THE MENACE OF DIONYSUS: SEX ROLES AND REVERSALS IN EURIPIDES' BACCHAE

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GREEK TRAGEDY, LIKE GREEK MYTH and literature generally, presents a complex and ambivalent image of woman. As the one who bears and cares for children and tends house and hearth, she is at the center of what is secure, nurturing, life-giving; but in her passionate and emotional nature and the violence of her sexual instincts which she is felt as little able to control, she is regarded as irrational, unstable, dangerous. Hence she is seen as an integral part of the civic structure on the one hand, but also regarded as a threat to that structure on the other. In this aspect she is associated also with what is hostile or threatening to the organized and formed inner space of the city. She has her place within the sheltered inner domain of the house, but also has affinities with the wild, savage world of beasts outside the limits of the city walls.[1]

The Greek poets and tragedians return to this ambiguity again and again. The *Oresteia* of Aeschylus dramatizes the horror felt toward the act whereby the woman violently overcomes the man, the queen kills the king. A whole series of animal images stresses the inversion of civilized values inherent in such an act: the lioness defeats the lion, the cow destroys the bull. The *Trachinian Women* of Sophocles develops the grim paradox that the patient Deianeira has faithfully kept the house during the years when her husband, Heracles, has been off killing monstrous Hydras and Centaurs, but she has also kept hidden in the very depths or recesses (*mychoi*) of the house – that is, in the space belonging to and symbolic of woman – the deadly poison of the monstrous Hydra, given her as a love-charm by the lustful Centaur, Nessus.[2] In the *Hippolytus* the hero, when approached by the Nurse on Phaedra's behalf, cries out that women should not have human servants, but should dwell only with the savage "biting beasts who do not speak" (*Hipp.* 645-8).

Such women in tragedy threaten the polis not only because they are associated with the irrational forces of emotion and sexuality to which they are felt to be less resistant than men,[3] and not only be-

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cause of the narcissism of the Greek male in the psychological mechanisms studied by Philip Slater,[4] but also because they are seen as closer to the basic biological processes of nature, parturition, lactation, menstruation. In their greater closeness to the rhythms of the natural world, they oppose the yearning for autonomy and independence from nature, the desire for that which neither comes into being nor passes away, which permeates all Greek thought, be it Homeric epic with its ideal of immortal glory, or epinician poetry with its deathless and radiant divine world which the victor touches through his moment of brilliant achievement, or Platonic philosophy with its concern for the unchanging One or the immutable Forms which stand above and beyond the changing particulars of our transient sense-world.

In woman too the Greek desires for clarity of definition, for clearly defined limits, meets a stumbling block. Her position between culture and nature, to which a number of scholars have pointed,[5] confuses the basic antinomies with which the Greeks demarcate the human, civilized world from the savage, chaotic, violent realm of the beasts "outside."[6]

In view of these ambiguities, one can understand the affinity that exists in Greek culture between the threatening aspects of Dionysus and the threatening aspect of women. Both are associated with the release of emotional energies which are usually controlled and channeled for the benefit of the order of the polis. Both occupy an ambiguous place between the human and the bestial realms and between civic order and the potential chaos of the natural world beyond the limits of the polis. Both too are connected with the processes of nature in its vital and hence uncontrollable, mysterious aspect.

A fundamental quality of Dionysus in Greek literature is his dissolution and confusion of basic polarities.[7] He is an Olympian god, but he appears in the bestial form of bull, snake, or lion. He has a place at the center of the civic religion (the Greater Dionysia of Athens being the most familiar example); yet his worship also involves ecstatic rites on the wild mountainside, performed at night by women carrying flaming torches. He is a male god, but he has the softness, sensuality, and emotionality which the Greeks generally associate with women. He is Greek, but he comes from barbarian Asia, escorted by a band of wild Asian women. He is a local Theban divinity, but he is also a universal "god of many names," whose power, as Sophocles says in the last ode of the *Antigone*, extends

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from Italy to the East. He is neither child nor man, but occupies a position somewhere in between as the eternal adolescent. Through his connections with wine and with the life-giving liquids and moisture that nourish life, he is also connected with the biological processes of the natural world and specifically with the growth of new vegetative life.

Rationality, clear limits between human and bestial, independence of the biological processes of the life-cycle: these implicit ideals of the male-oriented polis are all challenged and called into question both by Dionysus and by women. Women and Dionysus are closely associated in several myths which involve threats to the polis and its values. Such, for instance, are the myths of the daughters of King Proetus of Tiryns, the daughters of Minyas of Orchomenos, King Lycurgus of Thrace. *Resistance* to the god seems to be a basic component of the Dionysiac myth.[8] It is as if the very nature of the god provoked a reaction of hostility in those who represented the male-centered authority of the polis. The particular historical circumstances from which such myths may derive doubtless reflect more general, deeper attitudes and anxieties.

In Sophocles' *Antigone* the heroine's opposition to the male-oriented rationalism of Creon's *polis* in the name of the blood-ties of the family and the honor due the dead also involves Dionysus. He appears in the first ode of the play as the god of the polis to whom the Thebans pray in gratitude for the salvation of their city. But the last ode, when Creon's proud constructions are about to disintegrate, presents a very different Dionysus, a divinity connected with the maternal Demeter (1120) and with the "chorus" of "fire-breathing stars" in the vast spaces of the heavens (1146-8) beyond the citizen "choruses" (cf. 1151-4 and 152-4) within the limits of the city's theater. Associated with the vital processes of nature, with women, and with madness, answering control over nature by sympathy with nature, reason by ecstasy, Dionysus' prominence in the *Antigone* adds another dimension to its male-female conflicts.

The function of Dionysus in the sexual antagonisms of the *Bacchae* is two-fold. On the civic or political plane, he represents a threat from outside to the stable order of the polis, a threat from the wild and the alien, the ecstasy of barbarian-seeming rites. In this respect Dionysus and his women followers endanger the civilized order which is embodied in the culture-hero Cadmus, founder of Thebes,

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and, more ambiguously, in his grandson, Pentheus, Cadmus' successor as king of Thebes. On the personal or private plane Dionysus embodies a threat to the psychological coherence and integration necessary for the successful passage in the life-cycle from childhood to adulthood. He is a threat to the rigidly masculine value-system which the young Pentheus, standing at the critical transition between adolescence and manhood,[9] feels that he must espouse with a vehement exclusiveness, as if to maximize the differentiation between the male world to which he aspires and the female elements both in himself and outside himself. Ironically, the very vehemence of that rejection of the female leads not to a successful passage to masculine status, but to the reverse, infantile regression and domination by the female in the form of the destructive mother.

Euripides, so often the critic of his society's accepted values, reveals the paradoxical truth that male identity is achieved not by rejection or violent domination of the female and of the "feminine" forms of experience associated with Dionysus, but by a more complex process of balance and integration. It would be rash to view Pentheus as a symbol of the Greek male in general. Yet, like Creon in the *Antigone*, he seems to embody a type of overreaction to feminine modes of experience which was not uncommon in this male-dominated society. His death by dismemberment, then, is not merely a poetic justice done to one who resists the god of fusion, but also a reflection of a psychological and social reality for the society as a whole. One-sided commitment to male-oriented values involves not merely a suppression of women, but also a fragmentation of the male psyche which represses a whole area of human experience and human emotionality. This society's extreme sexual differentiation, even with its preferential treatment of the masculine, is as inimical to male as to female psychic integration. The women become mad and leave the inner space which defines them and gives them their secure, if limited, identity; yet the men too suffer dismemberment.

What is perhaps ultimately tragic in Pentheus' fate, then, lies in the implicit recognition that the narrowly masculine orientation of this society is as destructive of male as of female self-realization. Its sharp division of sexual roles, symbolically concentrated in the figure of Pentheus, can lead not to wholeness, but only to disintegration. Pentheus' insistence on (and the polis' high valuation of) maleness, for example, restricts the mode of human association to the

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warrior-society of the hoplite band, with its rigid discipline, its hierarchical ranking of inferior and subordinate (cf. 721, 1046), its use of intimidation as a mode of social order (cf. 668-671), its competitive rivalry or "strife" (*eris*, 715). So structured, a society is closed to the kind of communion possible in the Dionysiac *thiasos* or "holy band" (cf. the untranslatable θιασεύεται ψυχάν in 75, "mingles his spirit with the holy band" [Kirk], which denotes "the inward feeling of unity with the *thiasos* and through it with the god" [Dodds]). Unable to envisage this spontaneous fusion and communion of the total *thiasos*, Pentheus can imagine it only as the setting for isolated, individualistic sexual acts, where, incidentally, the woman still remains subordinate to the male she "serves" (221-225):

> In the middle of the sacred bands (*thiasoi*) bowls of wine stand full, and one by one they go slinking off each to different places in the wilderness (ἄλλην δ' ἄλλοσ' εἰς ἐρημίαν 222) and serve the beds of men. The pretext is that they are maenads making sacrifice, but in fact they put Aphrodite before their Bacchic god.

What is true of the relation between man and man applies also to that between man and nature, for as we shall see Pentheus' male warrior code implies the rigid separation between man and nature by the barriers of gates and towers which the hoplites defend, the absolute antithesis to the Maenads' free crossing between city and wild and their open receptivity to the gentle gifts of the earth as of their god (704-711).

Pentheus' death, then, reflects not merely the triumph of Dionysus nor even the defeat of the male hoplite values, but the failure of the society as a whole, the failure of the great Athenian experiment which seemed so brilliant two or three generations before. Old and self-exiled, viewing the Greek polis from the remote and alien court of King Archelaus in Macedonia, Euripides was in a position to contemplate such a possibility even more radically than in any of his earlier works. In a world dominated by sexual (and other) dichotomization rather than complementation, neither men nor women can achieve a fully integrated identity. The city fails in one of its most basic functions, to realize the full human potential of its citizens. It can only violently reject the god whose nature it is to bypass such di-

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chotomies; his arrival brings dismemberment, destruction, confusion of identity to *both* sides, to men and women alike.

In this respect the *Bacchae*, like the *Antigone* and the *Trachiniae*, exemplifies the capacity of tragedy to stand outside the familiar norms and the remarkable ability of Athenian culture to institutionalize a criticism of those norms, to find a socially acceptable frame which allows the anti-culture, the suppressed values and drives, to emerge and find a coherent, articulate shape. The Dionysiac myth of the *Bacchae* and the Dionysiac form of tragedy here work together to enable this "anti-culture" to come forth from unconscious into conscious knowledge. In the myth, as in the aesthetic form of tragedy which frames it and heightens its expressive possibilities, dichotomy collapses into fusion, separation yields to incorporation, and absolute division gives way to ambiguity. By uniting symbolically and analogically the various areas of Dionysus' powers (god of religious ecstasy, wine, vegetative growth, fusion with nature, illusion, tragedy) and by concentrating them upon the exaggerated masculine and civic values of Pentheus, the *Bacchae* also reveals the poet's self-conscious awareness of the radical subversiveness of his tragic form. With the repressed energies of women the tragedian also liberates the emotions, the types of religious experience, the forms of interpersonal relations and relations to external reality, the modes of verbal, gestural, and aesthetic expression which receive only limited or marginal recognition in the dominant cultural pattern.

Confusing the boundaries between youth and adult and between male and female, Dionysus embodies all that Pentheus has repressed in defining himself as the authoritarian king of Thebes: in Freudian terms, the sexual energy which now appears in prurient, perverted form – the desire to observe the Maenads secretly as they sleep; or, in Jungian terms, the *anima* or female half of his psyche which he has also denied in favor of a narrow masculine ethic of discipline, martial force, restrictive rationalism. For these reasons Pentheus cannot accept Dionysus and his rites, reacts violently against him often in terms of bitter attacks against women and what he takes to be the lechery and debauchery of his women-followers, and is destroyed – literally torn apart – by the female component of the city and of himself, rent by his mother, Agave, her sisters, and their followers, the women of Thebes in a Dionysiac rite beyond the walls of the polis on the wild mountainside.

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The adolescent Dionysus of the *Bacchae*, as also of the vase-paintings of the latter half of the fifth century, has the force and energy of a man, but the grace, charm, soft beauty and seductiveness of a girl.[10] For Greek tragedy that combination of male and female characteristics is menacing and ominous rather than potentially helpful and harmonious.[11] Dionysus' ancestry too combines both sexes in a mysterious double birth, for he is the child of a mortal mother, but is actually born from the "male womb" of his immortal father (*Ba.* 90f., 526ff.). His mortal mother, Semele, also has associations with the earth and may have been the survival of a pre-Greek earth-goddess,[12] whereas his father, Zeus, is the Olympian par excellence, the god of the sky and regulator of celestial phenomena.

The play links these ambiguities within Dionysus to those within Pentheus. Pentheus too occupies an ambiguous place between the civilized world and the wild and between two "fathers." One of these, Cadmus (actually his maternal grandfather), is a founder of cities and a vanquisher of monstrous earth-born serpents.[13] The other, the "biological" as opposed to the "cultural" father, Echion, is himself an earth-born monster, an opponent of the Olympian gods (cf. 538-44).[14] For Pentheus, as for Dionysus too, as we shall see, the relation with his mother is fraught with ambivalence and violence. And finally, like Dionysus, he too stands at an ambiguous point of transition between childhood and manhood, between the softness, sensuality, and unreliability of adolescence and the firmness of the adult male warrior, disciplined, steadfast, and unmovable in his hoplite armor.

As Dionysus vacillates between Olympian and mortal birth, so Pentheus vacillates between autochthony and normal birth from a woman. As the son of Echion, Pentheus is "earth-born," γηγενής (996f = 1015f.). His links to autochthonous birth may be connected to an implicit denial of woman's role in birth, and hence to a denial of sexuality itself. Hence he feels that violence toward women which makes it impossible for him to achieve his adult male status and to fulfill his kingship of Thebes, for the "Earth-born Men" are notoriously violent. Elsewhere in the Theban cycle they appear as the destroyers of cities, i.e., as the threat to just that institution which Pentheus the King is supposed to protect.[15]

Taken back into his mother's arms (cf. 968-70) and into his mother's body in the rite of *omophagia*, the "raw-eating" of the hunted

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victim in the Dionysiac rite (cf. 139f.), Pentheus undergoes a violent "rebirth" which contrasts with the successful "rebirth" of Dionysus, torn from his mother's body and transplanted to the "male womb" of his immortal father's thigh. Dionysus' status as a god outside of the cycles of generational passage and mortal birth reflects a deficiency of connection with the mother, at least on the biological level. It is in fact his attempt to reestablish this maternal bond by asserting his links with Thebes that produces the disaster for the human protagonists.[16] Pentheus, on the other hand, for all his defiance of woman, suffers from an excessive closeness to the mother: he never fully escapes the maternal bond. As is characteristic of Euripidean (and other) tragedy, we are left oscillating between the two extremes without a stable balance or point of rest. Being proven the son of his biological father, Echion, places Pentheus in the realm of the beasts and leaves him totally exposed to the beast-like aspect of his own mother who rends and devours him as if he were a beast. But being proven the son of his father, Zeus, establishes Dionysus in the honor within Thebes at the price of destroying the ruling family and exiling the founder of the city himself, metamorphosed into the shape of the monstrous serpent that he slew as a preliminary to the founding act itself.

Beside Pentheus' chthonic ancestry from Echion, there is also an Olympian ancestry too, namely the marriage of Cadmus and Harmonia, his maternal grandparents. But the result of this union of a goddess with a mortal is, ultimately, unhappy, as is usually the case with goddess-mortal unions.[17] Aside from Semele (whose union with Zeus can hardly be considered a success, at least from her point of view), the other three daughters of this marriage all lose their sons, two by their own hand (Ino, Agave). Even this Olympian side of Pentheus' ancestry has its sinister aspect, however, for Euripides reminds us that it has its origins in Ares, the god of war (cf. 1332) and in one tradition the father of the dangerous serpent that guards the waters of Dirce.[18]

The action of the play constitutes a kind of *rite de passage* for both god and the mortal. Here both have to come to terms with the question of birth from a woman (Semele, Agave) or birth from something else ("male womb" of Zeus, "earthborn" through Echion). The two situations have diametrically opposite results. Entering as a nameless "Stranger," Dionysus exits as a proven god, his Olympian

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patronymic firmly asserted (1341, 1343). Beginning as the securely ensconced king of Thebes, Pentheus exits from city to wild as the scapegoat and beast-victim, deprived of every aspect of his masculine identity, dressed as a woman and returned to his mother, a helpless and confused child who can only call out his mother's name, completely impotent before her power (1118-1121).

Because Pentheus is both an individual figure and an embodiment of the civic order of Thebes, his tragedy involves more than just a single man's crisis of identity. It implies also a vision of the political and cosmic order which centers upon him as king. Through Dionysus' dissolution of boundaries – boundaries between parts of the self as well as between parts of the social and natural order – the disintegration of personal identity is both causally parallel and typologically homologous to the disintegration of the social structures. The analogy between the internal and external or personal and social disintegration is facilitated by the fact that both the personal and the social order that Pentheus embodies have the same basis. His emotional coherence and the coherence of the civic order which he strives to defend rest upon the imposition of the sharpest possible dichotomy between male and female and upon the violent repression of the latter if it threatens to get out of control, as it does upon the arrival of Dionysus and his Maenads.

In neither the inner realm of his palace nor the outer condition of the city can he tolerate the possibility that women, bearers and symbols of free sexual instincts and uncontrolled emotion, should run around free or, quite literally, "loose" (e.g. 445). The palace is a symbol both of Pentheus' soul and Pentheus' political authority, that is, of both the internal and external dimensions of his authoritarian and repressive character. It is significant that the scene which immediately follows upon the destruction of the palace, real or illusory – the so-called "palace miracle" (576-603) – presents a microcosm of Pentheus' failure in the whole play. He attempts to fetter, control, and shut away Dionysus in the safe dark places of the palace (609-21), as he had shut him away in the dark, locked spaces of his psyche and as he would shut away in the workrooms of his palace the Maenads who would run freely on the mountains. In the parode they sang a joyful ode on leaving "the looms and shuttles" under the goad of the god's ecstasy (116-19). But Pentheus' threat is to sell them as slaves or to possess them as "servants for his looms" (ἐφ' ἱστοῖς δμωΐδας

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κεκτήσομαι 514). In both cases, they are both enclosed as "property" (cf. *kektēsomai* 514) within the house and become part of the commercial structure of the city, which of course is in the hands of men. But in the second half of the scene with Dionysus after the "palace miracle," the god eludes him. He cannot be "bound" or "enclosed" (cf. 642-3), but "flees the bonds" (648).

The attempt and failure of Pentheus to "bind" the god encapsulated in this brief scene before the palace (604-659) are then projected on the larger screen of the civic and political order when the messenger enters with the news of the Maenads who are in fact running loose on Cithaeron (660 ff.). The link between these two dimensions of Pentheus' repressiveness toward Dionysus and his women – palace and city, self and polis – is already established in the closing exchanges of this scene: Pentheus' language of binding and enclosing, hitherto restricted to imprisoning Maenads and Dionysus within the palace, shifts to the wider spatial frame of enclosing the *city* by walls and towers against the god and his followers (653-4):

> *Penth.:* I order you to lock every tower in a circle.
> *Dionys.:* Why? Do not gods overleap walls too?[19]

Pentheus' identity-crisis, as we have suggested, revolves about the crucial passage from youth to full-fledged hoplite warrior, a passage which also involves leaving behind his mother for the totally male society of warriors. Hoplite status, however, also involves an attitude of mind, a quality of discipline and stability which stands at the opposite extreme from the female emotionality associated with Dionysus. Dionysus' rites, as old Teiresias points out at the beginning, include both young and old and potentially (as Teiresias and Cadmus' participation also implies) both men and women. But exclusiveness comes increasingly to pervade Pentheus' image of the social order: a warrior-society of obedient, disciplined male citizens in hoplite ranks who protect the enclosed, walled space of the city in which the women are safely secluded and secured.

From the very beginning of the play, however, these hoplite values are directly threatened by Dionysus. Near the end of the prologue the god warns (50-52):

> ἦν δὲ Θηβαίων πόλις
> ὀργῇ σὺν ὅπλοις ἐξ ὄρους βάκχας ἄγειν
> ζητῇ, ξυνάψω μαινάσι στρατηλατῶν.

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> But if the polis of the Thebans in anger with arms seeks to drive the Bacchants from the mountain, I shall join battle leading my maenad army.

The juxtaposition of "anger" and "arms" (*orgē, hopla*) and of "maenads" and "lead an army" (*mainasin stratēlatōn*) creates two opposing, but complementary reversals. The first discordantly associates the steadiness of the hoplites, representatives of calm, firm discipline, with the passion of "anger." The second phrase confers upon the disordered "mad women" (the literal meaning of *mainades*) the military order of soldiers who follow and obey a general (*stratēlatōn* 52).

Teiresias' sophistic discourse on the powers and attributes of Dionysus develops this paradox, but in a remote, theoretical perspective. Remarking that Dionysus has "a share in Ares," god of war, he points out that the panic fear and madness (*phobos, mania*) which Dionysus can inspire "flutters an army with fright when it is under arms (*hopla*) and in its ordered ranks (*taxeis*) before it even touches the spear" (302-5). The great central narrative scene which describes the Maenads on Mount Cithaeron finally fulfills these hints. Here the men of Thebes are filled with the passion of "anger" (*orgē*) as they "rush into arms" (*hopla*) (757-8), whereas the women, initially at least, have the "moderation" or *sōphrosynē* (*sōphronōs*, 686) and "good order" (*eukosmia* 693). They proceed in ordered ranks (*tetagmenē* 723; cf. *taxeis* 303) and follow Dionysus' command to follow him "armed" (*hōplismenai*, 733) with the thyrsus, a clear echo of the god's threat to lead an "army" of Maenads in the prologue (50-2).[20] In the sequel the hoplite spear or lance (*lonchōton belos* 761) proves futile, as Teiresias, in his very different context had hinted that it would (cf. *lonchai* 304). The Maenads, "shooting forth their thyrsuses from their hands" (762, where the inverted phallic imagery is obvious) turn the male warriors "to flight" (*phygēi* 763), "women (defeating) men" 764). Pentheus' response to this news is a flurry of martial commands in elaborate language (780-4), culminating in the pointed admission of the violent sexual threat to his masculine and martial authority, "Nothing can exceed this if what we suffer we suffer from women" (785-6).

In this scene, as even more dramatically in the second long recitative in the play, the account of Pentheus' death at the hands of

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the Theban Maenads, women are not only warriors, but also hunters. Thus they usurp the two activities which cross-culturally are most often the prerogatives of men. In this play, moreover, they are the "hunted" who soon turn into the "hunters" (cf. 732), just as the proud and violent king becomes their helpless beast of prey.[21]

Pentheus' first response to the news of the Maenads on the mountain, as we have seen, is in terms of gates and towers, the enclosures, guarded by male warriors, which enforce the separation between the city and what lies outside. His next command, now directly after the messenger's account of the Maenads, is "Go to the Electran gates" (780-1). But of course it is in the nature of Dionysus and his followers to destroy such boundaries, both literally and metaphorically. Here Pentheus' resistance to Dionysus and his violent assertion of sexual differentiation suddenly gives way to the willingness to be dressed as a Maenad himself, a total confusion of the boundaries of the self and of sexual identities, once the god releases his repressed desire to see the Maenads.

The final destruction of Pentheus also involves both an inversion of sexual values and a destruction of gates. When he has been torn apart by his mother, Agave, a huntress and a warrior both, she, as leader of the Maenad band whom Pentheus would have kept "outside" by means of gates, towers, and bonds, now passes "within these gates" (1145) "to the palace" of the king (1149; cf. 1165), shouting to her "fellow-huntsman," Dionysus. She calls Dionysus not only "fellow-hunter," but also "victorious athlete" (*kallinikos* 1147), another inversion of exclusively male prerogatives. Pentheus, we recall, who scorned Dionysus for long hair unsuited to "wrestling" (455) admitted at his point of crucial change or confusion of sexual identities that he was "caught in a hold from which he can't escape" (800) and was brought to a "contest" where the god will be "the victor" (975).

When Agave does finally enter the palace, bearing the prey of her grisly "hunting," her first words call attention to those very civic boundaries which Dionysus and his women followers have violated and confused: "O you who dwell in the lovely-towered town *(kallipyrgon asty)* of Theban earth, come and behold this prey which we, the daughters of Cadmus have hunted..." (1202-4). She then reverses sexual values in the martial rather than the spatial sphere as she goes on to extol hunting with bare hands over the use of nets or

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spears (1205-8). She employs once more a compound of the word *lonchē*, spear, which was prominent in the sexual reversals in the area of war earlier (cf. 304, 762). She would affix the head of Pentheus to the palace in words that recall the attack upon a city (1213 f.), the culminating ironical destruction of the civic values of male warfare, fortifications, and boundaries that Pentheus asserted.

As Agave affixes this prey of her "hunting" as a trophy to the palace walls, so she also exhibits deeds of "daring" (*tolmē*) which properly belong to men: "Coming to the town within these walls," says Cadmus, "I learned of my daughter's deeds of daring (*tolmēmata,* 1222-3). "Daring," *tolmē*, was Pentheus' boast when, disguised as a maenad, he was going to spy on their rites (961-2): "Lead me through the middle of the Theban land, for I am the only man (*anēr*) who dares (*tolmōn*) to do this." Now, however, the male achievements which he should have won are transferred to the mother who has destroyed her son. It is she, then, who "boasts" of her "excellence" to her father in terms which, within the usual norms of the Greek family, would be appropriate to the son, not the daughter (1233-40):

> Father, you can now make the greatest boast, that you have sown by far the best daughter of all mortals. I mean them all, but me especially, who have left the shuttles at the loom and come to greater things, the hunt of beasts with my hands. And I bring this now in my arms, as you see, taking this prize of excellence (*aristeia*), to be hung up in your halls.

The coveted "prize of excellence" or *aristeia* (1239) is just what the young warrior should have obtained as the mark of his sure passage from boyhood to manhood. But now it is the daughter, not the son, who gives it to the father; and that very "prize" is the head of the son savagely killed and torn as a wild beast by the mother. Thus the differences between male and female, between kindred and enemy, between child and adult, and between beast and man are all collapsed simultaneously in this violent triumph of the Dionysiac religion.

These inversions of sexual roles go even farther in the next exchange. As Agave claims the "prize of excellence" (*aristeia*) of the successful hero-warrior and boasts to her father like a young man who has passed his first trials, so conversely she speaks as the father whose "character" the son should imitate. Still under the

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influence of the Dionysiac madness she utters a wish that Pentheus "might be a good hunter, resembling his mother's character (*tropoi*) when he set out hunting wild beasts with the young men of Thebes" (1252-5). "Young men," *neaniai*, reminds us again of Pentheus' adolescent status (cf. *neanias*, also at a point of crucial generational transition, in 974). But now it is the mother, who has just led "young women," *neanides* (1079), against men on the mountain and has replaced the father in forming the "character" which the young man should show in adulthood. The feast that would celebrate the boy's inscription into his fratry or male confraternity by his father is now not a feast of joyful celebration (cf. 1242, 1246 f.), but a perverted rite where the quarry to be eaten is the youth himself.

Some semblance of order is recovered when the paternal authority of Cadmus calls his daughter back to sanity.[22] The brief dialogue reestablishes Agave in the internal spaces of the house and reasserts her dependencies on its male members, husband, father, son, after the threatening autonomy of the Dionysiac release from authority (1273-6):

Cadm.: To what house did you go in marriage?
Ag.: You gave me to one of the Sown Men, as they say, Echion.
Cadm.: What child was then born for your husband in the house?
Ag.: Pentheus, from the union of his father and myself.

Agave still finds it hard to grasp this collapsing of inner and outer space, house and wild, Thebes and mountain, that her madness has encompassed. "Where did he die," she asks, "in the house or in what places?" (1290). Cadmus' answer, "There, where the dogs once tore apart Actaeon" (1291), associates Pentheus with another adolescent whose generational passage failed through sexual immaturity and a problematical encounter with female sexuality. Like Pentheus, Actaeon sees what he should not see and meets the death of a beast through a female figure, Artemis, whose place is in the wild, a goddess who, like Dionysus, draws women away from their role as wife and mother in the house to the wild forests.

Agave's Dionysiac experience is hardly a real liberation. At the end she is left totally bereft of any of the defining and sustaining structures of her life. Like her father Cadmus, who goes off to lead barbarian hordes against Greek cities in the form of a monstrous serpent, she is deprived of country, city, house, and its sheltering

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inner spaces (cf. 1366, 1367-70). She has no place in the wild either, and she feels only repugnance for Mount Cithaeron and the bacchantic rites performed there (1382-7).

As all the boundaries dissolve, Agave, not unlike Phaedra in the *Hippolytus*, is seen as both the god's instrument of vengeance and his victim. The joyful "sharing with" of the Dionysiac experience (e.g. 726 f.) becomes the sharing of exile and suffering (cf. συμφυγάδες 1382).

Speaking of the psychological functions of the cult of Dionysus Philip Slater[23] suggests that

> it provided the ultimate fantasy solution to the torment which sex antagonism occasioned in Greek life by eliminating the exaggerated differentiation imposed by culturally defined sex roles.

Yet what tragedy gives us is not the solution to these tensions, but their dramatic representation in the most extreme and uncompromising terms. The social function of myth and cult may be to mediate these polarities, as Lévi-Strauss thinks, or to provide a solution to deeply felt emotional conflicts, as Slater suggests. But the function of myth as recast in tragedy is to strip away the mediations and expose the conflict in its most absolute form.[24] The "problem of the *Bacchae*," then, has no resolution; and the power of the tragedy lies in the vehemence with which the two sides clash and in the unmitigated horror of the wreckage that emerges from that encounter. Neither young nor old, neither men nor women, neither the yielding nor the recalcitrant are spared. However useful Slater's formulation may be for understanding the social and psychological function of the cult of Dionysus, it does not do justice to the suffering and violence of Euripides' play. Here equilibrium is not restored; we are left with a sense of total disorientation: exile, suffering meted out far beyond what the offense seemed to merit, cruel and distant gods who liberate men and women from the limitations of their ordinary consciousness, but at the price of also releasing their most destructive impulses.

Euripides vividly dramatizes the conflicts created by Dionysus' presence in the polis, the release of the emotional and irrational forces so closely associated with women. In Bacchylides' account of the myth of the maddened daughters of Proetus, the paternal figure can appease the angry goddesses with sacrifices and temples, and the

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girls can be brought back within the framework of house and city not much the worse for their wanderings in the Arcadian wilderness.[25] But in the tragedy even the paternal figure is exiled and brutalized; and the irrational forces which woman is felt to embody and contain have to run their fearful course until house and city and the women themselves are overwhelmed by the disaster.[26]

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NOTES

[1] See Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Hestia-Hermès: sur l'expression religieuse de l'espace et du mouvement chez les Grecs," *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*[3] (Paris 1974) 1.131 ff. See also Froma I. Zeitlin, "Ritual, Symbolic, and Expressive Behavior in the Women of Aeschylus," sections I and IV (forthcoming).

[2] See Charles Segal, "Mariage et sacrifice dans les *Trachiniennes* de Sophocle," *AC* 44 (1975) 35-36 and "Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: Myth, Poetry, and Heroic Values," *YCS* 25 (1976) 126 ff.

[3] Male lust, of course, also receives its due share of responsibility in Greek tragedy: cf. Euripides, *Hippol.* 966 ff.

[4] Philip Slater, *The Glory of Hera* (Boston 1968) and "The Greek Family in History and Myth," *Arethusa* 7 (1974) 9-44, with the useful caveat in Helene P. Foley's review, *Diacritics* 5.4 (1975) 31-36 and Marilyn B. Arthur's critique, "Review Essay: Classics," *Signs* 2.2 (Winter 1976) 395-397.

[5] For example Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, Calif. 1974) 67-88, especially 73 ff.; also M. Z. Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," *ibid.*, 30 ff.

[6] See Charles Segal, "The Raw and the Cooked in Greek Literature: Structure, Values, Metaphor," *CJ* 69 (1974) 289-308, especially 296 ff.

[7] See, *inter alia,* Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus, Myth and Cult* (1933), transl. R. B. Palmer (Bloomington, Ind. 1965) 110 ff. and 120 ff.; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus* (Cambridge 1948) 176-177; René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris 1972) 181 ff.; P. Vicaire, "Place et figure de Dionysos dans la tragédie de Sophocle," *REG* 81 (1968) 355-356; L. Gernet, *REG* 66 (1953) 392-393.

[8] See Otto (preceding note) 71 ff.; Girard (preceding note) 197-200; Henri Jeanmaire, *Dionysos* (Paris 1951) 139, 142 ff. (on the *Bacchae*), 201 ff.

[9] Pentheus is repeatedly called a "young man," *neanias* (274, 975, 1254), and his passage from youth to adulthood is stressed throughout the play,

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a point which I hope to develop elsewhere. See also A. J. Podlecki, "Individual and Group in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *AC* 43 (1974) 155. Though Pentheus is not literally an adolescent, he reenacts the emotional and archetypal experience of the passage from adolescence to maturity. In psychological terms, he is fixated at the adolescent stage of personal development.

[10] For the change from the virile bearded Dionysus of black-figure vase-paintings to the more youthful, softer god of the latter half of the fifth century, see Jeanmaire (above, note 8) 155.

[11] Clytaemnestra's "man-counseling heart" is the most familiar example: Aeschylus, *Agam.* 11; see also Zeitlin (above, note 1) section IV. For the reverse see Euripides, *Electra,* 932 ff. and 948 ff.

[12] See Otto (above, note 7) 59 ff. for this theory and its uncertainties.

[13] Pentheus calls Cadmus "father" (*pater,* 251, 1322), as Cadmus calls him "child" (*pais* or *teknon*: 330, 1308, 1317). As culture-hero, Cadmus slays the serpent that guards the spring of Dirce and makes possible the founding of the city: see J. Fontenrose, *Python* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1959) 306-320 and Francis Vian, *Les origines de Thèbes: Cadmos et les Spartes* (Paris 1963), 94-113, especially 105 ff.

[14] For the sinister significance of Echion and Pentheus' "earth-born" ancestry see Fontenrose (preceding note) 316-317, Winnington-Ingram (above, note 7) 79 and 181, Marilyn Arthur, "The Choral Odes of the *Bacchae* of Euripides," *YCS* 22 (1972) 171-175. The dangerous serpent, from whose teeth the "earth-born Sown Men" are born, is also earth-born or *gēgenēs*: see Fontenrose, 308 and Vian (preceding note) 29 and 106-109.

[15] See Aeschylus, *Septem* 424 ff.; Euripides, *Phoenissae* 128-130, 1131.

[16] In the prologue (line 41) Dionysus gives his desire to vindicate his mother's name as one of his reasons for coming to Thebes.

[17] See, for example, Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York 1975) 9 ff.

[18] See Vian (above, note 13) 106-109; Arthur (above, note 14) 173-174.

[19] For the importance of architectural motifs in the play see William C. Scott, "Two Suns over Thebes: Imagery and Stage Effects in the *Bacchae*," *TAPA* 105 (1975) 339 ff., especially 341.

[20] See Richard Hamilton, "*Bacchae* 47-52: Dionysus' Plan," *TAPA* 104 (1974) 139-149; Podlecki (above, note 9) 150-151.

[21] For hunting and its reversals see Winnington-Ingram (above, note 7) 94 ff. and 106 ff.; Otto (above, note 7) 108-109; Scott (above, note 19) 339 with the further literature cited there in note 9; G. S. Kirk, *The Bacchae by Euripides* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1970) 13-14.

[22] For other aspects of the awakening scene see Winnington-Ingram (above, note 7) Chapter 10.

[23] Slater (above, note 3) 283-284.

[24] See, for instance, Girard (above, note 7) 196: "La tragédie ne parvient à

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trouver son équilibre nulle part, elle n'a pas de lieu où elle puisse s'installer. De là son incohérence féconde, face à la cohérence stérile de tant de schèmes intellectuels et esthétiques irréprochables.''

[25] Bacchylides 11.95-112. In Bacchylides' version the madness is sent by Hera, but elsewhere it comes from Dionysus: see Apollodorus 2.2.2, and the remarks of A. Henrichs, *ZPE* 15 (1974) 300f., à propos of Hesiod, frag. 37.15 M-W.

[26] A version of this paper was presented at the ''Berkshire Conference on Women's Studies'' at Bryn Mawr College in June, 1976. I thank especially Professor Froma Zeitlin and Professor Joseph Russo for friendly and helpful discussion. Some of the preliminary research for this study was done during my tenure of an American Council of Learned Society's Fellowship (1974-1975), which I gratefully acknowledge. I have also benefited from the seminar which I offered at the École des Hautes Études, VI Section, Paris, in the winter of 1975-76, where some of this material was presented. It is a pleasure to record my warm thanks to Mmes. Nicole Loraux and Suzanne Roy-Said and MM. Jean-Pierre Vernant, Marcel Detienne, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet for stimulating discussion and valuable criticism as well as cordial hospitality.

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