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Nonnian Perversions

by

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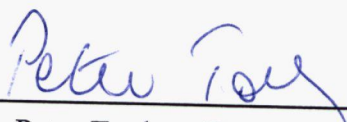
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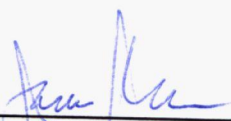
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Nonnian Perversions" submitted by Meaghan Rondeau in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.



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Abstract

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This thesis is a study of three sections of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, each of which exemplifies Nonnus' practice of perverting genres, motifs, and prior works of literature. In the first chapter, Nonnus' six references to Homer are considered in the light of their surrounding context. The resulting conclusion—that Nonnus wishes his epic to be everything Homer's poems are not—is then applied to four significant passages of *Dionysiaca* 24 and 25. The second chapter is centred upon a passage of foreshadowing at the beginning of Nonnus' Pentheus episode whose close verbal and thematic ties to Euripides' *Bacchae* deceptively suggest that Nonnus will follow the play closely when he later narrates the foreshadowed events. The final chapter is a discussion of the Aura epyllion, in which Nonnus takes his predilection for perversion to the extreme, inverting a common literary motif and inflicting it upon a character who cannot tolerate its consequences.

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This thesis is dedicated, with immeasurable fondness and gratitude, to the memory of my grandfather, Malcolm Rondeau. *Nihil carburundum bastardum!*

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INTRODUCTION

§
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 The *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus is an audacious,¹ tasteless,² and ambitiously loquacious³ epic. Nonnus himself, I suspect, would not only agree with this statement but take it as a compliment, an indication that he had successfully accomplished what he set out to achieve. Critics who write off his poem because it has these qualities are making a mistake, but an understandable one. Homer taught the Greeks and Romans what an epic was supposed to be, and, today, he teaches scholars the same thing. He is, and always has been, the standard of measurement for writers and readers of epic. When measured by the Homeric yardstick, Nonnus is quite likely the most incompetent epic poet of all time, because it appears that, compared to Homer, he is woefully terrible at everything. He fails at creating a brave and wise hero. He fails at constructing a smoothly-flowing narrative.⁴ He fails at maintaining proper epic seriousness. And beneath each of these glaring failures lurk countless sub-travesties. (His characters don't talk to each other!⁵ There is an awful lot of lechery!⁶) If we tried hard enough, reading this poem with a stern Homeric eye, we could probably find a problem with every line.

But that would be a misguided and unhelpful approach to the poem. Nonnus is not an incompetent attempted imitator of Homer. He did have Homer's yardstick with him the whole way through—not because he wished to write a proper (i.e. imitation Homeric) poem, but because he wished to do the opposite. And Homer's standard was

¹ Chamberlayne (1916) 42.

² Rose, in Rouse (1940) vol. 2, 274, note b.

³ Hopkinson (1994c) 122.

⁴ Vian (1976) XVIII: "On ne doit donc pas s'attendre à trouver dans l'oeuvre une architecture harmonieuse."

⁵ Wifstrand (1933) 142.

⁶ Enough, in fact, that Winkler wrote an entire Ph.D. dissertation about it.

not the only one that Nonnus had in his line of sight as he worked: perversions of nearly every ancient genre of writing, literary motif, and poet can be found in the *Dionysiaca*. It is as an inverter of his sources, primarily but not exclusively Homer, that Nonnus shows his cleverness and originality, producing antiquity's most unexpected epic.

The poem is also, of course, a product of its time. Writing in the fifth century,⁷ Nonnus had access to works written in a wide variety of literary genres and was influenced by the popular writers of late antiquity.⁸ Much of the *Dionysiaca*'s self-professed ποικιλία⁹ is a result of Nonnus' enthusiasm for incorporating the characteristics of so many types of writing, and the work of so many writers, into his epic.

Nonnus and Homer: not only the title of an important article by Neil Hopkinson, but also the most discordant of the Panopolitan's paradoxical pairings. Nonnus mentions Homer six times in his poem, and there are many scenes therein which earlier scholars view as imitations of passages from the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Hopkinson, however, interpreting Nonnus' references to Homer as indicative of desire to emulate and surpass his poetic predecessor, goes on to argue that this desire is exemplified in certain significant passages of the *Dionysiaca*. Viewing Nonnus' method from this angle gives the reader a much more enlightening and accurate perspective on the poet's policy, and gives Nonnus some well-earned respect. But I do not support Hopkinson's view that each of the epic's references to Homer contains emulation or rivalry. When viewed in their surrounding contexts, all six of them prove to be uncomplimentary and hint at a

⁷ Vian (1976) I-XVII, discusses this, hypothesizing 450-470 (XVII) as Nonnus' likely *floruit*. See also Shorrock (2001) 1; Rose in Rouse (1940) vol.1, vii; Hopkinson (1994c) 121.

⁸ Cf. Vian (1976) XLV-XLVI for a list of these.

⁹ *Dion.* 1.12 ποικίλον ὕμνον ἀράσσω. Cf. Hopkinson (1994b) 10-12, Shorrock (2001) 21-22, Vian (1976) XXX.

practice of perversion. Throughout the poem, Nonnus does everything Homer does not; his goal is to be the anti-Homer, and the most noticeably Homer-inspired passages of the poem that have been viewed as imitations of Homer, or (as Hopkinson suggests) emulative attempts to surpass him, are in fact inversions of their Homeric counterparts. Chapter 1 is an explanation of how each of Nonnus' six references to Homer is anti-Homeric by virtue of its content, context, or both, followed by an analysis of how Nonnus' relationship with Homer plays out in four important Homer-inspired passages in books 24 and 25, his epic's centre.

Another poet with whom Nonnus has complicated connections is Euripides. Books 44 through 46 are Nonnus' tragedy-length¹⁰ reworking of the *Bacchae*. Nowhere else in the epic does he make such extensive, continual use of one poet's work, and that it is the work of a playwright, though perhaps an unexpected move from the reader's standpoint, does make sense: firstly, the *Bacchae* is by far Greek literature's most famous Dionysiac work; and secondly, Nonnus has a fondness for writing in a variety of genres. But, as with Homer, Nonnus does not merely retell Euripides' story. Chapter 2 is a detailed look at one very small part of "Nonnus' *Bacchae*," lines 44.46-79 and the subsequent passages of book 46 to which they are linked. I selected this material for discussion because it is an excellent demonstration of Nonnus' typical approach to another writer's work. What we learn from analyzing it is applicable not only to many other aspects of Nonnus' Pentheus episode but also to his use of other authors (including Homer).

In lines 44.46-79, Nonnus describes a prophetic dream Agave has had years ago. There is, of course, no such dream in Euripides; in Nonnus, however, these occur

¹⁰ As Hopkinson 1994c (121) has noted.

frequently. But although the dream itself is a new addition to the story which the reader, by the time she has arrived at book 44, will recognize as another manifestation of a popular Nonnian motif, its content, while foreshadowing Pentheus' death to Agave, seems also to foreshadow to the reader that Nonnus' version of Pentheus' death will happen just as it does in the *Bacchae*. Lines 44.46-79 contain copious verbal and thematic echoes of the play, which, taken together, give the impression that Nonnus intends to imitate Euripides. As it turns out, however, the real-life versions of the dream events earlier recounted by Agave, which occur in book 46, are inverse, Nonnian variations of the Euripidean scenes on which they are based. Nonnus shows his familiarity with the *Bacchae*'s language and themes in book 44, in order to set up what proves to be an effective and surprising contrast between Euripides' version of the story and his own.

The final chapter is a discussion of the *Dionysiaca*'s final book, in which Nonnus creates the ultimate perversion. Her name is Aura. She is a follower of Artemis and mythology's most determined virgin; Nonnus turns her into a "rapist" of Artemis and mythology's least maternal mother. The story of Aura is a disturbing reversal of a common ancient literary motif, in which a girl progresses from maidenhood to motherhood in five steps. Homer's Nausicaa (*Odyssey* 6) and Tyro (*Odyssey* 11), Aeschylus' Io (*Prometheus Bound*), and Moschus' Europa, despite their widely-varying circumstances and attitudes about marriage/motherhood, all experience this five-step transition, and they all accept their fate once they have given birth.

But Nonnus has intentionally created a character who cannot accept hers. She has a dream that foretells the loss of her virginity and reacts with a verbal and visual assault

on Artemis as the two bathe in a river: she fondles the goddess' breasts, accuses her of having a maternal appearance, and provides her with a list of potential husbands. As punishment for this strange sacrilege, Aura is raped and impregnated by Dionysus.

Whereas most maidens in myth are able, even despite having been raped, to settle down and raise their children, Aura, upon giving birth, becomes even more adamant in her refusal of maternity, and the story descends into chaos, ending with Nonnus' final insult to Aura: her metamorphosis into a fountain.

The inverted echoes of Homer's epics in books 24 and 25, the tragic Pentheus episode of books 44-46, and the Aura epyllion of book 48 may seem too unrelated to belong together in a single thesis; this is why I chose them. Regardless of which author, genre, or motif Nonnus is employing at the moment, his policy remains the same. This consistent, unconventional use of his sources makes the *Dionysiaca* the unique, wandering, tongue-in-cheek behemoth of a poem that it is. It is the common stylistic thread that links together the diverse elements of his ποικίλον ὕμνον.

CHAPTER ONE

Nonnus, the Anti-Homer

Nonnus' relationship with Homer is one of the most frequently discussed topics among both the *Dionysiaca*'s critics and its admirers. The problem is a long way from being solved. Though it was acceptable and even expected for an epic poet to borrow words and ideas from his predecessors, and from Homer especially, it is rare for an epic poet, however obviously influenced by Homer's poetry, to mention his name.¹¹ Virgil has often been considered the Roman Homer,¹² but he does not label himself thus in the *Aeneid*. The *Posthomerica* of Quintus "I Can't Believe It's Not Homer" Smyrnaeus picks up where Homer's *Iliad* leaves off, and though it is a large-scale rip-off of Homer's style and subject matter, Quintus, who could have claimed Homer as his main influence without causing so much as a raised eyebrow, does not mention his predecessor's name either.

In light of this, it is even more peculiar that Nonnus, of all people, draws the name of Homer into his poem with such insistence. It features the protagonist and plot than

¹¹ Vian (1991) notes that both Nicander and Ennius did refer to Homer in their epics.

¹² This is not the place for an extensive discussion of Virgil's use of Homer, but a brief one will be useful to highlight the contrast between what Virgil does and what Nonnus does. Virgil, writing a distinctly Roman epic, alters and modifies his Homeric models, simultaneously paying homage to the Greek poet and Latinizing him. For example, Virgil's Aeneas is a Romanized composite of Homer's Achilles and Odysseus, and the whole poem is scrupulously organized into an "*Odyssey*" component (books 1-6) and an "*Iliad*" component (books 7-12). Virgil immediately defines his relationship with Homer in the epic's first two words, *arma virumque*, and establishes that the focus of his poem will be Rome (*tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*, 1.33). This is not inversion or parody of his predecessor, but rather modification, the specific purpose of which has been clearly explained in the proem. Virgil respectfully Romanizes Homer, while Nonnus insolently inverts him. Virgil is capable of using his sources in a way similar to (but not quite the same as) the way Nonnus uses his; Thomas (1999) argues that there are six categories of reference in the poems, among which is "correction," in which "the poet provides unmistakable indications of his source, then proceeds to offer detail that contradicts or alters that source" (127). In fact, this is what Hopkinson thinks Nonnus does with Homer. I think it is important, however, to distinguish between contradiction/polemical alteration and consistent, intentional inversion.

which no more unhomeric could be conceived, and its style, as many scholars have noted, is both modern and original.¹³ Some passages in the *Dionysiaca* are reminiscent of, or based on, episodes from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but these are few and far between. They do not hold the poem together.¹⁴ An attempt to make a thorough comparison between the *Dionysiaca* as a whole and the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* or both would fail, which is perhaps why no one has undertaken the task.¹⁵ Shorrock has suggested that Homer is a father figure to Nonnus, just as Zeus is a father figure to Dionysus,¹⁶ and Hopkinson's view is that Nonnus' predominant desire was not to imitate Homer but to surpass him.¹⁷ Were it not for his name-dropping, would so many scholars be so certain that Nonnus wanted to imitate Homer? They seem to have little else in the way of evidence for this position.

Nonnus, in my view, treats Homer and his poetry no differently than he treats other authors, genres of literature, and themes—which is to say, he consciously perverts him at every opportunity. Nonnus is not Homer's clone, son, or rival; he is Homer's opposite. Nonnus is fond of creating bonds between contrasting ideas, themes and characters, and his references to Homer are the ultimate extension of his practice of yoking opposing notions together and forcing them to make the most of their

¹³ Chamberlayne (1916) 42: "[H]is merits...are quite invisible to any modern reader who applies a Homeric standard to him. So far from its being Nonnus' intention to reproduce the Homeric atmosphere as Quintus Smyrnaeus endeavored to do, he seems to have been far less an archaizer than a most audacious modernist." Braden (1974), arguing that the *Dionysiaca* has both classical and modern characteristics, writes, "There is much in Nonnos that seems to look forward to a rewriting of literary rules, a reforming of genres and classical possibilities (879). Fauth (1981) 153 makes similar remarks.

¹⁴ Duc (1990) 191: "Ce qui, dans les Dionysiaques, subsiste de l'épopée pure, c'est surtout la conquête de l'Inde et le nombre de 48 livres qui annonce une concurrence ouverte avec les chants homériques. Mais la chronologie est repousée et refoulée à tel point que des contradictions évidentes n'ont pas l'air de gêner l'auteur."

¹⁵ There are studies of the Homeric features of some very small parts of the *Dionysiaca*, but no one has ever argued for the existence of any large-scale structural, stylistic, and/or thematic resemblance between the works of the two poets. This is interesting, considering there is certainly no shortage of scholarly references to Nonnus' alleged "slavish imitation" of Homer. Collart (1930) for example, declares, "Nonnos est l'esclave de ses sources" (51), and later that "Nonnos a suivi docilement ses modèles" (256).

¹⁶ Shorrock (2001) 197-205.

¹⁷ Hopkinson (1994b), *passim*.

uncomfortable situation.¹⁸ Nonnus is the anti-Homer. In order to establish himself as such, he must draw as much attention as he can to the poet, and invert his work as much as possible. He begins this task by choosing a protagonist who receives a mere six lines' mention in the *Iliad* (6.132-7) and a total of seven lines' discussion in the *Odyssey* (11.322-5; 24.73-5), a god¹⁹ of virtually no importance to Homer but a protagonist very well suited to the literary tastes of late antiquity.²⁰ Nonnus does seem to admire Homer, but he has no desire to follow in his predecessor's footsteps. Rather, he makes a path of his own, in the opposite direction.

Books 24 and 25 are the *Dionysiaca*'s core, and within them is a concentration of Homer-inspired material. (I) In book 24 (68-108) there is a theomachy in which each fighting god is saved by another divinity intent upon protecting him/her; this seems to be a direct, deliberate contrast to *Iliad* 16.426-455, where Hera convinces Zeus that he must not save his mortal son Sarpedon. (II) Later in book 24, a feast is followed by a song about Aphrodite (218-326), which are perversions of the *Odyssey*'s banquet at the palace of the Phaeacians and the song of Demodocus (8.55-70 and 265-366) respectively. (III)

¹⁸ Winkler (1974) notes, "When unexpectedly juxtaposed, familiar phrases jolt the reader into a new perspective" (2). Also, cf. Wifstrand (1933) 81: Nonnus' epithets describe their subjects either particularly well or particularly poorly.

¹⁹ That he is a god is in itself a perversion of the epic tradition. In the article "Dionysus as an Epic Hero" (Hopkinson [1994b] ed., 156-66), Bowersock writes that the Dionysus of Nonnus' time was not the same Dionysus Homer had known, and that the elements of the god that developed over the course of the classical and Hellenistic periods led to his being a suitable epic hero for Nonnus. "Fortunately Dionysus ultimately found an epic poet who could do for him what Homer long ago had no interest in doing. Not that we should blame Homer: one could hardly have written a poem about a serene old gentleman. The ancients needed the rejuvenation of Dionysus, his rampant sexuality, and his exuberant travels, to put him in the way of an epic poet" (157). What this does not explain is why an epic poet would have selected a divine protagonist, and in what sense Nonnus' Dionysus, ineffectual immortal immoral cowardly sniveling rapist that he is, is a hero in any sense of the term.

²⁰ Roberts (1989) likens the late antique literary tradition to the visual art of the same period. He cites "certain general stylistic trends that come to the fore in the tetrarchic period and recur throughout the period of late antiquity: emphasis on the typical, rather than the particular, and on the underlying significance of a figure or object rather than its individuality, represented stylistically by a certain uniformity of presentation...and a tendency toward flat, two-dimensional treatment of space and thematic organization of detail" (69).

Book 25 begins with Nonnus' second proem and another invocation of the Muse, which seems Homeric, but what Nonnus asks the Muse to help him recite is distinctly late antique in style, and its content is a clever reversal of Homer's catalogue of Zeus' lovers (14.315-28).²¹ (IV) At the end of book 25, Dionysus receives a shield made by Hephaestus (310-567), in a passage which is in many aspects an inverted *Iliad* 18. The inspiration for all of these scenes clearly came from Homer, but they are not imitations; they are perversions of the most deliberate kind.

Before discussing these scenes from the *Dionysiaca*, it is necessary to inspect each of Nonnus' references to Homer. Neil Hopkinson has provided important insight into this matter in his own analyses of the references, but I do not agree entirely with his view that Nonnus is a rival of Homer; where Hopkinson sees emulation and competition, I see Nonnus trying to be everything Homer is not. When he begins a passage in a Homeric way, as he does, for example, in the case of the shield of Dionysus, he is not, as Hopkinson suggests, engaging in emulation that gradually metamorphoses into rivalry;²² rather, by first creating close verbal and/or thematic ties between a Homeric passage and one of his own, he is able to make his subsequent antithetical version of the Homeric scene all the more effective and apparent. Nonnus is not confused about Homer and his treatment of the poet is not hesitant.

His first reference to Homer is in the second section of his first proem:

Ἀξατέ μοι νάρθηκα, Μιμαλλόνες, ὠμαδίην δε
 νεβρίδα ποικιλόνατον ἐθήμονος ἀντὶ χιτῶνος
 σφίγξατέ μοι στέρνοισι, Μαρωνίδος ἔμπλεον ὁδμῆς
 νεκταρέης, βυθίη δὲ παρ' Εἰδοθέῃ καὶ Ὀμήρῳ
 φωκᾶων βαρὺ δέρμα φυλασσέσθω Μενέλαῳ. (1.34-38)

²¹ Vian (1990) 16.

²² Hopkinson (1994b) 23.

Hopkinson calls this a “jocular and self-confident polemic”,²³ noting that Callimachus often wrote in a similar tone “to advocate a new aesthetic for poetry”.²⁴ The new aesthetic that Nonnus is here advocating is not just a late-antique version of Homer’s: he is neither telling Homer’s stories in a new style nor telling untraditional stories in Homer’s style; so it is neither “old wine in new bottles”²⁵ nor “new wine in old bottles”²⁶). It is a late-antique *perversion* of Homer’s. This accounts for the characteristics of the episodes of *Dionysiaca* 24 and 25 discussed below. Hopkinson is right to call the poets’ relationship “uneasy”,²⁷ but wrong to view Nonnus’ first reference to Homer as an indication that he considers Homer a rival whom he wishes to surpass.²⁸ To call the two rivals is to imply that they have a common goal. In fact, though they begin from the same line, their respective Muses send them in opposite directions. Nonnus does not say that he intends to compete with Homer. He says that he is going to be what Homer is not: he will wear a wine-scented fawnskin instead of the usual chiton (35-7); meanwhile Homer will continue to reek of sealskin (37-8). His tone is playful, but he means what he says. What Nonnus is saying in the first proem is that he is a new kind of poet who intends to write a new kind of poem altogether, not that he has any desire to do Homer’s job better.

This reference to Homer, like the other five, appears in a perverse context. The content of the second part of this proem is superlatively unhomeric. Nonnus invokes the Muses in line 11, as a good epic poet should, but then he quickly rejects them for

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Shorrock (2001) 139, note 99.

²⁷ Hopkinson (1994b) 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, and *passim*. Hopkinson comes back to this point often; the first time is on p. 9: “Although his poem is influenced by many forms of writing, it is chiefly moved by the desire to refashion Homer, and by the desire, openly professed, to surpass him.”

Maenads, adding insult to injury by invoking them in an identical way

(Ἀξάτ'ε μοι νάρθηκα, 11 and 34). After all, Maenads must be more naturally suited for the challenge of helping Nonnus write about Dionysus. That Nonnus commands the assistance of Maenads shows just how unhomeric his epic will be. He further distances himself from Homer by continuing to refer to Dionysiac things: fawnskin (35), wine (36-7), tambourines and goatskins (39), claiming that his Apollo (Φοῖβον ἐμόν, 41) might become agitated if he were to take up the aulos (40). Nonnus knows that Apollo and the Muses are usually in charge of these productions, but by indicating outright that he has chosen different sources of inspiration, especially in a passage that began as an invocation to the very Muses he soon sets aside in favour of the Maenads, he leaves us no doubt that this poem will cut a path through territory Homer never explored. He considers and rejects the Apolline, Homeric road; he will not be a second Marsyas (41-44). Already in book 1 Nonnus indicates that he is the anti-Homer, an inverter of the epic tradition.

Nonnus' next mention of Homer is in book 13:

οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ τόσα φῦλα δέκα γλώσσησιν ἀείσω
οὐδὲ δέκα στομάτεσσι χέων χαλκόθροον ἤχῳ,
ὁππόσα Βάκχος ἄγειρε δορυσσόος, ἀλλὰ λιγαίνων
ἡγεμόνας καὶ Ὀμηρον ἀοσσητῆρα καλέσω
εὐεπίης ὅλον ὄρμον, ἐπεὶ πλωτῆρες ἀλῆται
πλαγκτοσύνης καλέουσιν ἀρηγόνα κυανοχαίτην. (47-53)

According to Hopkinson, "This image of Homer as safe resort and helper in time of need is reminiscent of the protective role implied in the notion of Homer as poetic father."²⁹

And it does appear to be a reverential reference to the poet: the "lost sailor" Nonnus with

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

what seems to be self-deprecation calls on “Homer, the helper, the whole harbour of eloquence” to assist him with his catalogue of the Dionysiac army.³⁰ However, it is misleading to consider this passage without looking carefully at its context. What precedes it is:

Ἄλλὰ πολυσπερέων προμάχων ἡρώϊδα φύτλην
καὶ λασίων Σατύρων, Κενταυρίδος αἶμα γενέθλης,
Σειλενῶν τε φάλαγγα δασυκνήμοιο γεραιοῦ
καὶ στίχα Βασσαρίδων Κορυβαντίδες εἶπατε Μοῦσαι·
(43-6)

And what follows it is a catalogue of an army of these creatures, the likes of whom Homer would never have allowed to brandish weapons in the *Iliad*. The worst soldier in that epic is Thersites, and, though remarkably unattractive (2.216-19), he is at least human. Nonnus introduces Satyrs and Centaurs (44), Seilenus and his phalanx (45), and Bassarids (46).

This second reference to Homer, then, is as perverse and irreverent as the first. Nonnus brings up satyrs, centaurs, Seilenoi, and Bassarids, and then invokes not Homeric Muses but, once again, goddesses more suited to his Dionysiac purposes. Nonnus is mentioning Homer at the least appropriate of times; having preceded his invocation with an army of women and weird creatures, and a group of unhomeric but very Nonnian Muses, he assumes an attitude of humble deference in order to call upon Homer for assistance in the composition of an upside-down version of his own poetry. This is neither emulation of Homer nor an attempt to surpass him. Rose claims that lines 13.49-52 indicate that Nonnus “will imitate the Catalogue of Ships, the beginning of which,

³⁰ Book 13 is generally agreed to be the place where Nonnus’ *Indiad* starts. Hopkinson (1994b) suggests that this catalogue, as well as that of book 26 (38-365), “are so placed as to recall the structure of the *Iliad*” (28).

Hom. *Il.* ii.484 ff., he has just paraphrased.”³¹ But it is not an imitation either: Nonnus has just explained what kind of soldiers the Dionysiac army consists of, and now, by way of undermining Homer further, he is forcing the poor man to be present as he and his frenzied Bacchic Muses catalogue them. Viewed separately from their context, 13.43-6 and the catalogue of soldiers (13.53-568) might seem to be reverence and imitation respectively, but in fact they are not. When Nonnus refers to Homer, or paraphrases/quotes him, one can be almost certain that the surrounding context of the supposed imitation will cast a shadow of perversity over it.

Nonnus’ third reference to Homer appears at the beginning of the second proem of the epic, within his invocation of the Muses (discussed below). Explaining how he will set up the remainder of his description of the war, he says:

οὐ μὲν αἰείσω
 πρώτους ἔξ λυκάβαντας, ὅτε στρατὸς ἔνδοθι πύργων
 Ἰνδὸς ἔην· τελέσας δὲ τύπον μιμηλὸν Ὀμήρου
 ὕστατον ὑμνήσω πολέμων ἔτος, ἑβδομάτης δὲ
 ὑσμίνην ἰσάριθμον ἑμῆς στρουθοῖο χαράξω. (25.6-10)

This is Nonnus’ only indication that he intends to imitate Homer.³² But it is not a general reference to the structure of the whole epic: Nonnus limits it very clearly to his intention to follow Homer in narrating just the last year of the war, and while he is undeniably setting up a parallel between Homer’s narration of the *Iliad* and his own *Indiad*, he immediately diminishes its Homeric character by linking the seven sparrows (ἑβδομάτης...στρουθοῖο) to the seven gates of Thebes (Θῆβη δ’ ἑπταπύλῳ

³¹ In Rouse (1940) vol. 1, 432.

³² Specifically, verbal imitation of 2.308 ff. But there is some important variation in Nonnus’ version: he refers to Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι (*Il.* 2.491), where Homer’s are Κορυβαντίδες...Μοῦσαι (46); he wishes the Muses to tell of Bacchus (49), not Ilium (2.492), and his line 48, while a verbal parallel of *Il.* 2.490, is made liquid with the word χέων, and contains the word χαλκόθορον, which is unattested elsewhere in ancient literature (Cf. Peek [1968-75] s.v. χαλκόθορος).

κεράσω μέλος, 11), a city of particular importance in the *Dionysiaca*, and to Pentheus, whose story is told in books 44-46 (see Chapter Two).³³ The number seven is also particularly Nonnian.³⁴ The comparison with Homer's structure is there, undeniably, and while it cannot and should not be disregarded, it must also be viewed for what it is and no more. It is not an announcement that Nonnus is fashioning the whole poem, or the whole *Indiad*, after Homer's *Iliad*. (Even if he were to say he was doing this, it would not be true!) It is Nonnus' only emulative³⁵ mention of Homer, and he limits it to one specific aspect of the *Dionysiaca*'s composition.³⁶

The fourth reference to Homer appears near the end of the second proem, again in book 25:

Παμφαῆς υἱὲ Μέλητος, Ἀχαιίδος ἄφθιτε κῆρυξ,
 ἱλῆκοι σέο βίβλος ὁμόχρονος ἡριγενείῃ·
 Τρωάδος ὑσμίνης οὐ μνήσομαι· οὐ γὰρ εἴσκω 255
 Αἰακίδῃ Διόνυσον ἢ Ἑκτορι Δηριαδῆα.
 ὑμνήσειν μὲν ὄφελλε τόσον καὶ τοῖον ἀγῶνα
 Μοῦσα τεῖ καὶ Βάκχον ἀκοντιστήρα Γιγάντων,
 ἄλλοις δ' ὑμνοπόλοισι πόνους Ἀχιλῆος ἔδσαι,
 εἰ μὴ τοῦτο Θέτις γέρας ἥρπασεν· ἀλλὰ λιγαίνειν 260
 πνεῦσον ἐμοὶ τεδὸν ἄσθμα θεόσσυτον· ὑμετέρης γὰρ
 δεύομαι εὐεπίης, ὅτι τηλίκον Ἄρεα μέλπων
 Ἰνδοφόνους ἰδρῶτας ἀμαλδύνω Διονύσου.

³³ It also connects Nonnus to Pindar, Hopkinson (1994b) points out: "Already Nonnus has dropped to the wise hints of his inspiration from Pindar: ποικίλον ὕμνον (1.15) is a phrase found twice in the epinicia, and κεράσω μέλος is another Pindaric echo redeployed to describe the heady Nonnian brew... The music [of Amphion's lyre, 25.18-21] is said to belong to Pindar; and the joint Boeotian origin of Pindar and Dionysus is seen to be a further reason for Nonnus' importation of the lyric stance into epic" (13).

³⁴ Nonnus uses 14 compound words featuring the prefix *επτα* or *εβδο*, and all together there are 75 occurrences of these words in the epic (cf. Peek [1968-75]).

³⁵ Hopkinson (1994b) 12.

³⁶ I am not saying that Nonnus never fashions anything in his epic after anything in Homer's, or that Nonnus does not use Homeric words and phrasing frequently. But on the whole, Nonnus goes out of his way to go his own way. This poem resembles the work of Homer far less closely than Quintus' and Virgil's epics. When Nonnus uses Homer for more than just a word or a line, he tends to put it into a new, unexpected context, and almost always perverts the Homeric passage somehow. For example, he takes the *Iliad*'s famous speech of Glaucus ("Τυδείδῃ μεγάρθυμε, τίη γενεήν ἐρεείνεις; / οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν...", *Il.* 6.145-6 ff.) and has his Cadmus recite a variation of it for Queen Electra in *Dion.* 3.248-319).

Ἄλλά, θεά, με κόμιζε τὸ δεύτερον εἰς μέσον Ἴνδῶν,
 ἔμπνοον ἔγχος ἔχοντα καὶ ἀσπίδα πατρὸς Ὀμήρου,
 μαρνάμενον Μορρῇ καὶ ἄφρονι Δηριαδῇ
 σὺν Διὶ καὶ Βρομίῳ κεκορυθμένον· (253-67)

Here is a perverse invocation if ever there was one. Nonnus begins by invoking Homer as though he were the very sun in the sky, using the same word (παμφαῆς, 253) with which Dionysus invokes Heracles Astrochiton at Tyre (παμφαῆς αἰθέρος ὄμμα, 40.379). These are the only two occurrences of the word παμφαῆς in the epic,³⁷ and they are both used in invocations. Nonnus' description of Homer's book as ὁμόχρονος ἡριγενείῃ (254), "contemporaneous with the morning," further connects this passage to Dionysus' prayer in book 40. For Nonnus, here, as Homer is the sun, Homer's poetry is the sunlight itself.

But, of course, Nonnus wastes no time knocking down what he has set up with such apparent reverence. Why he invokes Homer is to let his predecessor know that he will not follow the *Iliad*'s lead in his own epic. He will not talk about the Trojan War; his Dionysus is not comparable to Homer's Achilles, and the same goes for Deriades and Hector (255-6). Furthermore, Nonnus continues, Homer should have sung of Dionysus, "had Thetis not snatched this prize from him" (260). The meaning of this remark is uncertain, but its point comes through nonetheless. In commenting on what Homer ought to have done, Nonnus draws the reader's attention to two facts: one, Homer did not do it; and two, Nonnus *is* doing it. When he asserts that his own subject matter is more worthy than Homer's, he forces us to notice that there are deliberate differences between his own

³⁷ Cf. Peek (1968-75) s.v. παμφαῆς.

work and his predecessor's. He is not trying to beat Homer at his own game, as Hopkinson suggests; he is playing a different game entirely, and he wants us to know it.

While he believes Homer's subject matter leaves much to be desired, Nonnus here, as in book 13 (discussed above), confesses great and apparently sincere admiration for Homer's εὐέπεια, eloquence. It is this, when it is anything at all, that receives praise in Nonnus' references to Homer. But the reason why he so badly desires Homeric eloquence is so that he may effectively pervert everything Homer does.³⁸ To wish for Homer's inspiration in achieving his goal of being the anti-Homer of epic poets is not emulative but twisted: Nonnus desires eloquence as Dionysus desires Aura.

Nonnus uses Homer's name twice more in this passage. In 25.264-7, he writes as though he is himself a participant in the battle he is creating on paper, asking the Muse to "bring [him] for a second time into the Indians' midst, bearing a living sword and the shield of father Homer" (264-5). Both Hopkinson and Shorrock take πατρός 'Ομήρου as evidence for the position that Nonnus views Homer as his father.³⁸ But what Nonnus actually says is "father Homer", not "*my* father Homer". This phrase foreshadows the upcoming (25.310-567) shield ecphrasis, one of Nonnus' most elaborate perversions of a Homeric episode. The "shield of father Homer" is, among other things, that which Achilles receives from Hephaestus in *Iliad* 18. The "living sword" may well be Nonnus' stylus, and if the shield is Homer's poetry, then 25.264-5

³⁸ "Nonnus pictures himself as springing from πατρός 'Ομήρου as Dionysus is born from the μηρός of Zeus, his πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ (1.7)" (Hopkinson [1994b] 13). Shorrock (2001) discusses this idea extensively (197-205); also, interestingly, referring to the story of Tylus and Moria (25.451-552), he remarks, "The theme of perverted paternity is fundamental to Homer's epic" (176), and in a note on the same passage, comments, "[T]his disturbing exemplum of perverted paternity, set in such an emphatic position, must give us pause for thought" (176, note 133). However, he neither elaborates on this nor investigates its effect on his subsequent discussion of Homer and Nonnus. If Nonnus does in fact view Homer as his father, this is perverse paternity indeed.

are a reference to what is coming up in this book. There is no doubt that Nonnus sees Homer as the most important of his predecessors, but it cannot be claimed, on the basis of this phrase, that Nonnus views Homer as his own literary father.

In 25.279, Nonnus once more involves Homer in something particularly unhomeric. The “ceaseless sound of Homer’s wise trumpet” (269) will be heard only at the same time as the “army-leading echo of Bacchus’ syrinx” (268). It is indeed in his battle descriptions that Nonnus’ poetry comes closest to Homer’s,³⁹ but; even here, Homer will have to contend constantly with Dionysus and the cacophony of the god’s loud army. Nonnus’ references to Homer are always somehow qualified. They are made either at the least appropriate time, or in the least appropriate way, or both.

Nonnus’ next Homer reference is in book 32. He says:

‘Ομηρίδες, εἴπατε, Μοῦσαι,
τίς θάνε, τίς δούπησεν ὑπ’ ἔγχει Δηριαδῆος· (184-5)

This brief invocation of the Homeric Muses precedes an extensive list of the victims of Deriades’ spear—in other words, members of Dionysus’ army, which, as has been mentioned, is a perversion of the Homeric army. Their various connections to Dionysus, and, where applicable, their bestial bodies, are emphasized throughout the passage. An unnamed soldier looks for “evil-averting Dionysus” (198) as he dies; Echelaos dies clutching the *μυστίδα πεύκην* (206); Morrheus decapitates Erigbolus the dancer (223), and then, instead of continuing to fight, the army of Dionysus, as cowardly as Homer’s soldiers are brave, runs away: Nonnus mentions a Satyr (255), a Seilenus (258), book 5’s Aristaeus (268-9), the Corybant Melisseus (270-1), some Cyclopes (273) a Pan

³⁹ See, among others, Hopkinson (1994b) 19; Vian (1991) 15; Schmiel (1997), unpublished article on *Dion.* 37.

(277), and others. Nonnus specifies that he wants the assistance of the Homeric Muses precisely because this is a particularly inappropriate time for them to show up. This is not emulation. In the light of what follows it, this invocation of Homer's Muses appears downright satirical.

The final mention of Homer is 42.180-1. Here Nonnus interrupts his narration of the story of Dionysus and Beroe to make an observation.⁴⁰ He explains that Dionysus, waiting for her,

ἤθελεν εἰσέτι μίμνειν·
 πάντων γὰρ κόρος ἐστὶ παρ' ἀνδράσιν, ἡδέος ὕπνου
 μολπῆς τ' εὐκελάδοιο καὶ ὁππότε κάμπτεται ἀνὴρ
 εἰς δρόμον ὀρχηστῆρα· γυναιμανέοντι δὲ μούνῳ
 οὐ κόρος ἐστὶ πόθων· ἐψεύσατο βίβλος Ὀμήρου. (42.177-81)

This passage highlights once more the dissimilarities between Nonnus' subject matter and Homer's. Here Dionysus is pining with desire, as so many people so often do in this epic, and it is in his commentary on the nature of ocular gratification that Nonnus suddenly brings Homer's name into the poem for the last time. The activities Nonnus lists in this priamel-esque passage are taken from *Iliad* 13.636 ff.,⁴¹ but they are all of thematic significance to the *Dionysiaca*, and, specifically, to Dionysus himself: sleep and dreams (178), song (179), dance (180), and, most importantly, desire. A person can experience satiety with the first three, but not with πόθος. Reading this epic, especially the last eight books, one notices that this remark is as applicable to Nonnus himself as to his characters' endless infatuations—is it that his womanmad characters never tire of

⁴⁰ He does this quite often; e.g. his comments about the nature of women's desire (42.209 ff.) and dreams (42.322 ff.).

⁴¹ Rose in Rouse (1940) vol. 3, 240-41, note *a*.

looking at the objects of their desire, or that Nonnus himself never tires of writing variations on this theme?

In any case, this is an inappropriate place for Homer and the *Iliad* to make an appearance—which means that, for Nonnus, this is a perfect place for Homer and the *Iliad* to make an appearance. Firstly, Nonnus is placing Homeric words into a context Homer never would have created for them; and secondly, he is calling Homer a liar. Hopkins says that, in lines 13.46-53 and 32.184-5, “Homer is the poet’s ally; but at 42.181 he takes on the role of opponent as Nonnus scores a direct hit”.⁴² By balancing this uncomplimentary mention of Homer against two that he considers favourable, Hopkins supports his view that Nonnus’ relationship with Homer is ambiguous. While I do agree that 42.180-1 is a negative reference, I do not see a collection of positive ones against which to set it. Nonnus’ desire for Homeric eloquence and references to the earlier poet turn up at the least appropriate moments; Nonnus drags Homer into the most Nonnian situations and forces him to put up with the Dionysiac craziness he creates.

Here, then, what we have is not a checkmark for the “rivalry” column, to offset those in the “emulation” column, but rather another instance of Nonnus treating Homer as he always does. He puts a Homeric speech into a strange—ἀήθης—new context, then shoots it down. Where most epic poets are content to tacitly and tactfully make changes to their predecessors’ poetry, Nonnus, to whom subtlety is of no importance, draws attention to what he considers to be falsehoods in earlier literature. This is his firmest application of that policy.⁴³

⁴² Hopkins (1994b) 14.

⁴³ It has the directness and succinctness of Stesichorus’ Helen palinode, whose first line is οὐκ ἔστ’ ἔτυμος λόγος οὗτος.

(I) In *Iliad* 16, as Patroclus and Zeus' son Sarpedon advance on each other, Zeus, watching the fight (431), shares his thoughts with Hera:

“ὦ μοι ἐγών, ὃ τέ μοι Σαρπηδόνα, φίλτατον ἀνδρῶν,
μοῖρ' ὑπὸ Πατρόκλοιο Μενoitιάδαο δαμῆναι.
διχθὰ δέ μοι κραδίη μέμονε φρεσὶν ὀρμαίνοντι,
ἥ μιν ζῶν ἐόντα μάχης ἄπο δακρυόεσσης
θείῳ ἀναρπάξας Λυκίης ἐν πτόνι δήμῳ,
ἦ ἤδη ὑπὸ χερσὶ Μενoitιάδαο δαμάσσω.” (Il. 16.433-8)

This is a deadly serious matter, and Hera's response to her husband is profound. She provides two firm reasons why Zeus ought not to follow his paternal instinct to save his son from slaughter. Firstly, she says, Sarpedon is “a mortal man, long doomed by fate” (ἄνδρα θνητὸν ἐόντα, πάλαι πεπρωμένον αἵσῃ, 441) to die. Secondly, she continues,

“αἶ κε ζῶν πέμψῃς Σαρπηδόνα ὄνδε δόμονδε,
φράζεο μή τις ἔπειτα θεῶν ἐθέλῃσι καὶ ἄλλος
πέμπειν ὃν φίλον υἱὸν ἀπὸ κρατερῆς ὑσμίνης·
πολλοὶ γὰρ περὶ ἄστὺ μέγα Πριάμοιο μάχονται
υἱέες ἀθανάτων, τοῖσιν κότον ἐνήσεις.” (445-9)

Zeus, if he saves his mortal son from death in the war, will set a precedent for the numerous other gods with mortal sons to do likewise. Hera recommends to Zeus that, “εἴ τοι φίλος ἐστί, τεδὸν δ' ὀλοφύρεται ἦτορ” (450), he ought to allow Sarpedon to die before having his body brought to Lycia to be given a proper burial (451-7).

In *Dionysiaca* 24, Deriades and the Indian army are preparing to ambush Dionysus and his soldiers (68-72). As in *Iliad* 16, Zeus is watching the proceedings; here, though, Homer's ἰδὼν is replaced by the more verbose and Nonnian

οὐδὲ Διὸς λάθεν ὄμμα πανόψιον (24.73). And rather than taking a moment to philosophize about the appropriate course of action, Zeus wastes no time in zooming down to the scene of the battle, προασπίζων Διόνυσου (74). As Zeus hastily (ἔσσυμένως, 73) speeds down to protect his son, the reader becomes aware that Nonnus is taking her in a decidedly unhomeric direction. Furthermore, Dionysus is a god. The gravity of Sarpedon's situation in the *Iliad* is attributed by Hera to his mortality (16.441). Zeus, though not faced with mortality himself, must struggle to accept that his son will die, and his decision not to intervene in Sarpedon's fate (458) is not easily made. In the *Dionysiaca*, on the other hand, Zeus does not ponder anything when he sees that Dionysus is in danger (if in fact an immortal can face real danger in war); he merely acts. Nonnus is making a travesty of a serious and genuinely sad scene from the *Iliad*. Homer's Zeus philosophizes about his mortal son's situation but reluctantly decides to let fate unfold as it must; Nonnus' Zeus without a minute's thought rushes to protect the immortal Dionysus.

But Nonnus, though he has already gone too far, does not stop here. He actually turns the perversion up a notch, by continuing his story thus:

καὶ σφετέροισιν ἰόντες ἀρηγόνες, ἄλλος ἐπ' ἄλλῳ,
 σὺν Διὶ πάντες ἵκοντο ναετῆρες Ὀλύμπου
 ἄλματι πωτήεντι. (75-77)

Apparently, if Zeus jumps off a mountain, everyone else does too. Once again Nonnus declines to explain the gods' motives for helping their own offspring—it is likely because Nonnus' motive in writing this episode is to be everything Homer is not. This is what happens when Hera's warning about Zeus setting a precedent comes true. It is ludicrous enough that Zeus shields his immortal son; that *all* (πάντες, 76) the immortals follow

his lead emphasizes the ludicrousness to a point where it cannot be viewed as inadvertently tasteless.

Still furthermore, lines 75-77 are followed by a typically Nonnian over-the-top catalogue of who saved whom: Zeus, after protecting Dionysus, turns into an eagle, snags his son Aeacus in his talons, and carries him not away from but, inexplicably, *to* Deriades' army (77-82); Apollo saves Aristaeus (83-5); Hermes snatches Pan (86-7); Urania saves Hymenaeus (88-91); Calliope saves Oeagrus (92); Hephaestus snatches up the Cabeiroi (93-4); Athena saves Erechtheus (95-6); a variety of gods preserve the lives of the Hamadryads (97-8); Leto helps Apollo to protect the nymphs of the laurel (99-101); finally, Cydnus' daughters save Maenads (102-4). (At this point, are there any soldiers left, besides Aeacus, to fight the Indians?) Nonnus begins with Zeus protecting an immortal son, then writes of the same god bringing a mortal son into the battle, and follows this up with a veritable rainshower of gods swooping down to grab their own progeny or favourites. In this passage alone Nonnus has found three different ways to pervert Homer's account of Zeus' decision not to save his mortal son.

(II) The tale of Ares and Aphrodite in book 8 of the *Odyssey* is one of the epic's lighter moments. In the μέγα δῶμα (8.5) of Alcinous, after everyone has eaten and participated in various athletic events, Demodocus sings the amusing story of Aphrodite's initially secret (λάθρη, 269) but later very public affair with Ares. The song is 101 lines long (8.266-366), and I will not recount it in detail but will rather draw attention to those elements therein employed by Nonnus in his own original story of Aphrodite inverted. There are many similarities in the two stories; Hopkinson points out the most significant

ones. As stated earlier, the interpretation of the relationship between Nonnus and Homer that Hopkinson sets out in this article is that the former emulates and competes with the latter. It seems, then, that the following is to be viewed as indicative of emulation:

“Nonnus’ tale, which is unattested elsewhere, has many similarities to and echoes of the song of Demodocus. Both are sung in the evening as part of the entertainment at a banquet; both are performed in response to a request, and are preceded by a summary of another song by the same bard; both bards are given food; both songs are introduced with ὦς, and then merge into the voice of the narrator. Both feature Aphrodite; but whereas in Homer she is mocked for the sexual excess of adultery, in Nonnus she is taunted for abandoning her responsibility for sexual matters. In both tales Aphrodite is a mute character who features in a tableau to which other gods react with amusement. Both tales involve handiwork, but in contrast to the λεπτὰ chains of Hephaestus (*Od.* 8.280), which are so fine as to be invisible, Aphrodite’s fabric is embarrassingly παχύς (246). Both tales have humorous speeches by Hermes; and in both the denouement is Aphrodite’s departure for Cyprus.”⁴⁴

But in this paragraph are listed—seemingly indiscriminately—not only similarities between the stories, but also differences Nonnus has woven into his own after-dinner song. Nonnus must establish that he is modeling his bard Leucus’ song after *Odyssey* 8 before he begins to turn it upside-down. Hopkinson is correct to note the similarities between the introductions of the two songs. However, that Nonnus’ Aphrodite abandons the role she performed with amplified enthusiasm in Homer, and that Aphrodite’s thick thread is a contrast to Hephaestus’ invisible netting, are inversions, not emulative modifications, of Homer. Where Homer’s goddess is, as we would expect, driven by desire, Nonnus’ is goaded by ambition. This is particularly notable because Nonnus’ characters tend to be peculiarly susceptible to desire, and Aphrodite ought to be most susceptible of all to the very force she embodies. Nonnus’ story of an ambitious, abstinent Aphrodite both inverts the nature of the goddess and demonstrates that the

⁴⁴ Hopkinson (1994b) 21.

crucial differences between his Aphrodite and Homer's are no accident. She is the opposite⁴⁵ of her counterpart, and the opposite of everything a reader would expect her to be.

In contrast to Demodocus, who sings in the most opulent of surroundings, Nonnus' Leucus performs outside, in the forest (ἀμφὶ δὲ λόχμας / Βάκχος ἐοῖς Σατύροισι καὶ Ἴνδοφόνοισι μαχηταῖς / εἰλαπίνην ἔστησεν, 218-20), after a banquet which reads like an out-of-control version of Homer's.⁴⁵ As Hopkinson notes, not only does Nonnus' song, like Homer's, begin with ὥς (Od.8.268, Dion. 24.243); the line preceding Homer's ὥς—Αὐτὰρ ὁ φορμίζων ἀνεβάλλετο Κύπριν ἀεῖδειν—is one word away from being identical to the line that precedes the ὥς in Nonnus, which replaces Κύπριν with καλὸν (267).⁴⁶ But Nonnus, having recalled the reader to Homer's story with this close verbal echo, immediately launches into a reversal (not an emulative variation) of the Homeric version. Where Demodocus, as Hopkinson notes, tells of an Aphrodite who takes her role (desire and procreation) to the extreme, Leucus reverses the idea and sings of an Aphrodite who, for reasons unexplained, takes up weaving, the task for which she is least suited, thus causing extensive harm to humanity. Homer's bard sings of Aphrodite falling in love with Ares (ἀμφ' Ἄρεος φιλότητος εὖστεφάνου τ' Ἀφροδίτης, 267), whereas Nonnus' Aphrodite falls in love with the loom of Athena (κέντρον ἔχουσα

⁴⁵ The gore and excess of the slaughter and wine consumption are emphasized in 25.220-29, with the words and phrases ἐδαιτρεῦοντο (220), δαμάλαι στοιχηδὸν ἐμιστυλλοντο μαχαίρῃ / θεινόμεναι πελεκέσσιν (221-2), ἄσπετος οἶνος (227), and ἀπείρονας ἀμφιφορῆας (228).

⁴⁶ Cf. Hopkinson (1994b) 38, note 85, in which are listed the verbal echoes between the introductions to the two songs.

φιληλακάτοιο μερίμνης, 243). This is not a variation; it is a deliberate inversion of Homer. And before she begins to weave, Nonnus' Aphrodite even becomes, briefly, a parody of the *Odyssey's* Penelope:⁴⁷

ἡ δὲ πανημερίη καὶ παννυχίη πέλας ἵστοῦ
Παλλάδος ἔργον ἔτευχε παλλίλυτον· (250-1)

The Graces, too, abandon their usual tasks to engage in ungraceful incompetence with the new Athena (261-5).

Before Nonnus tells of the amusement this causes on Olympus—amusement quite unlike that which Homer's gods enjoy—he relates the lethal consequences that Aphrodite's inverse role causes on Earth. The actions of Homer's Aphrodite affect only herself and a few others, and give the male gods a good laugh, but the πόνοϛ of Nonnus' goddess is harmful to mortals, and ἀγέλαστος (256) for her:

καὶ μερόπων ἀλάλητο γάμων βίος· ἁρμονίην δὲ 265
ἔστενεν ἀχρήιστον ἀνυμφεύτων ὑμεναίων
ἡνίοχος βιότοιο γέρων δεδονημένος Αἰών·
καὶ φλογερὴν ἀγέραςτος Ἔρως ἀνελύσατο νευρήν,
παπταίνων ἀλόχευτον ἀνήροτον αὔλακα κόσμου.
οὐ τότε φορμίγγων ἐρόεις κτύπος, οὐ τότε σύριγξ, 270
οὐ λιγὺς αὐλὸς ἔμελπεν, “Ὑμὴν Ὑμέναιε” λιγαίνων·
ἀλλὰ βίου μινύθοντος ἱμασσομένης τε γενέθλης
συζυγίης ἀλύτοιο μετωχλίσθησαν ὀχῆες. (265-73)

The importance of fertility and procreation for humanity⁴⁸ are stressed here: if Aphrodite is not performing her allotted function, people cannot survive. The world depends on her, even if, on Olympus, the gods are either unconcerned or unaware that the extent of the harm being caused by Aphrodite's whim is so great. Athena's reaction to the situation is jealousy (βαρυζήλω δὲ μενοινῆ / ἔννεπε, 277-8); she gripes to Zeus

⁴⁷ Hopkinson (1994a) 276.

⁴⁸ Winkler (1974) 71: In the *Dionysiaca*, “[t]he threat of cosmic disorder is seen as a sexual one.”

that her allotted role has been stolen, and by “ἡ ταμίη θαλάμων, ἀπαλὴ θεός” (285), of all people. As Aphrodite destroys the human race, Athena’s complaint is that she is out of place.

Even without lines 265-73, and their resolution at the end of the song (325-6), the tale would have been an inversion of Homer’s, but the contrast between Nonnus’ serious tone and Homer’s light one is cleverly echoed in the contrast between the catastrophe unfolding on Earth and the Olympians’ predominantly trivial reactions (jealousy, amusement) to what Aphrodite is doing. Nonnus’ story is not only perverse in its portrayal of an anti-Aphrodite but also in its tone, and, though the gravity of the situation Aphrodite has created escapes the notice of most of the Olympians, it cannot escape ours.

Hermes does mention the state of earthly affairs at the end of his speech to the weaving goddess: “ἀρχέγονος γὰρ,” he says, “ πλάζεται εἰσέτι κόσμος, ἔως ἔτι πέπλον ὑφαίνεις” (319-20).⁴⁹ But the remark that Aphrodite has inverted the very order of the universe puts a smile on every god’s face (321), and despite Hermes’ serious remarks, Aphrodite gives up weaving not because she is concerned about the welfare of humans but because she is in awe of, or ashamed in the presence of, Athena (αἰδομένη γλαυκῶπιν, 323).

While Homer has Demodocus tell an amusing story of Aphrodite doing what she does best, Nonnus’ bard sings a predominantly serious song of an Aphrodite doing what she apparently does worst, and hurting humankind in the process. While the behaviour of Homer’s goddess can be explained as extreme manifestation of her usual character, the

⁴⁹ Cf. Hopkinson (1994b) 21-22 on the significance of the distinction between the λεπτός handiwork in Homer and Aphrodite’s παχύς creation in Nonnus: Hopkinson sees the song of Leucus as “an exemplary exercise in the combination of Homeric and Alexandrian poetics.”

actions of Nonnus' Aphrodite are extremely senseless when viewed in the same light. What they are is an extreme manifestation of Nonnus' desire to invert the Homeric Aphrodite and her story. The serious tone of Nonnus' tale is a reversal of the light tone of Homer's. Everything, then, points to the same conclusion: that Nonnus is intentionally being anti-Homeric.

The lightheartedness and exuberant sexuality of Demodocus' song would make a modified version of it an appealing and appropriate part of Nonnus' lighthearted, exuberantly sexual epic. But instead, Nonnus' song is a somber story about an abstinent Aphrodite. In other words, Nonnus has passed up an obvious opportunity to imitate Homer. The point he makes through Leucus' song is that even (or especially) on those rare occasions when he is fully aware that something distinctly Homeric, yet also in tune with his epic's theme and mood, could be inserted seamlessly into the *Dionysiaca*, his policy is to pervert it.

(III) In the *Dionysiaca*'s second proem, Nonnus invokes the Muse (25.1). Homer, the poet of concern to Nonnus in book 25, calls on the Muse at the beginning of his poems, and at particularly challenging points in his narrative, such as long lists or descriptions of warfare.⁵⁰ Nonnus leads us to believe that his invocation fits both of these criteria: book 25 is not, of course, the beginning of his epic, but it is the beginning of the second 24-book section; and the poet says he requires the Muse's help in singing the remainder of the Indian War (25.1-3), in addition to a selection of Theban stories (11-21). In lines 22-27 Nonnus reiterates his intention to describe the war. And, later, in line 264, Nonnus addresses the goddess for a second time. Despite his two invocations and multiple

⁵⁰ E.g. *Il.* 2.484 and 761, 11.218, 14.508, and 16.112.

declarations that it is time to narrate the war, however, there is not a single line of battle narrative in book 25. Instead, Nonnus follows the first mention of the Muse with a lengthy rhetorical discussion of Dionysus' alleged superiority to the heroes Perseus (31-147), Minos (148-73), and Heracles (174-252). This style of rhetoric was popular in late antiquity,⁵¹ which makes it all the more perverse for Nonnus to have inserted it into his epic after having—supposedly—set up a Homeric battle scene. Similarly, Nonnus' second invocation precedes not the anticipated war stories but rather a description of Dionysus' army sitting around doing nothing (271—3), Indian women's lamentations (273-6), and two strange anecdotes set at a literally wine-dark river (277-80, 281-90).⁵²

Having called on the Muse at the beginning of book 25 and given her twenty-one lines' worth of instructions, Nonnus enthuses:

Ἀλλὰ πάλιν κτείνωμεν Ἐρυθραίων γένος Ἰνδῶν·
οὐ ποτε γὰρ μόθον ἄλλον ὁμοῖον ἔδρακεν αἰῶν
Ἥφου πρὸ μόθοιο, καὶ οὐ μετὰ φύλοπιν Ἰνδῶν
ἄλλην ὀπιτέλεστον ἰσόρροπον εἶδεν Ἐνυώ, 25
οὐδὲ τόσος στρατὸς ἦλθεν ἐς Ἴλιον, οὐ στόλος ἀνδρῶν
τηλίκος. ἀλλὰ νέοισι καὶ ἀρχεγόνοισιν ἐρίζων
εὐκαμάτους ἰδρῶτας ἀναστήσω Διονύσου,
κρίνων ἡνωρέην τεκέων Διός, ὄφρα νοήσω,
τίς κάμε τοῖον ἀγῶνα, τίς εἵκελος ἔπλετο Βάκχου.
(25.22-30)

It is as though the more interesting battle, for Nonnus, is not the fighting between the two armies but the rhetorical battle he sets up between Dionysus and three other sons of Zeus. In the above passage, Nonnus seems to claim that the Indian War's superiority to the Trojan War is directly linked to Dionysus' superiority to other sons of Zeus. But, ironically, Nonnus is making a point that seems a criticism of his own poem: Dionysus is

⁵¹ Rose in Rouse (1940) vol. 2, note d, 252; Vian (1990) 16ff.

⁵² This is followed by the shield ecphrasis, discussed below.

a god, and Deriades merely a man; therefore, we know from the beginning that the Indians are at an insurmountable disadvantage in the war, and we wonder why it takes Bacchus and company seven years to defeat them.⁵³

Furthermore, Nonnus compares Dionysus to three mortals.⁵⁴ How can the god fail to win this contest? Zeus has plenty of immortal offspring to whom Dionysus could be fairly and, since the poet is attempting to build up his Bacchus, favourably compared. But, inevitably, Nonnus chooses the most perverse approach to the genre of rhetoric, whose placement after an invocation of the Muse and an exhortation to battle is itself a strange surprise for the reader.

The heroes to whom Nonnus compares the god were not selected at random. As Vian notes in his introduction to book 25:

“Homère avait ouvert la voie en dressant la catalogue des aimées de Zeus en E. 315-328. Si l’on met à part l’épouse d’Ixion et les déesses Déméter et Létô, le poète énumère dans cette ordre Danaé (Persée), Europé (Minos et Rhadamanthe), Sémélé (Dionysos) et Alcmène (Héraclès) et certaines exégètes semblent avoir voulu découvrir dans cette liste une classement selon les preferences de Zeus. Il n’est pas douteux en tout cas que Nonnos s’est souvenu de ce passage célèbre quand il a conçu son triple parallèle.”⁵⁵

Nonnus, then is inverting a passage from the *Iliad*, and placing the inverted version into a new context. In *Iliad* 14.313-29, Zeus is coming on to Hera with smooth (?) talk, telling her that of all the women he has loved—here follows a condensed list—she comes out on top. Zeus concludes his speech with the verdict that Hera is the one he most desires (313-14, and 328). Nonnus, inverting this pattern, concludes each section of his rhetorical

⁵³ Lindsay (1965) 393: “[A]t worst [the *Dionysiaca*] is a dull farrago of interminable Bacchic onslaughts which lack all drama because we know the wretched Indians cannot defeat the god.”

⁵⁴ Vian (1990) writes, “Le procédé de la *syncrisis*, voisin du genre des «vies parallèles», a joui d’une grande fortune chez les rhéteurs et Nonnos le pratique avec predilection dans toute son épopée. La confrontation entre les quatre grands demi-dieux est un thème traditionnel” (16).

⁵⁵ Vian (1990) 16.

interlude with a declaration that Dionysus is greater than his competitor (140-7, 167-73, 244-52).⁵ And thus Nonnus manages to pervert not only the Homeric use of the Muses and the genre of rhetoric, but also a passage from the *Iliad*, in *Dion.* 25. 1-263.

Nonnus invokes the Muses once again, with overwhelming enthusiasm, in lines 264-70. He begins the invocation with a request that the goddess “bring [him] back into the Indians’ midst” (264) and ends with the bold claim that he will “destroy the remainder of the Indians with his living spear” (270). Reading this impassioned proclamation leads to an expectation that Nonnus is finally going to launch into war narrative.

But he does not. In fact, the Indian army does not make it into book 25 at all. We are told what Dionysus’ army is doing: nothing whatsoever! Nonnus describes this lack of activity in lines 271-3:

Ὡς ὁ μὲν Ἰνδῶοιο περὶ ράχιν εὖβοτον ὕλης
ἔζετο Βάκχος ὄμιλος ἐρημάδος ἄστος ἐρίπνης,
ἀμβολίη πολέμοιο.

There are Indian women mourning on the streets (273-6), but no men in sight. Deriades, too, is dejected, and a trademark Nonnian sidelong glance (278-9) reveals to him that the Hydaspes river has turned into wine (280),⁵⁶ which saddens him further. Here follows a very strange story indeed. An old blind man comes to the river and regains his sight upon sprinkling his eyes with the wine-water (281-91); then a group of unattended hunting dogs drink from the river and become intoxicated (292-6). As Nonnus points out, the vinification of the river predicts Dionysus’ victory (νίκην

⁵⁶ The textual difficulties in book 22 brought to light by this passage are discussed in Vian (1990) 27-29 and Collart (1930) 153-4.

Ἰνδοφόνοι προθεσπίζουσα Λυαίου, 299). These are particularly Bacchic, unhomeric events, not at all out of place in the *Dionysiaca*, but in striking disharmony with the enthusiastic, if perverse, invocation of the Homeric Muse that precedes them.

(IV) So far, we have seen an astonishingly variegated proliferation of Nonnian perversions in books 24 and 25, but the shield ecphrasis (25.310-572)⁵⁷ perhaps tops them all. The notion of providing divine armour to his hero and describing it elaborately is, of course, not unprecedented. But Nonnus' by now familiar technique of producing material that is a 180-degree rotation of Homer's gives originality to the *Dionysiaca*'s version of Homer's motif. As Nonnus has told us (256), his Dionysus is no Achilles; and the armour Bacchus receives is anything but "the shield of father Homer". In the first place, Dionysus, being divine himself, has no need of divine protection. Secondly, whereas it is his mother Thetis who brings the shield to Achilles in the *Iliad*, Dionysus receives his shield from Attis, the individual than whom no less motherly could be conceived.⁵⁸ Here, as elsewhere, Nonnus alters an established literary motif to suit his own perverse purposes.

Achilles, in *Iliad* 18, hears of Patroclus' death and is shattered. Thetis hears his lamentation and comes to him, and the two have a long, moving conversation in which death is the prominent theme. Achilles weeps, "My dear friend Patroclus has perished" (18.80-81), and goes on to speak of his own mortality: since Thetis married a mortal

⁵⁷ Homer is not Nonnus' only source of inspiration for book 25. On the structure and events of book 25, Vian (1990) provides a list of eight "points communs" (30) outlining the similarities between *Dion.* 25 and Triphiodorus' *Capture of Troy*, concluding, "Il est manifeste que Triphiodore a fourni à Nonnos le canevas de la première parti de son chant."

⁵⁸ Another thing separating Nonnus' shield from Homer's is that the former's is engraved with scenes of great significance to the *Dionysiaca*. But there is not time to discuss that properly here.

(θνητὴν, 87), he will someday die and be mourned by his mother (86-90). Returning to Patroclus, Achilles says that he cannot live among men until he has caused Hector's death (90-92). The discussion continues to feature morbid words and thoughts; here, as in the Sarpedon passage, Homer emphasizes the finality and inevitability of death, the one obstacle Achilles cannot overcome.

As Thetis points out, her son has lost his armour: “ἀλλὰ τὸν ἔντεα καλὰ μετὰ Τρώεσσιν ἔχονται” (130). Achilles wishes to return to the war in order to avenge Patroclus' death, but he has nothing to wear. Thetis, then, has two very good reasons for requesting that Hephaestus provide her son with divine armour: his mortality, and his current lack of protective gear. The former necessitates the latter. But neither of these is a problem for Dionysus. Whether he fights fully armed or in his birthday suit, there is no danger that he will lose his life. Dionysus is indeed no Achilles; consequently, *Dionysiaca* 25 is no *Iliad* 18. The divinity of Nonnus' hero precludes any profound discussion of death, and the lack of battle in book 25 further removes from Dionysus' situation any need for armour.

Rose remarks that “Nonnos is more than usually tasteless in providing divine armour for Dionysos, who is divine already.”⁵⁹ Nobody would disagree that Nonnus is often tasteless. But he is never *just* tasteless; there is a method to his modifications of prior works, motifs, and themes. A scene in which “the mortal Achilles...at the crisis of his fortunes needs and receives supernatural help”⁶⁰ becomes, in Nonnus' hands, a scene in which the immortal Dionysus, angry because there is a pause in the war (303-310), receives superfluous supernatural help...delivered by a eunuch.

⁵⁹ Rose in Rouse (1940) vol. 2, 274 note b.

⁶⁰ Rose in Rouse (1940) vol. 2, 275 note b

In the *Iliad*, Thetis brings the shield to Achilles. The scene of a mother bringing divine armour to her son became, following Homer, a traditional motif in epic poetry. In the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnus (tastelessly) perverts the motif while also demonstrating his awareness that this is not how the story generally unfolds.

Dionysus is miserable (κατηφιόωντι, 310), and lamenting (ἔστενεεν, 309) when he sees a man in a chariot approaching him. Καί μιν ἰδὼν, Nonnus writes, Διόνυσος ἀνέδραμε, μὴ σχεδὸν ἔλθῃ / Πείην πανδαμάτειραν ἄγων ἐπὶ φύλοπιν Ἰνδῶν (322-3). Dionysus—it seems he has read the *Iliad*—is expecting his mother, but instead, he gets Attis, a male follower of Cybele, whose colourfully-described self-castration has made his body feminine (δέμας θήλυνε σιδήρῳ, 318). With or without male genitalia, this individual could not be less like Rhea. He is an uncaring male stranger, the antithesis of the expected concerned female relative.

Nonnus' characters rarely converse.⁶¹ While Homer's characters are constantly speaking and addressing and answering one another, Nonnus' prefer yelling long speeches that seem aimed at no one in particular. Consequently, a loving dialogue like that of Achilles and Thetis is out of the question here, and Nonnus writes its opposite instead. Attis stops his chariot and yells a speech at Dionysus, reproaching him for not yet having defeated the Indians (327-35) and commanding him to accept a shield from Rhea and Hephaestus (336-8). Interrupting Attis (339), Dionysus yells back that Hera, Ares and Zeus are preventing his victory; “Σχέτλιοί ἐισι θεοί, ζηλήμονες,” he

⁶¹ Wifstrand (1933) 142.

gripes, satirizing *Odyssey* 5.118.⁶² Having informed Dionysus that, with the shield, he will have no reason to fear gods or the army of Deriades (352-6), he satiates himself at a banquet to which he was not invited and which seems to have materialized out of nowhere (368-70), and drives away.

The *Dionysiaca*'s six references to Homer repeatedly confirm the exceptional nature of Nonnus' relationship with his predecessor. He invokes the poet by name, which is unusual in epic poetry, with insistence; but the Dionysiac context surrounding the invocations, and often the content of the invocations themselves, indicates that he has in fact gone out of his way to be the anti-Homer of epic poets. Every epic composed after the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* owes a substantial debt to Homer; all of them contain passages, themes, and characters which are clearly imitations or modifications of Homeric ones. But Nonnus is not an imitator, and his modifications of Homer are consistently, intentionally perverse. His protagonist is a god, one in whom Homer apparently had little interest; his army is a grotesque, effeminate, and cowardly collection of "warriors" who are inversions of Homer's handsome, manly, courageous soldiers. When Nonnus invokes Homer, it is to draw the reader's attention to the fact that he is being as unhomeric as he possibly can. Ironically, he inverts and undermines Homer's poetry by means of that very Homeric εὐέπεια which he has requested from Ὀμηρίδες Μοῦσαι.

The theomachy and the song of Leucus in book 24, and the proem and shield ecphrasis of book 25, are episodes that show Nonnus' policy of perversion in action.

⁶² This is how Calypso begins her diatribe to Hermes when he informs her that she must let Odysseus go (Nonnus replaces Homer's ἔσπε with εἴσι; the sentences are otherwise identical). Calypso says that the gods are jealous because she has a mortal lover (119-20). There, they are interfering with love; here, with war.

These episodes were inspired by Homeric ones, but they are not, as Hopkinson suggests, emulative or rivalrous modifications. If he really wished to emulate Homer, Nonnus would not write inverse versions of Homer's most memorable stories, and if he were merely rivaling Homer, there would be no explanation for why his episodes are always precise reversals of Homer's. The rivalry argument accounts for differences, but not for constant perversions. When Nonnus closely echoes Homer at the beginning and end of his passage, he is showing familiarity with the Homeric story and signaling to the reader that he is about to write its opposite. If Homer had composed an epic about Dionysus, Nonnus' protagonist would have been Achilles.

CHAPTER TWO

§ A Tragedy of Epic Proportions: *Dionysiaca* 44-46 and Euripides' *Bacchae*

§

In books 44 to 46 of the *Dionysiaca*, which tell the story of Pentheus, Nonnus releases himself from his strange bond with Homer and demonstrates that his ties to Euripides are no less tangled. That Nonnus' Pentheus episode frequently echoes Euripides' *Bacchae* is neither debatable nor surprising.⁶³ What is less obvious and more interesting is the way Nonnus plays with Euripides. He disassembles, extends, contracts, rephrases, and inverts so much of the *Bacchae*'s language and content that a reader, recognizing Nonnus' relationship with Euripides, finds it very similar to that which he has with Homer. Nonnus' Pentheus story, though clearly dependent upon Euripides' version for its very existence, is at the same time—like everything else in the epic—deliberately unconventional. Nonnus nearly always goes out of his way to both avoid following the *Bacchae* too closely (or at all, in many cases) and to draw attention to the fact that he is not imitating the *Bacchae*. This policy requires him to show his familiarity with this or that element of the play before he undertakes to turn it on its head.⁶⁴ Consequently, a reader often finds Nonnus alluding to the Euripidean account of an event before replacing it with his own, rearranging the pieces of the *Bacchae*'s plot, or nearly quoting Euripides without going so far as to actually use any of Euripides' words. Through these devices, Nonnus makes evident his knowledge of Euripides, and, while assuring the reader that he is quite aware of how the plot would unfold were Euripides in

⁶³ This has been noted and discussed to various extents by, notably, D'Ippolito (1964) 164-177; Shorrock (2001), 194-7; Heath (1992) 136-141, Fauth (1981) 124-31.

⁶⁴ This policy applies not only to Nonnus' treatment of Euripides but to his relationship with every author on whose work he draws in the *Dionysiaca*.

charge, leaves her with no doubt as to which poet is in charge *now*. Nonnus clearly does not feel obligated to chain himself to the plot of the *Bacchae* or heap predictably-placed quotations upon his readers until they suffocate under the weight of so much uninspired imitation. Nonnus is above all an innovator; he pays homage to no end of literary predecessors, but he is well aware, as his readers ought to be, that homage is not imitation.

One must also keep in mind that the three books of the *Dionysiaca* devoted to Pentheus are part of a much greater whole.⁶⁵ The *Bacchae* is a self-contained script, whereas Nonnus' Pentheus story is infused with themes that flow outward from it in both directions, making appearances in many other episodes within the epic.⁶⁶ Many of these themes, as shall be discussed, do not appear in the *Bacchae* at all. By employing them, Nonnus brings to the plot of his own Pentheus episode a variety of un-Euripidean, and distinctly Nonnian, motifs, emphases, and events, the presence of which contributes further to the originality of books 44 to 46. As to plot, Nonnus' Pentheus story is self-contained;⁶⁷ thematically, however, it is certainly not.

Nonnus' propensity to innovate and his enthusiasm for themes not used by Euripides are what make his version of the story original. From the beginning of book 44, he shows both his familiarity with Euripides and his unwillingness to copy the *Bacchae*. Where this practice produces its most interesting and unusual result is in book

⁶⁵ Newbold (1993) concludes his article with the opinion that "the *Dionysiaca* does not exemplify successful revolution but, rather, defective narrative and the splintering of the epic into a series of ecphrases and miniatures" (110). While there are a great deal of ecphrases and miniatures in the epic, this does not prevent it from being a cohesive unit with a single protagonist and thematic continuity, the product of a consistent compositional practice on Nonnus' part.

⁶⁶ To name the ones most relevant to the Pentheus episode: Dionysus' conversion of disbelievers, prophetic dreams, perverse portrayal of Artemis, sparagmos, voyeurism. There are undoubtedly others.

⁶⁷ Collart (1930) 59, viewing the poem as a gigantic piece of ring composition, says book 5 complements book 44, and indeed he may be correct. Nonetheless, this does not affect my point that a reader of Nonnus' Pentheus books would not find the story incomplete or incoherent on account of not having read *Dion.* 5.

44—specifically, 44.46-79, in which Agave recalls a prophetic dream she had years earlier.⁶⁸ By examining this dream’s convoluted relationship with the *Bacchae*, I hope to clarify some of the uncertainty surrounding the little-explored subject⁶⁹ of Nonnus’ relationship with Euripides.

Nonnus skillfully leads us to Agave and her dream, introducing book 44 with a wide shot of the Boeotian landscape (1-15), dwelling on two of his favourite things, bodies of water (6-10) and Hamadryads (11-14), before zooming in on a wrathful Pentheus attempting in vain to bar Maenads and Seilenoi from his city (16-26). Then, his palace begins to shake: in the *Bacchae*, this does not happen nearly so soon, but only at line 585, a third of the way into the play, as a consequence of Pentheus’ attempt to bind and imprison Dionysus, as the god explains (616-19). Nonnus’ much earlier introduction of the event with the word ἥδη (35) draws attention to his innovation. By introducing a version of this critical scene from the middle of the *Bacchae* at the start of his own Pentheus story, he gives it a very different significance than it has in the play. In Nonnus’ hands it becomes an effective means of foreshadowing (πῆματος ἔσσομένοιο προάγγελος, 38). He goes on to establish it as an omen aimed very pointedly at the entire city of Thebes, describing the wobbling altar of Athena Oncaia, a

⁶⁸ D’Ippolito (1964) writes, “Una lunga parte iniziale (XLIV-XLV 51) e la conclusione (XLVI 356-367) sono i tratti che più si distaccano dal modello euripideo” (166). It is true that the beginning and end of the story are the places where most of Nonnus’ plot innovations are located. But, as I will show, the beginning of Nonnus’ Pentheus episode, though original in its plot, does contain many close verbal echoes of the *Bacchae*: the dream passage is the Pentheus episode’s best (but not its only) example of Nonnus telling his own story in Euripides’ words. D’Ippolito seems to want to see the epyllion as Nonnian at the beginning and end, and Euripidean in the middle, whereas I see it as Nonnian and Euripidean from beginning to end. Where there is Nonnus there is Euripides, and vice versa.

⁶⁹ Shorrock (2001) comments, “These books have received little critical attention, with the exception of those scholars keen to restore a section missing from the end of Euripides’ play” (195).

local goddess,⁷⁰ whose statue then begins to sweat (43-44).⁷¹ And the statue of Ares, the god directly associated with Cadmus' foundation of the city, begins to ooze gore, ἄγγελος ἔσσομένων (44-45). It could not be clearer that the earthquake, along with the (characteristically Nonnian) strange oozings of the statues of Thebes' patron gods, foreshadow the arrival of Dionysus and the downfall of Cadmus' descendants. The Thebans, imitating their city's gates, begin to tremble (δεδόνητο, 37 [gates] and δεδόνηντο, 46 [Thebans]).

Enter Agave. Having foreshadowed doom for the Thebans by uprooting and replanting a Euripidean episode, Nonnus introduces her thus:

Καὶ ναέται δεδόνηντο· φοβῶ δ' ἐλελίζετο μήτηρ
 Πενθέος ἀνχήμενος, ἐβακχεύθη δὲ μενοινῆ,
 μνησαμένη προτέρωιο δαφεινήεντος ὀνείρου
 πικρὰ προθεσπίζοντος, ἐπεὶ πάρος ὑπόθι λέκτρων
 ἐξ ὅτε κοιρανίην πατρώιον ἥρπασε Πενθεύς,
 πάννυχον ὑπναλέοις ὁάροις εὐδουσάν 'Αγαύην
 φάσματα μιμηλοῖο διεπτοίησεν ὀνείρου,
 ἀπλανέος θρώσκοντα δι' εὐκεράου πυλεῶνος· (44.46-53)

⁷⁰ Cf. Chuvin's ([1976] 82) comment on Athena Oncaia. Nonnus refers to her more than once, but Rose (in Rouse [1940] vol. 1, 169) in his note to 5.15, her first appearance in the poem, says only that Oncaia is "[a] local title of Athena (meaning unknown), given later [5.70] to one of the Gates of Thebes". Nonnus' own explanation is that Mene is allotted this gate because the name Oncaia is a reference to "the honk of cattle [ἐκ βοὸς ὀγκηθμοῖο φερώνυμον, 71], because the Moon herself, bullshaped, horned, driver of cattle, being triform is Tritonis Athene" (71-3, Rouse's trans.). Nonnus, then, seems to be equating this version of Athena with the Moon, although Rose says, in his note to line 73 (vol.1, 172-3), that this "rare explanation of Tritonis...is purely fanciful". It should be noted that in book 45, Pentheus says to Cadmus, "Ὅγκαίης δ' ἀνάειρε σαόφρονα χαλκὸν 'Αθήνης"(69), thus creating direct apposition between the thyrsus of Dionysus and Athena's bronze.

⁷¹ Winkler (1974) discusses extensively the variety and significance of the liquids that are forever spurting and dripping from the *Dionysiaca*. In discussing the poem's widespread references to lactation, he writes, "Other kinds of moisture are just as spontaneously born or ejected: honey, nectar, semen, venom, olive oil, wine, dew, and all may be denoted by the single word ἔρση" (70). He does not mention book 44's sweat and blood, to which his point is equally applicable.

Prophetic dreams like Agave's are one of Nonnus' favourite literary devices; they affect many of the epic's most prominent characters, mortal and divine.⁷² Unless Nonnus specifically states that a dream is deceptive (as he does in the case of Morrheus, 34.89-91), a reader may be certain that its content will soon be realized. Though the use of dreams as a method of foreshadowing is not an exclusively Nonnian or late antique motif (the classic classical example is that of Clytemnestra)⁷³, no author uses them more extensively, and no audience would have appreciated them to a greater extent.⁷⁴ By introducing his Pentheus episode with a dream, Nonnus immediately establishes that it will be original (that is, not an imitation of Euripides' version), while also sparking in his reader's mind recollections of the *Dionysiaca*'s many other prophetic dreams. A reader who has arrived at this scene in book 44 will have come to recognize the dream-as-foreshadowing motif as a significant recurring feature of the poem.

Though one occasionally catches a glimpse of Euripides in the above passage, one's attention is always quickly drawn back to its peculiarly Nonnian character. The description of Pentheus as a usurper of his power (44.43ff.) is likely a deliberate implicit reference to, and reversal of, the *Bacchae*'s portrayal of Pentheus as the city's lawful ruler; Robert Shorrock has called this "[o]ne prominent and distinguishing feature of Nonnus' version of the *Bacchae*."⁷⁵ Nonnus' use of the word ἐβακχεύθη, like so many other words and phrases in lines 35 ff., is foreshadowing, a reference to the imminent

⁷² Aristaeus, Actaeon's father (5.415-32); Semele (7.136-54); Nicaia (16.282-301); Dionysus himself (18.169-94 and 42.323-35); Lycurgus (20.256-61); Deriades (26.6-35); Ares (29.325-61); Morrheus (34.89-98); the people of Tyre (40.440-500); Erigone (47.148-86); Ariadne (47.320-35); and Aura (48.258-86).

⁷³ Stesichorus, fr. 219, Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 523-39; Sophocles, *Electra*, 410-30.

⁷⁴ Patricia Cox Miller's *Dreams in Late Antiquity* (1994) is a study of the most well-known recorders, interpreters, and dreamers of dreams. In her introduction, she writes, "This book focuses on a type of imagination that was deeply embedded in the culture at large" (12).

⁷⁵ Shorrock (2001) believes there is "heightened emphasis placed on the theme of paternity and the rites of succession" (195) in Nonnus' version. I do not find this argument compelling, but I do think Shorrock's note about Nonnus' reversal of Pentheus' role is an important one.

madness of Agave.⁷⁶ A word still more popular with Nonnus, μιμηλοῖο, occurs in line 52. Fraudulent/deceptive perceptions are one of Nonnus' many obsessions, and he almost always describes dreams with formulae containing μιμηλός (copied, imitative) or ἀπατήλιος (deceptive), even when they are in fact true and accurate prophecies.⁷⁷

By introducing the plot of the Pentheus episode with a prophetic dream, Nonnus links it securely to the other occurrences of these dreams in the epic, while as hastily and unsubtly as possible distancing himself from Euripides' plot and chronology. Furthermore, he attributes the dream to Agave, who does not appear in the *Bacchae* until line 1168, as a raving, bragging Maenad. Nonnus' Agave comes into the spotlight immediately, and in full control of her mind.⁷⁸

Already the reader should realize, as a result of the features of Nonnus' version of the story discussed above, that Nonnus feels no more compelled to imitate Euripides than he does to imitate Homer. Rather, he makes the reader aware of his familiarity with the *Bacchae* by making alterations to its structure, content, and language, such that, while we see Euripides everywhere in these books, we cannot help but notice that most of the time we see the tragedian standing on his head, or making use of peculiarly Nonnian words and concepts. One cannot help but think that *Dionysiaca* 44-46 would cause the

⁷⁶ Nonnus later (45.158) uses it in the same way to describe the Tyrsenian pirates, who are themselves, like Agave, about to experience the full power of the god (but have not yet). The word does seem to imply that those to whom it is applied are already mad, but that is not true of either the pirates or Agave (see note 16).

⁷⁷ E.g. 18.171 ὑπναλῆς...ἀπατήλιον εἰκόνα χάρμης; 26.7 μιμηλὴ δολιοιο...ὄψις ὄνειρου; 29.326 φάσματα ποικίλλουσα δολοπλόκος ὄψις ὄνειρου; 47.334 ἀπατήλιον ὄψιν ὄνειρων; 42.334 μιμηλῶ πτερόεντα νόον πόμπευεν ὄνειρῳ. See Peek (1968-75) vol. 3, s.v. ὄνειρος. Cf. Riemschneider (1957) 57-61 on Nonnus' preoccupation with things feigned, false, etc.

⁷⁸ That is, she has not become a Maenad yet. Euripides' Agave is explicitly a Maenad: Dionysus announces upon his arrival that he has made all the women into Bacchantes (32-38), and makes it clear that the daughters of Cadmus are with them (35-38). Nonnus' Agave is obviously upset and afraid, but Dionysus has not yet made her a Maenad: he does this, with the help of the Furies, in 44.260-4. Fauth (1981) chapter 7 discusses the madness of Nonnus' Maenads.

tragedian neither to applaud Nonnus' work, nor to write him off as a mere imitator, but rather to spin in his grave.

But the description of the dream further complicates matters: it is Euripidean in both language and content, as shall be explained below. In lines 54 to 79, Nonnus tells of the three φάσματα of which her dream consisted: firstly, Pentheus dressed as a Maenad (54-7), secondly, the dismemberment of Pentheus (58-67), and thirdly, her boastful speech to Cadmus (67-79).

It is important to note that Nonnus' lines 44.54-79 are modelled on the *Bacchae*. Not only are many thematic parallels immediately apparent, but there are, as shall be shown, verbal echoes of Euripides as well. Nonnus' very Euripidean accounts of the three visions lead a reader to expect that he will follow the playwright's lead in his own depictions of these events. But one discovers instead that all three play out in ways which are deliberately unlike the episodes of the *Bacchae* to which they correspond. This is a clear example of Nonnus' method of showing familiarity with an earlier version of a story, then producing a perversion of it.⁷⁹

(I) The first of the φάσματα is recounted as follows:

ἔλπετο γὰρ Πενθήῃ χοροῖτυπον ἄβρὸν ὀδίτην
 ἄρσενα κοσμήσαντα γυναικείῳ χρώα πέπλῳ
 ῥίψαι πορφυρόνωτον ἐπὶ χθόνα φᾶρος ἀνάκτων,
 θύρσον ἐλαφρίζοντα καὶ οὐ σκήπτροιο φορῆα. (54-7)

This condenses *Bacchae* 912-42 and also contains reminiscences of 821-36. The latter is Dionysus' discussion with Pentheus concerning the necessity of his cross-dressing in

⁷⁹ A method which at times he condenses into one step: showing familiarity with something *by* producing a perversion of it.

order to spy on the Maenads; the former, which more closely resembles *Dionysiaca* 44.54-7,⁸⁰ is the scene in which Pentheus is dressed as a Bacchant. These are very significant moments in the *Bacchae*,⁸⁰ and Nonnus' version of them is equally outstanding, if for different reasons. Agave's recollection of her dream in the *Dionysiaca* calls the *Bacchae* to mind. In Agave's dream, just as he does in the *Bacchae* (ἔνδον προσείων αὐτὸν ἀνασείων τ' ἐγὼ / καὶ βακχιάζων ἐξ ἔδρας μεθώρμιστα, 930-1), Pentheus dances like a Maenad, χοροίτυπον ἄβρὸν ὀδίτην (44.54). Euripides' Pentheus asks Dionysus, “εἰς γυναῖκας ἐξ ἀνδρὸς τελῶ;” (822); Nonnus, echoing the playwright's use of symmetry in this line, has Agave dream of Pentheus ἄρσενα κοσμήσαντα γυναικείῳ χρώα πέπλῳ (55). Both Pentheuses enthusiastically bear thyrsi—in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus informs him that this will be one of his outfit's accessories (θύρσον...χειρὶ, 835), and, sure enough, once he has dressed up, he asks Dionysus' advice: “πότερα δὲ θύρσον δεξιᾷ λαβὼν χειρὶ / ἢ τῇδε, Βάκχῃ μᾶλλον εἰκασθήσομαι;” (941-2). Nonnus' Pentheus appears in Agave's dream θύρσον ἐλαφρίζοντα (57).

In Nonnus' brief description of the first φάσμα, there is not as much close verbal reminiscence of Euripides as there is in the longer and more elaborate accounts of the second and third ones. What we do find, though, is that even in Nonnus' four-line passage, the thematic parallels to the *Bacchae* are thickly packed together, producing an effect of “Euripides from concentrate.” And the four lines give no hint of the Nonnian havoc that is to come: as far as one can tell from this morsel of foreshadowing, Pentheus'

⁸⁰ As Dodds (1960) remarks in his commentary to the play, the interaction between Pentheus and Dionysus, “in its three stages [343-518; 642-861; 912-76] is the dramatic kernel of the play: everything else leads up to it or flows from it” (131).

cross-dressing, when it occurs, will happen the way it happens in the *Bacchae*. (This is not to say, of course, that anyone who has made it this far into the epic could seriously believe that Nonnus' version of the story would be unoriginal. All I mean to assert is that, in his account of the first part of Agave's dream, Nonnus gives nothing away.)

The scene in which Pentheus fulfills the first φάσμα's foreshadowing occurs at 46.81-138. Dionysus persuades Pentheus to dress like a Maenad (and not just *any* Maenad, but his own mother), he does so, and they head out. The scene is certainly based on the *Bacchae*, but Nonnus is not content merely to imitate Euripides. Several very un-Euripidean happenings in these lines produce an effect quite unlike that of the *Bacchae*. The most notably Nonnian aspects of *Dion.* 46.81-138 are:

- (1) the greater physical presence of Agave, and the emphasis on Pentheus' becoming her (83, 110);
- (2) the reference to, and perversion of, the story of Actaeon and Artemis, which is one of Nonnus' preoccupations throughout the epic, and particularly within his Pentheus episode (87-88);
- (3) the presence of Mene (99-105); and
- (4) the spying of the Thebans (128-138).

Agave, as has been discussed, is introduced without delay into Nonnus' story. In the *Bacchae*, however, we do not hear her name until Pentheus utters it in line 229,⁸¹ and

⁸¹ If even then: Dodds (1960) 98 notes that "Collmann rejected the lines [229-30] on the pedantic ground that ὄσα ἄπεισιν includes other women besides the daughters of Cadmus. A stronger objection is the form Ἀκταίονος: elsewhere in the play (337, 1227, 1291) the oblique cases have ω as they have in Aesch. (fr. 241) and in Nonnus." He goes on to provide arguments for the other side of the case, and to state that he himself thinks "the lines are appropriate enough dramatically." The next occurrence of Agave's name in the *Bacchae* is 682; there is nothing in Dodds' apparatus or commentary to suggest that this occurrence is contentious. Perhaps, then, this should be considered the first certain instance of Agave's being mentioned by name.

she does not come onto the stage until the play is two-thirds over. This does not imply that she is unimportant to Euripides' story, but the reader does notice that Nonnus gives her a much greater presence in the *Dionysiaca*. She is the first character Nonnus dwells upon in book 44, whereas she is the last to appear in the *Bacchae*. Furthermore, because she had the prophetic dream whose content is now playing out in book 46, one is reminded of her whenever something from the dream is realized, as occurs for the first time in 46.81-138.

Not only is Agave's dream coming true, but Pentheus—and this is a completely Nonnian innovation—*becomes* his mother. He is not dressed up as some generic Maenad; Dionysus instructs him, “γίνεο θήλυς Ἀγαύη” (83), and he complies: χροί ποικιλόνωτον ἐδύσατο πέπλον Ἀγαύης (110).⁶ The god's exhortation in line 83 stands out because it seems almost redundant; he has just finished urging Pentheus to exchange his φάρεα...βασιλῆια (82) for θήλεα πέπλα (83). Thus, we know that the latter half of line 83 is not merely Nonnus' way of having Dionysus tell Pentheus to dress up in women's clothes—the god has just finished doing that. “Put on women's clothing” and “Become your mother” are far from synonymous utterances. Apparently, Pentheus views this matter as I do; he takes the god's command literally and, οἰστρομανής (106), dresses in his mother's peplos.

Few possibilities excite Nonnus more than that of Artemis as a wife and/or mother. Classical literature offers the unfortunate end of the would-be rapist Orion as evidence that attempting to rape the goddess is a terrible idea, and the death of Actaeon as a warning against even accidental interference with her modesty. No author presents her as anything other than the archetypal militant virgin. None but Nonnus, that is. In

the *Dionysiaca*, the notion of Artemis taking a husband arises often. Hera suggests that she will join Artemis to Alcyoneus in marriage (ὅτε...ἀείσω / εὐνέτιν...Ἀρτεμιν Ἀλκυονῆος, 48.21-2); Aura, while she herself ogles and fondles the goddess (48. 341-50), tells her to sleep with Hermes and Ares (358); Pentheus remarks that he will marry her (44.177), citing aversion to incest (“μῶμον ἀλυσκάζουσα κασιγνήτων ὕμεναίων”, 179)—not devotion to chastity—as her reason for having refused to marry her brother Apollo (177-9); and Dionysus tells Autonoe a disturbing tale of Artemis and Actaeon living in marital bliss (44.283-318). Even by his own standards, Nonnus’ persistent fascination with the notion of Artemis playing a role which she has persistently refused to consider playing, one which would require her to relinquish the very essence of her character and become an inversion of herself, is extreme.⁸²

Nowhere does Nonnus indulge his passion for the perversion of Artemis’ nature more thoroughly than in the Pentheus episode. This is where we find Pentheus proposing (sarcastically, yes, but it is alarming that he would propose it even sarcastically) to take her as a wife and, more significantly, Dionysus telling Agave that the goddess has in fact married Actaeon. The story of Actaeon is another of Nonnus’ preoccupations, and, while Nonnus does follow Euripides’ lead in including Actaeon within his Pentheus episode, we find that the extent to which he discusses Actaeon and the context into which he places the deer hunter tend not to be Euripidean.

⁸² Nonnus plays the same game with Aphrodite in book 24 (242-326) and Aura in book 48. The Aura episode is particularly disturbing because it is presented not as a possibility (as with Artemis here) or a fictional story (as with Aphrodite) but as an actual event. It is the ultimate in Nonnian perversion, appropriately located in the ultimate book in the epic.

Unless lines 229-30 are an interpolation,⁸³ the *Bacchae*'s first mention of Actaeon occurs in Pentheus' first speech, as he explains his intention to chain the Maenads (231):

ῥσαι δ' ἄπεισιν, ἐξ ὄρους θηράσομαι,
 Ἴνω τ' Ἀγαύην θ' ἥ μ' ἔτι κτ' Ἐχίονι
 Ἀκταίωνός τε μητέρ' Αὐτονόην λέγω. (228-30)

Throughout the play, Euripides presents Pentheus as a second Actaeon.⁸⁴ All we are told here is that Actaeon is the son of Autonoe, which is not news—hence, perhaps it is of no particular concern here that lines 229-30 may not be genuine.⁸⁵ In any case, approximately 100 lines later, Cadmus does say to Pentheus:

ὄρᾳς τὸν Ἀκταίωνος ἄθλιον μόρον,
 ὃν ὠμόσιτοι σκύλακες ἄς ἐθρέψατο
 διεσπάσαντο, κρείσσον' ἐν κυναγίαις
 Ἀρτεμίδος εἶναι κομπάσαντ', ἐν ὀργάσιν. (337-40)

Like Actaeon, Pentheus makes sacrilegious (δυσσέβειας, 263) claims which offend a god and lead to his ironic death at the hands of murderers who do not realize who he is. Furthermore, in the *Bacchae*, when Agave asks where her son died, Cadmus replies, “οὐπὲρ πρὶν Ἀκταίωνα διέλαχον κύνες” (1290)—not only have they both died in the same way (διεσπάσαντο, of the dogs' mangling of Actaeon [339]; ἀπεσπάραξεν [1127]; σπαραγμοῖς [1135] and διασπαρακτόν [1220] of Pentheus' death), but they have both met their fates in the same place. The analogy is now complete.

⁸³ Cf. note 25 above.

⁸⁴ Dodds (1960), commenting on *Bacchae* lines 337-40, says, “The parallel [between Pentheus and Actaeon] is closer than Cadmus knows: Pentheus too will suffer sparagmos in the same place [as Actaeon did]. That seems to be the reason why Actaeon crops up so often in the *Bacchae* (230, 1227, 1291)” (113).

⁸⁵ I would argue that their being spoken by Pentheus in his first speech may be evidence to support their legitimacy. Pentheus' being the first character to mention Actaeon would be appropriate, and would add strength to the bond Euripides creates between the two doomed young men.

In the *Bacchae*, Cadmus says it was Actaeon's claim to be a better hunter than Artemis that led to his death. Euripides' association of Pentheus with Actaeon is extremely effective, yet equally concise; he uses only seven lines to make the comparison. With Nonnus, however, it is, not surprisingly, a different story. First, it is told in great detail. Book 5 is devoted to Actaeon, and within the Pentheus books the story comes up repeatedly. One instance of this occurs in Nonnus' description of the real-life events which correspond to Agave's first φάσμα: Dionysus, just after ordering Pentheus to become his mother, encourages him to become a hunter, saying, "Βάκχῳ μούνοῦ ἔριζε, καί, εἰ θέμις, ἰοχεαίρῃ, / ὄφρα λεοντοφόνον σε μετ' Ἀκταίωνα καλέσσω" (87-88). Like Euripides, Nonnus associates Actaeon with both Artemis and hunting proficiency, but, from book 5, we know that Nonnus' account of Actaeon's transgression follows a different tradition than Euripides'.⁸⁶ Dionysus' comment may well remind a reader of Actaeon's fate in the *Bacchae*—especially considering the εἰ θέμις he throws in; this strange burst of propriety on the god's part provokes a reader's recollection of the Euripidean tradition and points her directly to the obvious conclusion that it is not θέμις whatsoever—but it is an illusory allusion: Nonnus' Actaeon is punished not for conceit about hunting prowess but for leering at Artemis as she bathes (5.303-315). Thus, 46.87-8 cannot mean in the *Dionysiaca* what they mean in the *Bacchae*. Nonnus' comparison of Actaeon and Pentheus does not include their having committed a similar crime against a god. Nonnus, not surprisingly, favours the erotic explanation for Artemis' wrath, not only because he is

⁸⁶ Heath (1992) discusses both the Euripidean (10-18) and Nonnian (135-56) accounts.

preoccupied with sex and nudity⁸⁷ but because he is especially preoccupied with these matters when it comes to Artemis, as shall be discussed later. Dionysus' exhortation to Pentheus in Nonnus serves the function of recalling the reader to Euripides while drawing attention to the important differences between the playwright and his perverter.

Another thing these lines recall to the reader's mind is the disturbing, ridiculous tale of Artemis and Actaeon at the end of book 44 (283-318), arguably the most gratuitously perverse passage in the whole epic. Deeply strange in itself, and a blatant contradiction to what has occurred in book 5, it is as purely Nonnian as it is un-Euripidean. Dionysus *νυκτιφάης* (279) creeps into Autonoe's bedroom, *ὀρφναίοις... πόδεσσι* (278), and launches a characteristically Nonnian soliloquy in her direction, intending to incite her to run into the hills (297) as his newest Maenad. He tells Autonoe that Actaeon and Artemis are married (285-6), that Actaeon is still alive (287), that she herself ought to become a *γαμοστόλος* (309), and that it is only a matter of time before Artemis gives birth to a child (312-14). All of this is shocking and absurd, and becomes even more so in the light of the fact that, in book 5, Actaeon has not only died a meticulously-described death (332-69) and appeared to his father in a dream to tell him where to find the scraps of corpse (520-22), but is mourned by Autonoe and the rest of his family (370-87). There is no doubt that Actaeon is quite dead. When Dionysus makes his speech to Autonoe in book 44, then, we wonder how the woman could believe that Actaeon is alive, let alone that he is living a pleasant domestic life with Artemis, of all goddesses. This defies even the lax standards of logic to which Greek

⁸⁷ Cf. Winkler (1974), esp. 4-17; 70-128, but also elsewhere.

mythology typically holds itself accountable. Nonnus' mythology is clearly bound to no standards whatsoever.

Connected to the strange and inexplicable story Dionysus tells to Autonoe is Mene,⁸⁸ who does not take part in the *Bacchae* but who makes a handful of cameo appearances in the *Dionysiaca*, beginning in book 1 when she, a Titan, battles against Typhoeus in the Typhonomachy (213 ff.). Within the Pentheus episode, Mene appears in book 44 and again in book 46, and her presence in both cases is of a very dark nature. She is one of the gods to whom Dionysus, though a god himself, prays—he is also devoted to Heracles 'Ἀστροχίτων, as we see in book 40 when the god is in Tyre (369 ff.); this Heracles has mythological connections to the sun⁸⁹, who, in Nonnus, is the moon's father (40.375-7, 44.191). Mene's being the night sky's brightest body logically associates her with darkness (and dreams); Dionysus invokes her at a point in the Pentheus story when he believes sinister assistance is required (44. 201-216)

In book 46, Mene helps to drive Pentheus mad:

καὶ Βρομίῳ συνάεθλος ἐπέχραε Πενθεί Μήνη
 δαιμονίῃ μᾶστιγι· συνερχομένης δὲ Λυαίῳ
 λυσσήεις θρασὺς οἷστρος ἄμερσινόοιο Σελήνης
 φάσματα ποικιλόμορφα μεμνηνότε Πενθεί δείξας
 φρικτὸν Ἐχιονίδην προτέρης μετέθηκε μενοινῆς,
 καὶ σφαλερῇ Πενθήος ἐπεσμαράγησεν ἀκουῇ,
 δαιμονίης σάλπιγγος ἀλάστορα δοῦπον ἀράσων·
 ἀνέρα δ' ἐπτοίησε·

(46.99-106)

⁸⁸ Cf. D'Ippolito (1964) 168. According to Fauth (1981), Nonnus' Mene is a "uranian and nether-world source of this diffuse radiation of insanity (καὶ μανίης μεδέω καὶ λύσσαν ἐγείρω, 44,229); for just that reason she is 'like Bacchos' (44,226 f.) and Bacchos is 'companion of Mene (44,218)" (115). Cf. also 107 ff., 125 ff.

⁸⁹ Cf. Rose in Rouse (1940) 181, note a.

This happens because Dionysus asked her to do it in book 44. Mene's presence in the two books parallels and emphasizes the dark power of Dionysus himself, who, like Mene, is associated with darkness throughout this episode.⁹⁰ In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus drives Pentheus mad himself; in the *Dionysiaca*, however, Mene is a crucial and compelling part of the story. In book 44, she calls Dionysus her σύνδρομε (218); she allies herself with him completely (“σὺν σοὶ δυσμενέεσσι κορύσσομαι,” 226); she even claims a powerful position in the madness provocation business:

ἴσα δὲ Βάκχῳ
κοιρανέω μανίης ἑτερόφονος. εἰμὶ δὲ Μήνη
Βακχιάς, οὐχ ὅτι μόνον ἐν αἰθέρι μῆνας ἐλίσσω,
ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ μανίης μεδέω καὶ λύσσαν ἐγείρω.
οὐ χθονίην σέθεν ὕβριν ἐγὼ νήποινον ἐάσω. (226-30)

And, after making this speech, she insinuates in lines 231-252 that she helped to bring about the unpleasant fates of Lycurgus, Deriades, the Tyrsenian pirates, and Orontes, all of whom have prominent roles in the *Dionysiaca*. The association of Mene with Dionysus' evil schemes is a Nonnian innovation, and the nocturnal scheming of Mene and Dionysus in book 44 thus connects Agave to the other victims of their sinister devices.

Spying is another pervasive motif within the *Dionysiaca*.⁹¹ As in the story of Artemis and Actaeon, there is spying in the *Bacchae*, but Nonnus, telling the story in his trademark predictably unpredictable way, does not imitate Euripides in his narration of the events that follow Pentheus' dressing up. And, because peeping occurs not only in his Pentheus episode but in almost innumerable other places throughout the epic,

⁹⁰ E.g., Dionysus is νύκτα δοκεύων, 44.189; νυκτελῖω, 203; νυκτιφαῆς, 218 and 279; ὀρφναίοις πόδεσσι, 278.

⁹¹ Winkler (1974) devotes the entire first chapter of his dissertation to the epic's instances of voyeurism.

recollection of the most outstanding of these past instances shapes one's understanding of the present one.

In the *Bacchae*, there is less voyeuristic spying than one might expect. Pentheus does talk about spying (κατασκοπήν, 838) on the Maenads: “καὶ μὴν δοκῶ σφᾶς ἐν λόχμῃς ὄρνιθας ὥς / λέκτρων ἔχεσθαι φιλτάτοις ἐν ἔρκεσιν,” he says to Dionysus (957-8). Later, the Messenger reports that, “ὥς ὁρῶμεν οὐχ ὁρώμενοι” (1050), the small group of spies tried first sitting in a valley (1048), but Pentheus, complaining of his inability to see them, said, “ὄχθον δ' ἐπεμβὰς ἢ ἐλάτην ὑψαύχενα / ἴδοιμ' ἂν ὀρθῶς Μαινάδων αἰσχροουργίαν” (1061-2). However, as the Messenger himself points out, the Maenads attacked him almost immediately upon his ascension to the treetop (ὅσον γὰρ οὐπῶ δῆλος ἦν θάσσων ἄνω, / καὶ τὸν ξένον μὲν οὐκέτ' εἰσορᾶν παρῆν, 1076-7); thus, he did not have much of an opportunity to engage in the voyeurism to which he had been so enthusiastically looking forward. In the *Bacchae*, then, voyeurism is discussed and anticipated, but is never said to actually occur.

Not so for Nonnus: he never passes up a chance to tell of someone secretly sneaking a peek at someone else, especially when it is such a perfect opportunity as that presented by the Pentheus episode. His version of Pentheus' transformation kills two birds with one stone: it perverts Euripides and, in so doing, provides a very effective instance of spying. In 44.128-38, the Theban citizens stare at Pentheus from various lookout points as he (all gussied up in his own mother's clothing) and Dionysus head for the hills (46.116-127). These lines are vintage Nonnus. Within the description of the peeping Thebans is a proliferation of words designating roundness—ἀμφὶ,

στεφανηδὸν and ἐκυκλώσαντο (128); τροχόεντα (129); ἐλίξας and again στεφανηδὸν (135). Riemschneider has noted that roundness is one of Nonnus' fondnesses,⁹² and he is also partial to using clusters of nearly synonymous terms within short passages like this one.⁹³ In addition, 46.128-38 contain an abundance of words and phrases related to seeing, another of Nonnus' favourite topics: ὑψιφανής (130), δοκεύων / δόχμιον ὄμμα τίταινεν (133-4), παπταίνων (137). This produces an effect of visual enclosure/entrapment of Pentheus. He is surrounded on all sides, being watched from every direction. It is a particularly unsettling instance of spying because of the encirclement: typically, Nonnus presents a single watcher,⁹⁴ whereas here, the whole city is watching. Furthermore, the word ἐκυκλώσαντο appears in Agave's dream (44.61), where its subject is not spying Thebans but θῆρες (61) about to attack him. There are also many references to roundness/encirclement—often in words identical to those which appear in the spying scene—in the passage of book 46 in which this part of Agave's dream is realized: ἀμφὶ, στεφανηδὸν and ἐκυκλώσαντο (180), ἐπηχύναντο (182), περισφίνξασα (183), αὐτοέλικτος (187), κεκυλισμένος (188). The Thebans' visual feast upon Pentheus' body foreshadows the Maenads' literal one.

Euripides' Dionysus claims that he will prevent such a thing from occurring, in the following exchange (841-2):

Pentheus: καὶ πῶς δι' ἄστεως εἶμι Καδμείους λαθών;

⁹² Riemschneider (1957) 53.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 48.

⁹⁴ Winkler (1974) 2-3 lists 23 instances of voyeurism in the epic, and all of them have a single watcher. Strictly speaking, the Thebans' spying on Pentheus is not voyeurism, but it is curiosity-driven peeping that Pentheus does not notice happening, and Nonnus does present it as sexually charged; he dances like a woman (46.116-120), he releases his hair to let it flutter in the breeze (122), he is "fluttering his veil" (138).

Dionysus: ὁδοὺς ἐρήμους ἵμεν· ἐγὼ δ' ἡγήσομαι.

Soon after this, Dionysus claims a desire to make Pentheus γέλωτα (854),

γυναικόμορφον ἀγόμενον δι' ἄστεως (855), but, when the god is leading Pentheus through the city, there is no evidence to indicate that they are being watched.⁹⁵ Thus it is almost certainly not the case that Dionysus in lines 854-5 refers to an actual situation in the play—there would have been no spying Thebans onstage, though it could be argued that the play's audience took on that role. In any event, nothing is certain with respect to the *Bacchae*'s references to spying, whereas Nonnus makes a great unsubtle production of the staring citizens. Not only does it foreshadow Pentheus' demise, it strengthens the parallels between Pentheus and the Maenads (and, hence, Pentheus and Agave): like the Maenads, Pentheus, dressed as a Maenad, is watched. Pentheus in the *Dionysiaca* is both object and subject of peeping.

(II) Agave's second vision is the dismemberment of Pentheus:

καί μιν ἰδεῖν ἐδόκησε πάλιν Καδμηὶς Ἀγαύη
 ἐζόμενον σκιεροῖο μετάρσιον ὑψόθι δένδρου·
 καὶ φυτὸν ὑψικάρηνον, ὅπῃ θρασὺς ἔζετο Πενθεύς, 60
 θῆρες ἐκυκλώσαντο, καὶ ἄγριον εἶχον ἐρωήν
 δένδρον ἀπειλητῆρι μετοχλίζοντες ὀδόντι,
 τρηχαλαίαις γενύεσσι· τινασσομένοιο δὲ δένδρου
 κύμβαχος αὐτοκύλιστος ἔλιξ δινεύετο Πενθεύς,
 καί μιν ἐδηλήσαντο δεδουπότα λυσσάδες ἄρκτοι· 65
 ἀγροτέρη δὲ λείαινα καταίσσουσα προσώπου
 πρυμνόθεν ἔσπασε χεῖρα... (44.58-67)

⁹⁵ It is true that part of the watcher's titillation results from his subject's unawareness of what is happening. Thus, one may wonder if in fact Euripides' Pentheus is unknowingly watched as he proceeds from the city. However, given that there is no indication in the *Bacchae* that anyone really does spy on Pentheus, we must conclude that it does not happen. Had Euripides wanted the audience to know about the occurrence of such a thing, he would have written it into the play.

Once again, thematic and verbal similarities abound between *Dionysiaca* 44.58-67 and the passage of the *Bacchae* on which it is based. This passage is a reworking of a substantial section of Euripides' messenger speech (1020-1151).

Thematically, as with the first vision, similarities are evident. Lines 59-60 of Agave's dream describe Pentheus sitting high up in a shady tree—ἐζόμενον σκιεροῖο μετάρσιον ὑψόθι δένδρου, 59—and are reminiscent of *Bacchae* 1070 (Πενθέα δ' ἰδρύσας ἐλατίνων ὄζων ἔπι), 1076 (ὅσον γὰρ ὄψω δηλὸς ἦν θάσσων ἄνω), and 1095 (ὥς δ' εἶδον ἐλάτῃ δεσπότην ἐφήμενον). Nonnus' line 44.61 recalls *Bacchae* 1106 (φέρει, περιστᾶσαι κύκλῳ...—and Agave says this, just as it is she who dreams it in the *Dionysiaca*); in both cases, Maenads surround the tree. Lines 44.61-3, in which the Maenads hoist the tree as though with levers (μετοχλίζοντες, 62), recall *Bacchae* 1104 (ρίζας ἀνεσπάρασσον ἀσιδήροις μοχλοῖς). Nonnus' Maenads use their teeth and jaws (ἀπειλητήρι...ὀδόντι, 62; τρηχαλαίς γενύεσσι, 63), while Euripides' use δρυίνους...κλάδους (1103), but both authors refer to levers of an atypical sort. *Dion.* 44.63-4 restate *Bacchae* 1111-13 (ὑψοῦ δὲ θάσσων ὑπόθεν χαμαιπετῆς / πίπτει πρὸς οὔδας μυρίοις οἰμώγμας Πενθεύς); both versions describe Pentheus' fall from the tree. Nonnus, as we would expect, emphasizes the somersaulting descent of Pentheus, using δινεύετο (64) where Euripides uses πίπτει (1112) and leading up to the verb with αὐτοκύλιστος and ἔλιξ. *Dion.* 65 condenses the *Bacchae*'s attack of the Maenads, while also, as shall be discussed, foreshadowing what is to come in book 46. And Nonnus' lines 44.66-7 restate Euripides' 1121-8: in both

versions, a raving Agave wrenches Pentheus' arm from its socket. Undoubtedly, Nonnus has modeled Agave's second vision upon lines 1020-1151 of the *Bacchae*'s messenger speech.

Nonnus tends to reword his predecessors' stories as he reworks them; consequently, there are fewer close verbal echoes of Euripides within this section of Agave's dream than there are thematic ones. Nonetheless, it is evident that Nonnus knew well the *Bacchae*'s words, and had them in mind no less than he did the plot as he wrote. Even in reviewing the thematic parallels to Euripides listed above, one finds similarities which suggest, if not prove, that this is the case: *Bacchae* 1104 and *Dionysiaca* 44.62 both feature very unconventional levers; both versions have references to Maenads encircling Pentheus' tree; both contain specific references to Pentheus falling. In all of these cases, Nonnus uses words different from, but often synonymous with, those of Euripides. Nonnus employs this technique throughout his epic, not only when playing with Homer but with all of the authors to whose work he refers. His most noteworthy and extensive near-quotation of Euripides occurs in lines 46.125-7, within the full account of Agave's first vision. Here, Pentheus is dancing crazily (114-24), and, right before introducing his innovation of the voyeuristic Thebans, Nonnus writes:

καὶ διδύμους Φαέθοντας ἐδέρκετο καὶ δύο Θήβας·
ἔλπετο δ' ἀκαμάτων ἐπικείμενον ὑπόθεν ὤμων
Θήβης ἑπταπόροιο μετοχλίζειν πυλεῶνα (125-7),

which echoes *Bacchae* 918-19 (and recalls 945-6):

καὶ μὴν ὁρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίου δοκῶ,
δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας καὶ πολίσμ' ἐπτάστομον· (918-19)

(and) ἄρ' ἂν δυναίμην τὰς Κιθαιρώνας πτυχὰς
αὐταῖσι Βάκχαις τοῖς ἐμοῖς ὤμοις φέρειν; (945-6)

It is a strange Nonnian echo, however. Lines 918-19 are especially crucial to our understanding of Nonnus' literary practices, as they feature the Panopolitan's most calculated use of synonyms.

In place of Euripides' ὀρᾶν, Nonnus uses	ἐδέρκετο;
“ ἡλίους	“ Φαέθοντας
“ δύο	“ διδύμους
“ δισσᾶς	“ δύο
“ ἐπτάστομον	“ ἑπταπόροιο

This is Nonnus' predilection for verbal variation at its most extreme. He is deliberately rewording Euripides' sentence, in most instances choosing synonyms of Euripides' words not for any obvious stylistic reason but rather purely for the sake of originality. Euripides' δύο modifies ἡλίους; Nonnus' modifies Θήβας. Euripides' Θήβας is modified by δισσᾶς. Nonnus' διδύμους modifies Φαέθοντας. The three words designating “two” or “double”—δύο, δισσᾶς, and διδύμους—are virtually synonymous; each could modify the city or the suns just as effectively as either of the others. Nonnus plays with Euripides' words not because he is attempting to change or improve the content of his predecessor's sentence in his own version thereof, but because, when he does imitate a prior work of literature, he is insistent upon infusing it with originality. However, whereas Nonnus' use of διδύμους and δύο adds no original meaning to his sentence, but merely draws attention to the fact that he is cleverly going out of his way to state Euripides' idea in different words, his Φαέθοντας is not really synonymous with Euripides' ἡλίους. The latter is precisely the word one would expect to see for “suns”, while Nonnus' Φαέθοντας would stand out even to a reader unfamiliar with the *Bacchae*: Phaethon, commonly, is not the sun at all; rather, he is the

son of the sun, who perishes in a doomed attempt to drive his father's chariot.⁹⁶ Thus, Φαέθο^ςντας is an unusual choice in itself, not merely by virtue of its being used in this particular sentence. It draws even more attention to these three lines.

This sentence reveals Nonnus' plan of attack, or at least a very significant aspect of it, and it explains why there are not as many precise verbal parallels between Nonnus and Euripides (or Nonnus and anyone whose work he reworks) as we might expect. At times, he uses synonyms simply because it seems he cannot stand to imitate another poet too closely: when he uses the same words as a predecessor, he tends to use them in a very original context (e.g., he includes verbal echoes of Euripides' *Bacchae* within his description of Agave's dream, which is entirely his innovation), and when he is quite tightly adhering to some part of a predecessor's plot, he does so in different words. Even when eager to imitate an aspect of a prior author's work, Nonnus refuses to compromise his originality.

Though they by no means run rampant through Nonnus' description of Agave's dream, close verbal echoes of the *Bacchae* do exist. They are:

D. 44.58	καί μιν ἰδεῖν ἐδόκησε πάλιν Κασμῆς Ἀγαύη
B. 918	καὶ μὴν ὄρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίου δοκῶ
D. 44.61	Θῆρες ἐκυκλώσαντο
B. 1106	φέρε, περιστᾶσαι κύκλῳ
D. 44.67	πρυμνόθεν ἔσπασε χεῖρα
B. 1125-7	λαβοῦσα δ' ὠλέναις ἀριστερὰν χέρα... ἀπὸ πλάγος ὤμον

⁹⁶ Euripides, *Hippolytus* 735-41; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.750-2.400, and *Dionysiaca* 38.105-435.

This adds to the Euripidean character of Agave's dream. We must keep in mind, though, that these Euripidean themes and words are occurring within a Nonnian, un-Euripidean context.

The first of Agave's visions, as has been shown, plays out in a very different way from its corresponding scene in the *Bacchae*, and the second, too, is shaped by its peculiarly Nonnian aspects. Once again, Nonnus reshapes and perverts crucial events from the play, producing a version of the death of Pentheus which, though similar to that of Euripides, is original and unusual. The most notable Nonnian departures from the playwright in 46.145-216—the lines in which Agave and her co-Maenads spot and dismember Pentheus—are:

- (1) the emphasis on the differing perspectives of Agave and Pentheus—the theme of humans as lions and vice versa arises in Agave's recollection of her dream and recurs in 46.176 ff.;
- (2) the reversal and perversion of Agave's role in the murder (46.192 ff.; esp. 209-11); and
- (3) the long, unanswered speech of Pentheus (46.192-208).

Nonnus has a persistent fascination with the notion of faulty perception, of things not seen for what they are, or seen for what they are not.⁹⁷ In Agave's second vision, and the occurrence of its corresponding events in 46.145-216, the theme of perceiving beasts as humans and vice versa arises frequently. This theme appears in the *Bacchae*, too—the

⁹⁷ Cf. note 79 above. E.g., Europa seeing a bull who is really Zeus (1.46-50), Cadmus appearing to be a shepherd (2.3), the dogs' failure to recognize Actaeon (5.364-5), Actaeon's dream exhortation to his father to look for a deer, not a man, with its repeated suggestions of "If you want to find *x*, look for *y*" (5.421-9), Hera appears to Dionysus as Ares (189-95), Heracles crushes Periclymenos, who has the ability to change his form, when he appears as the counterfeit shape of a bastard bee" (43.249), Aura looking at Artemis and seeing the body of a lactating mother (48.351-69). There are many other examples of this Nonnian preoccupation.

chorus calls Pentheus a beast's, perhaps a lion's, son, thus implying that Agave is also inhuman⁵

(οὐ γὰρ ἐξ αἵματος γυναικῶν ἔφυ / λεαίνας δέ τινος ὄδ' ἦ

Γοργόνων / Λιβυσσᾶν γένος, 988-90), and, later, Agave herself calls Pentheus

λεοντοφυῆ (1196). There is also, of course, the scene in which Agave carries her

son's impaled head to Cadmus and announces that she has killed a lion (1211-15 ff.). A

similar scene occurs in Nonnus' Pentheus episode, and it is discussed below. But Nonnus

takes this scene from Euripides and runs with it, using it not only where Euripides does

but in many other contexts in books 44 and 46. The effect of Nonnus' repeated use of

this theme is an increased sense of confusion and chaos for the reader of (and participants in) his Pentheus story.

In book 46, Pentheus is noticed by Agave, who has just made a speech to the Maenads (162-75). Then,

Ὡς φαμένη σκοπίαζε καθήμενον ὄψοι δένδρου,
ἄγριον οἷαλέοντα, θεημάχον υἷέα μήτηρ·
καί μιν ἀγειρομέναις ἐπεδείκνυε θυιάσι Βάκχαις·
υἷέα δ' ἔμφορνα θῆρα καλέσσατο λυσσάδι·φωνῇ. (176-9)

These four lines contain a reversal of something Agave has perceived earlier, while

recalling her dream: in lines 44.60-1, she remembers *Pentheus* sitting in a tree,

surrounded by *beasts* (καὶ φυτὸν ὑψικάρηνον, ὅπη θρασὺς ἔζετο

Πενθεύς, / θῆρες ἐκυκλώσαντο...), and in lines 44.64-7, Agave recalls that:

δινεύετο Πενθεύς,
καί μιν ἐδηλήσαντο δεδουπότα λυσσάδες ἄρκτοι·
ἀγροτέρη δὲ λέαινα καταίσσουσα προσώπου
πρυμνόθεν ἔσπασε χεῖρα. (64-7)

When the events foreshadowed in Agave's dream are realized, her role and her son's are reversed.⁹ Agave had dreamt specifically of Pentheus—his name appears at the end of lines 44.60 and 64, so there is no ambiguity about what she is seeing—surrounded by wild animals (θήρες, 61; ἄρκτοι, 65) and dis-armed by a lioness (λέαινα, 66). When recalling her dream, she perceives the situation as Pentheus, her human son, being murdered by beasts, in particular a lioness. This perspective is reiterated in her third vision: καὶ ἄσχετα μαινομένη θῆρ / ἡμιτόμου Πενθήος ἐρρισαμένη πόδα λαιμῷ /ἐδείκνυε μάρτυρι Κάδμῳ (44.67-71). Here there is no ambiguity; the beast is clearly Agave, and Pentheus' name appears once more. Agave, as she reflects on her dream, perceives its content in a way opposite to how she perceives it when it occurs in reality. Unlike Euripides, Nonnus, through the device of the dream, is able to have Agave view these events while she is still ἔμφορνα,⁹⁸ and react to them with horror (44.80-3) *before* they happen, as well as after. Nonnus' Agave here plays a role similar to that of the messenger in the *Bacchae*, but, perversely, she tells the story prior to its occurrence, and she is not a third-party observer but the murderer and mother of her victim.

Before she goes mad, Agave not only sees herself kill Pentheus, but also sees herself gloat about it in a speech where, again, the issue of who is a beast and who is human arises. It is packed into 44.73-7. The sane Agave, reflecting on this vision of what the reader knows to be her future actions, recalls having said to Cadmus:

“Ἐἰμὶ τεῇ θυγάτηρ θηροκτόνος· εἰμὶ δὲ μήτηρ

⁹⁸ Nonnus' application of this term to Agave is another indication that his use of ἐβακχεύθη (discussed above) implies not that she is mad, but rather that she will be.

Πενθέος ὀλβίστοιο,⁹⁹ τεῇ φιλότεκνος Ἀγαύη.
 τηλίκον ὥλεσα θῆρα· λεοντοφόνοιο δὲ νίκης
 δέχνυσο τοῦτο κάρηνον...
 τηλίκον οὐ ποτε θῆρα κατέκτανε σύγγονος Ἰνώ...” (73-7)

The Agave in the dream views the situation from the Maenad’s perspective, emphasizing what she believes is the truth of the matter: she is θυγάτηρ, μήτηρ, Ἀγαύη; she is a beast killer (θηροκτόνος, λεοντοφόνοιο), she has hunted down something inhuman (θῆρα, 74 and 77). A similar scene, and a similar speech, occur in the *Bacchae*; they are discussed below. By having this terrible misperception simultaneously foreshadowed and recalled by a sane Agave, Nonnus perverts both Euripides’ chronology (as he often does) and Agave’s function and personality. While Euripides’ Agave has no idea that she is soon to slay her son, Nonnus’ Agave must experience the added anguish of seeing herself do it before she actually does it.

Lines 46.176-9 articulate both perspectives. This is the moment when Agave’s perception undergoes a reversal, and in this sentence, Nonnus combines her former sanity with her current madness. In 176-7, the mother sees her son, who is *like* (οἶα) a lion; in 178-9, Agave shows the other Maenads what she sees, calling her υἱέα ἔμφορνα (Nonnus calls Actaeon ἔμφορνι θύμῳ, 5.333) a beast in a crazed voice. Whereas in her dream she sees Pentheus encircled by beasts and attacked by a lion, when the scene occurs in reality, she, crazed, sees her son as lionlike and beastly. The reversal of Agave’s perception is artfully articulated in the construction of lines 177 and 179. In 177, the οἶα acknowledges Agave’s misperception while emphasizing the truth, and the placement of υἱέα beside μήτηρ draws attention to the familial bond—if not identity—

⁹⁹ Nonnus uses this word perversely throughout the Pentheus episode, always forcing it upon those to whom it is least applicable. Cf. Wifstrand (1933) 81.

between the two, thus stressing the horror of what is to come. Line 179 is a misperception neatly enclosed within two halves of a contrast: it begins with $\upsilon\acute{\iota}\epsilon\alpha\ \delta'\ \xi\mu\phi\rho\omicron\nu\alpha$ and ends with Agave's $\lambda\upsilon\sigma\sigma\acute{\alpha}\delta\iota\ \phi\omega\nu\eta$, effectively expressing the dichotomy of sanity and madness, and the perspectives of Pentheus and Agave respectively. In the centre is $\theta\eta\rho\alpha\ \kappa\alpha\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\sigma\alpha\tau\omicron$, a phrase which captures both Agave's faulty perception and the truth—she *calls* him a beast, but we know that he is not one. The location of $\theta\eta\rho\alpha$ beside $\upsilon\acute{\iota}\epsilon\alpha\ \delta'\ \xi\mu\phi\rho\omicron\nu\alpha$ is yet another instance of contrast, but Nonnus' seamless side-by-side placement of these words blurs the dichotomy he has established in 177: the line's caesura in fact falls after $\theta\eta\rho\alpha$, and this in conjunction with Nonnus' familiar habit of doubling or tripling synonyms in a sentence¹⁰⁰ could certainly cause confusion to the reader of this line.

Were it not for the device of the dream, 46.176-9 would not be nearly so effective. That Nonnus has Agave view the situation from two opposing perspectives allows him to create instances of misperception that could never have existed in the *Bacchae*, and reverse those which are reminiscent of the play.

Sparagmos is never pleasant. In the *Bacchae*, there is horrible irony in the fact that Pentheus' dismemberment is spearheaded by his own mother. The messenger explains: $\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\eta\ \delta\epsilon\ \mu\acute{\eta}\tau\eta\rho\ \eta\rho\acute{\xi}\epsilon\nu\ \iota\epsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha\ \phi\acute{\omicron}\nu\omicron\nu\ / \ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \pi\rho\omicron\sigma\pi\acute{\iota}\tau\nu\epsilon\iota\ \nu\iota\nu$ (1114-5). Euripides' Pentheus, in his short pre-mortem outburst, tries to get Agave to recognize him as her son, drawing attention to their family ties in a failed attempt to avoid being ripped to shreds (1118-21), but she who has begun the murder continues to play a dominant role in it (1125-8), and her sisters receive an "honourable" mention for

¹⁰⁰ E.g. $\mu\alpha\sigma\tau\eta\rho\omicron\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\epsilon\omicron\ \ \text{Κάδμου}$, 1.45. Cf. Riemschneider (1957) 69.

their own participation in the festivities (1129-31). In the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnus creates a unique twist on Euripides' already grotesque version of the event by inverting the *Bacchae*'s irony. Whereas Euripides' Pentheus experiences agony because his mother is leading the slaughter, Nonnus' Pentheus is similarly anguished for the reverse reason: he, like his predecessor, cites Agave's maternity when trying to keep her from attacking him (192-4), but, upon realizing that she is not listening (204-5),¹⁰¹ decides that, at the very least, he wants Agave to do the honours herself:

εἰ δὲ κατακτείνεις με χαριζομένη Διονύσω,
 μούνη παῖδα δάμασσον, ἀγάστονε, μηδὲ δαμῆναι
 Βασσαρίδων τεὸν υἱά νόθαις παλάμησιν ἔασης.

(46.206-9)

Pentheus knows what is going to happen, and his last pathetic request is that his death come at the hands of his mother alone. But Nonnus will not grant him this favour; instead,

Ὡς φάμενος λιτάνευε, καὶ οὐκ ἤκουσεν Ἀγαύη·
 ἀμφὶ δέ μιν δασπλήτες ἐπερρώοντο γυναῖκες
 χερσὶν ὁμοζήλοισι· κυλινδομένου δὲ κονίη
 ἥ μιν ὀπισθιδίους πόδας εἵρυσεν, ἥ δὲ λαβοῦσα
 δεξιτερὴν προθέλυμνον ἀνέσπασεν, Ἀυτονόη δὲ
 λαιὴν ἀντερύεσκε·

(46.209-14)

The irony in the *Bacchae* is that Agave plays the leading role in her son's death; the perverted irony in the *Dionysiaca* is that when Pentheus begs her to do just that, she ignores his plea, and the Maenads attack him χερσὶν ὁμοζήλοισι; two strangers and Aunt Autonoe get to him before Agave does. Euripides' Agave is not persuaded (οὐδ' ἔπειθέ νιν, 1124) by Pentheus' request that she stop the madness; Nonnus' Agave, on

¹⁰¹ Cf. Wifstrand (1933) 142: the *Dionysiaca* is full of speeches that appear not to be heard, or at any rate are not acknowledged, by their intended recipients.

the other hand, οὐκ ἤκουσεν when he asks her to lead it. Nonnus takes an already abhorrent state of affairs and, through perversion of Euripides, manages to make it worse.

No disturbing scenario in the poem would be complete without a long, impassioned, ignored soliloquy. Nonnus' use of such speeches is unprecedented in ancient literature, and the proliferation of rhetorical speeches like that of Pentheus contribute greatly to the poem's tone and to its uniqueness.¹⁰² The result of Nonnus' use of speeches is profound detachment between many of the *Dionysiaca*'s characters—particularly at times when it is particularly inappropriate, as Nonnus often combines his fondness for these speeches with his fondness for perversion and excess in his plot lines.

Pentheus in the *Bacchae* greeted death laconically, according to the messenger, who reports that Pentheus, after his mother began the attack, said:

ἐγὼ τοι μήτηρ, εἰμὶ πάνις σέθεν
Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος·
οἴκτειρε δ' ὦ μήτῆρ με, μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς
ἁμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνῃς. (1118-21)

Pentheus in the *Dionysiaca*, however, is different. First, he makes his speech before the women pounce on him, unlike Euripides' Pentheus, who pleads with his mother after she has already begun the attack (1114, she falls upon him; 1118-21, she speaks). Second, his speech is over four times longer than his predecessor's, and, while it appears initially to be an imitation thereof, as the speech goes on, it becomes progressively less Euripidean and more Nonnian. In fact what it most resembles is not the final speech of Euripides' Pentheus but that of his own Actaeon in book 5. The speech establishes

¹⁰² Roberts (1989) discusses the characteristics of late antique literature but (a) focuses on Latin authors and (b) does not discuss any Latin author whose style with speeches resembles Nonnus'. It seems that over-the-top, emotional, rhetorical speeches are the only kind Nonnus' characters know how to make (as Wifstrand has noted; see note 41 above). It is hard to imagine anyone in the *Dionysiaca* participating in what we would call a discussion.

Nonnus' Pentheus as knowing and accepting of his fate. Whereas the *Bacchae*'s Pentheus simply begs his mother not to kill him, Nonnus' Pentheus progresses through a variety of mental states until he arrives at the one discussed above: acceptance of his imminent death, combined with a desire to have it carried out by his mother, which, as has been shown, leads to perversion of one of the *Bacchae*'s crucial events.

Pentheus' speech can be divided into stages:

- (1) Plea for assistance (192)
- (2) Plea for his mother not to kill him (193-4)
- (3) Rhetorical questions (195-8)
- (4) Farewell to his homeland (198-200)
- (5) Another attempt to get Agave to recognize him (201-4)
- (6) Acknowledgement that she is not listening (204-5)
- (7) Plea for his mother alone to kill him (206-8)

Of these, only the second, third, and part of the fifth resemble what Pentheus says in the *Bacchae*. Euripides' Pentheus does beg his mother to let him live (1120-1), his reminder that she gave birth to him is similar to Nonnus' με, τὸν ἔτρεφες (197 and 204), and his use of μήτηρ (1118, 1120), παῖς σέθεν (1118), Πενθεύς (1119) and παῖδα σον (1121) certainly resemble Nonnus' παιδοφόνοις (193), φιλότεκνος (193), μήτηρ ἐμή (194), με τὸν υἱέα (195), παιδοκτόνε μήτηρ Ἀγαύη (200), παῖδα (207) and τεὸν υἱά (208).¹⁰³ Both Pentheuses do repeatedly come back to the theme of their status as Agave's son and attempt to convince her not to kill them. This is to be expected, under the circumstances. But the brief speech of Euripides' Pentheus is

¹⁰³ One ought to note the profusion of Nonnus' distinctive compound words, however.

entirely focused upon this theme, while Nonnus' Pentheus rambles for a long time and brings up many things which his predecessor does not.

In book 5, the complement to book 44, Actaeon, the complement to Pentheus, receives a complimentary sparagmos courtesy of his hounds. As the dogs, thinking that their master is merely a beast,¹⁰⁴ attack him, Actaeon manages to retain not only his human mind but also his rhetorical speechmaking style, uttering a 28-line lament much of whose language and content closely resembles that of Pentheus in book 46. Line 190 of Pentheus' speech contains the phrase φρένας ἔσχε, which recalls the use of ἐχέφρονας in 5.368. Line 192 of Pentheus' speech, γείτονα πότμον ἔχων κινυρὴν ἐφθέγγετο φωνήν, resembles Actaeon's πότμον ἐὸν στενάχων κινυρῇ βρυχήσατο φωνῇ (5.336). In line 193, Pentheus uses the phrase παιδοφόνους παλάμησιν, which echoes 5.359, ἐμαῖς παλάμησιν ἐμοὺς ἔθρεψα φονήας. The latter in turn is a contrast to line 46.208's νοθαῖς παλάμησιν ("my hands" vs. "false/bastard hands"). The word λύσσης appears in 46.194,¹⁰⁵ while λυσσῆεντι appears in 5.353. In 46.197, Pentheus says, "οὐκέτι γινώσκεις με, τὸν ἔτρεφες, οὐκέτι λεύσσεις," which resembles Actaeon's "οὐκέτι μορφῇν, / οὐκέτι γινώσκουσιν ἐμὴν ἑτερόθροον

¹⁰⁴ Here, too, Nonnus plays with the notion of beasts, humans, and who seems what to whom. This situation is a sort of inverse of Pentheus' situation, in that Actaeon, unlike Pentheus, really does have the shape of a beast, and the dogs, unlike the Maenads, really are inhuman. Actaeon says, "ἄλλοφυῆς γὰρ / μορφῇ θηρὸς ἔχει με, καὶ ἀνέρος ἦθος ἀέξω. / σφωιτέρω πότε θῆρες ἐπιστενάχουσιν ὀλέθρῳ....ὀλλύμενος δὲ / ὀφρύσι θηρείησιν ἐχέφρονα δάκρυα λείβω" (5.346-51).

¹⁰⁵ Nonnus ends line 46.197 with λεύσσεις; this is probably an intentional play on words.

ἦχῳ” (5.364-5). The phrase τεὸν ὄμμα in 46.198 recalls book 5’s ὑμετέρων δὲ / ὀφθαλμῶν (341-2) and ὄμμασιν ἡμετέροισιν (345). Also at the end of line 46.198, Pentheus says, “χαῖρε, Κιθαιρών”, which recalls the end of 5.355, εἰπέ, Κιθαιρών. In book 46 Pentheus says, “δέρκεο μορφὴν / ἀνδρομέην...οὐ θῆρα δοκεύεις” (201-2), while in book 5 Actaeon laments, “μορφὴ θηρὸς ἔχει με, καὶ ἀνέρος ἦθος ἀέξω” (347). Nonnus’ two uses of φείδεο in line 46.203 echo his use of ἀφειδέας in 5.358 and ἀφειδέσι in 5.362. In 46.207, Pentheus uses δάμασσον and μηδὲ δαμῆναι, while Actaeon uses δάμασσε in 5.360 and μηδὲ...δάμασαν in 5.364.

It is evident from the quantity of verbal parallels between these two passages, and the thematic parallels they imply, that Nonnus intended for them to complement each other. It is no accident that Nonnus uses the phrase πενθάδι φωνῇ (5.267; it reappears in 46.241), and the phrase πένθει μήτηρ in 5.374. They are puns designed to make the reader think of Pentheus. And while Pentheus’ speech in book 46 does contain reminiscences of its corresponding speech in the *Bacchae*, the similarities between Pentheus’ speech and that of Actaeon are much more pervasive and significant. Furthermore, in addition to the verbal and thematic parallels, Nonnus establishes an ironic contrast between the two passages: Actaeon in 5.360-4 laments that he wished some other animal, instead of his own dogs, had killed him, while Pentheus, as we have seen, wishes for his own mother, not someone else, to kill him (46.206-8). In the latter passage, then, Nonnus is not only perverting Euripides’ plot but inverting one of his own motifs. In this linking of the two characters and the similarities in their final speeches,

Nonnus demonstrates that he is less concerned with imitating Euripides than with creating thematic continuity in his own poem: the description of Agave's vision leads us to think Nonnus will follow Euripides, but when the scene occurs in reality, we find instead that he has stopped following in the playwright's footsteps and stepped back into one of his own well-worn paths.

(III) Nonnus narrates Agave's third vision thus:

καὶ ἄσχετα μαινομένη θῆρ
 ἡμιτόμου Πενθήος ῥεῖσαμένη πόδα λαιμῷ
 θηγαλέοις ὀνύχεσσι διέθρισεν ἀνθερεῶνα,
 αἵμαλέον δὲ κάρηνον ἐκούφισεν ἄρπαγι ταρσῷ 70
 οἰκτρὰ δαιζομένου, καὶ ἐδείκνυε μάρτυρι Κάδμῳ
 παλλομένη, βροτέην δ' ἀλιτήμονα ῥήξατο φωνήν·
 “Εἰμὶ τεῇ θυγάτηρ θηροκτόνος· εἰμὶ δὲ μήτηρ
 Πενθέος ὀλβίστοιο, τεῇ φιλότεκνος Ἀγαύη.
 τηλίκον ὤλεσα θῆρα· λεοντοφόνοιο δὲ νίκης 75
 δέχνυσο τοῦτο κάρηνον ἐμῆς πρωτάγριον ἀλκῆς·
 τηλίκον οὐ ποτε θῆρα κατέκτανε σύγγονος Ἰνώ,
 οὐ κτάνεν Αὐτονόη· σὺ δὲ σύμβολα παιδὸς Ἀγαύης
 πῆξον ἀριστοπόνοιο τεοῦ προπάροιθε μελάθρου.” (44.67-79)

Like the first two visions, the third, 44.67-79, contains both thematic and verbal echoes of the *Bacchae*. Thematically, everything in this passage corresponds to something in the play. The lioness' detachment of Pentheus' arm recalls *Bacchae* 1125-7 (λαβοῦσα δ' ὠλέναις ἀριστερὰν χέρα, / πλευραῖσιν ἀντιβᾶσα τοῦ δυσδαίμονος / ἀπεσπάραξεν ὦμον). The exulting lioness' presentation of the head to Cadmus recalls *Bacchae* 1238-9 (φέρω δ' ἐν ὠλέναισιν, ὥς ὀρᾷς, τάδε / λαβοῦσα τὰριστέϊα), and her triumphant speech, too, is based closely on its Euripidean counterpart (but we should keep in mind that in the *Bacchae* it is not uttered

by a talking lion). She draws attention to the fact that she is Cadmus' daughter, as she does in the *Bacchae* (*D.* 44.73, *B.* 1233-7). Both Agaves also call themselves the mother of Pentheus (*D.* 44.73-4, *B.* 1212—note that this is not a line from Agave's first speech to Cadmus). Each brags about her hunting skills (*D.* 44.75, *B.* 1236-7, 1241-2), declares herself more outstanding than her sisters (*D.* 44.77-8, *B.* 1234-7), and commands Pentheus to hang the head on the wall (*D.* 44.79, *B.* 1239-40). Once again, all the themes from Agave's dream correspond closely to Euripides' plot. Once again, Nonnus is creating the illusion that he intends to imitate Euripides.

Verbally, there are fewer parallels. The reason for this is that Nonnus has reversed Agave's perspective in the dream such that she and her companions are beasts attacking a human Pentheus. This has no effect on the presence of thematic parallels, because, despite the reversed perspective, themes from the corresponding Euripidean passage are nonetheless equally employable and appropriate, whereas direct echo is less likely to occur between two passages with such significant dissimilarities. However, Nonnus does use Euripides' words in Agave's speech, in the following lines:

D. 44.76 δέχνυσο τοῦτο κάρηνον ἐμῆς 'πρωτάγριον ἀλκῆς

B. 1240-1 σὺ δέ, πάτερ, δέξαι χερσίν·
γαυρούμενος δὲ τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἀγρεύμασι...

D. 44.78-9 σὺ δὲ σύμβολα παιδὸς Ἀγαύης
πῆξον ἀριστοπόνοιο τεοῦ προπάροιθε μελάθρου

B. 1213 πηκτῶν πρὸς οἴκους κλιμάκων
1239-40 λαβοῦσα τάριστεία, σοῖσι πρὸς δόμοις...

In addition to direct echo of the *Bacchae*, Nonnus is here again playing with Euripidean synonyms, using the phrase *τεοῦ προπάροιθε μελάθρου* (79) where Euripides uses *πρὸς οἴκους κλιμάκων* (1213) or *σοῖσι πρὸς δόμοις* (1239).

In 46.213-264, the final installment of the dream comes true. Agave decapitates Pentheus and heads home to Cadmus. Nonnus once more demonstrates that he is uninterested in merely following Euripides' plot, and creates more links between the three Pentheus books and the rest of the *Dionysiaca*. The most notably Nonnian aspects of this section are:

- (1) the continued mistreatment of Artemis (221-24);
- (2) Agave's claim that Artemis, the Dryads, and Ares were watching her (223, 225-9); and
- (3) Agave's (as opposed to a messenger's) announcement of the slaughter to Cadmus (221-38 ff.), and the replacement of Euripidean stichomythia with a long speech by Cadmus (239-65).

Perhaps the only point upon which all of Nonnus' fans and critics would agree is that he is superlatively shameless. When Agave presents her son's head to Cadmus, she says:

“Κάδμε μάκαρ, καλέω σε μακάρτερον· ἐν σκοπέλοις γὰρ
 χερσὶν ἄθωρήκτοισιν ἀριστεύουσιν Ἀγαύην
 Ἄρτεμις ἐσκοπίαζε, καὶ εἰ πέλε δεσπότης ἄγρης,
 ζῆλον ὑποκλέπτουσα λεοντοφόνου σέο κούρης” (221-4)

Nonnus has brought Artemis back to be the recipient of more sacrilege. In the *Bacchae*, Agave does brag, extensively, about her “accomplishment” (1233-43), but there is no mention of Artemis in these lines. As if it is not enough to have linked the goddess romantically to all manner of gods and mortals, here he has Agave claim that Artemis was jealous as she watched the Maenad skewer her son on a thyrsus. This is reminiscent

of the version of the Actaeon myth that Nonnus rejected: just as Actaeon, in the alternate tradition, brags that he is a better hunter than Artemis, so Agave makes a similar claim, perverse not only because it is she, not Actaeon, who makes it, but because she is bragging about having slaughtered her own son, not a wild animal. Every time Artemis appears or is invoked in the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnus further perverts her role. Here he has Agave's first comment to Cadmus relate directly to Artemis: Cadmus is blessed because (γὰρ) Artemis has seen Agave's activities. He builds up suspense by waiting for a line and a half before revealing her, the subject of the sentence, and then has Agave immediately add that this goddess who is so consistently infuriated by mortals' claims of superiority or offenses against her (Niobe, Actaeon, Agamemnon, Aura, Orion, etc.) and who never fails to act on her rage in a powerfully destructive way against her offenders, will make an exception for Agave and hide (ὑποκλέπτουσα) her alleged jealousy. The Artemis of ancient literature with whom we are familiar hides nothing. The Artemis of the *Dionysiaca* is constructed entirely of inversions and mockeries of her usual character, and is constantly a victim of the poet's, or his characters', gleeful sacrilege.

Agave is bragging, as she does in the *Bacchae*, but her speech in Nonnus' Pentheus episode is not Euripidean. Her opening line seems to confirm what the dream passage hints at—that Nonnus intends to follow Euripides. But at the offensive, unconventional mention of Artemis, we realize we are back in Nonnian territory. The realization is confirmed as Agave continues:

καὶ Δρυάδες θάμβησαν ἑμὸν πόνον· ἡμετέρης δὲ
 Ἀρμονίης γενέτης κεκορυθμένος ἡθάδι λόγχῃ
 παῖδα τετὴν ἀσίδηρον ἐθάμβεε χάλκεος Ἄρης
 θύρσον ἀκοντίζουσιν ἀλοιητῆρα λεόντων,
 κυδιόων.

(225-9)

Agave says Artemis was not the only one watching her performance. She seems at least as preoccupied with who saw her take down Pentheus as she is with the act itself. How she knows (or why she thinks) there were gods and Dryads spying on her is not explained, but she appears certain about it and the reader is given no reason not to follow her lead. Furthermore, having told her father who was watching the deed, she goes on to say:

σὺ δὲ, Κάδμε, τεῶν ἐπιβήτορα θώκων
Πενθέα δεῦρο κάλεσσον, ὅπως φθονερῆσιν ὀπωπαῖς
θηροφόνους ἰδρώτας ὀπιπεύσειε γυναίου. (229-31)

Here again we see Agave's fixation with sight and eyes. Like Artemis, Pentheus too will be jealous of her (φθονερῆσιν ὀπωπαῖς). The use of ὀπωπαῖς in line 230 and the similar-sounding, linguistically related ὀπιπεύσειε in the next line draws our attention to Agave's (and Nonnus') desire to have eyes upon her. Two things contribute to the perverse Nonnian irony of this remark. Firstly, it was Pentheus' spying that led to his death, and secondly, his eyes are in fact upon her as she speaks; she is, after all, carrying his head. Whereas Euripides' Agave brags about her achievement and ability, as discussed above, Nonnus' Agave, before doing the same (232-8), presents a catalogue of her spectators and ironically demands that Cadmus call Pentheus to come and behold this sight with his eyes. This focus on vision and spying, in addition to the perverse portrayal of Artemis, makes Agave's speech Nonnian and connects it thematically to the rest of the *Dionysiaca*.

The importance of Artemis to the epic has been repeatedly noted. Agave's other alleged spectators, the Dryads and Ares, have significance in the Pentheus episode and throughout the rest of the poem. Dryads, and their metrically variant equivalents

(Hadryads, Hamadryads) are found in the *Dionysiaca* wherever there are trees to inhabit (hence their name). Because they live hidden in the woods, Nonnus occasionally has them witness one of the epic's disturbing or unpleasant acts, which very often occur in forested areas. Nonnus also capitalizes on their fear of defloration repeatedly in the epic, most notably in 2.98-162, where two displaced Dryads express their concern about being found and raped, now that their trees have died due to Typhaon's drainage of the world's water. Euripides' *Bacchae* has a disturbing forest scene, but no Dryads.¹⁰⁶ In the play, it is only the messenger who views the sparagmos and reports it to Cadmus' (1043 ff.). When Nonnus' Agave says that Dryads were watching her, she distances herself further from Euripides while linking herself to the other points in the epic where someone's actions are seen by spying Dryads.

Ares is not completely excluded from the *Bacchae*: in line 302, Teiresias, referring to Dionysus, says, "Ἀρεῶς τε μοῖραν μεταλαβὼν ἔχει τινά. Dodds comments that "the reason for this slightly artificial introduction of Ares is perhaps the special position which he held in Theban legend".¹⁰⁶ He is likely correct; even in a play about Dionysus, Ares' connection to Cadmus' foundation of the city cannot be forgotten. In his book 44, Nonnus similarly includes a tribute to Ares—the god's statue oozes blood (44.44-5). This is so explicitly connected to Thebes and its inhabitants that we cannot doubt Nonnus' intention to link the god to his city. But Ares appears or is mentioned frequently in the *Dionysiaca*; he is neither exclusively nor even primarily the god who had a hand in Thebes' foundation. Above all else, he is the god of war and slaughter. Of the more than 30 Nonnian epithets and descriptions of Ares listed in Peek's lexicon,¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Bacchae*, 110.

¹⁰⁷ Peek (1968-75) vol. 1, s.v. Ἀρης.

most relate to war, while only Διρκάϊον (2.671) connects him to Thebes—and ironically, as Rose notes, “It is rather too soon to give him that epithet, for there was no Thebes as yet and no Dirce.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, he is Θρηίκιος Ἄρης in both 27.313 and 48.227.¹⁰⁹ Nonnus, then, does not present Ares as particularly or solely Theban in the *Dionysiaca*, though in books 44 and 46 he does, appropriately (for once), attribute special significance to Ares. Of course, being Nonnus, he does this as inappropriately as possible. Making him a spectator of Agave’s activities is, like many other things in Nonnus’ Pentheus episode, unprecedented. Agave’s description of Ares as ἡμετέρης δὲ / Ἀρμονίης γενέτης... /...χάλκεος Ἄρης (46.335-7) combines his Theban connections (Harmonia’s parent) with his usual role (brazen), all within a context that is novel and Nonnian.

Messenger speeches and stichomythia are common stylistic devices in Greek tragedy. The former are, among other things, a playwright’s way of narrating violent acts which he had no means of staging. The latter is used to create intensity in the dialogue of two characters; it can also, as Dodds notes,¹¹⁰ serve as a sort of literary drumroll, leading up to a moment of particular significance¹¹¹ or a character’s departure from the stage.¹¹² They are two of the most defining formal features of tragedy.

Both of them appear in the *Bacchae* after Agave has killed Pentheus. A messenger comes to inform the chorus, and the audience, of Pentheus’ death. As soon as

¹⁰⁸ In Rouse (1940) vol. 1, 93, note d. See note 49 above.

¹⁰⁹ Peek (1968-75) vol. 1, s.v. Ἄρης.

¹¹⁰ *Bacchae*, notes to lines 651-3 (p. 157), 836 (p. 178), 842 (p. 179), 927-9 (p. 194), 1268-70 (p. 230).

¹¹¹ Dodds (1960), commenting on 1268-70: “The decisive moment is marked, as at *Alc.* 1119, by a breach of stichomythia: after 1269 we may suppose a pause of hesitation, during which Cadmus waits in expectant silence. Cf. *El.* 965, which is similarly followed by a pause while Electra gazes at the approaching figure, and *IT* 811, where Orestes pauses to think of a test” (230).

¹¹² As perhaps in *Bacchae* 836 (Dodds [1960] 178) and certainly in 842 (179).

he has finished his 109-line speech (1043-1152), without waiting for a reaction to his shocking announcement, he leaves. Later, Cadmus enters the stage, where Agave and the chorus have been discussing Agave's recent "hunting" expedition (1153-1215). He and his daughter soon begin an exchange in stichomythia, Cadmus slowly leading Agave back to reason and forcing her to recognize the truth of what she has done (1263-1300). The *Dionysiaca* is of course not a tragedy; even the Pentheus episode, which, as Hopkinson notes, is of approximately the same length as the *Bacchae*,¹¹³ and contains reminiscences of the play's content, does not resemble it stylistically. It is a tragic story told in epic style—specifically, in Nonnus' epic style. And this is nowhere more apparent in the Pentheus episode than in 46.221-38. and 239-65. There is no messenger speech (nor is there a chorus to hear it—Nonnus narrates the events to us himself, 145-218), and, unlike in the *Bacchae*, where Cadmus discovers from unspecified passers-by what has happened to Pentheus (1222-4), Nonnus' Cadmus learns it from Agave herself. Her speech, though reminiscent of a speech of Euripides' Agave (1234-43; see above), is more horrifying than its model in that Nonnus, unlike Euripides, has not eased Cadmus' shock by allowing him to hear about his daughter's crime before having to see his dismembered grandson and hear Agave brag about the murder. The speeches are similar, but their context is significantly different. As a result of his altering this part of Euripides' plot, Agave's words are more shocking, and Cadmus' grief is more intense. As with the dream in book 44, Nonnus gives Agave a more prominent, active role in the story than she has in the *Bacchae*. Just as her dream is, as has been discussed, a perverse, inverted messenger speech, so here her bragging and explanation of the day's activities make her a messenger to Cadmus.

¹¹³ Hopkinson (1994c) 121.

In *Bacchae* 1233 ff., Euripides' Cadmus and Agave speak to each other in stichomythia, the former gradually coaxing his daughter toward revelation of her true actions and recovery of her sanity, the latter paying careful, active attention despite her madness. In *Dionysiaca* 46, however, in response to what he has seen and heard, Cadmus makes a long, rhetorical speech (239-64), which is followed (it would be incorrect to say *answered*: the intended recipient of the speech does not acknowledge it) by a stylistically similar speech from Agave (283-319). Again, Nonnus is inverting Euripides. Cadmus' speech is 22 lines long, and it is a typically Nonnian outburst—it is long, repetitive,¹¹⁴ emotionally intense,¹¹⁵ pithy, and full of uneasy unions of mutually exclusive or discordant notions;¹¹⁶ it contains a catalogue;¹¹⁷ and it is ignored by the person to whom it is directed.¹¹⁸

The description of Agave's dream is, of course, only a very small piece of Nonnus' Pentheus episode, but it is the most intriguing and enlightening instance of something that Nonnus does again and again in books 44 to 46. Further study of other

¹¹⁴ Lines 242-4 all begin with οἶον θῆρα δάμασσας; 245, 246 and 250 all have τὸν after the caesura; 245 and 246 begin with δέρκεο σείο λέοντα; 250 and 252 contain καλέσω and καλέσω respectively; 253 and 254 begin with καλᾶ; 254 and 256 end with Κρονίων. Cf. Schmiel (1998), esp. pp. 326-328 on Actaeon's speech in book 5, which is most similar to Autonoe's in terms of its subject matter and emotional intensity (both situations feature a parent grieving for a murdered child).

¹¹⁵ Of course the exclamation points with which Rouse ends most of Cadmus' statements do not appear in the Greek, but I suspect Nonnus would have used them just as frequently had they been available to him.

¹¹⁶ Most notably: a sensible beast, 242; a beast from the womb of a woman, 243; a lion cradled in a man's arms, 247; a lion nursed by a human mother, 246-8; a son's life ended by the one who gave it to him, 252; a breathing corpse, 260.

¹¹⁷ Here, of Cadmus' children and their misfortunes: Ino lives in the sea (256), Semele has been incinerated (256) Autonoe laments Actaeon (257), Agave has killed Pentheus (258), Polydorus is an exiled wanderer (259).

¹¹⁸ See note 41 above. Cadmus has not drawn Agave out of madness; Nonnus reports that Dionysus νόον μετέθηκεν Ἀγούης (270). Though Cadmus has made a speech so powerful that inanimate Cithairon and its trees and fountains, and a group of Dryads, lament on account of having heard it (265-8)—it has even brought tears to the ungrieving/Pentheus-less (ἀπενθήτου, a tasteless pun if ever there was one) Dionysus (269-70), but Agave is oblivious. What causes her immense grief is the sight of Pentheus' head, when she recognizes it as such for the first time (274), after Dionysus has returned her sanity.

such scenes in these books would, I think, yield the same conclusion: that Nonnus does not want to imitate Euripides, that he wants to do everything Euripides does not, that the most crucial themes and motifs in the Pentheus episode simultaneously connect them to the *Dionysiaca* and distance them from the *Bacchae*. Nonnus very consciously, very deviously sets up the illusion that he intends to imitate the playwright, but in the end he always veers off the Euripidean path into his own literary world of inversion, misquoted quotation, disassembly and strange rebuilding of plot details, and increased or decreased emphases on characters and events. When he does imitate Euripides, he does so within contexts that Euripides would (and, in some cases, could) never have created. In short, Nonnus' version of his predecessor's work is a perversion, and a successful one.

CHAPTER THREE

The Final Insult: An Inverted Plot Pattern in *Dionysiaca* 48

Prophetic dreams feature prominently in Greek literature. Often, their recipients are girls of marriageable age, and their function, ostensibly, is to plant into these girls' minds an awareness that the next phase of their lives, which will include defloration and motherhood, is imminent. It is not the case that the dreams are *causing* the girls to think about marriage, but it is no more true that the dreams are always symbolic representations of thoughts the girls have already begun to have. For many of Greek literature's most famous females, a prophetic dream of this sort tends to be the starting point of a very specific chain of events which occur in the same way to every girl regardless of her reaction to her dream, or her willingness (or lack thereof) to take an active role in its fulfilment. For Homer's Nausicaa and Tyro, Aeschylus' Io, and Moschus' Europa, though they are the products of different poets, time periods and literary genres, a dream sets off the same sequence of events, which plays out as follows:

1. Dreamer reacts strongly to what she has just dreamed;
2. Dreamer removes herself from the place where she has been sleeping, and usually goes outside, often with a group of friends;
3. Dreamer goes somewhere where there is water—a river, ocean, or fountain;
4. Dreamer is separated from her friends (if necessary) and then deflowered by a god; and,
5. Dreamer subsequently gives birth.

That the personalities of Nausicaa, Tyro, Europa, and Io have little in common is irrelevant: the five experiences listed above will occur to all of them, with the exception of Nausicaa, whose story ends halfway through the fourth, and in the same order for all of them, with the exception of Tyro, in whose story there are a few explainable variations.

After the similarities in the stories of these four girls have been identified, Nonnus' Aura will be considered. Like the others, Aura has an experience that follows the pattern, but, unlike the others, she is a devotee of Artemis obsessed with preserving her virginity. In the final book of his epic, Nonnus takes this well-known pattern from Greek literature and perverts it as much as he can. He creates a new literary character (this is Aura's first and last appearance in Greek literature), establishes beyond a doubt that she has neither the inclination nor the ability to deal with sex and motherhood, and then proceeds to inflict those things upon her anyway. It is both the *Dionysiaca*'s greatest disaster and Nonnus' greatest success—horrifically destructive for Aura and many of the people (and animals) around her, but also a fitting climax to an epic infested with perversions and preoccupied with its own originality.

1. REACTION

In Homer, dreams are most often objective.¹¹⁹ That is, Homer's dreamers, upon awakening, are not usually confused and do not usually have to spend a great deal of time interpreting what they have dreamed. And for the Greeks, dreams, or at any rate the ones in which they were most interested,¹²⁰ were thought to be predictive.¹²¹ We see this view

¹¹⁹ Dodds (1951) 104-106.

¹²⁰ Not all dreams were thought to be predictive: according to Artemidoros, probably the most well-known ancient dream analyst, there are "two types of dreams: only one, the *oneiroi*, points forward, while the

reflected in Greek literature: dreams reveal the future, and a character may run into a problem when (s)he fails to interpret the dream correctly, but there is always a single correct interpretation which is a prediction of something to come.

Homer's Nausicaa dreams that a friend of hers, who is in fact Athena in disguise, is standing before her and speaking to her. Luckily for Nausicaa, and luckily for us, Athena does not mince words: "σοὶ δὲ γάμος σχεδὸν ἔστιν," she says (*Od.* 6.27). This is the message in four of the five girls' dreams, though they do not always receive it in an explicit and straightforward form. Nausicaa receives detailed instructions from the goddess: she is told what to do, when to do it, where to go and how to get there.¹²² She has been careless (μεθήμονα, 6.25) up to this point, but when she awakens she will be so no longer.

Nausicaa, of all these dreamers, is the happiest and most willing to accept the implications of her dream. She does not try to resist; rather, she runs to her father first thing in the morning and ecstatically begs to be allowed to do laundry. Is her father confused or disheartened? No; he knows exactly what his daughter is thinking (πάντα νόει, 6.67) and is as happy to let her go as she is to be allowed to go. For

other, the *enhyphnia*, holds no interest because they are indicative merely of a present state of affairs" (Price [1990] in Halperin, Winkler and Zeitlin, eds. [1990] 371).

¹²¹ According to Price (1990) 366, unlike certain relatively modern dream analysts, those of ancient Greece, notably Artemidoros and Macrobius, based their analyses on a conception of dreams as predictive as opposed to retrospective. Four of the literary girls in question are explicitly described as having *oneiroi*: Nausicaa, *Od.* 6.49; Io, *Prometheus Bound* 655; Europa, 1; Aura, *Dionysiaca* 48.263. I cannot recall ever having run across the word ἐνύπνιον in Greek literature, where the vast majority of dreams are predictive.

¹²²

"ἀλλ' ἴομεν πλυνέουσαι ἅμ' ἧοι φαινομένηφι /...ἀλλ' ἄγ' ἐπότηρυνον πατέρα κλυτὸν ἦῳθι πρὸ / ἡμιόνους καὶ ἄμαξαν ἐφοπλίσαι, ἥ κεν ἄγησι / ζῶστρά τε καὶ πέπλους καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα" (*Od.* 6.31-38).

Nausicaa and her family, the dream and its inevitable result are unproblematic. But not everybody can be as easygoing and cheerful as a Phaeacian....

Homer's Tyro, who speaks to Odysseus in the underworld, describes experiences quite different from those of Nausicaa (and, as we shall see, of Io, Europa and Aura as well). Tyro's story, though brief, does include all five of the above elements, but in her case they occur in a different order. She goes to the river (3),¹²³ then receives a divine deflowering (4),¹²⁴ then has her dream (1),¹²⁵ then goes home (2) (as opposed to away from home, as the others do),¹²⁶ and then gives birth to the children. Poseidon has promised to her (5).¹²⁷ And so her dream is different from those of the others, because it serves a different purpose: Tyro has departed from childhood already,¹²⁸ and so needs no reminder or warning that she is not a little girl anymore. Tyro's dream comes from Poseidon, and she is informed not that she will soon become pregnant but that—surprise!—she already has: “Χαῖρε, γύναι!...Τέξεις ἀγλαὰ τέκνα,” announces the god (11.248-9; how convenient for Poseidon that χαῖρε means both “rejoice” and “goodbye”). Tyro's dream is the typical virgin's worst nightmare.¹²⁹ But Tyro, like Nausicaa, seems to accept her circumstances without complaint; she does not in fact rejoice, but she does not become despondent or murderously psychotic either. The brevity of the Tyro story prevents it from giving much attention to Tyro's psychology,¹³⁰

¹²³ *Od.* 11.238-40.

¹²⁴ 11.245.

¹²⁵ 11.247-52.

¹²⁶ 11.251 (“νῦν δ’ ἔρχεαι πρὸς δῶμα,” Poseidon instructs her).

¹²⁷ 11.254.

¹²⁸ The significance of her falling in love with a river, and spending her days in its waters, will be discussed later.

¹²⁹ Especially in the pagan world, where the notion of immaculate conception is inconceivable. Virgins who are impregnated by Greek gods are not worshipped as exemplars of holy chastity. Defloration, for the Greeks, is defloration; whether it comes from a mortal or an immortal does not matter.

¹³⁰ As is noted by Schmiel (1981) 268.

but, presumably, if she had been inordinately excited or horrified by Poseidon's announcement, we would have heard about it.

Aeschylus' Io has not one dream but rather a recurring dream which haunts her nightly for some unspecified period of time; Io describes it to Prometheus thus: "αἰεὶ γὰρ ὄψεις ἔννυχαι πωλεύμεναι / ἐς παρθενῶνας τοὺς ἑμοὺς παρηγόρουν" (*Prometheus Bound*, 645-6), later adding, "τοιοῖσδε πάσας εὐφρόνας ὀνειράσι / συνειχόμεν δύστηνος" (655-6). Like Nausicaa, Io gets instructions about where to go.¹³¹ She is even told who is in love with her.¹³² This is a very straightforward dream. Io may not like what it tells her, but what it tells her is not unclear in any way. Why, then, when Io tells her father Inachus about the dream (thereby taking a step further than does Nausicaa, who does not reveal the cause of her happiness to her own father), is he so confused, and why, when he consults oracles as a result of his confusion, are their pronouncements "αἰολοστόμους / ἀσήμους δυσκρίτως τ' εἰρημένους" (661-2)? Inachus is like Nausicaa's father in reverse: where the former "understands everything" despite Nausicaa's embarrassment to tell him anything, the latter understands nothing despite the fact that Io tells him everything.

It is with Io that we first see clearly one problematic aspect of these prophetic marriage dreams. While Nausicaa is ready for her future and plays an active role in bringing it (or, at least, some of it) to fulfilment, and Tyro responds to her pregnancy with indifference if not glee, Io has no desire to leave her home, be a cow, or enter motherhood. She has not chosen this; Zeus has chosen her, and he is going to have her in

¹³¹ "ἔξελθε πρὸς Λέρνης βαθὺν / λειμῶνα" (652-3).

¹³² "Ζεὺς γὰρ ἡμέρου βέλει / πρὸς σοῦ τέθαλπται" (649-50).

whatever way he can, at whatever price to her and her family.¹³³ With the Io story, it becomes evident that prophetic dreams are not necessarily indicative of readiness or willingness, on the dreamers' part, to be departhenized and become mothers. It happens that some of the dreamers are ready, but this is by no means always or even usually the case. These dreams do not imply consent on the dreamers' part to the occurrence of the prophesied events. If a god becomes smitten with a girl, he will inflict his smittenness upon her without giving her well-being a second (or first) thought.

Unlike Io's dream, Europa's is allusive and symbolic. It requires decipherment, if not by Europa then by the reader of *Europa*. Aphrodite is the harbinger of this dream, but it is not explicitly about marriage,¹³⁴ and Europa, upon awakening, does not have a clue what it means (24). However, she is unsettled by it; her reaction is timid and fearful (δειμαλέην, 20), and she does ask, very perceptively, "τίς μοι τοιάδε φάσματ' ἐπουρανίων προίηλε;" (21). As Moschus describes it, there is nothing particularly pleasant about the dream; nevertheless, it is described in the very first line as γλυκὺν and Europa, once she has expressed her confusion, ends her speech with a wish that the gods fulfil the dream "ἐξ ἀγαθὸν" (27). She is behaving, though she is not aware of it, as though she does in fact understand and has in fact accepted the dream's implications.

¹³³ Eventually, an intelligible oracle comes to Inachus: he must choose between forcing his daughter out of his house or the equally enticing option of having himself and all his family killed by the most destructive available lightning bolt (663-6).

¹³⁴ Europa's dream is an allegorical representation of her migration from her homeland; Moschus is aetiologizing. The dream of Atossa from Aeschylus' *Persians* may be the dream's primary thematic influence, but Atossa's dream serves a completely different function and consequently bears little verbal resemblance to Europa's (Schmiel [1981] 267).

2. REMOVAL TO OUTDOORS

Once the girls awaken, their fates are sealed. They can run—and they do—but they can't hide. In fact, as we will see, they all run toward the very thing they think they are fleeing. Each of the girls, immediately after opening her eyes and reacting to her dream, leaves the place where she has been sleeping and goes elsewhere, usually outdoors, and often gathering her friends first. In her discussion of erotic pursuits represented in Greek pottery, Sourvinou-Inwood writes: "The scenes are undoubtedly perceived as happening outdoors—either in a specific outdoor space known from the story and read into the scene by the viewers...or in an unspecified outdoor space".¹³⁵ The situation is the same in literature. Deflorations do not occur indoors. Dowden refers to "the sense of marginality and the outside that is so prominent in the liminal stage of passage rites".¹³⁶ None of the authors of the stories in question make explicit reference to ritual, but in all of the stories there are elements thereof,¹³⁷ which makes sense, as they are old myths which may well have been explicitly connected to some initiation ritual in their original conceptions (if any story is truly original).

Nausicaa, having obtained permission to air her family's dirty laundry, is surrounded by her handmaids as she leaves her house--her father has gladly provided transportation (6.68)—and makes her way to the river (84-5). Tyro, who wakes up pregnant, does the reverse and, as per Poseidon's instructions (11.251), goes from outside to inside, from the river to her house; her transition from girl in the house to woman outside the house has occurred prior to the events described in the story, and is referred to

¹³⁵ Sourvinou-Inwood (1987) 141.

¹³⁶ Dowden (1989) 160.

¹³⁷ Not only the inside-outside transition and the family/friends-marriage transition but also, as discussed below, the prominence of water, are concepts which take centre stage in rituals performed by maidens on the brink of marriage.

obliquely by means of the reference to her having fallen in love with the river Enipeus (238-40).¹³⁸ Tyro is not accompanied by her friends; this is, again, evidence that she has of her own accord crossed the threshold which separates girlhood and adulthood. Io, unlike all the other girls, is driven out of her home by her father ἄκουσαν ἄκων (671), and will wander to her fate alone, metamorphosed, mooing, and miserable, traversing no end of foreign lands until at last she reaches the place where Zeus will restore her shape and impregnate her (790-815; 846-52). Europa finishes her speech, leaps out of bed (literally—the word Moschus uses is ἀνόρουσε, 27), and locates her closest friends, all in the same line; then out they all go to pick flowers.¹³⁸ We know what will happen next.

3. WATER

The girls all go outside, and, very interestingly, they all go to a river, a stream, a fountain, or the ocean—proximity to water is a prerequisite for engaging in the sacred transaction.¹³⁹ Once again, we seem to be dealing with an element of Greek ritual which has, probably unintentionally on the authors' part, been incorporated into this collection of stories. As Sissa points out,¹⁴⁰ λύνειν means both “to yield” and “to melt”—this etymological connection between water and the loosening of the maiden's girdle is likely not a mere coincidence. And Dowden discusses in detail the importance of water to the nuptial rituals of girls, citing many examples of such rituals. “Washing or passing

¹³⁸ This is a bad idea. A girl near flowers is bound to be *deflowered*. Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) 137 notes that girls on the brink of losing their virginity are often depicted as holding flowers; Hopkinson (1994c) 201 notes that this is a common theme in literature, adding that Europa's fate is very similar to Persephone's.

¹³⁹ As Archilochus so eloquently calls it, *First Cologne Epode* 15.

¹⁴⁰ Sissa (1990) 345, note 14.

through water,” he writes, “is the archetypal transitional ritual.”¹⁴¹ It makes sense that water should be associated with eligible virgins, as “moist, lush sites display natural sympathy with maidens’ initiation rites”.¹⁴² Rivers are both marginal and sacred.¹⁴³ Water is the harbinger of offspring for the land, and so it is thought to promote fertility in women.¹⁴⁴ Redfield, who claims erroneously that “rivers do not seem to have played much of a part in ritual”,¹⁴⁵ goes on to cite two, one described by Pausanias (2.7.8) “where the boys and girls supplicated the river”¹⁴⁶ and another from Ps.-Aeschines,¹⁴⁷ who discusses “the spring rite in the Troad where brides bathed in the waters of the Scamander and called upon the river to take their virginity”.¹⁴⁸ Girls bathed ritually at Brauron as well.¹⁴⁹ This, I think, is enough evidence to suggest that the connection between maidens, defloration and water is as meaningful as it is pervasive. And in the stories of our five mythological girls, it plays out as follows.

Nausicaa gathers her handmaidens and they proceed to the river (αἱ δ’ ὅτε δὴ ποταμοῖο ῥόον περικαλλέ’ ἴκοντο, 6.85). Homer tells the story as though Nausicaa is going to the river in order to do laundry, but in the story pattern as I see it the cause-effect relationship is in fact the opposite: Nausicaa is doing laundry in order to be at the river. In case we haven’t got the point despite Homer’s bluntness, he throws in an epic simile to help us out, comparing Nausicaa and her entourage to Artemis and the goddess’ friends (102-9), ending the comparison with a description of Nausicaa as

¹⁴¹ Dowden (1989) 171.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 160.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 102.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 123.

¹⁴⁵ Redfield (1994) 121. He discusses only two such rituals. Dowden’s list is substantially longer; in a single paragraph he lists ten (123), and these and more are discussed in detail throughout the book.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Ps.-Aeschines, *Epistles*, X.3.

¹⁴⁸ Dowden (1989) 123.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 190-1.

“παρθένος ἀδμής” (109), the latter word meaning both “unwedded” and “untamed”.

The plot thickens.

Precocious Tyro is in love with (ἡράσσατ', 11.238) the river Enipeus. She has been visiting her beloved frequently (πωλέσκετο, 240). We can now see the deeper implications of this state of affairs. Loving a river symbolizes Tyro's willingness to make the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Had we not already seen what is going to happen to Tyro, we would have guessed. And though Tyro's story is short, it contains no shortage of words related to water; in just seven lines (238-44) we have ποταμοῦ, ποταμῶν, ῥέεθρα, προχοῆς ποταμοῦ, πορφύρεον...κῦμα, and κυρτωθέν.¹⁵⁰ One can hardly take one's mind off water when reading this passage. And apparently neither can Tyro.

We see the same fixation on water in Io's tale. She, as a cow, goes—
ἐμμανεῖ σκιρτήματι (*PB* 675)—πρὸς εὐποτόν τε Κερχνεΐας ῥέος /
Λέρνης τε κρήνη (676-7). Here we have three water words in a line and a half of text. If this is not enough for us, we can read on; Prometheus tells Io, “ἔστιν πόλις Κάνωβος ἐσχάτη χθονός / Νεΐλου πρὸς αὐτῷ στόματι καὶ προσχώματι / ἐνταῦθα.../ ...τέξεις κελαινὸν Ἑπαφον” (846-51). Childbirth and water are repeatedly, explicitly, linked in this play.

¹⁵⁰ According to Liddell and Scott, the verb κυρτώ very often refers to the arch formed by a breaking wave; hence my inclusion of this verb with the water words.

Europa's story echoes Tyro's verbally and, to a lesser but still very noticeable extent, thematically.¹⁵¹ There are water words too numerous to mention, from the moment Europa and her friends, *τερπόμεναι ῥοδέη τε φυῇ καὶ κύματος ἡχῇ* (36), as naively as possible, begin to gather flowers. And within Europa's story is the flower basket ecphrasis about Io, which, though only ten lines long, itself contains eleven words pertaining to water.¹⁵² As the Io story parallels Europa's, some water words are to be expected, but it is surprising, and helpful to my argument, that they are packed into the ecphrasis so densely and, it seems, deliberately. Perhaps the most interesting detail of all, though, is that the bull-Zeus' first words to Europa are “Θάρσει παρθενική· μὴ δείδιθι πόντιον οἶδμα” (154). Of all things, why should Europa fear the *water*? She has just been abducted; she may never see her homeland again; she is riding on a swimming bull; she senses what the bull is going to do to her—the water is the absolute least of her worries, or ought to be. Perhaps Moschus' description of the water as ἄσπετον (128) makes more sense than we thought, given the implications of its overwhelming prominence in the story.

4. SEPARATION AND DEFLORATION

The fourth stage of the maidens' post-dream experiences is separation from her companions, if necessary, and defloration. This does not apply to Nausicaa, as she will not be accosted by a god; rather, she encounters seaweed-encrusted briny Odysseus. And while it may be acceptable for a god to sow his wild oats in all manner of shapes and by

¹⁵¹ Schmiel (1981) footnote 25.

¹⁵² *Europa*, 44-54. We find ἄλμυρὰ...κέλευθα (46), νηχομένη, κυάνου and θάλασσα (47), αἰγιαλοῖο (48), ποντοπόρον (49), ἑπταπόρῳ...Νεῖλῳ (51) and Νεῖλου ῥόος (53) in these lines.

means of all manner of deception, men in Greek mythology are less inclined to behave this way, although there are, of course, instances of men raping women. But we all know a girl who encounters a mortal man is more likely to escape with her hymen than a girl who runs into Zeus of the immortal libido. Nausicaa is ready for marriage, and her family is ready for her to be married; suitors have already begun to pay attention to her (6.34-5). But her story is left incomplete in the *Odyssey*. Her trip to the river does not have immediate consequences.

Tyro's separation from her friends, as I have mentioned, has apparently occurred before the action of the story as narrated by Odysseus. She is alone with Enipeus when Poseidon comes along; he surrounds himself and his woman of choice with a wave, deflowers her, and puts her to sleep (*Od.* 11.243-5). Tyro is the only one of these five lucky virgins to be impregnated right in the water. And this is understandable, as she has been the most ready and willing of all these girls to experience the next phase of her life.

Aeschylus' Io is not pregnant; Prometheus tells her that she will be, eventually, but that she has plenty more aimless lonely wandering to do first. She is definitely as alone as can be, having been cast out of her house and forced to roam to Egypt. Prometheus, who has that name for a reason, says to Io, "ἐνταυθα δὴ σε Ζεὺς τίθησιν ἔμφονα / ἐπαφῶν ἀταρβεῖ χειρὶ καὶ θιγῶν μόνον" (*PB* 848-9). Perhaps bored with the usual method of impregnation, Zeus is going to try something different with Io.

Europa is with her friends when the bull comes onto the scene and seduces her. The girl immediately changes her mind about her priorities; we have seen Europa and her

friends delighting in the flowers and the water, but once the bull has made its appearance Europa says to her friends, “δεῦθ’...ὄφρ’ ἐπὶ τῷδε / ἐζόμεναι ταύρῳ
τερπόμεθα”(103-4). She has, it appears, discovered something more interesting than flowers. But in her infuriating nescience she does not realize what that something is, and in a shining display of (more) unintentional perversion invites her friends to mount the bull with her. But Zeus is too quick for Europa’s friends and absconds with her as soon as she climbs onto his back, hauling her directly into the water and separating her from her companions all at the same time (109-10). Zeus tells Europa, a load of bull riding through the sea, that they are on their way to Crete, “ὅπη νυμφήα σεῖο / ἔσσεται” (159-60), and as soon as they arrive, he loosens her maiden belt (164).

5. MOTHERHOOD

With the exception of Nausicaa, whose story has ceased to follow the pattern of the others discussed in this paper, the girls become pregnant. As Poseidon so eloquently informs Tyro (*Od.* 11.249-50), “Οὐκ ἀποφώλιοι εὐναὶ / ἀθανάτων.” Tyro is promised children and she gives birth to Pelias and Neleus (254). Io will give birth to Epaphus, conceived by the touch of Zeus (*PB* 849-51). Europa in the last line of her self-titled epyllion (remember that the first line introduced a γλυκὺν ὀνειρόν...) bears children to Zeus and becomes a mother (166).

It is clear that all of these stories resemble each other structurally. From a prophetic dream to childbirth, they progress in the very same way regardless of their protagonists’ reactions to each event in the sequence. The Greeks took great interest in dreams and were most interested in those which told the future; besides which, dreams

are an excellent literary device, and these two factors explain the occurrence of prophetic dreams in so many ancient works of literature. They are especially interesting to late antique readers. Aspects of ritual, in particular the transition from indoors to outdoors and the prominence of water in defloration, feature in all of these stories, and this accounts for much of the resemblance between them. Sex with a god leads to offspring, and this is why four of the girls become pregnant (and, given the absence of a lecherous god in Nausicaa's story, why one of them doesn't). All of the above factors combined allow for four extremely different girls to have very similar lives.

Was Nonnus aware of this pattern in Greek literature? Given that throughout the *Dionysiaca* he perverts nearly every imaginable literary genre and motif, and does the same to the individual authors on whose work he bases his own versions of myths, it is probably safe to say that he was. Nonnus' book 48 is, among other things, a disturbingly perverse story. Its perversion stems from the fact that Aura, undoubtedly the least suitable candidate for motherhood ever to appear in literature, has motherhood forced upon her. While the girls discussed above do occasionally have difficulties with certain aspects of their new lives, they all manage to put up with them; they give birth and disappear from the mythological scene. This is not the case for Aura, however. Aura's personality and circumstances, as Nonnus well knows, cannot be reconciled, and it is precisely this unbearable tension that drives the plot of book 48.

Nonnus makes it more than clear that the huntress Aura is a militantly unmaternal and chaste girl (48.241-4) who bears more resemblance to a lioness than to a

human being.¹⁵³ Only Nonnus would think to bring “a desirable vision of a dream foretelling impending marriage” (262-3) into such a person’s life and document the horrifying consequences with enthusiasm. Aura is our only example of a girl who has a prophetic dream, rejects its message furiously, and destructively resists every one of the ensuing results. She dreams that she is a lioness, and that Eros drags her to Aphrodite and makes her slavishly bow to the goddess as he mocks her virginity (263-283). Her reaction is, as we expect, pure rage; she has taken care to sleep under a :φυτὸν φιλοπάρθενον (294), yet the laurel Daphne, a fellow hater of intercourse, has betrayed her. How unfortunate for Aura that Nonnus of the incessant paradoxes is writing her story.

Aura, being a huntress, is already outdoors; she has all along been leading a liminal life. Like the other women, she leaves the place of her dream, in this case the laurel tree, in outraged disgust, and we next find her driving Artemis’ chariot, accompanied by the daughters of Oceanus (48.310-14). Both of the rapes in book 48 occur in or near water. The first, in which Aura is the aggressor and Artemis the victim, occurs at the bank of the river Sangarius. We know something unfortunate is about to happen when Artemis and her servants, Aura among them, stop at the place ὅπη κελάδοντι ῥεέθρῳ / Σαγγαρίου ποταμοῖο Διιπετὲς ἔλκεται ὕδωρ (48.326-7). To refer to Nonnus’ writing as overstatement is an understatement; here we have a line and a half in which all but two words refer to water. Not only that, but it is

¹⁵³ She is a lioness in her dream (48.277-8); she is a lioness in labour (788), and she is a lioness when she eats her child (918).

noontime,¹⁵⁴ when the sun is hottest and people, especially those who are sweaty and thirsty from hunting, have water on their minds. No good can come of this.

Later, after the episode with Artemis, Aura is wandering around outdoors as usual, and Nonnus takes care to tell us again and again and again that she is looking for a drink. Nonnus is many things, but subtle is not one of them. He describes Aura as *πίδακα μαστεύουσα, κατάσχετος αἴθοπι δίψη* (572), then *διψαλέη* (574), then a bit later *διψώουσα* (590), and finally she comes to the place that will be the beginning of her end, looking to discover *εἴ ποθι διαψώουσα Διὸς χύσιν ἢ τινα πηγὴν/ ἢ ῥόον ἀθρησειεν ὀρεσσιχύτου ποταμοῖο* (592-3). Since there is no naturally-occurring water where Aura is, Dionysus has to create some. “*Τελεσσιγάμοιο δε πηγῆς / εἰς στομα δέξο ῥέεθρα, καὶ εἰς σέο κόλπον ἀκοίτην*,” Peitho then says to Aura (598-9). No good can come of this either.

The first “rape” in *Dionysiaca* 48 is perhaps the only instance in Greek literature of a mortal woman raping a goddess. It is not a literal defloration, but what Aura does to Artemis is undoubtedly a verbal assault accompanied by invasive and unsolicited physical contact, and the goddess reacts to it as though it had been even more than this. It is pointless to try to find a motive in Aura’s actions; Nonnus’ primary concern here, as elsewhere in the epic, is not cause but effect. Aura, *μαζοὺς [Ἀρτέμιδος]* *ἀμφαφώουσα* (350),¹⁵⁵ as she speaks, begins by informing the unclothed Artemis that she is a virgin in name only (351), then tells her she bears more physical resemblance to

¹⁵⁴ The participle *μεσημβρίζουσα* appears in lines 262 and 335; *μεσημβριάς* in 590.

Aphrodite than to Athena (352-5) and therefore ought to be a wedding goddess with the former (356). Aura then offers Hermes and Ares as suggestions for husbands (358). She devotes the rest of her speech to comparing herself with the goddess, who is by now irate; most notable here are Aura's comments that Artemis' breasts look like they are full of milk (365-6) and that Aura's breasts, unlike those of Artemis, are "αὐτόματοι κήρυκες ἀσυλήτοιο κορείης" (369). What these comments add up to is that, as far as Aura is concerned, Artemis is not a virgin at all. And the speech of Nemesis, to whom the enraged immortal turns for assistance in devising a punishment for Aura, begins with a catalogue of all those who have attempted to rape Artemis (392-413).¹⁵⁶ (Never mind that they are men: Aura has been ascribing masculinity to herself all along.) This is no accident. When Nemesis says, "Αὔρη / παρθενικὴν ἤλεγξε, καὶ οὐκέτι παρθένος ἔσται" (445-6),¹⁵⁷ we cannot fail to see the irony, the reversal, and the connection between what has happened to Artemis and what will happen to Aura.

Now this state of affairs must be righted; therefore Aura must be wronged. Aura's second rape experience is a reversal of the first; this time, she is the victim. Nemesis arranges for Dionysus to fall in lust with the huntress (470-4), who, thanks to her treatment of Artemis, has cut herself off entirely from the goddess and Oceanus' daughters and is now, like the other girls under discussion in this paper, alone. Once

¹⁵⁵ This is the same verb Moschus uses to describe what Europa does to the bull (ἀμφοφάασκε, *Europa*, 95.).

¹⁵⁶ Nemesis mentions Tityos (who tried to rape Leto, Artemis' mother), Orion, Otos, and Ephialtes, and she expresses concern that Zeus might be trying to force Artemis into marriage.

¹⁵⁷ Note that ἤλεγξε means both "has disgraced" and "has disproved". Nemesis may be saying that Aura has *disgraced* Artemis' virginity (this translation implies that Aura's words have been false), or rather that Aura has *disproved* Artemis' virginity (this translation implies that there is some truth in Aura's comments). Given Nonnus' propensity for questioning Artemis' militant virginity (several times in the *Dionysiaca* there are references to Artemis as a wife or mother, on which see Chapter Two), the ambiguity here is not surprising.

again, it is noon (590); once again, Aura is near water, or rather the fountain of wine Dionysus has caused to spring out of the ground. The next part of the story writes itself: she becomes crapulent, he finds her unconscious on the ground, and she is raped (599-644). Aura, of all five of the characters under discussion, is the least inclined toward sex and motherhood; none of the others have rejected those things outright, though none of them have wished rape upon themselves either. Aura's story, like Tyro's, features sleep; Tyro falls asleep after departhenization (*Od.* 11.245)¹⁵⁸ and Aura before. It would have been impossible for Dionysus to rape a conscious or sober Aura; Noënnus had to render her utterly incapacitated in order for this event to happen. Alcohol-induced sleep makes the impossible possible for the lecherous divinity.

Very appropriately, Aura is dequivered before she is deflowered; throughout the story the quiver is a prominent symbol whose significance becomes especially interesting during the rape and continues to the very end of the episode. Given Aura's interest in hunting, along with the obvious (yet, curiously, not often exploited in literature) sexual connotations of the quiver and arrows, dequivering makes perfect sense. Before raping Aura, Dionysus χειρὶ...φειδομένην γλαφυρὴν ἀπέθηκε φαρέτρην / παρθενικῆς (625-6), and after he is finished, ἀπὸ σκοπέλου...φαρέτρην / χειρὶ λαβὼν καὶ τόξα πάλιν παρακάτθετονύμφη (648-9).¹⁵⁹ His removal and hiding of the quiver symbolize his "removal" of her virginity; his replacement of the quiver is a useless attempt to cover up his actions. Aura of course realizes immediately that something is wrong, and before her story is over we hear Artemis say,

¹⁵⁸ "ἄλυσε δὲ παρθενίην ζώνην, κατὰ δ' ὕπνον ἔχευεν"—this might be an example of hysteron-proteron, but who's to say? In any event, it doesn't matter; the association is there regardless of the order of the events.

¹⁵⁹ Aura is now called νύμφη; a few lines ago she was παρθενικῆς.

“Ἀναινομένη δὲ φαρέτρην / ὄργια μυστιπόλεψε γυναιμανέος σέο
 Βάκχου” (773-4), we hear Nicaia’s story of her own dequivering (824-5), and we see
 Aura launching εἰς προχοᾶς her ἀκόμιστον φαρέτρην (932) before she herself
 leaps into the water. This maniacal sacrifice of a “neglected” quiver to the river is more
 meaningful than we may have thought.

Not even after she has given birth does Aura show the slightest hint of maternal
 instinct; in fact, if anything, the birth of her children makes her angrier and crazier than
 ever. In lines 892-909 she makes a homicidal speech, in 910-916 she tries to get wild
 animals to eat her babies, and, finally, in 917-24 she tosses one of the babies into the air
 and eats it. Artemis herself is terrified when she sees this and rescues the second baby:
 παιδοκόμῳ κούφιζεν ἄηθει κοῦρον ἀγοστῶ (927). (Was Aura right all along,
 then, about her being more virginal and less motherly than Artemis?) Nonnus is
 consistently perverse: throughout the story, his Aura wants nothing to do with
 motherhood, and the further into that realm he pushes her, the more she resists. She
 simply cannot live with it, and she kills herself—Nonnus adds insult to her injury by
 having her metamorphose into a fountain.

There is a clear pattern in ancient literature which, incited by a prophetic dream,
 takes girls from maidenhood to motherhood. Nausicaa and Tyro accept it quite happily;
 Europa’s reaction is ambiguous; Aeschylus’ Io is devastated but accepts her fate in the
 end. Nonnus, however, will not let his Aura off so easily. He is aware of the pattern, and
 in the final book of his epic he inflicts it upon a girl who, as he well knows, cannot
 tolerate it. The consequences are horrendous, not only for Aura herself, but for her

cannibalized baby and for the mass of shepherds and flocks she massacres upon discovering what Dionysus has done. Furthermore, Aura's rape occurs as a result of her victimization of Artemis, an event more shocking and unprecedented than the retributive punishment it brings upon Aura. This epyllion is a clear manifestation of Nonnus' enthusiasm for paradox and perversion.

CONCLUSION

One need not enjoy reading the *Dionysiaca* to recognize and appreciate that it is a great accomplishment. Nonnus employs two unprecedented stylistic methods in the epic: he uses his predecessors' words and themes perversely rather than respectfully, and he narrates the poem in an unusually wide variety of genres, many of which were at the height of their popularity in late antiquity. This epic is unlike any other, primarily because it is a product of those two compositional concepts. It is no more useful to gauge Nonnus' success by Homeric standards than it would be to gauge Homer's success by Nonnian standards. They are both good poets. By using prior literature in a way that is novel for a writer of epic, Nonnus successfully avoids being a hemipygeal Homer, while simultaneously showing that he is familiar with both Homer's poems and his readers' expectations. Nonnus knows what Homer says, and he knows in what way epic poets are supposed to write. He is simply not interested in being an epigone. The *Dionysiaca* proves that, even for an ancient epic poet, rivalry and deference were not the only options when it came to their sources.

Nonnus' inclusion of different genres in the poem allows him to treat a variety of other writers and works as he does Homer. The Pentheus episode of books 44 to 46, composed of inversions of Euripides' *Bacchae*, is the most prominent and extensive of these. The most important point that the episode brings to light is that Nonnus' treatment of Euripides is no different from his treatment of Homer. We ought not to isolate the latter and analyze it as something Nonnus does specifically and exclusively with Homer. Because Nonnus is writing an epic, he naturally has no end of opportunities to work with

(or, rather, against) Homeric material, but the Pentheus episode shows us that Nonnus' method^b remains the same, regardless of the genre or source he is using.

^a Book 48 features a character so tormented by Nonnian inversions that she self-destructs, and even then Nonnus cannot resist burdening her with one final, eternal indignity. In telling her story, he inverts a common literary motif which, when employed by Homer, Aeschylus, and Moschus, takes their maidens from childhood to motherhood quite smoothly. Some of them suffer minor, or even major, distress at various stages of their journeys, particularly if they are unwilling travellers. But Aura^c, fiercely obsessed with virginity is another story, one that only Nonnus would tell. Her dream is humiliating as well as prophetic, and it has terrible consequences, including the "rape" of Artemis (a pervasive theme in the *Dionysiaca*, one of Nonnus' strangest obsessions), a massacre of flocks and herdsmen, a cannibalized baby, and, finally, Aura's suicide and metamorphosis. Aware of the elements of the story pattern through which mythological maidens become mothers, Nonnus attaches it to the character to whom it is least suited, inverting several authors' work in the process. Nonnus' use of this poetic plot pattern on the most inappropriate conceivable character is a fitting and clever conclusion to an epic whose deliberate perversions are what holds it together.

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