A COMPANION TO

TRAGEDY

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2
Tragedy and Dionysus

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In Athens of the classical period tragedy (as well as comedy and satyric drama) was performed at the theater of the god Dionysus, in his cult. A strong association of Greek drama with Dionysus persisted throughout antiquity, and it is virtually certain that drama also *originated* in Dionysiac cult. Myths were told about Dionysus, notably about his arrival in a new place where he was resisted by the local ruler, for example by Pentheus of Thebes. And yet, because most surviving tragedies and comedies dramatize stories that are not about Dionysus, it is legitimate to ask whether the cultic connection of Dionysus has any relevance to our understanding of the surviving plays. My answer – though not everybody will agree – is that it does.

The Genesis of Tragedy in Dionysiac Cult

Our most reliable source by far for the genesis of tragedy is the fourth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Though his testimony has been doubted, he could draw on research (now lost) into the early theater, and does indeed state (1449b37) that the process by which tragedy came into being is known. He makes three remarks of particular interest, that tragedy had an improvisatory beginning, that it came into being "from the leaders of the dithyramb," and that it developed *ek tou satyrikou* – that is, from something like the satyric drama. We should add the ancient tradition that, when the themes of tragedy ceased to be about Dionysus, it was decided that a satyr play was to be performed after each set ("trilogy") of three tragedies, i.e., to be a reminder of tragedy's humble origins. A satyr play was a boisterous drama, written by the author of the preceding tragedies, but with a chorus of satyrs – naked, hedonistic followers of Dionysus, with some equine characteristics. Only one satyr play survives complete, Euripides' *Cyclops*. The dithyramb was a hymn to Dionysus, probably once consisting of solo improvisation and choral refrain – sometimes sung by men dressed as satyrs – in a procession escorting Dionysus into the city.

To answer the question why it was the cult of Dionysus that produced tragedy, we must look not just at the main context for the performance of tragedy, the City Dionysia, but also at the other main polis festival of Dionysus at Athens, the "older Dionysia" (Thucydides 2.15.4), called Anthesteria. The City Dionysia (or "Great Dionysia") was – unlike the traditional Anthesteria – created or amplified as late as the sixth century BCE. The Anthesteria, a spring festival of Dionysus, seems to have derived its name from the Greek word for flower (*anthos*). It was a festival of the whole community of Athens, lasted three days, and included the opening and drinking of the new wine, as well as various other components. I will focus on five of these components.

The first component is that during this spring festival men and boys dressed up as (and wore the masks of) *satyrs*. This belonged to the hedonistic, wine-drinking aspect of the festival.

Second, it is likely that at some point in this festival Dionysus was escorted into the city, in a cart shaped like a ship, by satyrs playing pipes.

Third, Dionysus (whether impersonated, or in the form of an image) was united with the wife of the "king" archon (magistrate), in a "sacred marriage," as one element of female ceremonies that were celebrated in what was imagined to be the old royal dwelling, and that included mystic ritual, perhaps at the conclusion of the processional escort of Dionysus.

Fourth, these and other elements of the festival were associated with *myths*. For instance, the escort of Dionysus into the city was no doubt envisaged as a celebration or reenactment of his original arrival. The "sacred marriage" was seen as the union of Dionysus and Ariadne. The practice of drinking the new wine in silence and at separated tables was explained as a result of the hospitality once given at Athens to the polluted matricide Orestes. The story was told of Ikarios, who was given wine by Dionysus, gave it to his neighbors, and was killed by them because they became drunk and imagined that Ikarios had poisoned them. His daughter Erigone eventually found his body in a well, and hanged herself: the ritual of swinging at the Anthesteria was explained as propitiating her. And so on.

Fifth, the ritual was one in which, in a sense, the whole city took part (including children and slaves). This *inclusiveness* probably involved a sense of communality: collective wine-drinking may promote dissolution of distinctions, and in Euripides' *Bacchae* it is explicitly stated that Dionysus wants everybody to join in his worship, and "to be magnified while distinguishing nobody" (209).

Each of these five elements of the ancient Anthesteria contributed to the genesis of drama at another Dionysiac festival at Athens, the newly founded (or reorganized) City Dionysia, in the latter half of the sixth century BCE.

First, a precondition for drama is the *transformation of identity*, such as we find in the transformation of men and boys into satyrs at the Anthesteria, as well as predramatic (sixth-century) representations of *masks* of Dionysus. That boisterous performance by satyrs played an important role in genesis of tragedy is suggested, as we have seen, by Aristotle in the *Poetics*.

Second, with Aristotle's remark that tragedy arose from "the leaders of the dithyramb" (an originally processional hymn accompanying Dionysus), we should compare not only the *parodos* (entry-song) of Euripides' *Bacchae*, but also the processional entry of Dionysus at the Anthesteria, which was certainly musical (in the vase-paintings of the festival the satyrs are shown playing pipes) and, indeed, precisely the kind of ritual that the dithyramb originally accompanied. A fourth-century BCE Athenian (Phanodemos *FGrH* 325 F 12) tells us that in their songs and dances at the Anthesteria the Athenians addressed Dionysus as (among other titles) "Dithyrambos."

Third, the procession seems to have been associated with a myth, and with female *mystic ritual*. That female mystic ritual, which certainly involved transformation of identity, was an important factor in the genesis of satyric drama and of tragedy, I have argued elsewhere (Seaford 1994).

Fourth, the various rituals performed seem each of them to have been imagined as reenacting a mythical event. Moreover, the myths are *etiological* in that they explain why the ritual began to be performed. Similarly, tragedy reenacts myth, in particular, *etiological* myth of cult.

Fifth, tragedy, like the Anthesteria, is an institution of the polis and is addressed to the whole polis; and many tragedies seem to take the polis as a central theme.

Of course the combination of these five elements in the ancient Anthesteria was not sufficient to create drama. Something extra is required, which was supplied in the creation (or reorganization) – probably by the tyrants – of another Dionysiac festival (the City Dionysia) in the latter half of the sixth century BCE. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate what this something extra was. Suffice it here to say that whereas the ancient festival of the Anthesteria had long centered around a key moment in the agricultural year, the opening of the new wine, the new Dionysia was largely designed to serve a *political* end: the *display* of the strength and magnificence of Athens – to itself and to others. We should also note that the organization and coordination of the new urban festival was greatly facilitated at this time by the introduction into Attica of (recently invented) coined *money*: the universal power of money, deployed at a single center or even by a single individual, is especially good at coordinating a complex new initiative, and tends in our period to replace the less flexible power of barter and traditional observance.

It is implied by what I have said so far that the myths dramatized in the earliest tragedies were likely to have been about Dionysus, as indeed an ancient tradition states. There are two reasons why the cult of Dionysus could contain, as it did throughout the classical period, dramatic enactments of myths that had nothing to do with the god. The first is that the number of myths about Dionysus is relatively small, so that the demands of originality resulted – in dithyramb, in tragedy, and even in satyric drama – in the adoption of non-Dionysiac myth. The other is that Dionysiac cult seems early on to have had elements in common with another kind of cult, that held in honor of heroes, usually at their tombs and often involving lamentation. The similarity and potential for synthesis between the Dionysiac cult and hero-cult is exemplified by an instance which has, again, a political aim: in early sixth-century

Sikyon the cult of the Argive hero Adrastus contained "tragic choruses" about his sufferings, which the tyrant Kleisthenes transferred to Dionysus while transferring the rest of the cult to the hero Melanippus (Herodotus 5.67).

Of the very earliest tragedies – those attributed to the four tragedians older (it seems) than Aeschylus – we possess 18 titles, of which only two indicate myths about Dionysus. These are *Pentheus*, attributed to Thespis, and *Dymainai*, or *Karyatides*, attributed to Pratinas. *Dymainai* are said by the fifth-century AD lexicographer Hesychius to be choral *bacchae* (maenads, women performing cult for Dionysus) at Sparta. Heracleides of Pontus, who lived in the fourth century BCE, was accused by his contemporaryAristoxenos of forging plays by Thespis, but may have followed Thespis' titles. Two fragments (2, 4) with Dionysiac content, attributed to Thespis, may well be forgeries.

Tragedies about Dionysus

The first dramatist of whom we possess complete plays is Aeschylus (ca.525–456 BCE). The surviving titles of tragedies attributed to him number about sixty, of which two may well have been about myths involving Dionysus (*Athamas* and *Toxotides*), and seven certainly were: *Edonians*, *Bassarids*, *Neaniskoi*, *Bacchae*, *Pentheus*, *Semele*, and *Xantriai* ("Wool-carding Women").

The only certainly attested Aeschylean trilogy on a Dionysiac theme, consisting of *Edonians*, *Bassarids*, and *Neaniskoi*, dramatized the story of the arrival of Dionysus from the east to establish his cult in Thrace, where the local ruler Lycurgus resisted it. In the drama the maenads were imprisoned and miraculously liberated, and it seems that Lycurgus was maddened by Dionysus, killed his own son Dryas, mistaking him for a vine (a subject represented in several vase-paintings), and was punished by Dionysus, probably by being taken off to imprisonment in Mount Pangaion so as to cure the land of sterility.

It is possible that only the resistance to Dionysus occurred in *Edonians* and that his punishment was dramatized in *Bassarids*, but it is more likely that resistance and punishment both occurred in *Edonians*, like the resistance of Pentheus and his punishment by Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Indeed, *Edonians* resembles Euripides' *Bacchae* (the only surviving tragedy about Dionysus) not only in its plot but also – to judge from its few surviving fragments – in detail, notably in the king's taunting interrogation of the captive Dionysus as effeminate (fr. 61) and in the Dionysiac shaking of the king's house (fr. 58).

If both resistance and punishment were dramatized in *Edonians*, what was the theme of *Bassarids*? The title refers to Thracian maenads, who were sent by Dionysus to dismember Orpheus. This was almost certainly the theme of the play. And of all the various reasons given for this punishment of Orpheus, the most likely to have occurred in this drama is the one contained in the reconstructed Chapter 24 of Eratosthenes' *Katasterisms*:

> Having gone down to Hades for his wife, and seen what things were like there, Orpheus no longer honoured Dionysus, by whom he had been made famous, but regarded the sun as the greatest of the gods, and called him Apollo. And so Dionysus was angry and sent the Bassarids against him, as Aeschylus the tragic poet relates, . . .

This has been argued in detail by M. L. West (1983). I add only that it is worth asking why experience of the underworld turned Orpheus into a devotee of the sun. The answer is, I think, provided by the amazing light that frequently marks the unforgettable transition from anxiety to joy for the mystic initiand, as it does also in the modern near-death experience. This light was, in mystery-cult, sometimes envisaged as the sun (cf., e.g., Aristophanes *Frogs* 155, 454–5). Mystery-cult was a rite of passage that had to be kept secret from the world at large: it often involved the imagined death of the initiate as a rehearsal for real death, as well as transition from ignorance to knowledge and from anxiety to joy. At *Bacchae* 629–30, in a passage full of correspondences with mystic initiation, Dionysus makes a "light" (this is the word in the manuscript, which scholars have mistakenly altered) which Pentheus *attacks* – an extreme expression of the individualistic obstinacy of his resistance to mystery-cult. And Sophocles, perhaps influenced by Aeschylus, made Lycurgus "put out . . . the fire" (*Antigone* 964). Orpheus is in myth associated with both Dionysus and Apollo. His choice of the sun (Apollo) implies its superiority to the mystic light of Dionysus.

The theme of the third drama in the trilogy (*Neaniskoi*, "Young men") is unknown. M. L. West argues that, given that Dionysus has destroyed his enemies, balance has finally to be restored by honoring Orpheus and Apollo. Perhaps cult was founded in their honor.

Of the four remaining titles of Aeschylean tragedies about Dionysus (see above), at least one may have been an alternative title (e.g., *Bacchae* may have been the same play as *Pentheus* or *Bassarids*). If so, then Aeschylus may have written only one other trilogy on Dionysiac myth, for instance, in the order *Semele*, *Xantriai*, *Pentheus*. Such a trilogy would, it seems, have told of the pregnancy and death of Semele (along with the birth of Dionysus), disbelief of Semele's story of union with Zeus, Dionysus' sending of Theban women in a frenzy to Mount Kithairon, and the resistance and punishment of Pentheus, i.e., the events leading up to and including the theme of Euripides' *Bacchae*. Although almost nothing survives from these plays, we do know that it contained the appearance of Hera (fr. 168) – as enemy of Semele and of Dionysus – and of Lyssa (Frenzy) inspiring maenads (fr. 169); and it is likely that those who touched the belly of the pregnant Semele were thereby possessed by the god (Schol. Ap. Rhod. 1. 636).

The birth of Dionysus, accompanied by thunder and lightning, must have been a remarkable event, even if in Aeschylus' drama only narrated. It was a myth closely associated with (and indeed probably experienced in) a ritual – initiation into the Dionysiac mysteries – and hence was a common theme of the dithyramb. It plays a prominent part in Euripides' *Bacchae*: it is mentioned by Dionysus in line 3, and in 6–12 he mentions Semele's tomb converted into a shrine, together with the royal

house destroyed (along with Semele) by the "still-living flame" of Zeus; the same myth is then narrated in the dithyrambic entry-song of the maenads (88–95); and when Dionysus later makes his epiphany with the destruction of the royal house by earthquake, thunder, and lightning, in a passage full of evocations of mystic initiation, Semele's tomb flares up again with "the flame that once Zeus's hurled thunder left" (598–9, 623–4). We are reminded of the most substantial fragment surviving from Aeschylus' *Edonians* (57), apparently from the (again, dithyrambic) entry-song of the Dionysiac chorus, in which there is mention of voices resembling roaring bulls from some invisible place, and the frightening sound of drums as of thunder under the earth (Seaford 1996: 155, 195–8).

Other Aeschylean titles of plays in which Dionysus may have been involved (if only by narration) are *Toxotides* ("Archeresses") and *Athamas*. *Toxotides* was about Actaeon, torn to pieces by his own hounds on Mount Kithairon. Actaeon is the cousin of Pentheus, who was torn apart by "hounds of Frenzy" (Euripides *Bacchae* 977; Seaford 1996: 230) in exactly the same place as Actaeon (Euripides *Bacchae* 1291). Actaeon's crime is, in the oldest attested version, not that he saw Artemis bathing (later frequently attested), but that he desired to take his aunt, Semele, as a wife. Several later texts associate him with Pentheus, in one case as an enemy of Dionysus. All this, together with various other considerations (Kossatz-Deissman 1978: 142–65), suggests that Dionysus may have had a role in the dramatized myth. Intriguingly, the drama is mentioned as one of those in which Aeschylus is said to have profaned the mysteries (Radt 1985: 63). These may well have been the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter, but may conceivably have been those of Dionysus. Given the use of the mirror in the mysteries of Dionysus, which is probably alluded to in Euripides' *Bacchae* (Seaford 1996: 223), it is of interest that Actaeon was said to have seen his horned head reflected in water shortly before his death.

The plot of Aeschylus' *Athamas* is unknown. In one of the myths in which Athamas is involved, he, together with his wife Ino, brings up the infant Dionysus, with the result that Hera drives them both mad and they destroy their own children. It is not impossible that this was the theme of Aeschylus' *Athamas*.

Sophocles wrote a *Hydrophoroi* ("Water-carriers"; no doubt describing the chorus), which – given that an alternative title of Aeschylus' *Semele* was *Hydrophoroi* – may have been about Semele giving birth to Dionysus. And he may have written a *Bacchae* (Radt 1977: 170), of which nothing survives.

Of Euripides the only known play on a Dionysiac theme is his *Bacchae*, which survives almost entirely complete. This text, which has been hugely influential both in antiquity and since the Renaissance, is by far our fullest source for Dionysiac cult in the classical period. It dramatizes the resistance of Pentheus to the new cult of Dionysus, his imprisonment of the god, the miraculous escape of the god with his destruction of Pentheus' house, Pentheus' sudden agreement to dress as a maenad in order to spy on the Theban maenads on Mount Kithairon, and his savage dismemberment by those maenads led by his own mother Agave. The drama contains throughout – in the experience of Pentheus – evocations of Dionysiac initiation,

many of them probably already there in the myth, albeit without revealing the mystic secrets that might have incited the kind of legal prosecution suffered by Aeschylus.

Other tragedies called *Bacchae* were produced by Xenokles (415 BCE), Sophocles' son Iophon, and (probably in the fourth century BCE) Cleophon. There had been a tragic trilogy on the story of Lycurgus (*Lykourgeia*) by Polyphrasmon (467 BCE). And there was a "Semele Thunderbolted" (*Semele Keraunoumene*) by Spintharos, a *Semele* by Carcinus, a *Semele* by Diogenes, and a *Dionysus* by Chaeremon, all probably of the fourth century BCE. We know almost nothing about any of these Dionysiac plays by minor tragedians. But from the titles, taken together with what does survive, it seems that in its frequent and powerful evocation of the birth of the god, combined with the dramatization of his defeat of resistance, *Bacchae* was typical of tragedy on a Dionysiac theme.

We should also note the existence of lost plays in which, whether or not Dionysus himself appeared, there may have been much mention of him or of his maenads, for instance, plays entitled *Actaeon*, Sophocles' *Tereus*, and Euripides' *Ino* and *Antiope*.

Tragedy and the Dionysiac

Certain features of extant tragedy may be said to derive from its origin in Dionysiac ritual: the centrality of the chorus, the tendency of the chorus to associate its own dancing with Dionysus (Henrichs 1995), the use of masks (used in the predramatic cult of Dionysus), the ubiquity (in contrast to Homer, for example) of the evocation of ritual, perhaps the thematic importance of a suffering individual. We have also traced the presence of Dionysus himself in what we know of Athenian tragedy. But clearly most of what survives is not about Dionysus. Can it make sense to call a narrative or drama Dionysiac if Dionysus himself plays no part in it?

The obvious answer is no. But the question raises a broad issue. The Greek deities, we need to remind ourselves, are no more than human constructions. About each of them we need to ask: in what social circumstances did human beings need to imagine her or him? The question may be, in certain divine manifestations, unanswerable. And even when it is answerable, the answer may consist of various social circumstances which have nothing to do with each other; or the same social circumstances may inspire the imagining of different deities (or no deity at all) in different places and times. Nevertheless, the question is worth asking, and we should ask it about Dionysus.

In Homeric epic Andromache is twice compared to a maenad (see below), and Dionysus has only four mentions. Three of these are brief: he is twice associated with death (*Odyssey* 11.325, 24.74), and once called the son of Semele and "a joy for mortals" (*Iliad* 14.325, i.e., as associated with wine). In the fourth he escapes from King Lycurgus into the sea, and Lycurgus is consequently blinded by Zeus (*Iliad* 6. 130–40).

All three of these Homeric associations – with death, with wine, and with autocratic resistance – persist throughout pre-Christian antiquity. Is it possible to

find any connection between them, any formula which subsumes them all? One possibility is the idea that has its most influential form in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872; see chapter 5 in this volume), namely that Dionysus embodies the confusion of boundaries, which may result in the unity of opposites. He writes, for instance, that "the primary effect of Dionysiac tragedy is that... the divisions between man and man yield to an overwhelming feeling of unity, which goes back to the heart of nature": this is because "the man of culture (*Kulturmensch*) felt himself nullified in the presence of the chorus of satyrs" who embody nature (§7).

We can use this notion to subsume our three Homeric associations. First, Dionysus presided, throughout pre-Christian antiquity, over mystery-cult, which provided happiness in the next world by rehearsing the transition to it, and so was imagined as uniting the opposites of life with death. Second, wine, by collapsing the conventional boundaries of perception, tends to unite individuals, especially at a wine festival of the whole community such as the Anthesteria. Third, it is clear from Euripides' *Bacchae* that such indiscriminate communitarianism (208–9) threatens autocratic control. And we can extend the idea to cover other fundamental forms of the unity of opposites, notably human–animal, man–god, and male–female, each of which was associated with Dionysus (notably in *Bacchae*) and occurred in the ritual of mystic initiation.

Extant tragedy can be called Dionysiac not just as originating and performed in the cult of Dionysus, but also in the tenuous sense that – in sharp contrast to, say, Homeric epic – it tends to embody all the aforementioned unities of opposites even when Dionysus himself is not involved. But there is a further confusion of boundaries that is, I suggest, fundamental to tragedy. This is a consequence of what I have called Dionysiac communitarianism (or unity). I mean the dissolution of the boundary between the community as a whole and autocratic rule. This remains, even in our "Western democracies," an idea whose appeal should not be difficult to understand. It is most visible perhaps in the two most accessible tragic treatments of Dionysus, Aeschylus' trilogy about Lycurgus and Euripides' *Bacchae*. Nietzsche's distaste for the politics of his own time made him imagine Dionysus as a metaphysical principle with nothing to do with "the state and society." In this he was profoundly mistaken.

In the Homeric version Lycurgus is punished by being blinded by Zeus. But in Aeschylus it is Dionysus who does the punishing, by inciting Lycurgus to a frenzy in which he kills his own son. In Euripides, too, the resistant autocrat is punished by the Dionysiac frenzy that inspires the maenads, led by his own mother, to tear him apart. Homeric epic, by contrast, tends to avoid mention of frenzy (apart from the frenzy of battle) and of kin-killing. In Aeschylus the trilogy may have ended with the founding of cult, for Apollo or Dionysus. And in Euripides' *Bacchae* it is virtually certain that Dionysus, in the lost part of his final speech, founded Dionysiac cult for the polis of Thebes (Seaford 2000: 83–91). What we have is the disruption inherent in kin-killing followed by the foundation of cult for the whole polis. This is a surprisingly common pattern (though not universal) in extant tragedy, and so does not require the agency of Dionysus, although it does, as we shall see, frequently attract Dionysiac

metaphor. I have elsewhere suggested that the pattern derives from the Dionysiac origins and early themes of tragedy (Seaford 1994). Athenian tragedy was (in contrast again to Homer) a product of the polis, and in tragic myths the polis tends to benefit from the foundation of polis cult, which should not – tragedy insists – be resisted or neglected, and from the tendency of the ruling family to *destroy itself*, sometimes under the influence of deity (notably Dionysus), and never producing the collective guilt that would result from its destruction by the polis. Dionysus is god of the whole community: for instance, we have seen this in Euripides' *Bacchae*, and an oracle cited by Demosthenes (*Against Meidias* 52) insists that Dionysus be worshiped by the Athenians "all mixed up together." A fundamental boundary that Dionysus dissolves is between community and ruling family. In Euripides' *Bacchae* this also takes the subjective form of opposition between the almost impenetrable individualism of the autocrat Pentheus on the one hand and the chorus that aspires to "merging the soul in the thiasos" on the other (75). The dissolution of this opposition is initiated by Dionysus persuading Pentheus – suddenly and somewhat improbably – to dress as a maenad (a change that can also be seen as belonging to the experience of mystic initiation projected onto Pentheus).

But is the presence of our pattern enough to allow us to call a tragedy Dionysiac, even where Dionysus himself does not occur in it? The answer is a matter of choice. What is important is the social process, sometimes but not always associated with Dionysus himself. In some tragedies the family destroys itself under the influence of another deity, such as Aphrodite in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. In Euripides' *Medea*, where we might have expected that for a mother to kill her children was possible only in the frenzy inspired by Dionysus (as in *Bacchae*), the autonomous sanity of Medea adds pathos.

Whatever terminology we decide to use, I maintain that the pattern I have identified, which is alien to, for example, Homeric epic, derives from the genesis of tragedy in Dionysiac cult. And the same may be said perhaps of other features of extant tragedy, for instance, the fundamental opposition between the powerful (and sometimes impenetrable) individual and the anonymous communality of the chorus, and perhaps even the social marginality of the chorus, who are only very occasionally able-bodied males. Then there are the frequent evocations of Dionysiac cult, not necessarily in dramas involving Dionysus himself. I conclude by looking at these.

The first category consists of various mentions or brief descriptions, by several tragedians, of Dionysus or of Dionysiac cult. In the case of fragments quoted without specification of the play (e.g., Aeschylus frr. 341, 382, 355), it may be that they are from plays involving Dionysus himself (e.g., the Lycurgean trilogy). Where we know the context (i.e., normally of passages from extant plays) it is sometimes difficult to evaluate the tone of the reference to Dionysus. When, for instance, in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* there is mention of the presence of Dionysus and his nurses at Colonus in Attica, this seems entirely positive, cohering completely with the praise of Colonus and of Athens that is at the heart of the play. But when, on the other hand, in the same author's *Women of Trachis*, Heracles is said to be "from Bacchic Thebes"

(510–11), our knowledge of the ambivalent role of Dionysus at Thebes, well known from Euripides' *Bacchae* (e.g., 860–1), may suggest that the phrase may perhaps hint at the terrible death that we are about to see inflicted (inadvertently) on Heracles by his own wife, especially as the tuft of wool with which she had smeared Heracles' garment with the dead centaur's blood caused to "erupt from the earth on which it lay clotted foam, as of the rich liquid . . . from the bacchic vine poured on the ground" (703–4). Even the other Dionysiac reference in the play (219), to the ecstatic dancing of the female chorus on the news of Heracles' return, may seem ominous (Schlesier 1993).

There is something similar in the same author's *Antigone*. Thebes has been delivered from the onslaught of Polynices and his allies, and the chorus evokes celebrations in which Dionysus will rule and shake Thebes (i.e., with dancing, but with the inevitable suggestion of his power to create the kind of earthquake that in *Bacchae* destroyed Pentheus' palace). Moreover, a mere 18 lines earlier, the ecstatic aggression of Capaneus, one of Thebes' attackers, is described with the image of bacchic revelry (as is another of Thebes' attackers, Hippomedon, by Aeschylus *Septem* 498). The other references in the play to Dionysus are to Liturgies' suppression of bacchic cult (956–64, see above), and then the vain choral invocation of the god to come to purify Thebes (1115–52): he is invoked, I believe, not only as god of the whole community (and so naturally opposed to the introverted, incestuous Theban ruling family), but also as *Iakchos* (1152), the form he takes in the Eleusinian mysteries (1120), in which the emergence of a young girl (*Kore*) from the earth brings salvation, in contrast to the failure to rescue Antigone from below the earth (Seaford 1990).

The second category of evocations of Dionysiac cult consists of what seem to be metaphors, drawn from the ("bacchic") frenzy that was, in life as in drama, imagined as inflicted by Dionysus, notably on his female followers, known as "maenads." Here too there is frequently the possibility of a negative association. And there is a further complication. Although "bacchic frenzy" (e.g., Cassandra *bakcheuousa* – "in a bacchic frenzy" – at Euripides *Trojan Women* 342) was in tragedy a way of describing frenzy in which Dionysus himself is not necessarily in the mind of the author, such expressions evoke the possibility – hard to exclude, given the impossibility of knowing which deity is responsible for any particular case of frenzy – that Dionysus himself is involved. Moreover, it seems that the metaphor (or idea) of "bacchic frenzy" tended to describe the kind of frenzy (imposed by Dionysus on Lycurgus in Aeschylus or on Agave in Euripides, and in various other myths) that produces killing within the family and so the self-destruction of the household: i.e., frenzy is the means by which Dionysus creates the "Dionysiac" tragic pattern described above.

A prime exhibit is Euripides' *Heracles*. Heracles has returned home, rescued his family from the tyrannical usurper Lykos, and slaughtered his enemies. Iris and Frenzy (Lyssa) then arrive, sent by Hera, to inspire Heracles with a frenzy in which he will kill his children, and to make a physical assault on Heracles' house. This process is embellished with comparisons with the Dionysiac, even if sometimes only to be *contrasted* with the Dionysiac, so that, for instance, one of the first reactions of the chorus is to say that "dancings are beginning without the drum and not

embellished with the thyrsos of Dionysus" (892–3). Heracles is repeatedly said to be in a bacchic frenzy (896–7, 966, 1086, 1119, 1122, 1142). The combination of kin-killing frenzy and physical destruction of the house (864–5, 905, 1007) is the same as that imposed by Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*. *Bacchae* undoubtedly was influenced, even in detail, by Aeschylus' *Edonians* (see above); and it has been argued on the basis of various vase-paintings that this scene of Euripides' *Heracles* was influenced, even in respect of the appearance of Lyssa, by Aeschylus' *Edonians* (Sutton 1975). A fragment of *Edonians* – (58: "the house has the god in it, the roof is in a bacchic frenzy") suggests the destruction by Dionysus of the house of Lycurgus comparable to those by Dionysus in *Bacchae* (cf. esp. 587–93, 726) and by Lyssa in *Heracles*. And so we have three instances of a typical scene of divine destruction of a royal house (together with frenzied intrafamilial killing), two involving Dionysus himself; the other without him (but with Dionysiac imagery). A pattern of activity that is strongly associated with Dionysus (but without requiring the involvement of Dionysus himself) attracts sustained Dionysiac imagery. This exemplifies a key transition in the history of tragedy, from myths involving Dionysus to those that do not.

Another instance of sustained Dionysiac metaphor in Euripides is from his *Trojan Women*. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* Cassandra is an inspired prophetess. In Euripides she has just been allocated as concubine to Agamemnon after the fall of Troy, and appears not only as an inspired prophetess but as a bride and as a maenad. There is frequent reference to her maenadism and bacchic revelry (169, 171, 307, 341, 367, 408, 415, 500). To be sure, her frenzy is caused not by Dionysus but by Apollo (408). But when she says that she will kill Agamemnon and destroy (in return) his house (359, 461), and that her union with Agamemnon will cause matricide and the upturning of the house of Atreus (363–4), the Dionysiac imagery seems especially apt.

Cassandra in *Trojan Women* appears *running* (307, 349). Emphasized in *Bacchae* is the ability of the maenads to *run* (731, 748, 1091–2). In Euripides' *Suppliants* Evadne comes "running from my house in a bacchic frenzy" (1000–1) to jump onto the funeral pyre of her husband. Whereas Cassandra sees herself as about to destroy her consort and his household, and so appears as a ghastly bride, Evadne appears as a (suicidal) bride because she is reacting to the destruction of her household by wanting to share the death of her husband.

Another running maenadic bride is Iole, who is represented in a choral strophe of Euripides' *Hippolytus* as responsible for the destruction of her husband (550–4); interestingly, in the antistrophe another instance of the association of sex with death is the birth of Dionysus at Thebes, which involved the killing of his mother Semele by the thunderbolt of her lover Zeus (554–62). This was (we have seen) a central theme of the song that developed into tragedy, the dithyramb; and it suggests the association of the unity of opposites (here sex, new life, and violent death) with the cult of Dionysus. The main theme of *Hippolytus* is the illicit passion – that will destroy the household – of Phaedra for her stepson Hippolytus. In the pain of her suppressed passion she expresses the desire to be hunting hinds on the mountainside, i.e., to be a maenad (Schlesier 1993: 109–10).

Another tragic "maenad" who, it seems, rushes out of the house and imagines herself as a bride is Antigone in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*. There is evocation of the bridal ceremony of unveiling (*anakalypteria*). The same rare word for veil (*krēdemnon*) is used in the Homeric description of Andromache, on the death of her husband Hector, rushing out of her house "like a maenad" to the city walls and throwing off the veil given to her on her wedding day (Seaford 1993: 115–21). But what interests us in the Euripidean passage is the self-description of Antigone as "maenad of the dead" (1489). The dead are her brothers Eteocles and Polynices, whose mutual slaughter has destroyed their own household. The idea "maenad of the dead" occurs also, in a slightly different form, as "maenads of Hades" in Euripides' *Hecuba* (1076), of the "mothers" (1157) who killed Polymnestor's children, and should, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1235), be restored, as "maenad of Hades," of Clytemnestra.

Some tragic "maenads" are (at least indirectly) agents of the destruction of the household (e.g., Cassandra and Iole). To these we should add the real maenad Agave as well as the male Heracles (and probably Lycurgus). The "maenadism" of another male kin-killer, Orestes in Euripides' *Orestes*, is the frenzy of remorse. The blood of his mother is said to put him in a bacchic frenzy (339; cf. 411, 835). The consequent association of maenadism with the Furies maddening him (e.g., 319) had already appeared in Aeschylus' version of the story (*Eumenides* 500). The maenadism of Euripides' Heracles is (at least as believed by Amphitryon) a *result* of killing (his enemies; 966–7), as well as its cause.

Other "tragic maenads," by contrast, merely react to killing performed by others. There may be influence here from a general tendency, derived perhaps from cult, to associate maenadic ecstasy with the ecstasy of lamentation (Seaford 1994: 322–3). The female chorus of Aeschylus' *Septem* applies a word for maenad (*thuias*) to themselves as lamenting (835–6), and Hecuba calls her lament for her dismembered (716) son a bacchic tune (Euripides *Hecuba* 685–6).

We have seen that the maenadic metaphor may be attracted by a female character exhibiting one or more of the characteristics of maenadism (as we find them, above all, in *Bacchae*). These characteristics are frenzy (Heracles, Cassandra, Evadne, Iole, Phaedra, Antigone, Orestes, the Furies, Clytemnestra, etc.), running (Cassandra, Evadne, Iole, Phaedra (?), Antigone), intrafamilial killing and destruction of the household (Heracles, Cassandra, Iole, Orestes, Clytemnestra), and lamentation for family members (Antigone, Hecuba). The captive mothers of *Hecuba*, "maenads of Hades" according to Polymnestor, dismember children in the wild (1075–8) – another imagined characteristic of maenads. All these characteristics embody the reversal of norms expected of the female (especially as wife and mother) – even the *running*, which expresses potential uncontrollability, as, for instance, in a Dionysiac ritual described by Plutarch (*Moralia* 299e), in which the female followers of Dionysus are chased by a male priest.

Several such maenadic characteristics are combined in the figure of Clytemnestra as described by Aeschylus at *Agamemnon* 1235, where the case for reading "maenad of Hades" is reinforced by the immediate context, in which she is described as raving

and breathing unlimited aggression against her own (family) and as having uttered a cry (*ololyge*) of triumph, as in the turning point in battle (1235–7). All this is typically maenadic. Maenads, like Clytemnestra, kill their own family members, utter the *ololyge* (e.g., *Bacchae* 689), and behave like males – even to the point of engaging males in battle (e.g., *Bacchae* 731–5). There are even fourth-century vase-paintings from southern Italy, inspired, it seems, by a reperformance of Aeschylus, in which Clytemnestra, wielding her axe, is dressed as a maenad.[1] Clytemnestra's anomalous rule over the household seized from the husband she has killed is called an "evil bacchic revel" (Aeschylus *The Libation Bearers* 690).[2]

To conclude, we have discussed some but not all of the references in tragedy to Dionysus or his cult. Among those which we have discussed, a distinct group is formed by those in which behavior not apparently influenced by Dionysus is nevertheless described in Dionysiac terms, for instance, as "bacchic frenzy." Even in such cases it seems rash to exclude entirely the possibility that Dionysus himself is imagined as somehow involved, especially given that tragedy originated – and continued to be performed – in the cult of Dionysus. Further, such Dionysiac "metaphors" tend to be applied to people who destroy (or are faced with the destruction of) their own household, notably by killing (as maenads do in myth) their own kin. And this self-destruction, followed by the institution of cult for the whole polis, is a typical pattern of tragedy.

Notes

1 Leningrad Hermitage 812; Bari 1014 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1988: 933 n.126); Kossatz-Deissman (1978: 91, 99–100).

2 With Portus' καϰϳφ for καλϳφ; for the case for retaining καλϳφ see Schlesier (1993: 113).

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