often been noted, Pentheus shifts from hunter to hunted in the play, but the preliminary stages of this confrontation involve music, dance, symbolic displays, and costuming.

Dionysus begins the play by putting on stage (55 ff.) a chorus who are his followers, not the citizens of Thebes. They make his music and use his instruments, sing imitations of his ritual songs to cult meters, dance his dances, tell his myths, and, in the palace scene, respond to a divinity that Pentheus can neither see nor control. They are, as I suggested, his players, for each ode reflects or anticipates the shifting demonstration of divinity promised in the prologue. In the parodos they display the god's costume, music and dance and invite Thebes to join in their worship (see especially 105–06). In the first stasimon, taking their cue from Tiresias' speech in defense of the god, the chorus shift to present in lyric form a similarly anachronistic view of the god as a fifth-century patron of symposia and festivals.[7] They endorse the opinion of the ordinary man (*plêthos*, 430), which is immediately voiced on stage by the *therapôn*.[8] The second stasimon marks the transition in Dionysus' position from "powerless" to powerful as it moves from despair at the imprisonment of their leader to a recognition of Dionysus' divinity as it is manifest in the destruction of the palace and in the sound of the god's voice off-stage. Whatever we conclude occurs in the palace scene, whether nothing at all, or a major or minor change in the stage building, no stage business at this point could adequately imitate the apocalyptic destruction, including lightning and earthquake and a ruined palace, which the chorus see while Pentheus does not. The miracle must become for the audience more symbolic and prophetic than realistic. They see not a miracle, but a chorus enacting the experience of a miracle, or presenting a theatrical illusion.[9] The third stasimon (862–911) takes up the god's words in a previous scene—that he will avenge the god who is *deinotatos* and *êpiôtatos* to men— by moving from release to vengence, using the same metrical patterns to express

[7] For a more detailed treatment of the complex and multi-layered choral odes and their undermining of fifth-century ethics, see especially Marilyn B. Arthur, "The Choral Odes of the *Bacchae*," *YCS* 22 (1972) 145–81, and Hans Diller, "Die Bakchen und ihrer Stellung im Spätwerk des Euripides," *Abh. Mainz* (1955).

[8] See Dodds 117 and 131 on the relation between the first stasimon, the Tiresias scene, and the appearance of the *therapôn*. The movement noted by Dodds in the third and fourth stasimon from particular to universal which is contrary to Euripides' usual practice may arise from the exceptional responsiveness of the chorus to shifts in the fate of their cause in each preceding scene.

[9] For the most recent discussion of the palace scene with an up-to-date bibliography, see V. Castellani, "That Troubled House of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *TAPA* 106 (1976) 61–84. I am still inclined to agree with Dodds (*Euripides' Bacchae* [Oxford 1960^2] xxxvii) that Euripides has put a "psychological miracle at the center of the action." Theatrical—or psychological—illusion are the only avenues by which the god can be worshipped and understood.

joy and anger; it is immediately followed by the scene in which Pentheus sees double, and sees for the first time the bestial as well as the gentle aspect of the stranger. In the fourth stasimon the chorus prophetically imagine Pentheus' destruction on the mountain, soon to be reported by the messenger; the final ode celebrates the god's victory over Pentheus (1153–64).

In the *Bacchae*, then, the chorus replay or "preplay" through partially ritualized song, dance and music what Dionysus and his converts enact with language and gesture only. At the same time they do not occupy the same position, emotionally, intellectually or perceptually, between the royal family and the audience as they do in other tragedies. They stand between us and the more extreme perspective of the maddened spectators to Pentheus' tragedy on the mountain, and their attitude, because of their exclusive allegiance to the god, comes to seem pitiless and inhumane. This creation of multiple audiences to the god's theatrical demonstration of his divinity makes the spectators conscious that they are viewing and interpreting the god's actions through a series of subjective perspectives and performances. Access to the god is indirect and symbolic; how we interpret what we see is a product of our own degree of involvement in and assent to the events before us.

In the struggle between Pentheus and Dionysus, god confronts man through music, costume, dance and stage illusion. Euripides represents Pentheus' inability to understand and control Dionysus not only through the king's failure to interpret his words, but through his failure to discern the god within the theatrical forms that express him. Just as Dionysus is god of wine and the wine itself (279, 284), so Dionysus is the god of theater and the theatrical forms that manifest him. His "human" disguise and his divinity are, paradoxically, one and the same (see section III). Every scene in the *Bacchae* up to the final messenger speech makes a major issue of Dionysiac costume and movement as a visible representation of the elusive god. Large sections of the two long messenger speeches, as well as the parodos, communicate his divinity through descriptions of the costumes, songs, and movement of the maenads. In the early scenes Pentheus' response to Dionysiac dress, a mixture of incomprehension, fear and attraction, precipitates his downfall; he rejects the god by rejecting the visible and aural signs of his worship. He reacts to his grandfather's offer of an ivy crown as if he were threatened with mental contamination (344). After a detailed examination of Dionysus' dress and appearance in their first meeting, Pentheus wishes to strip off parts of the stranger's costume on stage (495 ff.). His response to dance and music is equally violent. He tries to send the

stranger to *dance* in the darkness of imprisonment in the stables (511). He also tries to stop the god's followers from making music, to suppress the insistent beating of their drums (513–14).

It is with theatrical weapons, also, that Dionysus destroys Pentheus. He entraps the king in a series of spectacles directed by himself. Twice, both in the stable scene, which the god reports as a kind of "messenger" (616–37),[10] and in the final disaster on the mountain, Dionysus calmly sets the scene—in the second case replete with costume, actors and set—and then stands back or disappears into a position of heavenly observation, an unmoved spectator of human struggle. The stable scene, in which Dionysus teases Pentheus with a bull that Pentheus imagines is the stranger, and then with his own false image, is a sort of off-stage rehearsal for Pentheus' mad scene. Dionysus then lures Pentheus, in a manner unique in extant tragedy, to change his costume and become his own player/worshipper.[11] Through costume he separates Pentheus, by playing on his internal conflicts, from his chosen role as king and hoplite (see esp. 809 ff.). In the scene where Pentheus begins to succumb to the god's power, Dionysus clinches his victory through a detailed description of the costume he is to wear: long hair, a female *peplos*, a fawnskin, and a *thyrsus* (830 ff.). Pentheus, as he chooses how to act, wavers between donning the dress of the god's worshipper and putting on his armor

[10] The god's unusual "messenger speech" teases the audience with its pretense of uncertainty about events that took place within the palace. See especially 629, κᾆθ' ὁ Βρόμιος, ὡς ἔμοιγε φαίνεται, δόξαν λέγω, and 638. What we know to be true, since we know that the stranger is a god, is presented as speculation to the chorus on stage. The choice of the more "primitive" (*Poetics* 4.17–18) trochaic tetrameters rather than the normal iambic trimeters (although see Ox. Pap. 2, no. 221, for a fragment of a messenger speech in trochaic tetrameters from Phrynichus' *Phoenissae*) seems appropriate to the irony here—the mocking god appropriates the role of human messenger to his own inhuman ends. The chorus' belief in their god does not depend on full knowledge—for them the god's voice and the shaking of the palace are sufficient demonstrations of his presence.

Dionysus also predicts the content of the first messenger's speech before he speaks (657–58); the servant of the king does not merely report the events on the mountain, but advocates recognition of Dionysus' divinity (769–70). Hence Pentheus has no access to any perspectives that do not argue for the god.

[11] Pentheus' adoption of another costume/role has multiple implications. The psychological aspect has been much discussed. By becoming a maenad Pentheus moves into a space characteristic of the god, where the differences between male and female, human and divine, man and beast, spectator and participant, are lost. Pentheus' costume change makes him an ecstatic worshipper of the god, as well as his ritual double. For further discussion of these issues see especially Clara Gallini, "Il travestimo rituale di Penteo," *SMSR* 34 (1963) 211–28, and C. P. Segal, "The Menace of Dionysus: Sex Roles and Reversals in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 185–202.

and proceeding against the women with force (845–46). He believes he will gain through his disguise the enticing perspective of a mere spectator (945 ff., also 829). Instead, once he has dressed as a woman, he rehearses his part and adjusts his costume like an actor before a play (927 ff.); he relishes his resemblance to his mother or her sisters and imagines that his dress will endow him with the powers of a maenad (945), little realizing that his change of costume has committed him to becoming instead part of an "unhappy spectacle" (1232, of Agave with the head of Pentheus) beyond his control. In the stable scene Pentheus contended with beast and stranger as separate images. Now he sees Dionysus as a beast, and in sensing that the stranger represents more than the man he has been playing on stage, he "sees" the god and his inhumanness for the first time. Costume, costume change and acting thus become in this play a central dramatic image for understanding and worshipping the god.

The meaning of a scene in Greek tragedy rarely depends primarily on the role-playing and on the role changes that a character makes on stage. The reverse is true for old comedy. It is not surprising, then, that Euripides makes extraordinary use of what were primarily comic techniques in stage business to illuminate and help the audience to interpret the changes of costume and movement in the *Bacchae*.[12] Cadmus and Tiresias gracelessly but sensibly accept the worship of the god by donning his fawnskin and *thyrsus* and adopting a hobbling dance. The "comedy" of this scene centers on their fussy concern to play their new roles correctly. As often in comedy the theatrical point lies in the lack of correspondence between inner and outer, the state of mind and body and the costume and movement. The dramatic juxtaposition between the identical movements of the graceful and authentic chorus and the decrepit old men as worshippers of the god might be compared, from the point of view of theatrical effect, to a scene like that in the *Thesmophoriazusae* between Agathon, Euripides

[12] Throughout Euripides' work there is a contrast between the comic and serious possibilities of role change. In the *Helen*, for example, Menelaus is restored from a ship-wrecked and almost comic nobody into an Homeric hero; simultaneously, Helen changes to mourning garb, a deception which leads to a symbolic remarriage between the two long-separated spouses. Control of costume change, or the use of role changes for deliberate deception, typically leads to a festive and rejuvenating outcome. In contrast, when Heracles' children put on mourning garments, the change of costume has serious implications, entrapping the characters in a larger pattern of action beyond their control and ironically anticipating the later sacrifice of the children by Heracles. Such costume change is relatively rare in Greek tragedy, however, and is generally reserved for climactic moments. In contrast costume change becomes the basis for the entire dramatic action in the *Bacchae*, and "comic" costume techniques are used for the first time in a play which has a disastrous outcome.

and Euripides' kinsman. The kinsman is too crude and masculine to adopt comfortably the female dress that the effeminate Agathon wears very naturally as an inspiration to his dramatic poetry. His inability to play the role is prophetic of his failure to maintain his disguise in the women's assembly and exposes Euripides' weakness as a dramatist; Aristophanes' own disguised heroes—like Dionysus in this play—have no trouble duping their victims. Cadmus, too, finally finds himself facing the tragic rather than the comic implications of his opportunistic (333–37) conversion to the god.

The same ludicrous fussing over Dionysiac costume is, of course, repeated in the terrible scene in which Pentheus tries awkwardly to rearrange his costume with the help of Dionysus. The king parodies the god. The visual effect is comparable to the confrontation between Heracles and Dionysus at the beginning of the *Frogs*. The fat and ludicrous god, dressed in an effeminate saffron robe, tragic buskins and a lionskin comes face to face with the original he is trying to impersonate, Heracles. Here we laugh as well at the inability of a divinity to carry off the kind of role change Aristophanes' comic heroes usually accomplish without difficulty. The Dionysus of the *Frogs* thinks that the costume gives him courage; instead it exposes his pretenses to true divinity and his cowardice. Pentheus' change of costume reveals his human limits; in imitating the god he does not acquire, as he expects, extraordinary powers over his environment, but the cerements of death (see 857–59 and 1156–57)[13] Only the smiling god of the *Bacchae* can change with sinister ease from divine to human and back, in all probability without even a change of costume (see section III).

In the case of the comic hero, the voluntary transformation of self through costume is a form of temporary control over circumstances not subject in reality to the force of the individual's desires or actions. Cadmus and Tiresias try to make such a "comic" accommodation to phenomena beyond rational control; by being willing to "act" they can accept the god while retaining their identities. They are simultaneously actors/worshippers and spectators. The mad Pentheus retains no such comic distance from and perspective on his role. To worship Dionysus—or to be a comic hero—is to adopt a temporary change of role, and to receive in exchange participation in a boundary-transcending experience. Euripides, by adopting stage techniques from old comedy, can evoke in the minds of the audience expectations it has about comic role playing—the ways in which

[13] But see Dodds' commentary on πιστὸν Ἄιδαν in 1157.

costume change can be used to expose the ignorance or the pretension of the hero's enemies, or to express the power, however temporary, of the hero's imagination over reality. In comedy we laugh at this exposure of ignorance or manipulation of reality because the characters are grotesque and the consequences are minimal, temporary, and certainly not deadly. In the *Bacchae* the identical theatrical techniques expose with accelerating horror the tragic inadequacy of man to understand and control either himself or his environment. Dionysiac madness becomes the dark double of comic befuddlement.

II

Dionysus' Festival

Euripides marks the events leading up to and following the death of Pentheus, beginning from Dionysus' transformation of Pentheus into a maenad, and ending with the return of Agave with the head of her son, with three stages suggestive of a ritual pattern, *pompê*, *agôn*, *kômos*. As we shall see, this pattern of events was used by contemporary Athenians to describe the stages of a festival, very probably including the dramatic festival at which the *Bacchae* was presented as part of the worship of Dionysus. Thus, the ritual language of the play urges us, I will argue, to think of Dionysus as presenting to Thebes a final demonstration of his divinity which is a primitive equivalent of the sophisticated mixture of tragedy and comedy through which he was worshipped in the theatrical festivals of Athens.

In lines 964–65, after Pentheus has been costumed as a maenad and is fully mad, Dionysus offers to be Pentheus' escort, or *pompos*, to the contests, *agônes*, ahead:

> τοιγάρ σ' ἀγῶνες ἀναμένουσιν οὓς ἐχρῆν.
> ἕπου δέ· πομπὸς [δ'] εἶμ' ἐγὼ σωτήριος,
>
> therefore, the necessary contests await you.
> Follow, and I shall go as your escort and protector,

This same vocabulary is used several times in the following scene. In 1047 the messenger says of Dionysus: ξένος θ' ὃς ἡμῖν πομπὸς ἦν θεωρίας ("and the stranger who was escort in our mission"). Pentheus is being led by the god to a *theôria*, a word which can mean

embassy, the experience of being a spectator, or spectacle, such as those presented at the theater or the games. The same is true in 829: *οὐκέτι θεατὴς μαινάδων πρόθυμος εἶ* ("you are no longer eager to be a spectator of the maenads").[14] In 974–76 Dionysus again speaks of the contest into which he is leading Pentheus:

> *τὸν νεανίαν ἄγω*
> *τόνδ' εἰς ἀγῶνα μέγαν, ὁ νικήσων δ' ἐγὼ*
> *καὶ Βρόμιος ἔσται. τἄλλα δ' αὐτὸ σημανεῖ.*
>
> . . . I am leading the youth
> to his great contest—and the winner shall be I
> and Bromios! The rest, the event itself will show.

In 1163–64 the chorus say of the "contest" in which Agave killed her son:

> *καλὸς ἀγών, χέρ' αἵματι στάζουσαν*
> *περιβαλεῖν τέκνου.*
>
> A fine contest, to embrace your child
> with a hand dripping with blood!

The *agôn* is followed by the triumphant return of Agave. She congratulates Dionysus for being *kallinikos* ("victorious," 1147; see also the chorus on the Cadmeian bacchants in 1161). The chorus reply with an invitation to a triumphal celebration—*δέχεσθε κῶμον εὐίου θεοῦ* ("so prepare to welcome the revel of the god of ecstasy," 1167)—and greet Agave as a fellow reveller: *ὁρῶ καί σε δέξομαι σύγκωμον* ("I see it, and shall accept you as a fellow reveller," 1172). Agave pronounces herself *makaira* and *eudaimôn* ("happy" and "blessed," 1180 and 1258) for her victories over the "beast." Yet the play ends with Agave beginning a new *pompê* (1381, *ὦ πομποί*—if the lines are not interpolated), as she proceeds, lamenting, into lonely exile.

When they appear in conjunction, the three terms *pompê*, *agôn*, *kômos* mean respectively a procession prior to a religious festival, the

[14] The translations of 829 and 1167 in this paragraph are mine, not Kirk's (see above, note 5).

contest(s) celebrated at such a festival, and the festive revelry which follows such contests.[15] George Thomson has called attention to the similarities between this pattern and the official language used to describe the first day of the City Dionysia, where the statue of Dionysus is brought from Eleutherae to rest, for the remainder of the festival, in the theater.[16] The same suggestion could be made for the theatrical festival as a whole, with its day of procession, followed by the poetic contests, and concluding with celebrations in honor of the victorious poet.[17] Finally, this pattern is inherent as well, as

[15] R. P. Winnington-Ingram (*Euripides and Dionysus* [Cambridge 1948] 24, note 3, and 128, note 2) suggests that the pattern *pompê*, *agôn*, *kômos* (*kallinikos*) is meant to refer to the Olympic games. The pattern does fit what we know of the games from ancient sources, both in the sequence and in the naming of the proceedings, and provides an apt conclusion for the contest of power, sometimes pictured in athletic terms (491, 800), between Dionysus and Pentheus. God and man, as Tiresias points out, share a desire for *timê* (319–21). At the same time specifically *poetic* inspiration behind the costuming of Pentheus which inaugurates these contests is emphasized in the use of the verb *ekmousoô* in 825: Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς ἐξεμούσωσεν τάδε.

[16] George Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens* (London 1940) 156–62. In the myth the Athenians at first resisted the god, but were smitten by a disease from which they freed themselves by manufacturing *phalloi* in honor of the god (Schol. Ar. *Ach.* 243). If Thomson were correct, both the festival pattern and the play would refer to the introduction of the god's worship into a city, but with varying results. Thomson finds the pattern *pompê*, *agôn*, *kômos* in the *Bacchae*, in the Spartan initiation ritual, and in tragedy (131–32, 180), although he does not try to explore the implications of his theory for a study of the play. The major difficulty with Thomson's theory is our ignorance about the order of events at the City Dionysia. On the general problem see A. W. Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 1) 63–66, and L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932, rep. Hildesheim 1966) 138–42. The law of Euegoros, quoted by Demosthenes, refers to a *pompê*, and a *kômos* which may well have occurred on the first day of the festival before the dramatic *agônes*, but after a series of performances in honor of various gods at their shrines and a sacrifice to Dionysus. Nevertheless, I am arguing here that Dionysus is introducing to Thebes a "primitive" or proto-theatrical festival, and that the pattern *pompê*, *agôn*, *kômos* is clearly the standard and most easily recognizable structural form for most Greek festivals. Thus Dionysus in the *Bacchae* could conflate the initial day of the Athenian City Dionysia with its introduction of the god, the larger festival, with its dramatic *agônes* followed by a celebration of the victorious poet, and comedy, with its comparable structural pattern, in a manner which could easily be recognized by the audience as an emerging version of the more complex and extended City Dionysia known to Athens. As I will also argue, Dionysus *introduces* his worship to Thebes through directing a "play" that could be interpreted as either a "comedy" or a "tragedy." For a more detailed treatment of the implications of treating the pattern *pompê*, *agôn*, *kômos* as festal, and of possible allusions to festivals other than the theatrical festivals, see my Harvard dissertation (noted above) and René Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré* (Paris 1972), especially 170–200.

[17] See Aristophanes *Ach.* 504 for *agôn* used of the theatrical contests at the Lenaia.

For *kallinikos* used to describe the victorious poet and his hero see *Ach.* 1227, 1228, 1231, 1233, and *Av.* 1764.

Francis Cornford has argued, in the language and structure of old comedy.[18] In the *Bacchae* Dionysus uses this "festival" or "comedy" in order to make the city of Thebes "see" his divinity. He costumes Pentheus, and brings him to a pre-arranged setting on the mountain as both spectator of and participant in an *agôn*. Both the maenads on the mountain (the doubles of their sisters in the chorus) and Pentheus begin as spectators dressed by the god, and then, at the god's command, become unwitting participants in a drama in which Pentheus is both mocked and "sacrificed" (934, 1114, 1127, 1135) by the god.[19] At the heart of the *agôn* lies Pentheus' vain and momentary recognition of his situation and his own disastrous errors of perception (*hamartiai*, 1120–21).[20] The episode closes with a *kômos* or celebration of the god's victorious creation shared by an "audience" (Agave and the chorus) whose minds are under the control of or dedicated to the god. Dionysus' revenge thus takes the form of a crude and terrifying "theater" or proto-theater in which Pentheus' death is—to the god—a divine joke, in which his *anagnôrisis* is fruitless, and in which the spectator has become an actor in a spectacle he cannot control.

The plots of myths about Dionysus' introduction of his worship to new cities can end happily or disastrously.[21] Those who accept the

[18] *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (Cambridge 1934). Regardless of the truth of Cornford's theory about the origins of comedy, this vocabulary was actually used in old comedy, and an analysis of the regularities of comic structure along these lines is both more productive and more convincing than it is in tragedy. See A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, 2nd ed. rev. by T. B. L. Webster (Oxford 1962) 194–229.

[19] See Dodds on 963 for a possible hint of Pentheus' role as a scapegoat. A sacrifice to Dionysus took place on the first day of the theatrical festival (a bull) and perhaps originally a goat was also sacrificed on the *thymelê* in the theater. See Walter Burkert, "Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 87–121, for an interesting argument about the relation between the original sacrifice in the theater and the dramatic sacrifices in Greek tragedy.

[20] Dionysus insists that Pentheus and Thebes must *learn* of his divinity (39, 657, 1345; on *amathia* see 480 and 490). It is unclear precisely *what* Pentheus recognizes in his final moments, or what he means by his *hamartiai* (1121), a failure to recognize Dionysus' divinity, a failure to know who he was (506), or simply a failure to know what he was getting himself into due to his madness. See Dodds' commentary on this passage.

[21] Ann Burnett, in "Pentheus and Dionysus: Host and Guest," *CP* 65 (1970) 26 ff., gives examples of Dionysiac myths where the god is accepted immediately and with happy results. In the longer *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, for example, the sailors who fail to recognize the god suffer metamorphosis, while the steersman, who does, receives *eudaimonia*. Burnett argues that Dionysus, up to line 810, gives Pentheus a fair chance—unique in tragedies of divine revenge—to recognize the god's divinity and receive his blessings. For a more extensive treatment of Dionysiac myths, see M.

god are blessed with *eudaimonia*; those who reject him are punished with madness and a deadly metamorphosis. Euripides retains this possibility of a "comic" or "tragic" outcome in the early scenes of the *Bacchae*. Dionysus will punish Pentheus only if he insists on resisting the god (50 ff.); he and his adherents argue that accepting the god means wine, festival and release from care. The similarities in the language of the early choral odes of the *Bacchae* and the comic chorus of Eleusinian initiates in the *Frogs* are for this reason not surprising.[22] As in comedy the god offers to Thebes the possibility of temporary regeneration through a reversal of normal social and political categories. An apparently powerless outsider, he confronts an opponent who is in some sense his "powerful" double, and destroys the enemy of festive pleasure with mockery. By being granted temporary control over reality the comic or "trickster" hero—like the god in this play—uses his ability to transform his and others' identity, and his ability to manipulate language, costume and theatrical illusion to bring the world into harmony with his aspirations.[23] The chorus welcome the return of the mad Agave, now a successful hunter rather than a mere woman (1167). In comedy the same gesture might well have resulted in a shared celebration between the city and the rejuvenated protagonist. But in the *Bacchae* the smiling god alone successfully completes a "comic" action, as he celebrates through the returning Agave a triumphant *kômos* (1167). Cadmus and Tiresias also make what at first appears to be the "comic" adjustment to Dionysiac festival, and shrug off old age in dance. But Pentheus, by resisting the god, inverts a potentially comic outcome. He is destroyed while enacting what might be termed a parody of a comic plot. The comic hero transforms himself to succeed in his desires and to

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Massenzio, "Cultura e crisi permanente; la 'xenia' dionysiaca," *SMSR* 40 (1969) 27–113. As his analysis shows, even immediate acceptance of the god usually leads to the sacrifice of the figure who introduces his viticulture.

[22] See *Frogs* 326–29 and *Bacchae* 80 and 106–07; *Frogs* 345–47 and the Cadmus/Tiresias scene; *Frogs* 333–34, 376, 394, and 410 and *Bacchae* 160–61; *Frogs* 346 and *Bacchae* 380–81. In Thucydides 2.38 Pericles describes the function of Athens' festivals as: Καὶ μὴν καὶ τῶν πόνων πλείστας ἀναπαύλας τῇ γνώμῃ ἐπορισάμεθα, ἀγῶσι μέν γε καὶ θυσίαις διετησίοις νομίζοντες . . . ,ὧν καθ' ἡμέραν ἡ τέρψις τὸ λυπηρὸν ἐκπλήσσει. Burnett (above, note 21) 27 stresses that Dionysus offers to Thebes a civilized public cult, which reverts to a dangerous and primitive form on the mountain only when the women were attacked.

[23] For discussions of the comic or trickster hero in old comedy and elsewhere see Cedric Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), and Leo Salingar, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge 1974). Dionysus also shares the *ponêria* and deceptiveness of the trickster hero. Even those who join in the hero's fantasies, like Cadmus, do not always end by sharing his festive victory.

save his city heroically. Pentheus abandons his plans to don armor and fight for his city in favor of satisfying his personal curiosity; at the same time he interprets his dressing as a woman as heroic (961–62) and deserving of honor and celebration on his return (see 963–70). Pentheus becomes not a hero, but, as he feared when sane, an object of divine *gelôs* or mockery.[24]

Yet in the *Bacchae* precisely the same pattern of events is to the smiling god and his chorus a "comic" celebration of Pentheus' exposure and defeat as an enemy to festival, and to the appalled second messenger and to Pentheus' family an occasion for tragic pity and lament. Once the god has left the field of human action, Pentheus' fruitless *anagnôrisis* (1113; 1120–21) and the inability of the maddened participants to pity their victim can be read as an abortive tragic action. Agave reaches and survives the full tragic *anagnôrisis* of her error denied to Pentheus (ἄρτι μανθάνω, 1296) and accepts her fate, although she wishes never to see a *thyrsus* again (1381 ff.). She now sees the mask of Pentheus as human—the representation of her son and a cause for *penthos*, not bestial and a cause for triumph. Cadmus creates sympathy for Pentheus by recalling the past kindnesses of the overzealous youth to his grandfather (1381 ff.). The second messenger is Pentheus' first sympathetic defender in the play and the first besides Pentheus to champion the men of the city (1036, if the text is correct), who have hitherto been silent or converted to the god. He laments the literal fall (1111–13) of his king (see esp. 1024 ff.). The adjective *perissos*, formerly used of Pentheus (429), is now applied to Agave's revenge (1197). The implication of these final scenes seems to be that gods may impose patterns of action of man, but tragic meaning—the reading and experience of these events as fearful and pitiful—is created by a strictly human perspective.

In the *Bacchae*, then, Dionysus borrows from the language, plot structure and stage business of comedy to make his theatrical demonstration of his divinity. As a god who presided over both parts of the dramatic festivals, comedy and tragedy, he dissolves and transcends the boundaries between the comic and tragic genres and shows them

[24] Pentheus plans to mock the smiling god or his converts (286, 322, 1081, 1293), but ends up being mocked (250 [through Cadmus], 503, 842, 854). The same word, *gelôs*, suggests both laughter and scorn. Sacrificial and tragic victims may also be mocked, but here the combination of vocabulary (*gelôs* and *kômos*), the god's smiling mask, and the god's dramatic strategies suggest the idea, if not the tone of comedy, as well as the traditional disgrace of being ridiculed by one's enemies. I share a sense of the tone of these comic scenes with Bernd Seidensticker, "Comic Elements in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *AJP* 99 (1978) 303–20. See also Dodds, especially 192.

as parts of the same experience—that is, parts of a divinity whose nature is expressed primarily by his ability to collapse or fuse oppositions and limits. Dionysus makes his victims see with pleasure what the sane mind would experience as painful. Pentheus "would enjoy seeing what causes" him "distress" (815); the mad Agave will think herself free from misfortune when she is actually supremely unfortunate (1259–62; see also 1232 as opposed to 1258). In a similar way the audience, trapped through comic/tragic irony and a partial identification with the god's cause (for we know that Pentheus is wrong), is torn between fear and horrified laughter at the king's delusions. Until the final scenes the god thus denies us clear access either to the comic laughter or to the tragic pity by which we control our theatrical experience.

Pentheus' terrifying transformation from spectator to spectacle shows in an extraordinarily theatrical form what it means to act or imitate—like all men—without full knowledge. The god, like the comic hero, never confuses presentation with reality; instead he controls reality through presentation. By using language on multiple levels and exploiting the physical accoutrements of theater and/or Dionysiac cult, he can manipulate and transform the world to create an upside-down festival world that does not operate by normal standards. The tragic hero, or, from the divine perspective, the "comic victim," is destroyed through his confinement to one level of language and sight. His imagination is limited by his own lack of self-knowledge, and the frame of the cultural order in which he exists. Pentheus insists that to believe in Dionysus he must see the god directly and at first hand, not indirectly and symbolically (the god shows himself to Pentheus in disguised form): *τὸν θεὸν ὁρᾶν γὰρ φῂς σαφῶς, ποῖός τις ἦν;* ("You say you actually *saw* the god? What was he like?"), he asks in 477. Or, in lines 501–02:

> *καὶ ποῦ 'στιν; οὐ γὰρ φανερὸς ὄμμασίν γ' ἐμοῖς.*
> *παρ' ἐμοί· σὺ δ' ἀσεβὴς αὐτὸς ὢν οὐκ εἰσορᾷς.*
>
> P: Well, where is he? He is not visible to my eyes.
> D: Here with me; but you, because of your impiety, do not behold him.

Pentheus repeatedly seems unable to see—or hear—the implications of the speeches, sounds or images presented to him.[25] At the same time he unconsciously responds to the god's message as he is finally lured to the mountain by a desire to see or spy upon the god's forbidden rites (811–15, 829, 838, 912, 916, 956, 1060–62); in fact he is never allowed, despite his wishes, to see the sacred activities of the maenads on the mountain (1060, 1075) until the moment of his death.

When Pentheus is finally costumed and maddened by Dionysus he comes on stage with a new and double vision. He sees two Thebes, two suns; he sees, as the god says, what he ought to see (924):

> καὶ ταῦρος ἡμῖν πρόσθεν ἡγεῖσθαι δοκεῖς
> καὶ σῷ κέρατα κρατὶ προσπεφυκέναι.
>
> You appear to lead on ahead of me as a bull
> and on your head horns seem to grow! (920–21)

Pentheus' ability to see only one level of reality continues in his state of madness; he simply substitutes the beast for the smiling mask.[26] His sight changes, and he has access to a vision of divinity unavailable to him before, but it brings no insight. He is unaware of the implications that this bestial image has for himself. He cannot, like the god, Tiresias, or the comic hero, "see" and control his transformation at the same time. By contrast, the chorus of believers cap this scene by evoking a *double* image of the god, impossible to normal human vision, as a beast with a smiling face or mask (*prosôpon*):

> φάνηθι ταῦρος ἢ πολύκρανος ἰδεῖν
> δράκων ἢ πυριφλέγων ὁρᾶσθαι λέων.
> ἴθ', ὦ Βάκχε, θηραγρευτᾷ βακχᾶν
> γελῶντι προσώπῳ περίβαλε βρόχον
> θανάσιμον ὑπ' ἀγέλαν πεσόν-
> τι τὰν μαινάδων.

[25] For excellent treatment of the language of sight in the play see Massenzio (above, note 11) 82–91. Among other points, he contrasts Dionysiac sight with Pentheus' narrower and more superficial desire to *spy*.

[26] It is unclear precisely what Pentheus sees here—the stranger and his double with horns (Dodds, 193), a stranger who is part man, part bull, or a bull whom he realizes is also the stranger, just as Agave refers to the head of Pentheus as that of an animal, but simultaneously shows her awareness of its humanity (1185–87; see Dodds, 224).

> Appear as a bull or a many-headed
> Snake or a fire-blazing lion to behold!
> Go, O Bacchus—around the hunter of Bacchants
> with a smiling face cast your noose:
> Under the deadly herd
> of maenads let him fall! (1018–23)

The language and action of the play demonstrate the god's divinity indirectly and symbolically and deny that we can adequately "see" Dionysus with human vision. The god can take any shape he wants (478), but is not fully visible to the human eye. In fact, even the chorus and the maenads on the mountain only hear, but do not see their god directly. He is a being who can successively or simultaneously appear as divine, animal and human. Pentheus defines the world through mutually exclusive antitheses and hierarchical relations. Man and woman, for example, are rigidly separate categories (822); each sex has its own sphere (217); one is subordinate to the other (786). Dionysus can simultaneously invert and subvert cultural categories: language, the roles of the sexes, classes and political hierarchy. To understand Dionysus is to understand that the order imposed on the world by human culture is arbitrary, and the permanent potential for a reversal or collapse of this order exists. Hence in the *Bacchae* the same words or symbols can have apparently incompatible connotations in the minds of supporters or opponents of the god, or at two different dramatic moments. *Sophia*, *sophos* and *to sophon*, for example, mean something entirely different to Tiresias or the chorus as defenders of the god, and to Pentheus as a defender of the cultural order; the chorus uses these terms in so many seemingly incompatible contexts that we lose any certainty of what the term means to the god's worshippers (see especially 655–56, 480; 203, 825, 1190; 395, 877=897, 1005). A *thyrsus* may at one point be a magic wand providing food and sustenance, at another point a weapon; at a third point this symbol of Dionysus' power loses its force and must be regarlanded (1054–55). Pentheus fails not only to see and interpret symbols, but he remains unaware or fatally resistant to the fact that linguistic signs can refer to more than one valid level of meaning at once. Unlike Dionysus (or the audience) he has no sense of irony or metaphor.

Dionysus and the chorus present to Thebes the possibility that Dionysiac festivals can express this potential for a reversal of the

cultural order in a controlled form; the play offers multiple demonstrations that the spectator who can understand reality (and especially divinity) through presentation retains distance and identity. The play or festival on the mountain is the "black" double of the play we have seen up to that point. The benign (*êpiôtatos*) god of theater can by implication present drama—and myths—as a part of the social and political life of the city; the terrible (*deinotatos*) god presides over comparable "festive" reversals of normality and identity outside the limits of the city and civilized control.[27] Thus, while Pentheus merely *imagines* that he "suffers terribly" (*πέπονθα δεινά*, 642) while dueling with the image created by the god, he is still safe; but on the mountain he is utterly destroyed. The first messenger speech gives Pentheus the precise scenario for his own death and a chance—by learning through presentation—to avoid it; here animals, not humans, are sacrificed.[28] The initial debates (*agônes*) between man and god become Pentheus' hopeless struggles (*agônes*) on the mountain. The maenads literally see the king as a beast and tear him apart; unlike the chorus they become with Pentheus actors in the play, not spectators of the action. By contrast, the chorus—as spectators—simply *imagine* Pentheus as a beast; in the fourth stasimon, where they envisage Pentheus' death—they participate, but indirectly, in the god's revenge on Pentheus. Finally, the chorus' single-minded and pitiless identification with the god's "play" is not that of the audience of Euripides' play, for that audience has access in the final scenes to a double reading of the god's drama that encompasses both a divine ("comic") and human ("tragic") reading of the same events.

In Plato's *Symposium* (223d3–9) Socrates argues with Aristophanes and Agathon that tragedy and comedy could be written by the same man. Socrates is presumably championing an unlikely cause.[29] Yet

[27] As René Girard (above, note 16) 181 says of the *Bacchae*, "la tragédie . . . ramène la fête à ses origines violentes, à la violence reciproque."

[28] Dodds (169) suggests that the traditional story of the herdsmen and the maenads would have been celebrated in ritual and dance. Dionysus' effect on the landscape is consistently presented in the play as comparable to that of a poet like Orpheus or Amphion, whose poetry is so powerful that it can move nature (see 561–64, 113–14, 726–27).

[29] Aristophanes in the *Frogs* suggests that the health and nature of one theatrical genre are inextricably linked with the other. A good comedy should contain, as the chorus of initiates say of their rites, a judicious mixture of seriousness and mockery (391 ff.). The poet was famous for making his own comedies out of parodies of Euripides (see especially Cratinus, fr. 307, where the poet mocks Aristophanes for his imitations of Euripides). Both poets use the figure of Dionysus to make implicit statements about the relation between genres, and to defend the value of dramatic poetry to the city (*Frogs* 1419, 1502).

Euripides, by allowing the god of theater to make his own theatrical demonstrations of divinity, reveals the common ground between apparently opposing genres, the shared preoccupation with human ignorance, pretension and lack of self-knowledge, with the relief from suffering and the exposure of the gap between man's godlike desires and his ability to achieve them.[30] In the *Bacchae* Dionysus brings drama to birth in Thebes as an experience and a form where boundaries are transgressed and cultural categories and oppositions are temporarily reversed or collapsed. Comedy allows its heroes to break the boundaries separating man and god, the socially encumbered individual and his heroic desires; its audiences revel—though harmlessly—in mockery, revenge, a delight in exposure and a free identification with its initially underdog protagonist. The god's "comedy" with its Dionysiac audience, the chorus, is in many ways a more terrifying form of the genre. Yet when the god has withdrawn from the level of human action to the machine, Euripides' tragedy frames and changes our perspective on the divine drama. The final scenes restore—or from the historical perspective create—the traditional boundaries between genres, and draw a sharp (and specifically tragic) line between man and god, the individual and his heroic aspirations, audience and protagonist, and between laughter and tragic pity.

III

Dionysus' Mask

In the prologue Dionysus announces that he will manifest himself to Thebes in human disguise and reveal himself as a god to the city. To do so he says he has put on a human *morphê* or *physis*. He redundantly emphasizes (lines 4–5 and 53–54) his donning of this human disguise.[31] Why, then, does Euripides make Dionysus draw

[30] Plato in the *Philebus* (48c–49c5) suggests in a very complex passage that tragedy and comedy are united by a concern with self-knowledge. Comic delusion is accompanied by weakness; ignorance in those who have the ability to retaliate is hateful and ugly. Pentheus' situation, as he moves from "strength" to weakness, falls uncomfortably between the hateful and the ridiculous; the god's apparent "comic weakness" at first obscures a hateful strength.

[31] No scholar has in my view convincingly explained away this redundancy on textual grounds. C. W. Willink, "Some Problems in the *Bacchae* I," *CQ* 16 (1966) 30–31, follows Bernhardy, although he too admits there are no strong linguistic grounds for condemnation. "To defend 53–54 is to believe that Euripides spoilt his own elaborate structure (of the prologue), and that, too, with a doubly tautologous couplet (repeating 4), introduced by a repetitive conjunction, following a clause which it could not

our attention to this point? Presumably some visual confusion about the god and his costume must be made clear to the audience. Using the aorist participle the god says he has "put on" mortal shape (4). The use of the aorist followed by a main verb in the present tense (5) suggests that the actor appears on stage already "disguised" as mortal, yet we are also required to accept this figure as a god, Dionysus:

> I have come, the son of Zeus, to this land of the Thebans, I, Dionysus. (1–2)

Yet does this figure with the smiling mask (smiling as we know from lines 439 and 1021) look mortal? While we know little of tragic masking conventions in the fifth century B.C. we can safely presume that most masks in tragedy were not smiling.[32] Moreover, gods, while they regularly appear in prologues and epiphanies, rarely dominate the *praxis* of tragedies. This is not true of tragedies about Dionysus, where the god is traditionally presenting his divinity to those who have not yet recognized him. Yet the continual presence of this divine smile on the level of human action was not so commonplace as to have lost its freshness as an image expressive of the gulf between god and man.[33] The smiling mask is unlikely to have been an Euripidean innovation, although the masks of other gods in Greek tragedies are never described in the text as smiling. The smiling mask was most probably a convention for deities—or for Dionysus alone—whose significance no playwright before Euripides—in so far as we know—took the opportunity to call our attention to and develop so explicitly.

Dodds explains the textual redundancy here as the playwright's means "of making it quite clear to the audience that the speaker, whom they accept as a god, will be accepted as a man by the people

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logically follow." My point is that the repetition is meant to be functional and emphatic.

[32] For the scanty evidence concerning fifth-century as opposed to later tragic masks see Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 1) ch. 4. Even in the fourth century the more stylized masks of the principal tragic or even upper class comic characters are never described or pictured in art as smiling. There are no other direct references to masks in classical tragedy, and even in comedy it is difficult to abstract precise information on the nature of masks from texts.

[33] For further helpful comments on the god's smiling mask see especially Thomas Rosenmeyer, *The Masks of Tragedy* (Austin 1963) 106–10, Felix Wasserman, "Die Bakchantinnen des Euripides," *NJW* 5 (1929) 274, and Dodds 439.

on stage."[34] Dionysus thus enters the play poorly disguised as human in the fashion of Homeric gods or the testing god of folk-tale.[35] His mask is not (and perhaps this is true of his costume as well), by the conventions of Greek tragedy, human. Therefore, simply by his costume he manifests his godhead, his unhumanness to the audience. The tragic irony for which the play is justly famous has a visual level. That is, the audience sees by his mask that the stranger is a god, but Pentheus has no such theatrical cues by which to recognize him. The audience is being asked to be self-conscious about a costume and a theatrical convention. To sum up then, for the audience Dionysus' mask represents smiling divinity in human disguise, for the characters, a man. One mask represents two meanings in a manner that captures the central irony of the dramatic action.

John Jones has eloquently argued in *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* that the ancient mask was meant to be a fully adequate means of representing character:[36] unlike the modern mask ancient tragic masks "did not owe their interest to further realities lying behind them, because they declared the whole man." In accordance with this convention, the Greek tragic audience should not be required to "peer behind the mask and demand of the actor that he shall cease merely to support the action, and shall begin to exploit the mask in the service of inwardness." When "the mind's construction" cannot be found in the face, masking becomes pointless. Jones' argument concerning the identity between mask and character for the ancient playwright is confirmed not only by most of the tragic practice of Aeschylus and Sophocles (such characters as Aeschylus' Clytemnestra are possible exceptions), but by post-fifth-century visual representations of poets who are shown composing while looking at masks.[37] Jones argues that Euripides' career is uniquely marked by a whole range of "mask-piercing" and "mask-exploiting" effects which challenge the ancient masking convention. Euripides "pierces" masks by creating conflicts between a character's internal state and his role in the action of the drama. Thus, Hippolytus' tongue swears, but his

[34] Dodds in his note on 53–54 also includes the views of previous commentaries.

[35] See H. J. Rose, "Divine Disguisings," *HTR* 49 (1956) 63 ff., on divine disguisings in Homer, and Burnett (above, note 21) 24–25 on the theme in the *Bacchae*.

[36] The following paragraph summarizes aspects of the argument made by Jones in *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1962) 45–46 and 270.

[37] For an excellent treatment of this issue with examples from art see T. B. L. Webster, "The Poet and the Mask," in *Classical Drama and its Influence: Essays Presented To H. D. F. Kitto* (London 1965) 5–13. Quintilian (11.3.73) says that skilled speakers borrow their emotions from masks, and Aristophanes also suggests that costumes can be a comparable form of inspiration for poetic composition (*Ach.* 411–12 and *Thes.* 97 ff.).

mind remains unsworn (*Hipp.* 612). The mad Pentheus' willingness to dress as a woman reveals an unkingly temperament. That is, "the mind's construction" is no longer fully to be found in the face or mask that the actor presents on stage. In the case of Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, however, the playwright moves away from such "mask-piercing" effects characteristic of his earlier work—that is, the exploitation of the action in the "service of inwardness" that comes close to undermining the tragic masking convention—to make the most original "mask-exploiting" gesture of his career. As we have said, by convention a tragic mask represents one character and one meaning. Yet Euripides has called our attention to the fact that the smiling mask of the god represents different identities to characters and audience. In addition, as the action of the play continues, the precise nature of what the mask represents to the audience becomes increasingly ambiguous. Certainly it continues to "represent" divinity to the audience. Yet the visual effect of the smiling mask has the same doubleness as the language of the play itself. The *eudaimonia* promised by the chorus to the adherents of Dionysiac religion is horribly ironic when the same term is applied to Agave on her return from the mountain after her destruction of her son (1258). Similarly, the god's mask remains smiling, but the visual effect of this smile does not remain consistent. The smile of the "gentle" stranger seems, from the human vantage point, to turn by the end of the play to a divine sneer, a ghoulish expression of inappropriate glee at a vengeance too easily executed. In short, Dionysus' mask, by becoming ambiguous, comes to owe its interest not simply to what it formally represents in a way characteristic of the normal tragic masking convention, but to "the further realities lying behind it," the invisible forces that unite the benign and destructive aspects represented by the single sign of the god's smiling mask. The mask, then, represents the god to the audience, misrepresents him to the characters and, as we will now see in more detail, in the final scene the mask must be interpreted as an artifact or symbol representing the god, or as much as we, or the characters, can ever visually and directly experience of him.

Pentheus in his final mad scene with Dionysus sees double, two suns and two Thebes. The audience also sees double in this scene, although in a different way. On stage are two figures wearing long robes, two wigs of long curls, two figures carrying the same Dionysiac

paraphernalia.[38] The sacrificial victim of the god—here his contemporary and his cousin—has visually become almost the ritual double he often seems to have been in religious and literary tradition. The god wears his costume and his ambivalent sexuality with sinuous grace and authenticity. The human figure pathetically parodies the divine in costume and movement; as often in comedy, the feminine image is imperfectly imposed on the masculine. Pentheus finds it awkward to assimilate what he has so long resisted. It is the masks of the two figures that remain for the audience most markedly different—one smiling and hence inhuman, the other presumably unsmiling and by tragic convention, human. At this pivotal moment in the play we set the divine smile of the god Dionysus against the mask of Pentheus the man. The presentation of the two masks isolated side by side against the similarity of the costumes visually anticipates in its significance the staging of the final scene, the total split between man and god, which becomes so poignant when in typically Euripidean fashion (cf. the *Hippolytus*) the characters are left to mourn with newly clarified vision while the god looks down from above. The smiling mask of the god suddenly retains no aspect of benignity, if indeed it ever had any before, beside the mask of the doomed and mortal Pentheus. Euripides has brilliantly exploited a poetic device known from Homer onwards—Homer with his two worlds, one of inviolable and often comic gods, the other of struggling and mortal men. *Iliad* I, for example, puts the two gatherings of men and gods, one dissolving into anger and disaster, the other into laughter, into deliberate juxtaposition.[39] The visual juxtaposition of the masks here also becomes a precise theatrical expression of the division between divine and human nature that lies at the heart of the play.

The mortal Pentheus survives in the *Bacchae* solely as the mask the character represents in Greek theatrical convention. For the

[38] The god and his victim are mythological doubles for each other; the victim dies in place of the god, and the god thus appears to escape death. (See H. Hubert and M. Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W. D. Halls [London 1964] 144 ff.) For futher examples in Greek myth of such doubling see J. P. Guépin, *The Tragic Paradox* (Amsterdam 1968), and for a discussion of its possible anthropological and tragic significance see René Girard (above, note 16) chs. 5 and 6. It is difficult to tell how similar the costumes of Dionysus and Pentheus would have been here. They both almost certainly wore long robes and fawnskins, and probably *kothurnoi*. Both have long hair, although Pentheus is poorly confined in a *mitra*. In Ar. *Frogs* (46) and Pollux (4.116–17) Dionysus wears the *krokôtos*, a garment emphasizing his feminine side, and to the audience, his divinity, but we cannot be certain of this in the *Bacchae*. If both Dionysus' and Pentheus' costume were saffron, the audience as well as Pentheus would see "two suns," two brilliant yellow costumes moving side by side.

[39] There is a similar contrast in *Iliad* 21 between the comic battle of the gods and the battlefield of men.

audience the mask remains Pentheus' own despite his transformation by Dionysus in other respects, and finally it returns unchanged to the stage impaled on Agave's *thyrsus*. Only to the mad Agave does Pentheus' mask temporarily appear that of a lion, the victim of the glorious god and herself. (The text emphasizes this issue of the temporary distortion of what the mask represents by the use of the word *prosôpon*, 1277.)[40] The conventional identification between the tragic figure and his mask formally corresponds to his dramatic situation. He cannot completely step outside of or internally withdraw from and control his character or his fate; he is strictly human. As Euripides' staging brilliantly demonstrates, the tragic character *is* his mask, and is ultimately limited in the action to what his mask represents. By contrast, gods are not limited to representing one character, one role, one place in the family, society and universe. They manipulate roles with a freedom found only in comedy, where the character's mask may, as here, represent contradictory identities to the audience and the characters on stage. By reducing Pentheus to his tragic mask, and by allowing Dionysus to exploit his mask in an extraordinary way, Euripides demonstrates through theatrical convention the nature of the division between god and man.

Dionysus appears in his final epiphany no longer "disguised" as the stranger. Given the rarity of costume change in Greek tragedy, I am assuming with the majority of commentators here that the god wears the same mask and costume throughout the play.[41] At this point the audience has lost the superior position it had—in the form we call tragic irony—over Pentheus. The smiling mask now represents a divinity to both characters and audience. In the prologue the god tells us that he has put on a mortal shape and will make him manifest to Thebes in a disguised human—that is, indirect form. Yet finally, when it has become clear to us that Dionysus can only be "seen" or

[40] Agave's envisioning of Pentheus' mask as a lion is what Jones would call a "mask-piercing" effect, for she now apprehends, like the chorus, the bestial side of her son, the inner self that was at odds with his outer role. Yet her sane vision restores his humanity.

[41] It is always possible that Dionysus changed his mask and/or costume in the final scenes, to appear as, for example, the Zeus-like uneffeminate divinity of all but the most recent vase paintings. Others have made similar speculations on Dionysus' appearance in the scene where Pentheus sees the god as a bull or, for example, on the mask of Oedipus after his blinding in the *O.T.* On the other hand, as we cannot prove that mask change ever occurred in Greek tragedy, and because mask change without a highly stylized system of masks would probably be confusing to an audience, it is safe, and probably safer, to assume that it did not occur here or elsewhere in fifth-century tragedy (even in comedy the disguised characters appear to change costume, not masks). [Certainly if the smiling mask was the (or a) conventional one for Dionysus, there would be no need for him to change masks when he appeared as a god.]

apprehended symbolically and indirectly by the theatrical means common to Dionysiac religion and Greek theater, he simply appears before us, and before a city which has returned to sanity, in his divine form in the epiphany. By theatrical convention, we are asked to accept the *deus-ex-machina* as an adequate and direct visual representation of the god. And as an audience, at least, we have never ceased to see the god's mask as divine. Yet the message of the action of the play is in tension with this final representation of the god. The action demonstrates the god's divinity indirectly and symbolically and denies that we can adequately "see" Dionysus with human vision. We can thus accept Dionysus' appearance in the epiphany as true to what we have come to understand about the god only if we consciously see the god's face as a *mask*, that is a theatrical or symbolic rather than a direct or "real" manifestation of the many-faceted divinity. As Jones suggests, Euripides here exploits to its limits the tragic masking convention. Euripides heightens the inscrutable effect of the god's epiphany by making his final appearance so gratuitous—an unnecessary addition to an already finished plot—and so puzzling in respect to the prophecies he makes to Thebes.[42] While we may "understand" that Dionysus is a god, and have come to realize with the protagonists a good deal more as well about how he must be grasped, we do not finally fully control this knowledge. The house of Cadmus, although it now accepts the god's divinity, faces yet further inhuman punishments. The play is for the audience also in a sense unfinished. The god makes clear that the repercussions of the events at Thebes will continue to be felt in Greece in the form of further barbarian incursions, reaching, by extension perhaps (here I rely primarily on the allusions to contemporary life in the choruses) even to fifth-century Athens.

By suggesting throughout the action of the play that we have access to the god by theatrical means—through mask, costume, voice and music, or through illusion, symbol, and transformation—Euripides seems to make a strong claim for art's ability to represent a reality inaccessible to ordinary human sight. Thus, by means of the theatrical convention of a smiling mask (which is not human) the audience

[42] On this point see R. P. Winnington-Ingram (above, note 15) 144: the *deus-ex-machina* is "spectatular but empty." His appearance on the machine reserved for divinities, rather than on stage, emphasizes the division between god and man already clear in the death of Pentheus. From another perspective, of course, it allows the characters a few moments free of the influence of the god to lament and come to terms with their fates, and to question the excessive nature of the god's revenge (1346 and 1348). Perhaps Cadmus' unenthusiastic reaction to Dionysus' promise of the land of the blessed (μακάρων τ' ἐς αἶαν, 1339) for himself and Harmonia (1360–62), is a further ironic comment on Dionysiac promises of bliss. See Dodds on 1330–39 for a discussion of Dionysus' prophecies.

"sees" Dionysus' divinity as the characters at first cannot. Yet if one mask represents different identities to characters and audience, if the smile that marks the mask means both benignity and destruction, and finally, if the mask in the epiphany can only be understood as a sign that represents forces which are in fact not directly accessible to the eye, then the audience can only make sense of its theatrical experience if it becomes conscious of the god's mask as a mask in the modern rather than in the ancient tragic theatrical mode.[43] Dionysus' divinity in the *Bacchae* can be understood through this power to control representation. Euripides makes his anomalous "untragic" mask become the central mocking image of what we as men can understand of a force that cannot be fully captured by human vision.

[43] Dionysus was worshipped in Greek cult as a mask (among many examples the *kalpis* signed by Hypsis, *c.* 510 B.C. (ARV 30,2) is particularly appropriate for the *Bacchae*, in that it portrays the worship of the mask of Dionysus in both his benign and bestial incarnations). The final scenes of the *Bacchae* help to clarify precisely why the god was worshipped as a mask.