CHAPTER 9

Euripides' *Bacchae:* The Language of the Self and the Language of the Mysteries

IN MEMORIAM GEORGE DEVEREUX (1908–1985)

Overcoming classicists' traditional resistance to psychoanalytical interpretation, George Devereux's essay on the recognition scene of the *Bacchae* has been widely recognized as one of the most successful applications of a psychoanalytical approach to an ancient Greek tragedy.[1] Devereux has shown how Cadmus, using a "flawless psychotherapeutic strategy,"[2] brings Agave out of a psychotic episode by a question-and-answer technique that forces her to speak and thus to bring to consciousness material in her unconscious and preconscious.[3] The present essay seeks to develop some implications of Devereux's suggestive work both in a theoretical and in a linguistic-interpretive direction.

From a theoretical point of view, Devereux's study shows how closely consciousness is bound up with language. This connection is, of course, a cornerstone of Freudian theory and practice, wherein the analyst's task is to lead the patient to verbalize repressed desires and

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1. George Devereux, "The Psychotherapy Scene in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *JHS* 90 (1970) 35–48. See, for example, Jeanne Roux, *Euripide, Les Bacchantes* (Paris 1972) 2.609, on *Ba.* 1264–67; citing Devereux's article, she remarks, "Cadmos recourt non à des exorcismes, mais à une thérapeutique méthodique telle que pourrait la pratiquer un psychiatre."

2. Devereux (note 1) 35.

3. Devereux (note 1) 43f.

fears and in the process bring to light the necessarily hidden sources of the neurosis. The exact relation between language and the unconscious, however, remains one of the most discussed questions of recent psychoanalytic speculation, particularly in the work of Jacques Lacan and his followers.[4] Does the unconscious in fact have the structure of language, as Lacan suggests? Or, with some Freudian critics, can one speak of the "non-communicating languages of the unconscious," for example, the symbolic language of dreams?[5] Is the oneiric discourse of this dream language of the unconscious akin to the transformative processes in figurative or poetic language, the displacements of familiar syntax in the rhetorical figures of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and so on?[6]

From a different but complementary point of view, Devereux's essay also raises the question of the relation between the dramatic performance and the unconscious of the spectators.[7] In the case of the *Bacchae* in particular, Euripides seems to be using the stage itself as a kind of dream world where our most buried fears and fantasies—particularly of an oedipal nature—can be acted out. The space of the dramatic representation thus becomes a privileged place in which, thanks to the rhetorical transformations and symbolic displacements effected by the poet's language, we can evade the censor and view things that we do not normally allow ourselves to see, hear things that we do not normally allow to be spoken.[8] Greek tragedy exter-

4. See for example Jacques Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," in *The Language of the Self,* trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore 1968; rpt. New York 1973) 3–27; Frederic Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977) 351ff, 365ff. Using a different approach but equally insistent on the role of language and the verbal transaction in the psychoanalytic exchange is the work of Roy Schafer, "Action and Narration in Psychoanalysis," *New Literary History* 12, no. 1 (1980) 61–85, and "Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980) 28–53.

5. "Linguaggi non comunicanti dell' inconscio" is the terminology of Francesco Orlando, *Per una teoria freudiana della letteratura* (Turin 1977) chap. 1 (cf. p. 21); also 60ff.

6. See Lacan (note 4) 31 and 51; Orlando (note 5) 56ff.; Jameson (note 4) 367f.

7. See also Devereux's interesting remarks on staged versus narrated events in tragedy and their relation to dream and the unconscious in "The Structure of Tragedy and the Structure of the Psyche in Aristotle's *Poetics,*" in Charles Hanly and Morris Lazerowitz, eds., *Psychoanalysis and Philosophy* (New York 1970) 60ff.

8. It is important to distinguish, as Devereux carefully does (note 7) between what is visually shown onstage and what is only recited or narrated (63): "Greek tragedy

nalizes and concretizes, visually and verbally, what remains dim, suppressed, and unformed in the unconscious. The *Bacchae*, like Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (which it resembles in a number of ways), has as its central theme the viewing and speaking of forbidden, secret things. As André Green asks, "Le théâtre, n' est-il pas la meilleure incarnation de cette *autre* scène qu' est l' inconscient?"[9]

The play as a whole, and particularly the "psychotherapy scene" studied by Devereux, is a mirror of the dramatic art itself in its power to reveal the hidden dimensions of the self and to effect a passage, perhaps an equilibrium, between unconscious and conscious knowledge. The illusionistic power of Dionysus, the god both of madness and the theater, is the power to create the involving fictions of the theatrical representation in the spellbinding magic of art. It is also the power of the poet to spin out the dream world of fantasy in which the terrors and desires repressed in the unconscious can be released. As an enactment of Dionysus' power and a reflection upon that power, the play reveals first the hypnotic power of the poet, as the mouthpiece of the god, to enfold us in his web of illusion and then the power of conscious knowledge to break the spell and return us to reality, but with a freshly experienced reintegration of conscious and unconscious.[10] In the psychotherapy scene the latter process predominates. It both complements and answers the gradual release of the unconscious by Dionysus in the first part of the play.

The fact that Agave, after the revelation, flees the scene of her acts, never (as she hopes) to return (1381–87), is both a natural human revulsion and also the poet's recognition of how painful the surfacing of the unconscious is, how difficult and dangerous are the means that

simply takes place on two levels: the raw event occurs off stage; its psychological consequences are shown on stage." We may add that the presentation of psychological states offstage, in narration only, often has a more dreamlike quality and can depict more deeply repressed, threatening, and anxiety-provoking states. Thus Agave's carrying of Pentheus' head impaled on a thyrsus, with its implications of the castrating power of the phallic mother, appears only as a narrated, offstage event (1139–42), whereas when she appears onstage with Pentheus' head, she carries it "in her arms" or "in her hands" (1277, 1280). In an otherwise excellent study, Helene P. Foley, "The Masque of Dionysus," *TAPA* 110 (1980) 131, states that "the mask [of Pentheus] returns unchanged to the stage impaled on Agave's *thyrsus*."

9. André Green, *Un oeil en trop* (Paris 1969) 11.

10. For these implications of the *Bacchae*, see Foley (note 8) and C. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton 1982) chap. 7, especially 234ff. and 259ff.

enable us to look into its depths, and perhaps also how gladly we would run away from what we have seen. This instinctive flight may be interpreted both as an individual reaction and as a cultural phenomenon. Euripides, writing in self-chosen exile in Macedonia, at the fringes of the Hellenic world, knows instinctively what his former compatriots most desire to see and to escape.

In the Cadmus-Agave scene the question-and-answer technique is employed by a father figure who embodies the reintegrative capacities of the ego. This scene is symmetrical with the previous scenes of question and answer between Pentheus and Dionysus (460–518, 648–59, 787–846, 912–70). These scenes are dominated not by a kindly authority figure speaking the voice of the ego but by Pentheus' ambiguous double, an alter ego of the same age, who speaks the voice of the id. The dialogue here effects not a progression to adulthood, consciousness, and ego integration but a regression to primary-process thinking.[11] The Agave-Cadmus scene shows a mortal coming out of the spell of madness cast over her by the god; the scenes between Pentheus and the Stranger show us a mortal gradually but inexorably falling under the god's mysterious power.

Corresponding to this basic difference of function between the two sets of scenes is a difference in the way in which the question and answer functions in each. Agave, confronting Cadmus with initial disappointment and annoyance (cf. 1251f.), asks her first question (not deliberately elicited by Cadmus) in a rather aggressive mood (1263): "What of these things is not well, or what is painful?"[12] Her mood changes to puzzlement as Cadmus bids her look at the sky and she asks why (1264–65). At this point Cadmus takes over the role of questioner for the crucial moments that bring Agave out of her madness (1266–79). His last question focuses on the most crucial detail of the passage between delusion and reality (1277): "Whose visage do you then hold in your embrace?" At this point the roles shift, and Agave becomes the questioner (1280): "Alas, what do I see? What is

11. I owe this technical term to George Devereux. I use it not to pretend to technical competence or to indulge in jargon for its own sake but to underline the extent to which Euripides' insights into the psyche anticipate the clinical observations of modern psychoanalysis.

12. Devereux (note 1) 41: "As late as 1263 Cadmus and Agave talk past each other." See also Roux (note 1) *ad* 1263: "Agavé interroge Cadmos avec un étonnement agacé, mais sa question marque le début de son retour à la conscience."

this that I am carrying in my hands?" Cadmus asks one last question (1283): "Does it then seem to you to resemble a lion?" The remaining questions (until the lacuna after 1300) belong to Agave, as she tries to find out what she has done (1286–98). This shift from the aggressive question of 1263 to the genuine requests for information as she takes over the role of questioner from Cadmus in 1280 marks the critical moments of her return to sanity and her genuine reclaiming of reality.

When we compare the analogous scenes of question and answer between Dionysus and Pentheus, we find almost the exact reverse of this relation. Here the question-and-answer technique of line-by-line exchange (stichomythy) has the function of bringing the questioner under the spell of the god's madness, of confusing subjective and objective vision, and thereby of blurring the division between reality and delusion. In the first face-to-face encounter between Pentheus and the Stranger, Pentheus occupies the position of apparent authority. He asks the questions, and the Stranger responds. The strict line-by-line query and response goes on for over fifty verses (460–518); but there is a crucial, if subtle, shift when for a brief moment Dionysus asks the question (492):

εἴφ' ὅ τι παθεῖν δεῖ · τί με τὸ δεινὸν ἐργάσῃ

Say what it is necessary to suffer. What is the terrible thing that you will do to me?

The question is a significant one, for it anticipates the massive reversal between doer and sufferer, active and passive, which Dionysus will soon effect as the victim and the captor change places.[13] Pentheus' only remaining question of this scene in fact reveals his helplessness and his ignorance rather than his power (501): "And where is he? Not visible to my eyes at least." From that point on, Pentheus never recovers his authority as questioner. He is on the defensive for the remainder of the scene (503–18). Dionysus attacks his ego at the places where Pentheus' defenses are most heavily concentrated and therefore most vulnerable: his identification of himself with the political power of the city (503), his implicit definition of that power as the

13. For the reversals of active and passive see Segal (note 9) 247–56; also C. Segal, "Etymologies and Double Meanings in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *Glotta* 60 (1982) 85ff.

ability to "bind" or constrain (505),[14] and his insecurity about his identity, about who or what he really is, as symbolized by the ambiguity of his name (503–8):

Pentheus. Seize him: he scorns both me and Thebes.
Dionysus. I tell you not to bind me, sane among you not sane.
Penth. I say to bind, having more authority than you.
Dion. You know not why you live nor what you do nor who you are.
Penth. Pentheus, Agave's child, my father Echion.
Dion. You are suited for misfortune in your name.

In the briefer scene of question and answer after the palace miracle, when illusion and reality are in fact thrown into confusion, Dionysus now answers Pentheus' questions with commands (647) or with other questions that reveal the hidden power of his own emerging authority:

Did I not say—or did you not hear—that some one will release me? (649).

What then? Do not the gods leap over even walls? (654).

Both of these interrogative sentences question the symbolical center of Pentheus' authority, the power to bind or constrain and the power to exclude by the civic and military force of the city all that Dionysus represents (cf. 504f., 653f.).[15]

At the turning point, as Pentheus' resistance changes to submission, the pattern of question and answer undergoes an interesting reversal. Pentheus' overcompensatory militaristic bluster slows down to a single brief question (803), which focuses on the ambiguity of active and passive (800–803):

Pentheus. We are at grips with this stranger who leaves us no path, who neither suffering nor doing will be silent.

14. On 506–8 and Pentheus' definition of his "authority" (*kyros*) by "binding" see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) 93, and "Etymologies" (note 12) 83.

15. See Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) chap. 4. For the importance of walls and enclosures, see also William C. Scott, "Two Suns over Thebes: Imagery and Stage Effects in the *Bacchae*," *TAPA* 105 (1975) 333–46, especially 341: "It is Pentheus' misfortune to oppose a god who refuses to be bound by architectural structures."

Dionysus. My friend, it is still possible to arrange these things well.
Penth. Doing what? Being a slave to my slaves?

Dionysus' line (802) leaves it deliberately ambiguous who is the active arranger. Pentheus' question implies that it is to be himself, but he has just admitted the confusion of active and passive (801). The god in fact tacitly assumes the role of power by taking over the questioning and trapping Pentheus through questions that reveal his (the god's) hidden knowledge of Pentheus' unconscious or repressed desires (806–19). The pivotal question leads Pentheus to avow openly his sexual curiosity and its voyeuristic form (811): "Do you wish to see [the Maenads] sitting all together on the mountains?" When Pentheus resumes the role of questioner in the latter half of the strichomythy, he is in nearly total subjection to the god who has now touched the hidden springs of his unconscious wishes (822–40). Pentheus' role as questioner here becomes exactly the reverse of what it was when he first encountered Dionysus (460–518). The question-and-answer dialogue is also exactly the reverse of that between Cadmus and Agave at the end.

The next scene completes Pentheus' submission to the power of Dionysus, and Pentheus' questions are again expressive of helplessness and complaisant acceptance rather than resistance and authority (cf. 922, 925–26, 941–42, 945–46, 949, 950). The scene ends with Pentheus finishing the sentences of Dionysus and Dionysus feeding him the lines that he will fill out with the ambiguous words of his doom (966–70):

Dionysus. From there another will lead you back.
Pentheus. My mother, surely.
Dion. Conspicuous among all.
Penth. To this I go.
Dion. Carried you will go.
Penth. To my soft luxury, you mean.
Dion. In your mother's hands.
Penth. And you will compel me to be dissolved in comfort.
Dion. Such dissolute comforts.
Penth. I touch what I deserve.[16]

16. The translation attempts to bring out some of the double meanings of these lines, on which see Lawrence J. Kepple, "The Broken Victim: Euripides' *Bacchae* 969–970," *HSCP* 80 (1976) 107–9; Segal, "Etymologies" (note 12) 88; and the commentaries of E. R. Dodds, *Euripides' Bacchae*, 2d ed. (Oxford 1960) and Roux (note 1) *ad loc.*

The line-by-line responsion of stichomythy here shortens to the half-line responses of *antilabē*. The language of the god now fully penetrates that of Pentheus, just as his personality penetrates and blends with the personality that Pentheus has kept repressed. The boundaries of their sentences become as fluid as the boundaries of their personalities. Dionysus' hypnotic power over Pentheus' mind takes the form of power over his language.

The overlapping of verbal expression on the level of syntax and versification parallels the overlapping and momentary coexistence of conscious and unconscious on the level of psychological meaning. Pentheus' speech loses its individual distinctness as he himself begins to become an extension of the god, now a Maenad worshiper and soon a beast-victim that takes the place of the god in the bacchic ritual of *sparagmos* and omophagy on the mountain (cf. the hints of devouring Pentheus in 1184, 1242, 1246f.). This scene shows the conscious self being submerged in the unconscious; the Agave-Cadmus scene shows conscious, ego-integrative functions reasserting themselves over the unconscious. But this process of anagnorisis (recognition) is fragmented between two different characters. Pentheus' momentary return to sanity is brief, pathetic, and ineffectual (1116–21), itself more like nightmare than reality (1122ff.).

In the *anderer Schauplatz* that the drama creates, visual appearances are doubled by the disguising of Dionysus as a Lydian youth and of Pentheus as a Maenad. This doubling has an equivalent in the realm of language. Just as there are two levels of visual representation, corresponding to the harsh and gentle sides of Dionysus (cf. 861), the smiling (1021) and the destructive god,[17] so there are two levels of verbal representation, corresponding to the conscious and unconscious self. Pentheus both sees and speaks double (cf. 920ff.). In the *Hippolytus* the confusion of appearance and reality by false speech—or, more precisely, by a doubling of language into written and spoken utterance—leads to the utopian wish that men might have "double voices" (*dissai phōnai*), one the true and "just" voice, the other "as it happened to be," so that there might be an infallible means of discerning the hidden reality of thoughts and feelings (*Hipp.* 925–32).

17. See Foley (note 8) 131–33.

The language of the *Bacchae* in a sense carries out this project, but in a way very different from the rationalism envisaged in the *Hippolytus*.

The various forms of doubling effected by Dionysus create a mirror for language through which language seems to speak the words of the hidden Other, the unconscious that Dionysus brings to the surface by making visible on stage the self that Pentheus has repressed, the sensual and sexual self that he has held under the same constraints or binding as those with which he would constrain and imprison Dionysus.

Dionysus constitutes for Pentheus what Lacan calls a Discourse of the Other, the language of his repressed, unconscious self. This language reflects back to Pentheus an image where the important thing is what Pentheus cannot recognize, the self he refuses to know. "The unconscious is knowledge," Lacan remarks, "but it is a knowledge one cannot know one knows, a knowledge which cannot tolerate knowing it knows."[18] The language of Dionysus in his meetings with Pentheus follows the strategies of this language of the Other, both to reveal and to mask the unconscious, for it is in this way that the repressed contents of the unconscious can evade the censor and come to the surface as speech.

This Discourse of the Other, which Dionysus constitutes as Pentheus' repressed alter ego, is balanced at the end of the play in the discourse between Agave and Cadmus in the psychotherapy scene so ably analyzed by Devereux. We may perhaps call the language of that scene a Discourse of the Self.

In the first part of the play the initially definite, univocal, authoritarian language of Pentheus gradually fuses with the hidden purposes of his repressed other self, enacted on the stage in the person of the Lydian Stranger / Dionysus. In the last part of the play, language moves out of this (con)fusion to clarity and recognition. Visual appearances follow the same pattern. Covered with the dress and wig of a Maenad, Pentheus is led out of the ordered space of the city to the wild spaces of the god (and of the self) where his speech loses contact with the rest of reality, with everything that has constituted the defining structures of his life. At the end, to bring Agave back to those structures of her life, Cadmus reconstitutes her relations with

18. From unpublished remarks at a 1974 seminar by Lacan, quoted in Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977) 166.

the members of her *oikos* (household) and the reality of her role as wife and mother. He thereby returns her from the unbounded, wild spaces and from the dissolution of personal boundaries in the *thiasos* (sacred band) of the god to the defining frame of the oikos which makes language possible.[19] No longer laden with the double or triple meanings of madness or Dionysiac hallucination, language once more expresses a unified, common ground of shared experience.

In Pentheus' first meeting with Dionysus face to face, the god's disguise as a Lydian youth gives nearly every verse a hidden double meaning. In his later encounters with the god / Stranger, these double meanings come closer to expressing the two planes, conscious and unconscious, of Pentheus' self. The language of "hiding" and of "persuading," "obeying," and "suffering" (involving various plays on *paschein, peithein, Pentheus, penthos*) forms the most persistent group of double meanings;[20] and we have already seen how these reach their climax in Pentheus' total subjection of the god's spell in the antilabē of 966–70 as he exits for the last time.

Pentheus' experience of the other himself embodied in Dionysus develops in a progression, from Teiresias' descriptions of the god, to his own meeting with the god in the guise of the Lydian youth, and then on to his encounter with the god in his bull form, the culmination of the double visions that Dionysus opens before him (922). Each of these double visions also has a verbal equivalent in a doubling of language. Thus, to take one example, Pentheus' line, "You have become a bull" (ταταύρωσαι γὰρ οὖν, 922), also means, "You have treated me with the savagery of a bull."[21]

Richard Seaford has convincingly argued that the double meanings of Dionysus' language reflect the language of the Dionysiac Myste-

19. Devereux (note 1) 42.

20. See especially 367, 506ff., 787ff., 845f., 910–70. For further discussion see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) 251–53, and "Etymologies" (note 12) 86. We may perhaps add 473, where Pentheus asks, ἔχει δ' ὄνησιν τοῖσι θύουσιν τίνα. The line means, "What help do [your rites] hold for those who do sacrifice?" But it might also be translated, "Do your rites hold any help for those sacrificing—whom?" or "Those to whom your rites bring help, whom do they sacrifice?" Line 357 holds a simpler form of double meaning. Pentheus threatens, "Bring him here to die seeing a bitter bacchanting in Thebes" (πίκραν βάκχευσιν ἐν Θήβαις ἰδών); but of course it is Dionysus who will convert what Pentheus sees as pleasurable into something bitter: cf. 634 and 815, and note the stress on seeing throughout (e.g., 624, 629f., 912ff., 1257ff., etc.).

21. See Segal, "Etymologies" (note 12) 88f.

ries, a language made deliberately obscure to the uninitiated but known to the initiates (472–74).[22] This hidden religious dimension of Dionysus' speech is paralleled by its hidden psychological dimension: The initiatory and the psychological functions of the double meanings are superimposed upon each other and are exactly symmetrical with each other. Both are different expressions of an aspect of reality which Pentheus denies. In both realms Dionysus is the god of the secret, other side of reality, the invisible world, whether of the self or of the gods, that remains in the shadow side of consciousness and of language.

This parallelism is particularly clear at the end of Pentheus' first encounter with the god, where the doubleness of meaning focuses on his most personal and most mysterious word, his name (506–8):

Dionysus. You do not know why you live, nor what you do, nor who you are.
Pentheus. Pentheus, Agave's son, my father Echion.
Dion. You are suited for misfortune in your name.

The play on the hidden meaning of the name of Pentheus as "grief" or "suffering" (*penthos*) echoes Teiresias' point at the end of the previous scene (367). The disguised god is now taking over the role of the prophet, Teiresias, in defending himself, Dionysus. But the lines that he speaks here also echo the lines spoken by another Teiresias to another tragic hero whose name conceals the hidden truths of his destiny and of his unknown self, the Oedipus of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*OT* 412–14; cf. *OT* 367).

Teiresias' lines in the *Oedipus* constitute a vital element of intertextuality for this scene of the *Bacchae*. In both passages the hidden language of the self parallels the hidden language of the truth about the gods. Sophocles' Teiresias introduces Oedipus to the mystery of divine forces invisible behind the human actions of the foreground, and he simultaneously introduces him to the mystery of his identity hidden behind the surface of his official, public identity as the ruler of Thebes. The prophet (cf. *Ba.* 551) who takes over the role of Teiresias

22. See Richard Seaford, "Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries," *CQ* n.s. 31 (1981) 252–75. Note the use of the term for riddles (double meanings of words) in Plato, *Phaedo* 69c when Socrates alludes to Orphic initiation and the different reception of initiated and uninitiated in Hades: πάλαι αἰνίττεσθαι.

in the *Bacchae* does the same for the ruler of Thebes, and in virtually the same words.[23] In Sophocles, however, the religious and philosophical aspect of this revelation of a hidden meaning behind words is paramount; in Euripides, the psychological meaning predominates, though the religious dimension, the covert references to the Dionysiac Mysteries, as Seaford has shown, is by no means negligible.

The two planes, the mystic and the psychological, remain intertwined throughout the *Bacchae*. What is "unspeakable" (*arrhēton*, 472) as the secret Bacchic Mysteries is also what is unspeakable as the Discourse of the Other, the problematical knowledge about the unconscious which remains at some level alienated from language. The mysterious light that blazes forth at the palace miracle marks both a religious mystery and the god's penetration of Pentheus' psychological defenses as he enters the well-guarded palace of the king.[24] The *theōria*, or sacred procession, in which Dionysus leads the maddened Pentheus out of the palace and the city to his doom on Mount Cithaeron (1043ff.) is both a mystic initiation that marks the revelation of Dionysus' full power as a god and simultaneously a revelation of the conflicts and contradictions within Pentheus which the god releases with a force that overwhelms Pentheus' ego and leaves him both physically and psychologically torn asunder.

The ambiguities of this procession on the ritual plane parallel its ambiguities on the psychological plane. Pentheus is both "lord" (*despotēs*, 1047) and passive victim, both human and beast, both hunter and quarry, both male and female, both preternaturally powerful (cf. 949ff.) and totally helpless, both sexually aggressive (cf. 957f.) and castrated or infantilized (1101ff., 1114ff.).[25] For the Dionysus of the *Bacchae*, even more than for the Aphrodite of the *Hippolytus*, the numinous power of the divine comprehends both the mysteries of the self and the mysteries of the god's presence among men.

This parallelism between the psychological and the mystical planes

23. It is another link between the stranger and the blind seer that *prophētēs* occurs only twice in the play, once of Teiresias (211) and once of Dionysus (551).

24. The identification of Pentheus' personal ego defenses with the physical defenses of his palace is implicit in what J. Wohlberg, "The Palace-Hero Equation in Euripides," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Hungaricae* 16 (1968) 149–55, calls "the palace-hero equation." Euripides' *Heracles* provides a close parallel.

25. On the implications of infantilization and castration in this scene see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) especially chap. 6.

of action and language in the experience of Dionysus pervades nearly every aspect of the play. It is especially marked in the theme of *anankē,* "necessity." On the one hand anankē involves the psychological "constrictions" (inhibitions, rigidities) within Pentheus and their release or unloosing by Dionysus;[26] on the other hand it points to the supernatural "necessity" exercised by Dionysus as the executor of the will of Zeus (cf. 1349–51).

Directly after the encounter between Pentheus and Dionysus the chorus sings the second stasimon, which moves from the mystic themes of the birth and "revelation" of Dionysus (519–36) to the "revelation" (*anaphainei,* 538) of Pentheus' hidden monstrosity as the son of earth-born Echion, "a savage-visaged monster, not a mortal man, but like a murderous giant, opponent of the gods" (542–44). The chorus then expresses its fears that the king will imprison the Stranger, "hidden away in dark enclosures . . ., in the struggles of Necessity" (*en hamillais anankas,* 552). But the first sign of Pentheus' imminent defeat is his discovery, after the palace miracle, that "the stranger who had been constrained by the necessity of bonds [*desmois en katēnankasmenos*] has fled away" (642f.). Dionysus' kind of necessity will overcome Pentheus'. Later, the force of necessity will appear as the god's power not only to unloose the literal bonds of Pentheus' prison but to release the hidden desires of Pentheus' unconscious. Fully under the god's hypnotic spell in his last moments on stage, Pentheus delights in the thought of being "carried in his mother's arms" (968f.): "You compel me by necessity to be dissolute," he tells Dionysus (καὶ τρυφᾶν μ' ἀναγκάσεις, 969). The god's necessity is both an internal, psychological force (as in 969) and a divinely sanctioned, supernatural power (1349–51).

The two meanings are already implicitly interwoven in the second stasimon, for the phrase that describes the imprisonment of the Stranger "hidden in the dark enclosures" (σκοτίαις κρυπτὸν ἐν εἱρκταῖς, 549) is a close verbal and metrical echo of the mystic birth of Dionysus in the parode, "hidden from Hera by the golden pins" in the thigh of Zeus, from which he is to emerge into the light (περόναις κρυπτὸν ἀφ' Ἥρας, 98), just as he will emerge mysteriously

26. In 497f. Euripides alludes to the cult of Dionysus Lysios, the Unbinder. For the themes of constriction and release see also Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) 100–106, and "Etymologies" (note 12).

and mystically from the darkness into the light in the palace miracle (cf. 594–99, 608–11).[27]

The parallels between the two dimensions of the action go even deeper, for from Homer onward the anankē of the gods often takes the form of binding or otherwise immobilizing their foes. It is particularly the earth-born Giants or monstrous serpents that the gods have to subdue with the immobilizing Necessity of their force.[28] In the second stasimon the chorus explicitly refers to "earth-born Echion" and compares his son, Pentheus, to one of those dangerous Giants who fought against the gods (542–44).[29] When he is led off to his doom to find death in the ambiguously soft "necessity" of his mother's embrace (968f.), the chorus describes him as the offspring of Libyan Gorgons (989f.) and invokes Justice against this "godless, lawless, unjust earthborn offspring of Echion" (995f.=1015f.).[30] Both passages make Pentheus a kind of primordial monster, defeated by divine Necessity in a great cosmogonic battle. This cosmic aspect of divine Necessity is parallel to the internal, psychological necessity of Dionysus, the power of the god to destroy Pentheus by releasing all the forms of his constrictions, the political authority of Pentheus' attempt to bind the god (cf. 504f.)[31] and the psychological constrictions of his tightly bound personality. Unbinding these, Dionysus also reveals the hidden monstrosity of Pentheus, the chaos beneath the orderly ruler, and the misfortune beneath his name and his origins (506–8).

The root *herk-,* "constrain," "hem in," recurs throughout the first part of the play to describe Pentheus' literal constriction of Dionysus by his political and military authority (e.g. 443, 497, 509, 549, 611,

27. See Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) 154–56. For the relation of light and darkness in 594ff. to the Dionysiac Mysteries, see Seaford (note 21) 256f.

28. On the gods' anankē in cosmogonic battle with Giants see Richard B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1954) 326ff.; Heinz Schreckenberg, *Ananke: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Wortgebrauchs,* "Zetemata" 36 (Munich 1964) 2–11, 40–42. Further discussion in Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) chap. 4 n.35.

29. See J. C. Kamerbeek, "On the Conception of *Theomachos* in Relation with Greek Tragedy," *Mnemosyne* ser. 4, vol. 1 (1948) 271–83, and Francis Vian, *Les origines de Thèbes: Cadmos et les spartes* (Paris 1963) 162ff.

30. On the chthonic aspects of Pentheus' "earth-born" ancestry see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) chap. 5.

31. See Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) chap. 4 passim.

618). But as Dionysus uses his own very different kind of power to "release" (*lyein,* cf. 498), the same root marks the surfacing of Pentheus' repressed sexual fantasies as he imagines the Maenads "held like birds in a thicket in the dearest *enclosures* [*herkē*] of their *beds*" (957f.). The power to bring a sudden, mysterious flash of light into the dark, subterranean, enclosed places of Pentheus' heavily guarded interior domain applies to the religious epiphany of the god in his Bacchic Mysteries (594–611, 629–35) and also to his figurative epiphany as the "revealer" of what lies hidden within Pentheus (*anaphainein,* 538 and 528; cf. 501).

The cosmological and psychological significance of Dionysus' necessity forms a contrast as well as a complementation. Pentheus, after all, is not a monstrous Giant or a Gorgon-generated serpent to be defeated in a universal clash of elemental forces, as in the Titanomachy of Hesiod's *Theogony* or the battles between Zeus and Typhos in Hesiod or Pindar. For all his bluster, Pentheus is no mythic paradigm of *vis consili expers* but only a confused, immature young man.[32] The Greek divinities, however, are not forgiving. Pentheus' failure to integrate the Dionysiac in himself and his city is projected upon the plane of civic religion as well as of individual personality and then extended into the cosmological plane as a conflict of divine order and monstrous violence. This homology between the psychological and the religious necessity of Dionysus shows the power of the god as both an internal and an external force. But at another level the homology does not entirely fit. The discrepancy between Pentheus as a primordial Giant and Pentheus as a mortal sufferer becomes larger in the latter half of the play, as Euripides engages our sympathies for the human victim and reveals more of the ambiguous, problematical side of Dionysus.

If Dionysus as "looser" or "releaser" (*lysios*) liberates the repressed sexuality of Pentheus, he also liberates the repressed destructiveness and rage of his female victims, the women of Thebes. It is part of Pentheus' ironic misapprehension of everything about Dionysus that

32. For such cosmic conflicts between order and chaos, see Hesiod, *Theog.* 664ff.; Pindar, *Pyth.* 1.13ff. and *Pyth.* 8.12ff.; Aeschyl., *PV* 351ff.; Eur., *Ion* 205ff. In this last passage Dionysus has a major role in the struggle, as he does also on the Siphnian frieze at Delphi. See in general Francis Vian, *La guerre des géants* (Paris 1952). For the inappropriateness of such a schema for Pentheus, see D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto 1967) 67f.

his Theban Maenads, so far from being sexually eager and submissive to males when released from the interior spaces of house and city (cf. 218–23, 957f.), turn against their submissive sexual role with unexpected and astonishing violence. After their defeat of the men who try to stop them from carrying off children and property (751–64), they fall upon a herd of cattle and tear apart with their bare hands both a "young cow full of milk" (*euthēlon porin,* 737) and bulls that toss their horns in both anger and sexual excitement (ὑβρισταὶ κἀς κέρας θυμούμενοι, 743). *Tauroi hybristai* in this verse almost certainly implies a sexual erection.[33] The Maenads here turn destructively against their own nurturant motherhood (the cow) and against the male procreative sexuality of the bull. Earlier they had nursed the young of wild animals at the breast (699–702) and caused the nourishing liquids of wine, milk, and honey to flow from the earth (702–13). But the other side of that promiscuous mothering of wild creatures is the symbolical destruction of their milk-giving capacities in rending the milch-cow. Its pendant is the tearing apart of the sexually aggressive bulls.

This double violence foreshadows Agave's rending of Pentheus, her own child, in a killing that is preceded by an act of symbolical castration as the Maenads uproot his fir tree (1104–10) and cast him down from his lofty perch to the earth below (1111f.). Both parts of this deed are prefigured symbolically in the rending of cow and bull (737–47). The destructive reaction against the motherhood of the cow reappears in the full release of maternal aggression in Agave's murderous rage against her own child. The revolt against the domination of male sexuality (of which the tumescent bull is the archetypal embodiment) takes the form of humiliating the phallic pride of Pentheus. In his madness he had delusions of lifting the mountain and of uprooting its peaks and valleys (945–50); but it is in fact the Maenads who have the superhuman strength to uproot the very tree to whose top Dionysus has shot him (1064–75), "upright into the upright sky" (1074).[34]

The power of Dionysus to release the repressed aggressiveness of

33. Cf. Pindar, *Pyth.* 10.36 and Xenophon, *Cyrop.* 7.5.62 ("*hybristai hippoi,* when castrated, cease from biting and from violent behavior," *hybrizein*). Roux (note 1) *ad* 743 cites the latter passage but does not draw the logical conclusion.

34. Note the verbal parallel between 949 and 1104 in the matter of "levers," *mochloi.*

the maternal figures as a complement to his release of the repressed sexuality of Pentheus is already implicit in the first description of the Maenads nursing baby fawns and wolves that they "hold in their arms' embrace" (ἀγκάλαισι . . . ἔχουσαι, 699f.). This phrase is the regular expression for carrying a baby, but it recurs near the end of the play when the hidden side of that motherhood has been fully revealed. What Agave then "holds in her arms' embrace" is the severed, bloody head of her son (ἐν ἀγκάλαις ἔχεις, 1277).[35] To this side of the maternal embrace corresponds the side of the maternal figure which the Dionysiac unloosing reveals, the imago of the terrible mother who glowers over the helpless, infantilized form of her son with foaming lips and rolling eyes (1114–24) before she tears his arm from its socket to commence the sparagmos (1125–36).

The landscape of the Maenad mothers' boundless generosity of milk, wine, and honey in the first scene (698–713) undergoes a corresponding reversal. That landscape of nourishing liquids reflects the life-giving functions of Dionysus as a god of the liquid vitality of nature and its fertility.[36] Several of the choral odes recreate this landscape of joyful abundance where water is the dominant element (cf. 141f., 154, 405–8, 419f., 519–22, 568–75, 865–76). But that liquid landscape, just like the nurturant motherhood that it symbolizes, shows its destructive other side when Dionysus releases the repressed rage of the Theban women. Then it becomes a strangling enclosure whose power to smother and obliterate lies just beneath the surface of quiet, shelter, and pleasure:

> ἦν δ' ἄγκος ἀμφίκρημνον, ὕδασι διάβροχον,
> πεύκαισι συσκιάζον, ἔνθα μαινάδες
> καθῆντ' ἔχουσαι χεῖρας ἐν τερπνοῖς πόνοις.
>
> There was a hollow vale, with crags around it, with water running through it, shaded over by pine trees, where the Maenads sat, holding their hands in pleasurable toils.

35. On the ambivalence of this embrace and related images of unfolding and strangulation see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) 104, with n.35; also "Etymologies" (note 12) 91f.

36. On Dionysus as a god of fertility, especially of the liquid vegetative life of nature, see Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 35.365a; Eur. *Phoen.* 645–56. Further discussion in Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) 10f. and 149ff.

At first glance this valley is a sheltered *locus amoenus,* a watery pleasance. It has, perhaps, vaguely sexual implications as the hidden hollows of the female body that Pentheus, wishing "to see but not be seen" (1050), hopes to watch. But nearly every word of the description carries a sinister implication. The enclosure, marked by the three prepositions *amphi-, dia-,* and *syn-,* prepares for Pentheus' entrapment.[37] *Ankos,* "glade," contains the same root as the enfolding "embrace" (*ankalai*) of his doom (1277; cf. 699) and perhaps of the "necessity" (*anankē*) of his grim fate (969; cf. 1351). *Diabrochon* (1051), literally "with water flowing through it," also carries hints of smothering and certainly of the "noose" of death (*brochos thanasimon*) which the murderous "Maenad herd" (an aspect of cows very different from that of 737) will draw around him (1021–23).[38] George Devereux, citing parallels from Roheim's studies of the Australian aborigines, has plausibly suggested to me that the Maenads' "holding their hands in pleasurable toils" refers to ritualized group masturbation. If so, this "pleasurable effort" of the group rite soon changes to a nightmarish group ritual of the opposite kind, the destruction of a young male's sexuality and life by (symbolical?) castration and bloody dismemberment. In any case, the hands of these Maenads will be employed in "toils" or "efforts" that are far from "pleasurable" (1206f., 1209, 1280, 1286; cf. 969).[39] Fewer than fifty lines later the gentler qualities of this watery landscape fade entirely before its murderous side as the Maenads, "maddened by the god's breath upon them, leap through the valley's rushing torrents and the broken crags" (διὰ δὲ χειμάρρου νάπης / ἀγμῶν τ' ἐπήδων . . . , 1093f.).

On the level of psychological meaning, this landscape is a symbolical projection of the female body and particularly of the mysterious, hidden body of the mother which Pentheus hopes to see in its

37. Although Dodds (note 15) does not make this point explicitly, his translation (*ad* 1051f.) catches the tone of dangerous enclosure: "There lay a glen, cliff-bound, refreshed with waters, close-shadowing pines." Cf. *Phoen.* 1570–76; Theocr. *Id.* 26.3 and 11; André Motte, *Prairies et jardins de la Grèce antique* (Brussels 1973) 233ff. with n.4.

38. For the implications of *diabrochos* see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) 104 with n. 35, and "Etymologies" (note 12) 89f.

39. For the importance of the theme of hands see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics* (note 9) chap. 3. In contrast to the "pleasurable toils" of 1053, note the painful "efforts" (*mochthoi*) of 1105, 1228, 1279. On the reversals of pleasure and related words see Jacqueline de Romilly, "Le thème du bonheur dans les *Bacchantes*," *REG* 76 (1963) 361–80.

secret places. But this landscape, like the figure of the mother itself, is also the object of nightmarish fantasies. The contrast of the two settings (1051–53 and 1093f.) exactly parallels the contrast of the two images of the maternal "embrace" (699f. and 1277). Dionysus' fusion of opposites collapses the two sides together in the ambiguities of 966–70. The power of Dionysus is the power to release both sides of these repressed images, each sliding into the other, each present in the other with a precarious balance that Euripides catches in the almost demonic ambiguity of his language (especially 968–70 but also 1051–53).

On the level of the play's religious meaning as a work about the place of Dionysus and the cults of Dionysus in the city, the ambiguities of these landscapes, shifting from joyful abandon to bloody horror, function as a microcosm of all the ambiguities surrounding this god. In writing his play about both aspects of Dionysus, Euripides reflects on the necessity for repression which makes the work of culture possible and also on the danger of those repressions for the individual and for the culture as a whole. As a psychological and religious drama simultaneously, the *Bacchae* explores the need and the capacity of man's cultural creations—the city, the family, religion, art—to absorb what most threatens those creations with dissolution. The classical polis had long made a place for Dionysus in its cults and festivals, among which were those at which such tragedies as the *Bacchae* were performed. In the *Bacchae* the attempt to exclude Dionysus from the individual personality and from the city as a whole ends in the violent dissolution of both the ruler and the community. Pentheus is literally dismembered; Thebes is left without a king; the remnants of the ruling family are scattered in exile (1352–60, 1379–87). But since everything that Euripides depicts as beautiful, life-giving, and joyful about the god takes place in the wild, on the mountains, or at the fringes of the Greek world, we cannot conclude that he was optimistic about the city's capacity to incorporate into its ordered structures a force and a god that, by their very nature, call those structures into question.

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